

KNITTING TAKES BALLS: MASCULINITY AND THE PRACTICE OF KNITTING

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Abstract

Historically, the craft of knitting has been associated with femininity within the domestic sphere. However, knitting has experienced a revival within the past 15 years. This work examines how some men engage in the practice of knitting and how participation in a feminized activity affects re-negotiations of masculinity. Through an examination of R.W. Connell's theory of Hegemonic Masculinity and Eric Anderson's theory of Inclusive Masculinity, this piece explores the manner in which men are formulating new ways of performing their masculinities in environments of diminished homophobia.

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Dedication

For the men whose stories populate this thesis. May you continue to challenge traditional ideas of masculinity and carve out new meanings of manhood for generations of young men to come.

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Introduction

Knitting is not an activity that necessarily remains constant, but experiences downturns and revivals. Within the past 15 years, knitting has experienced a resurgence within the private and public sphere (Myzelev, 2012; Turney, 2009). More individuals are picking up their needles and knitting at home and in public, and have even created websites, videos, magazines, books and entire social media sites dedicated to the craft of knitting. I place myself within this more recent revival period. After I saw a friend knitting one weekend three years ago, I decided I wanted to learn how to do what she was doing. It seemed so fun and empowering, and I found the process of creating something from two needles and string to be intoxicating. I could take over the means of production! I embarked on a project to teach myself how to knit (YouTube helped), and I have not looked back since.

However, I was perplexed as to why knitting is still associated as an activity predominately associated with femininity. Yes, the history of knitting indicates that men have actively been involved with knitting and have even influenced knitting design, but why weren't they knitting themselves? In her book, MacDonald dedicated a small section of her introduction to addressing why more women knit than men. The responses she received ranged from "men are too restless to sit still" to "[they] are more comfortable in their workshops" to "they're afraid of being called sissies" (MacDonald, 1988, pg. xviii). When I started knitting, I was also in academia, and I had developed a keen interest in masculinity studies. The responses that MacDonald outlines are not uncommon, but I refused to think that those could be the only reasons why there were so few men who knit. Having studied masculinity for several years, I felt that social changes were causing a shift in how masculinity was being defined. Entire works on the subject of "new" masculinity and metrosexuality have emerged (Berkowitz & Belgrave, 2010; Hall & Gough, 2011; Shiao & Chen,

2009; Simpson, 2002), as well as works dedicated to the subject of men in more feminized jobs and sports (Adams, 2010; Anderson, 2005; Bemiller, 2005; Chimot & Louveau, 2010; Cottingham, 2014; Harding, 2007; Moritz, 2011). So where are all the men who knit?

Men were the first weavers, but when the Industrial Revolution hit Europe, the number of male knitting guilds declined and the practice of hand knitting was passed onto women and was constructed as an occupation of the household (MacDonald, 1988, pg. xvi). This trend from Europe is the tradition that was brought to North America and contributed to the notion of knitting as a “female” practice (MacDonald, 1988, pg. xvi). Men were actively involved in bringing knitting to the masses in Europe. The most notable of these men was Edward the VIII, who was known as the Royal who brought Fair Isle knits¹ to the mainstream of fashion (Richards, 2005). Fair Isle knitting involves the use of several different colours of yarn knit into the same fabric to create coloured motifs (such as stars) and originates from the Fair Isle off the coast of Scotland. He most often wore Fair Isle knit sweaters during golf and polo matches, as well as during public relations visits (Richards, 2005). Another notable male linked to knitting is James Thomas Burdenell, who was known as the Earl of Cardigan (Richards, 2005). He requested that a sweater be created that he would not have to pull over his head (so as to not ruin his hairstyle) (Richards, 2005). From this request, the cardigan sweater was created, a style that is still worn widely to this day. Another man involved in the history of sweater design was Fitzroy James Henry Somerset who was known as Lord Raglan (Richards, 2005). Lord Raglan has lost his right arm during the battle of Waterloo, and due to this injury, his tailor designed a sweater with a diagonal sleeve seam running under the arm to the neckline so it would be easier for him to dress himself (Richards,

¹ All knitting terms are defined in the Glossary section of this thesis

2005). From this injury and the mind of his tailor, the Raglan sweater was created, another sweater design that is incorporated into many sweaters worn in modern day.

During World War II (WWII), boys adopted knitting as a way of assisting with the war effort. Trowbridge (2004) recalled his experience of knitting in boarding school during this time. He states that all boys were taught to knit at school, and they primarily knit 9-inch squares that were sent to the Red Cross (which would later be stitched together to form blankets) (Trowbridge, 2004). He speaks about how competitive all the boys got with their knitting, and recalls how competitions would be held to see who could knit the fastest, make the longest scarf or make the most noise with their needles (Trowbridge, 2004). He also specifically mentions that gender was not an issue with knitting at the time, stating that “no one ever suggested that it was inappropriate for us to be doing women’s work” – that question never came up (Trowbridge, 2004, pg. 134). From a feminist perspective, this particular statement is interesting, but at the same time not surprising. It could be argued that these young boys were contributing to the war effort, and were too young to contribute in any other way. As such, the practice of knitting allowed them a chance to exercise masculinity during times of war by creating and contributing something of substance, something tangible that would assist the Red Cross during a time of war. Furthermore, the work of knitting was not relegated to the home, like women’s knitting is constructed, but was practiced openly in school and could be constituted as a tangible contribution to a national war effort. As such, the boys could be seen as exercising their masculinity by knitting for the war, which could be associated as a form of British patriotism.

Although some academic literature has explored the topic of knitting, much of this work examines the practice of women who knit. There are still a limited number of studies that examine how men approach knitting, and how this practice affects their embodiment and performance of

masculinity. My research works to fill the gap that currently exists in academic literature on the subject of men who knit. Through interviews with fifteen respondents who identified as men, I demonstrate that some men are actively taking part in knitting during this current revival period. Some of the men I interviewed have been lifelong knitters who learned from their mothers, while others have decided to pick it up because their female partners knit, or because they have lost their jobs during the recent Western economic downturn and wanted to take the opportunity to learn something new. The reasons for taking part in knitting are varied, and this thesis serves to capture not only why some men are turning to knitting, but how this engagement with a feminized activity has affected their negotiations of their own masculine gender performance.

Considering R.W. Connell's theory of masculinity and incorporating Eric Anderson's work on inclusive masculinity, this thesis begins by exploring the literature on masculinity studies which serves to inform the analysis used when examining the experiences shared by the respondents. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity has long been considered one of the cornerstone theories of masculinity studies. However, it fails to allow for an examination of how masculinity is changing in a climate that no longer fosters homophobic attitudes as has been historically evidenced. Anderson's theory of inclusive masculinity not only builds upon Connell's theory, but allows for theorization as to how men are beginning to change their attitudes about male homosexuality, which in turn creates a space for them to re-negotiate masculine gender performance for themselves. These re-negotiations of masculinity were clearly observed among the respondents for this study, and their stories and experiences will be shared in the following chapters to illustrate how definitions of masculinity are beginning to shift at an individual level, which in turn is leading to broader social patterns of inclusive masculinity and vice versa.

What resulted from these interviews is a rich collection of anecdotes and stories that I was privileged to witness. Several themes emerged from the interviews, which will be analyzed in greater detail in the following chapters. Many of the men I interviewed stated that they experienced varying levels of social stigma for choosing to knit. Therefore, the chapter entitled *“I’m Man Enough to Knit”* explores issues of stigma, the manner in which men have come to reformulate the craft of knitting for themselves, and how men are beginning to re-negotiate masculinity in a more inclusive manner.

The chapter entitled *“Oh yeah, I might turn for him”* will examine themes of homosociality, as well as the friendships and relationship-building experienced by participants at knitting retreats in the United States. This chapter will continue to build on Anderson’s work on inclusive masculinity, as some of the heterosexual men I interviewed stated that interactions during these retreats with homosexual men allowed them to have a more nuanced understanding of homosexuality, thus assisting in changing attitudes toward masculinity and homosexuality.

The last chapter of this thesis entitled *“The Geek-a-Long”* will explore the nuanced relationship between knitting culture and geek culture, and demonstrate the similarities in masculine gender performance within these two groups. This chapter outlines the manner in which men who knit embody and physically read as men, but place a great deal of importance on more marginalized forms of masculine gender performance such as caring and consideration for others, and community involvement.

Although each chapter will explore the major themes that have arisen from this study, they will also serve to demonstrate the manners in which these men are reformulating masculinity for themselves, and in the process, creating more inclusive forms of masculine gender performance.

Masculinity Theory & Methods – From Hegemonic Masculinity to Inclusive Masculinity

Masculinity emerged as a field of study in the mid 1980s as a result of feminist scholars' emphasis on injustices faced by women in a patriarchal system. Carrigan, Connell, and Lee's (1985) research on the sociology of masculinity is considered to be the first seminal work that examines masculinity from a feminist academic perspective, and served to challenge the "men's liberation writings" that emerged in the 1970's (Wedgwood, 2009, pg. 332). Their research brought feminism and masculinity studies together, and served to put the "spotlight onto men, the other half of the gender relations equation" (Wedgwood, 2009, pg. 332). Several authors have been influenced by Connell's 1995 *Masculinities*, and built upon these theories (Kimmel, 1987; Kimmel, 1992; Messerschmidt, 1993; Messerschmidt, 1997; Messner, 1992; Messner, 1997; Messner, 2002) or challenged them (Demetriou, 2001; Jefferson, 2002; Moller, 2007; Petersen, 1998). The study of masculinity has historically been a marginal part of gender studies, but increasing interest in this field has led to several books and anthologies on the subject (Atkinson, 2011; Anderson, 2009; Brod, 1987; Connell, 2000, Jackson and Balaji, 2012; Kimmel et al., 2005; Pascoe, 2012;), as well as whole scholarly journals² dedicated to masculinity research. This has facilitated the study of both Western and non-Western masculinity (Ariha et al., 1998; Ghousoub & Sinclair-Webb, 2000; Gutmann, 1996; Gutmann, 2001; Law et al., 1999; Morrell, 2001; Olavarria & Moletto, 2002; Robertson & Suzuki, 2003; Tomsen & Donaldson, 2003; Worth et al., 2002), thus greatly contributing to the documentation of global masculinities and diversifying the available academic literature.

² e.g., *Men & Masculinities Journal*

Masculinity theory has evolved since its inception 20 years ago. This chapter will explore that evolution, paying close attention to how Connell's theory of masculinity has laid the groundwork for multiple theories that have arisen after its creation. Authors such as Kimmel, Demetriou, Messner, and Anderson will be explored to demonstrate how they have built upon her theoretical perspective. For this particular study, Kimmel, Demetriou, Messner, and Anderson were selected, as they have provided very distinct contributions to masculinity literature, and their works have generated a more nuanced way of examining masculinity that allows for lived experiences. Lastly, I will discuss newer frameworks that have arisen in recent academic works, paying close attention to Anderson's theory of inclusive masculinity, which will frame the perspective from which this study was approached.

Connell's Theory of Masculinity

R.W. Connell's theory of masculinity states that masculine gender is a social construction and a performance that changes over time, rather than being innate (Connell, 1992; Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). A series of socially normative behaviors and attitudes that align with accepted representations of masculinity are described as "hegemonic" (Connell, 1995). The concept of hegemonic masculinity refers to specific behaviors existing within a hierarchy of conduct that are considered culturally normative and ideal within masculine gender construction (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity implies that it is necessary for men to demonstrate strength, sexual prowess, ambition, power, domination, and control over others, particularly over women in order to be considered socially acceptable males in North America (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Very few men are capable to referencing all the traits of hegemonic masculinity in their gendered performances as men, and as such, the traits of hegemonic masculinity can be considered

“normative”, but not the “norm” (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Therefore, most men would be categorized in the realm of what Connell calls subordinate masculinity (Connell, 1995).

Subordinate masculinity implies that by seeking dominance, men subordinate and oppress one another as they strive to exemplify traits of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995). Within this category of masculinity, heterosexuality is exalted, and male gender performances are strictly regulated in an effort to reinforce male heterosexuality (Connell, 1995). In this way, "subordinate" men police the gender performance of other men within this category as a way of upholding hegemonic attitudes concerning “proper” masculinity. Interestingly, within Connell’s framework, men may be considered as being “complicit” with upholding hegemonic masculinity in Western society (Connell, 1995). By investing in the notion of hegemonic masculinity (even if they do not exemplify those characteristics), these men are offered a “payoff”, termed the “patriarchal dividend”, which is “the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women” (Connell, 1995, pg. 79).

The issue of gender performativity requires some clarification at this time. Within feminist academia, Judith Butler’s “Gender Trouble” is regarded as a seminal work with regards to describing gender as a performance. According to Butler, gender is reproduced and performed through “regulatory practices of gender coherence” (Butler, 1990, pg 34). As such, Butler outlines that gender is not something that is innate, but is influenced and regulated within society. Although Butler’s work on gender performativity is invaluable to the study of gender, her perspective is philosophical, while Connell’s perspective on gender performativity is more sociological.

Connell, much like Butler, agrees that gender is in fact a “performance”. However, Connell uses performance to signify that men reference elements of hegemonic masculinity in order to

“perform” their identities. Connell (1995) outlines how men undertake masculine performance with some level of agency: picking and choosing which elements of hegemonic masculinity they will reference and perform, and that those choices vary in different environments. Furthermore, unlike Butler, Connell highlights that this active referencing of hegemonic masculinity depends on which elements of masculinity they have access to, which is based on other elements of their identity, such as race and class (Connell, 1995). Therefore, Connell’s view of masculine gender performativity incorporates levels of social agency which are not apparent in Butler’s theory of performativity (Brickell, 2005). Furthermore, although Connell’s view is very similar to Butler’s, Connell actually highlights particular characteristics that men make reference to in order to perform appropriate masculinity within different settings (Connell, 1995). Therefore, for the purposes of this study, Connell’s definition of masculine performativity will be used, as opposed to Butler’s.

Current Themes in Masculinity Literature

There are several authors who have built upon Connell’s theory to examine Western masculinities in different social settings. Several authors have contributed to masculinity theory by incorporating Connell’s theory with Bourdieu’s theory of cultural production, which has bridged the gap between the Connell’s theoretical perspective on masculinity, and the lived experiences of several types of dominant masculinities (Coles, 2009; Dillabough, 2004; Fowler, 2003). A great deal of literature has been dedicated to the subject of masculinities within different contexts, such as sport (Adams, 2010; Angelini et al., 2013; Chimot & Louveau, 2010; Messner, 1990; Messner, 1992; Messner, 1994; Messner, 1997; Messner, 2009; Mishra, 2014; Rahman, 2011;), education (Edley & Wetherell, 1997; Hansen & Mulholland, 2005; Martino, 2008; Sevier & Ashcraft, 2009), deviance and criminality (Archer, 1994; Britton, 2011;

Cavender, 1999; Fox & Harding, 2005; Messerschmidt, 1993; Messerschmidt, 1997; Messerschmidt, 2000;), as well as newer literature on masculinity in feminized areas, such as cooking (Brownlie & Hewer, 2007; Mechling, 2005; Swenson, 2009; Szabo, 2012; Szabo, 2014a; Szabo, 2014b) nursing (Cottingham, 2014; Harding, 2007), babysitting (Blakemore et al., 1988; Willett, 2008), dance (Broomfield, 2011; Karthas, 2012), and cheerleading (Anderson, 2005; Bemiller, 2005; Moritz, 2011).

Connell's theory has served as the basis for most of the academic theoretical understanding of masculinity. Several theorists and researchers have used this theoretical understanding to analyze male behavior in different contexts, and theories surrounding masculinity have evolved in the past twenty years since the inception of Connell's theory. The next section will explore that evolution, mostly focusing on the changes in academic understanding of subordinate and hegemonic masculinity.

The Evolution of Masculinity Theory

Michael Kimmel's work on masculinity has built on Connell's theories on subordinate masculinity, outlining the importance of homophobia in the definition and policing of appropriate masculinity in the Western context. Kimmel builds upon Connell's work by examining how the roots of masculinity are linked to Freudian and Marxist theory, and emphasizes that masculinity is entrenched in separation of male behavior from the "feminine", most notably when it comes to homosexuality (Kimmel, 1994). Kimmel emphasizes that homosocial bonds are necessary in the creation of masculinity among men; they begin in early childhood, and fathers are the "first pair of male eyes before whom [boys try] to prove [themselves]" (Kimmel, 1994, pg. 130). The father's gaze serves as the standard for appropriate masculinity, clearly tying in to Freud's ideas, and this "constant scrutiny" serves as the benchmark against which he will measure his lifelong

performance of masculinity, along with other homosocial influences that arise throughout a man's life (e.g.: coaches, friends) (Kimmel, 1994, pg. 130). Although masculinity is tied to homosociality as a way of constructing masculine identity, what intrinsically follows is the idea that these relationships with other men lead to homoerotic desire (Kimmel, 1994). Therefore, homophobia is employed in these homosocial bonds as a "flight from intimacy with other men...the repudiation of the homosexual within...never completely successful and hence constantly re-enacted in every homosocial relationship" (Kimmel, 1994, pg. 130). Kimmel's contribution to masculinity theory emphasizes the manner in which homophobic attitudes and displays among men serve to uphold hegemonic masculinity as the exalted form of masculine gender performance, thus building upon Connell's theory of subordinate masculinity by stating that "homophobia is the central organizing principle of our cultural definition of manhood" (Kimmel, 1994, pg. 131).

Much like Kimmel, other authors have significantly built upon masculinity theory. Demetriou's critique of Connell's theory introduces the concept of the "hegemonic masculine bloc" (Demetriou, 2001). Demetriou argues that although Connell's theory has allowed for a theoretical understanding of masculine gender performance, it is much too rigid in practice as it is dichotomous in nature (hegemonic versus non-hegemonic) (Demetriou, 2001). Instead, Demetriou suggests that hegemonic masculinity does not solely exist as a "purely white, heterosexual configuration", but that it is hybridized, using references from subordinate masculine practices and performances to form a "hybrid bloc" (Demetriou, 2001, pg. 355). According to Demetriou, the masculine hegemonic bloc is "capable of reconfiguring itself and adapting to the specificities of new historical [contexts]" (Demetriou, 2001, pg. 348). This means that social shifts influence the definition of hegemonic masculinity, and that this category is in a

“constant process of negotiation, translation, hybridization, and reconfiguration”, and therefore to see hegemonic masculinity as a “closed, coherent and unified totality” is deeply flawed (Demetriou, 2001, pg. 355). As such, the concept of hegemonic masculinity is introduced as being far more flexible than had been initially outlined by Connell herself.

Steven L. Arxer’s study on masculinity explored the notion of a “hybrid” hegemonic masculinity, building upon Demetriou’s theoretical contribution, and allowing for a shift in the theoretical understanding of how "subordinate" men may still incorporate elements of hegemonic masculinity in their gendered performances. By observing participants in a bar setting to examine how hegemonic masculinity is both reproduced and challenged in a homosocial setting, Arxer found that although conventional understandings of masculinity are linked to a lack of emotionality among men, certain men in the bar setting attempted to share their feelings and insecurities with their friends (Arxer, 2011). These sharing “episodes” were often met with a level of derision from other men, stating that they needed to “get over her already” or not “think about it, man...we came here to get drunk and forget about all of this” (Arxer, 2011, pg. 405). In other cases, sharing was seen as acceptable, as long as the conversation revolved around references to sexual prowess. In one case, Arxer observed a conversation between two men, where one shared his insecurities about attracting a woman he liked, while the other man appeared to be very supportive and offered advice on how to “stand out from the crowd” (Arxer, 2011, pg. 409). Arxer’s research indicates that although men were employing elements of subordinate masculinity in group settings with other men (e.g.: sharing of feelings), that the only acceptable way this was done as a way of “gaining access to women’s bodies” (Arxer, 2011, pg. 417). Therefore, although certain elements of subordinate masculinity were observed, they were mitigated by remaining in the context of hegemonic masculinity (e.g.: sexual prowess), and

conversations lacking those references were deemed inappropriate within the performance of masculinity.

Although Arxer's findings confirm and build upon Connell's theory of masculinity, the methodological choices are similar to those employed by other masculinity researchers. For instance, an abundance of literature is dedicated to participant observation of masculinity, whether in real-life settings (Anderson, 2008; Green & Kaiser, 2011; Nicholas, 2012; Rivers-Moore, 2012) or through discourse analysis of media representations (Benwell, 2003; Craine & Aitken, 2004; Friday, 2003; Leit et al., 2001; Lindgren & Lelievre, 2009; McKay et al., 2005). Although these works have contributed to current understandings of masculinity in different contexts, the incorporation of men's everyday lived experiences in this study through in-depth interviews allowed for specific nuances of masculinity construction to be examined in a way that participant observation, although a valid form of sociological research, may not necessarily allow for. Considering the subject of this research, it is imperative that the actual voices of men be examined and brought to the forefront of knowledge formation on the subject of masculinity.

Hybrid/Inclusive Masculinity

In recent years, several authors have begun to outline how changes in masculine gender performance are forcing scholars to re-examine how they view men and their lived experiences. Although a great deal of debt is owed to the aforementioned authors, the emerging literature in the field of masculinity studies characterizes masculinity as possessing far more flexibility and nuance than previously thought.

Bridges and Pascoe's article on hybrid masculinities examines men's explorations of new ways to negotiate their masculinity that do not necessarily involve upholding hegemonic masculinity as the standard. They state that over the past twenty years, shifts in social attitudes

have allowed men far greater levels of individual agency in masculinity gender performance than what was previously outlined in earlier theories (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014). Examples of this can be seen in a recent work from Coston and Kimmel, who argue that men are beginning to “reformulate their own idea of what it means to be masculine...reject societal norms and deny the norms’ importance, [therefore] creating another set of standards for themselves” (Coston & Kimmel, 2012, pg. 102). Borrowing from Goffman’s work on stigma, Coston and Kimmel state that men who occupy the subordinate masculinity stratum are finding ways of challenging hegemonic masculinity by resisting those cultural norms and building new norms that better fit their own lived experiences (Coston & Kimmel, 2012, pg. 102). It is therefore possible to posit that men who do not exemplify hegemonic masculinity simply end up as subordinate males, but that they may in fact be choosing subordinate masculinity as a more fluid space to experiment with masculinity and explore other options that may have been previously closed off to them.

Although these authors state that significant changes are happening in the gender performances of men in a Western setting, most of the authors agree that these changes are not as significant as masculinity scholars may have hoped. For instance, Messner’s work in the mid 90’s explained that changes in masculinity were being documented, but that these changes were still mostly dichotomous in nature: looking solely at the “new man” and traditional masculinity (Messner, 1993). As such, Messner stated that although changes in masculine performance and acceptance of those new performances were rising, these changes were merely symbolic, and that they didn’t serve to make any real shifts in the patriarchal system (Messner, 1993). Bridges and Pascoe’s recent work also echo those sentiments, stating that performances of masculinity are seen as more flexible, but that this does not necessarily challenge current oppressive systems, like patriarchy (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014). Interestingly, although several hybrid masculinities

scholars recognize that these alternative performances may not overtly challenge patriarchy, other authors assert that hybrid masculinities create a “flexibility of patriarchy”, whereby experiences of privilege are being transformed and negotiated in different ways (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014, pg. 256; Johnson, 2005).

The issue of “flexibility” with regards to patriarchy is relatively new and remains to be addressed within academic literature. It is unclear at this time whether flexibility within this system can be regarded as a positive social change as a result of the rise of feminist work, or if in fact its’ adaptability reinforces the strength of this dominant system of oppression. These changes in masculinity have had significant effects on systems of oppression in a short period of time and work updating Connell’s initial theory of masculinity in the context of a new century has only recently emerged. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that observable changes to patriarchal systemic oppression may take longer.

Anderson’s Inclusive Masculinity

Recently, an author has emerged in masculinity studies who has not only built upon Connell’s theory, but has also critiqued it in such a way as to provide a space for a new form of masculinity theory, which he has called “Inclusive Masculinity”. Eric Anderson’s work on masculinity stems from interviews and observations of men who participate in cheerleading (Anderson, 2009). He found, like many others, that Connell’s theory of masculinity is heavily predicated on the notion that homophobia is a tenet that upholds hegemonic masculinity; however, the men he interviewed did not hold homophobic attitudes, and in fact, overt displays of homophobia were deemed unacceptable within the groups of young men he interviewed (Anderson, 2009). Without homophobia as a factor in his interviews, Anderson thought Connell’s theory failed to explain these men’s gendered performance with the appropriate nuance.

He found that rather than young men competing with one another, groups of men in school settings embodied different “masculine archetypes...without social struggle (jocks, emos, scholars, artists, etc.) and with no one group dominating” (Anderson, 2009, pg. 95). He found that each group co-existed harmoniously, and that none of these young men seemed interested in exemplifying their masculinity by dominating over other groups. In fact, Anderson found that “boys [were] happy with their group affiliation, and none [felt] oppressed” (Anderson, 2009, pg. 95). It was within this context that Anderson developed his theory of Inclusive Masculinity; although Connell’s theory is invaluable, the current lack of "homophobia", or the constant social fear of homosexuality that upholds hegemonic masculinity (Anderson, 2009), means that Connell's theory may no longer apply. In times of diminished homophobia, Connell’s theory fails to aptly capture the diversity and complexity of masculine gender performances (Anderson, 2009). Furthermore, Anderson goes on to challenge Kimmel’s work on homophobia and masculinity:

In this moment, behaviors and terrains that once homosexualized men, no longer have the same homosexualizing agency. And, once previously stigmatized terrain and behaviors become available to heterosexuals without the need for one to defend their heterosexuality, it opens up yet further social and emotional spaces for heterosexual men to occupy without threat to their publicly perceived heterosexual identities (Anderson, 2009, pg. 96).

Considering this statement, Anderson defines inclusive masculinity as a form of gender performance which no longer links masculinity with heterosexuality, thereby permitting men to explore different aspects of gender performance that were previously unavailable or unacceptable within a Western setting. Furthermore, as more men begin to explore variations in masculine gender performance, it is likely that these performances will gain social popularity — “masculinities once traditionally marginalized by hegemonic masculinity [may cause] some of the

attitudes once esteemed by [traditional] masculinity [to] no longer be valued: homophobia, misogyny, stoicism, [etc.]” (Anderson, 2009, pg. 97).

Anderson’s theory of inclusive masculinity creates a theoretical space for observation and capturing of men’s experiences with a sense of nuance previously unavailable in academic literature. My research on male knitters sets out to confirm Anderson’s theory of inclusive masculinity by examining the lived experiences of men who choose not to abide by or uphold hegemonic masculinity as the ideal. Instead, the men I interviewed for this study have each eked out a space for themselves within the concept of inclusive masculinity: performances and experiences that cannot necessarily be characterized as exalted, but are also not subordinate to any other displays of masculinity. Through an examination of the varying levels of stigma experienced by men who knit, I demonstrate that many of the men I interviewed are challenging traditional notions of masculinity and finding ways to navigate their participation in an activity that is associated as feminine, much like Anderson.

Within the framework of my own research, I have also set out to build upon Anderson’s theory by focusing on how inclusive masculinity is not only present at the individual level, but that is it also apparent in homosocial settings. The men I interviewed recounted stories of engaging in homosocial bonds with men, and these friendships created safe spaces for creativity and new ways of engaging with one another that are not expressed in existing literature. These bonds between heterosexual and homosexual men indicate that current attitudes among men towards homosexuality are shifting. Although Anderson’s work briefly looks at interactions between gay men and heterosexual men, my research highlights that current literature on the subject of male homosocial bonds requires revisiting in light of this new form of inclusive masculinity. My research demonstrates that men are beginning to reformulate new ways of bonding with other men

that do not involve consistent policing of masculine gender performance. Instead, the men I spoke to indicated that they not only formulate their own ways of being masculine that are not necessarily congruent with hegemonic masculine ideals, but are in fact open to the manner in which other men choose to perform their masculinities.

Methodological Considerations

This study on knitting men examines their motivation for engaging in knitting. Through the process of in-depth interviews with men in Canada and in the United States, this study aimed to discover what items men are knitting, for whom they knit, and why they continue practicing this craft, in order to see if there is a connection between participating in a “feminine” activity like knitting and engaging in transgressive and potentially transformative masculine gender performances. This section outlines the specific methodological decisions that were made throughout this study. Issues regarding the research process, researcher bias, and reflexivity will be discussed, as well as an outline of the research procedure.

Research Preparation

A literature review was conducted on the intertwining of gender and knitting over time. The review of current literature on male knitters began with a survey of newspaper articles. The most recent article — and specifically the one that prompted me to explore this topic in-depth — was entitled “Men’s Knitting: Is it ‘the new yoga’?”, published in the Telegraph in January 2014. This article explored men’s adoption of knitting in London, UK and the rise of this trend locally (Mertz, 2014).

Several articles on the subject of men’s knitting have been published in newspapers across the UK, Canada, and the United States in the past fifteen years. Methodologically, they are all quite similar: they feature interviews with men who openly discuss their reasons for knitting.

Although this proved a valuable place to start, these journalistic sources cannot be considered academic, as these interviews have not been undertaken with the same rigor required of academic literature. Furthermore, I noticed that the men interviewed for these news articles predominantly owned yarn stores or held managerial positions, which presented a gendered take on men who knit (Mertz, 2014; Moore, 1999; Irvine, 2005). These men's involvement in the "business" of knitting excluded narratives of male hobby knitters, thus gendering the discussion by presenting men as taking their crafting to a utilitarian level, further distancing it from a "feminine" practice.

Within academia, there are few academic works examining knitting and contemporary crafting. Although some studies have examined knitting, most of these works either focus on interviews with artists or content analysis of knitting magazines (Myzelev, 2012; Turney, 2009). Therefore, there is a severe lack of current academic literature analyzing men engaging in knitting, and even news articles on the subject are scarce. What we know so far comes from portrayals of men's knitting as either business or art, with no stories from men who knit as a hobby. When men are depicted as part of the knitting community, it is often as wearers of knitwear engaged in leisure activities. Furthermore, issues of heterosexuality versus homosexuality are deeply steeped into the images of knitting magazines, which may further discourage men from engaging in knitting (Myzelev, 2012; Turney, 2009).

Alongside conducting an extensive literature review on the subject of masculinity and knitting, I also networked with staff at local yarn stores. Particularly, I connected with the staff at my local yarn store, "Yarn Forward and Sew On", located near the downtown area of Ottawa. The all-female staff were very receptive to my research project, and mentioned that several men regularly came to the store to shop for yarn. I have also actively discussed my research idea with friends and colleagues. As a result of these discussions, a friend put me in touch with one of his

male friends who had just started knitting. After several weeks of chatting *via* Facebook, we decided to meet, as he wanted pointers for a particular project he was completing. After an afternoon of tea and knitting, he informed me of a newly-formed knitting group just starting to meet at a local advertisement agency in Ottawa. The knitting group was started by a man interested in knitting who did not want to spend a great deal of money on courses to learn how get started on a project. The first knitting group took place in late February 2014 in Ottawa, and there were approximately 5 men in attendance; each had only recently taken up knitting as a hobby. I spoke with them of my own experience with becoming a knitter over the previous year, how I learned new skills, and what my experiences with knitting had been so far. As the night progressed, I mentioned that I was doing a research project on male knitters. I could see that some of the men were a bit nervous about my project, and did not seem overly excited at the prospect of being “watched” at that moment by a researcher.

This encounter allowed me to consider potential issues with approaching men who knit about my research. At first, many seemed nervous about my motives for coming to the knitting group: was I there solely to watch them? From this experience, I realized that their discomfort, coupled with the current trends in research on knitting, participant observation and discourse analysis were not the optimal research methods for this particular project.

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to examine the negotiation of masculine gender performances among men who engage in a “feminine” practice. It is important to me as a researcher that the stories and lived experiences of these men come through in this research, and influence the manner in which researchers examine masculinity.

In order to illustrate the complexities of masculinity and engagement with knitting, I used semi-structured, in-depth interviews, each lasting approximately 1 hour. Interviewing as a research method allows respondents to represent themselves in meaningful ways through the recounting of stories and experiences (Gurney, 1985; Herod, 1993; Schoenberger, 1992). These stories grant the researcher context for understanding the lived experiences of the individuals they are studying (Herod, 1993; Schoenberger, 1992). Furthermore, interviewing as a research method allows for an “interpretation of reality” that is likely to be consistent with the experiences that individuals face in their everyday lives (Gurney, 1985; Schoenberger, 1992, pg. 216). Considering the preliminary meetings I had with men who knit, I chose interviewing as my preferred research method not only because I wanted to hear men’s stories and understand their experiences, but this method also allows for variations between participants to be considered as rich data sources and opens up the possibility for new meanings with regards to men’s experiences with masculinity (Herod, 1993). Furthermore, considering the methodological gap in the existing academic literature, I decided that interviewing everyday men about their experiences with knitting would not only contribute to academic knowledge on knitting, but also contribute to academic knowledge on the subject of masculinities by allowing men the opportunity to share their own stories and views about their experiences as men.

The stories and experiences that permeate my research represent what is commonly known in feminist academia as “situated knowledge”. Initially coined by Haraway (1991) and also conceptually employed by Harding (1991), situated knowledge refers to the concept that individuals know what they know as a result of their own positionality. This positionality is influenced by factors such as gender, race, class, sexual orientation and several other aspects of identity formation. More specifically, situated knowledge is a reflection of what Mullings (1999)

calls “positional spaces”, whereby the “situated knowledge of both parties in the interview encounter and engender a level of trust and cooperation” (pg. 340). Therefore, positionality of the research participants not only informs this research project, but my own positionality as the researcher influences the manner in which I interacted with the participants and the depth of the stories collected during the interview process.

Taking into account my own position, and that of the men I spoke to, the aim of this research is to share the actual stories of the men as they were recounted to me. Although my position as the researcher allows me to select which stories appear in this finished piece, the experiences recounted by the participants reflect their own positions, and therefore create situated knowledges within their given contexts. Semi-structured interviews allowed for coverage of certain topics throughout the interview, but left enough flexibility for new questions to come up during the course of the interview (Hesse-Biber, 2007). This interview structure also allowed the interviews to be compared and contrasted without sacrificing the breadth and depth of the data. Furthermore, this particular method allowed for open-ended questions, which encouraged participants to convey their own stories and experiences (Hesse-Biber, 2007). Considering the importance I have placed on sharing the lived experiences of men who knit, semi-structured, in-depth interviews allowed for a more narrative approach to this study, thereby place importance on the stories these men wished to share, and placing their experiences at the forefront of knowledge contribution on the subject of masculinities. However, it is important to note that as a cis-gendered, White, middle-class feminist researcher, I understand that there are complexities that arise as a result of interviewing individuals who do not necessarily share similar positionalities. The next section will examine the insider/outsider debate in feminist research, and will serve to clarify my own positionality while interviewing men who knit.

Insider/Outsider Debate

During the initial planning stages of this research, I had concerns about being a female scholar trying to interview men. Would they actually want to talk to me? What would they tell me about their experiences with masculinity? While considering the previous encounter with potential research participants, I began to think about how the space I occupy as a researcher straddles the insider/outsider dichotomy. As such, it is important to consider what the major arguments are within this debate, and how I as a researcher fit within these concepts.

There are several issues to contend with regarding how a researcher can occupy different positions and identities while interviewing subjects. Researchers that are considered “insiders” to the groups they are interviewing often share similar experiences and knowledge with their participants, and are well situated to establish good rapport (Arendell, 1997; Buford May, 2014,). Furthermore, researchers may be more likely to obtain authentic information from their subjects and are likely to be trusted to be less exploitative than individuals who are considered “outsiders” (Buford May, 2014). Within the context of my research, the most influential positional space that I shared with my respondents was that of “knitter”. With regards to my own experience with other knitters, I found that I tend to establish easy rapport with other knitters because of our shared interest and because we both understand the skill, dedication involved and language of knitting. A lack of understanding of the complexity of this practice would have greatly impacted my research, and would likely have impacted the breadth of the stories shared with me. My positionality as an “insider” with regards to knitting allowed me to begin the interviews by talking about knitting and establishing rapport with the participants. By showing them I was a knitter with my own experiences in the craft, I was able to talk to them at length about their experiences with knitting with little “translation” required with regards to knitting language and context.

The insider knowledge I possessed served to counteract the “outsider” status I occupied as a woman interviewing men. My prior knowledge of knitting served to level some aspects of the interview process that may have been more difficult for other researchers. However, as a feminist researcher, I understand that power dynamics during the interview process present challenges with regards to the information obtained and how it will be interpreted and used to create academic knowledge. Rose (1997) states that “differences between the researcher and researched are perceived as distances in the landscape of power” (pg. 312). Furthermore, some researchers state that women interviewing men may actually create a level of “threat” with regards to respondents and their presentations of masculinity, and that this may manifest itself in different ways: from men taking over the interview process, to dealing with issues of misogyny, sexism and homophobia (Arendell, 1997; Lee, 1997; Padfield & Proctor, 1996; Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2001). Upon reflection, the experiences described by other women who have researched men were not experienced in my own research project. In fact, the differences between myself and the respondents, especially with regards to gender expression, created very few issues during the interview process. Similar to other researchers who have studied men, I found that although I did not share the same positionality as the respondents with regards to gender, I observed that all the men seemed quite comfortable discussing various issues with regards to their masculinities, and that my position as a woman may in fact have facilitated this sharing (Grenz 2005; Williams & Heikes, 1993;). Much like Grenz’s (2005) experience, I found that my positionality as a woman created a context that allowed for a “desire to confess”, whereby the men I interviewed may have been more likely and willing to share stories of their experiences as men and the stigma they have endured because I am a woman: a position that is not necessarily considered marginal within the knitting community, but one that experiences oppression within the larger patriarchal social

context (pg. 2091). This desire to confess not only presented itself during the interview process, but was also reflected in the popularity my research garnered on social media. After posting the call for participants for this project, I received an astounding number of participant emails asking to be part of the study. I surmise that the interest this study received could be due to the fact that men are considered a minority within the knitting community, and that this study would allow for the opportunity to have their voices and experiences heard. Therefore, this desire to confess was not only influenced by my positionality as a woman and my ability to build rapport during the interview process, but was also clearly present when looking at the level of interest that men who knit presented with regards to this research and having their stories as minorities within the community shared in a larger context.

When considering the insider/outsider debate for this particular research, identity is fluid and consistently being negotiated throughout the research process, which contributes to the issue of researchers being considered insiders and outsiders all at once (Allen, 2004; Levy 2013). I chose to recognize that, in this case, I am neither fully an outsider nor an insider; but that for this particular research, my insider status as a knitter weighed more heavily within my identity formation than the fact that I was a woman. Furthermore, although I initially had concerns about being a woman interviewing men, I did not encounter resistance from participants as I was able to build good rapport through our shared interest in knitting. I contend that my identity as a woman, although placing me in the “outsider” category of this debate, coupled with our shared interest in knitting, actually created a space for respondents to share elements of their experiences as men and fostered a rapport where respondents had a desire to confess their stories.

Participant Recruitment

Participants for this study were recruited through several different methods. I initially intended to recruit participants using convenience and snowball sampling. Convenience sampling “consists of recruiting participants from places where they are easily accessible” (Hesse-Biber, 2007, pg. 310). At the early stages of the research process, I decided to create and post advertisements for the study around the Carleton University campus, as well as other local universities and colleges, since almost 20% knitters today are around the ages of 18 – 24 (Craft Yarn Council, 2012). However, approximately one month before I planned to begin my interviews, I came across a Facebook page entitled “Real Men Knit”, which currently has over 1,000 members. After receiving permission to join the group, I posted a call for information and literature on male knitters. Many of the group members seemed receptive to the research idea, and several indicated their willingness to be contacted when I was ready to begin interviews. This enthusiasm from group members shifted my focus from interviewing only men from my local area to potentially interviewing men from a plethora of different communities, and so I posted my call for participants on the Men Who Knit Facebook group page, as well as on the Men Who Knit discussion board on Ravelry, a popular social media site for knitters. Snowball sampling was also used in some cases to recruit participants.

Participants

I recruited 15 participants identifying as male, over the age of 18, who had knit something in the previous six months. Two of the participants were recruited locally, and the remaining 13 were recruited on Facebook and Ravelry. Participants were located in the United States (11), Canada (3), and Europe (1). Interviews were conducted in person for the local participants and over Skype or phone with the participants recruited online.

All interviews were audio recorded (with participant consent) to ensure data accuracy and to facilitate the sharing of their stories in their own words. I personally transcribed all the interviews to ensure participant confidentiality, while also listening for common themes that arose from the interviews. The coding program NVIVO was used to analyze the interview transcripts. This program allowed me to run queries on particular words and phrases within interviews, and allowed me to code the interviews electronically. This electronic coding permitted me to highlight key themes across different respondent interviews, while keeping the individual interview transcripts intact, which proved useful for bringing context to the participant responses.

Demographics

Participant demographics were collected during the interview process. Participants were asked to tell me a bit about themselves, and almost all divulged their ages, marital status, and where they were raised. Ten participants were in the 20-40 age range, and four were in the 50-70 age range³. Eight participants reported that they were either married or partnered, and seven were single.

While there were no questions on sexual orientation during the interviews, all respondents divulged this aspect of their identities; eight respondents identified as heterosexual, and seven identified as homosexual. The divulging of this personal information without prompting may be as a result of the “desire to confess” environment that was mentioned previously with regards to being a woman interviewing men. However, there were also a number of other similarities between the participants and myself, which may have contributed to building rapport and creating an environment during the interviews that fostered sharing of information by the participants

³ One participant did not divulge his age during the interview.

The participants for this research all identified as White men. Although this identification was not overt (in the sense that they told me they were White), participants did add me as a “friend” to the social media site for knitters: Ravelry. As a result of this, I was able to see photos of participants finished knitting projects, all of which had captured images of themselves in the process. My identity as a White researcher was shared with that of the participants in this study. Therefore, I not only was viewed as an “insider” because of our shared interest in knitting, but also because I was a White researcher interviewing White participants. As a result, the issue of race was not a large factor in this particular study with regards to my participants, which is not uncommon in research where “race matching” takes place (Buford May, 2014, pg. 133). Some scholars state that the race of the interviewer not only contributes to being an insider or outsider with regards to race, but may also influence how forthcoming the respondents will be during the interview process (Best, 2003; Buford May, 2014; Herod, 1993; Marx, 2001). In this particular research, race was not discussed at great length, largely because I as the interviewer identified as the same race as the participants. However, it is worth noting that one conversation with regards to race arose during the interview process. After interviewing several participants and noticing that everyone was White, I asked one respondent if he had ever seen any racialized individuals at knitting retreats, and more specifically, if there were any Black men that he knew who knit. His response to that question is as follows:

I think a lot of it is also economic and I think that it's gay culture. A part of it is, you're taking whatever vacation time you have from work, assuming you have a job that gives you vacation time and going to meet a bunch of guys who knit somewhere far far away, so you've got to have the money for that or the savings for that. A lot of people will know each other from their own cultural circles. You know, I grew up in a Black housing project in Philadelphia, I'm not a typical gay, white, middle-class guy and I feel kind of out of place at knitting retreats because of that. Even though I pass for a white, middle-class, gay guy, it's not my background. So I think that a lot of people there are of a similar, you know, white collar, have jobs that they can plan vacation time from, generally more stable in

their lives, especially economically. It does tend to be a self-selecting group of people. It is definitely an extended social circle.

This participant's statement illustrates that although knitting retreats are not necessarily closed to racialized individuals, there are elements such as race and class that influence who attends knitting retreats and who views this as a worthwhile endeavor. He stated during his interview that he had maybe seen one or two Black men at knitting retreats in all the years he had been attending them. Furthermore, the individuals who attend knitting retreats tend to connect on social media after attending the gatherings. Therefore, the online group "Real Men Knit" is likely to be comprised of White, middle-class men who have attended knitting retreats. At the time of recruitment for participants, I was not aware that the social media group where I was posting my call for participants would inevitably link me to men who have not only attended knitting retreats, but also attended gatherings whereby men tended to congregate not only based a shared interest in knitting, but also inevitably shared similar racial and class characteristics. However, considering that this research project with regards to interviewing everyday men who knit is lacking in the current scope of academic literature, I felt that the experiences that the participants recounted to me would contribute to academic knowledge, regardless of the participants race. Furthermore, as stated previously, I had a large number of participants who wanted to be part of the study, and therefore I did not feel at the time that it was necessary to recruit additional respondents that were non-White identified.

Worth noting at this time, the respondent quoted above stated that the majority of men who attend knitting retreats either identify or read as middle-class. Considering my insider knowledge of knitting, this is not a surprising finding. Knitting can be considered an expensive activity to undertake, especially as a knitter becomes more experienced and begins to learn which materials they enjoy working with. Considering my own position as a knitter, it is difficult to say how much

money I have spent on knitting paraphernalia, but I can undoubtedly say that it is a considerable amount of money. Knitting needles on average cost anywhere from \$50 to \$90 per set⁴, which includes only one set of needles in each size. As a result, many knitters tend to purchase additional needles and sizes as they become more experienced and knit more items. Furthermore, there are a number of different needle types: some are wooden, plastic, carbon, nickel plated, interchangeable, double pointed, straight, and round...the list goes on. Although not all knitters purchase all possible needle variations, it is not uncommon for knitters to possess more than one set of needles for any particular project. Furthermore, most knitters do not knit one project at a time, but have several projects on needles at any given time (my average is about 5), and therefore, this requires some knitters to have multiple sets of needles in the same or similar sizes. Aside from the costs of purchasing needles, the cost of yarn can be considered quite expensive. On average, a skein can cost approximately \$10 to \$30. Although on the surface, this may not seem overly expensive, it is important to note that projects such as socks only use approximately one skein to complete, while larger items like scarves and sweaters may require anywhere from 5 to 12 skeins of yarn, depending on sizing required for the finished product. Furthermore, yarn comes in a multitude of different materials, from inexpensive acrylic to mid-range merino wool to more expensive cashmere and silk wool. The preference of the yarn is left entirely to the knitter, but from the men I interviewed, I found that many of them (like myself) like to knit with mid-range to more expensive yarns for their projects. Therefore, it is clear that knitting as an activity can become quite expensive, and as a result, tends to attract individuals who have the economic means to purchase the material required to pursue their hobby. Furthermore, from my own experience, knitting is a slow and labor-intensive activity, often requiring a number of hours of leisure time in

⁴ Information regarding pricing was referenced from Knitpicks.com, a popular online knitting store.

order to complete any given project. According to one of the participants I interviewed, a single pair of hand knitted socks may take an average of 20 hours to complete. Therefore, it can be said that knitting is not only expensive in some cases, but that it requires a large amount of leisure time in order to participate in the activity: characteristics that are often associated with being middle-class. As such, almost all the men I interviewed either read or identified as middle class. Furthermore, I found that class was another intersection where I was also considered an insider with this particular group, and although no explicit conversations with regards to class occurred during the course of the interviews, my personal identification as middle-class and my understanding of the costs associated with knitting as an activity lead me to also consider the respondents I interviewed as middle-class.

Unintended Consequences

Every precaution was taken to minimize any harm to participants in this study. Although this study was not considered high risk, participants were informed of the intended length of the interviews (approximately 1 hour), and that the purpose of the interview was to convey the stories and experiences of men who knit. They were also informed that precautions would be taken to ensure their confidentiality, and that all interview transcripts would be saved on my personal computer in password protected files under pseudonyms. Participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the study any time before January 2015, which was when I expected to have all transcriptions and findings written. Participants were also informed that all interviews would be audio-recorded, with their consent, and that these recordings would be used for transcription and contextual purposes only. Participants were also informed for how long the research data would be kept and when it would be destroyed.

Although no glaring ethical issues arose, it is worth noting that, based on my recruitment method, many of the participants knew each other. Knowing this, I did not divulge any identifying information about particular participants of the study to other participants during the course of the interview process, and that the men who indicated that they knew some of the other participants only knew of them through their interactions on social media sites (Facebook and Ravelry). Furthermore, I found that several of the men I interviewed discussed this study online, and that they had voluntarily divulged that they had participated in the study.

There was one individual who wished to take part in the study but was unable to due to logistical issues. He became quite upset that he was unable to participate and began to question my legitimacy as a researcher on the website “Real Men Knit”⁵. Initially, I was anxious about the potential impact this may have on other potential participants. However, my concerns were quickly quelled, as there was an influx of men who wanted to participate. Within 24 hours of posting the call for participants on social media, I received 20 responses from potential participants wanting to speak about their experiences. Within a week of posting the recruitment sign, I had interviewed the 15 participants I have quoted in this study and turned away an additional 10 who had later responded to my call for participants. The influx of participants for this study and the popularity it gained on social media was extremely surprising.

Conclusion

The result of this study is a collection of experiences and stories recounted to me by men who knit. Their stories permeate this thesis, and serve to illustrate the manner in which some White, middle-class men are beginning to reframe their own ideas of masculinity. The following chapter will examine how men who knit contend with issues of stigma in their everyday lives.

⁵ See Appendix A

Although some men understand that engaging in knitting, an activity that is socially classified as feminine will garner them some levels of stigma, others have begun to reformulate, and in some cases, coopted knitting to better suit their own masculine performances. Therefore, in the following chapter, I address how masculinity as a gendered performance is in a constant state of flux, and requires ongoing negotiation.

***“I’m Man Enough to Knit”*: Negotiations of Masculinity and Stigma**

There is a great deal of literature on the subject of men in what are considered “alternate” or “female” oriented fields. Christine Williams’ (1992) work on men in female dominated fields illustrates the manner in which men are given preferential treatment within their workplaces (demonstrated often through promotions to higher-paying positions) and that the discrimination they face often comes from outside the sphere of their professions. Men who knit experience similar forms of preferential treatment whilst simultaneously contending with discrimination and stigma by individuals within the larger public. This chapter will explore the current literature on men in predominantly “female” fields, such as cooking, babysitting, figure skating and gymnastics, all areas that are socially constructed as “female” activities. These particular activities were selected as, much like knitting, they are often deemed to be hobbies, and therefore require dedication of leisure time and are more commonly viewed in the West as individual choices, as opposed to activities that are selected out of financial necessity (like jobs). This literature will serve to inform my analysis of how men who choose to participate in knitting contend with their own negotiations of their masculine gender performance

The “Glass Escalator” Effect: Reformulations of Men in Women’s Work

Christine Williams’ seminal piece on men working in predominantly “female” fields sheds light on the manner in which men are treated within the professions of nursing, childcare, and social work. Her research highlights that although women in “male” fields tend to experience discrimination that hinders their development and advancement in their chosen professions, men experience a type of “discrimination” that actually enhances their work experiences and allows them greater access to higher-paying positions within their professions (Williams, 1992). Through

interviews with 76 White men in “female” dominated fields, Williams demonstrates that men experience preferential treatment during the hiring process, and that many of the men describe how they are encouraged by their supervisors and colleagues to move from “frontline” positions to administrative roles that garner more prestige and better pay (Williams, 1992). Furthermore, male respondents for this study stated that they were more likely to have supervisors of the same sex, and that through development of shared interests and activities with their male bosses, respondents emphasized that these “bonds” allowed them to attain higher paying positions within different areas of their work (Williams, 1992). Williams’ study demonstrates that although women in male dominated fields often encounter the “glass ceiling”, men in female dominated fields experience the “glass escalator” – whereby the very notion of being a man in a field dominated by women connotes employees that are more knowledgeable and skilled and therefore deserve to achieve higher paying positions as a result of their sex (Williams, 1992).

Although the advantages to men in women’s professions is made quite clearly by Williams, she also highlights that not all men experience the “glass escalator” the same way. In fact, some respondents noted that their outward performances of masculinity played a role in the manner in which they achieved higher status positions (Williams, 1992, Harvey Wingfield, 2009). Respondents stated that men who were openly homosexual did not experience the same preferential treatment, and this often led men to “exaggerate their ‘masculine’ qualities” in order to be considered for positions that were seen as more “‘acceptable’ specialties for men” (Williams, 1992, pg. 299). Furthermore, as Adia Harvey Wingfield’s study on Black male nurses demonstrates, racialized men do not experience the glass escalator in “female” jobs, but instead experience “glass barriers”, where they encounter derision and mistrust not only by their colleagues and employers, but by clients as well (Harvey Wingfield, 2009).

Williams' study also examines the manner in which men in female dominated fields experience stigma from those who are not in their profession. She states that public perceptions of men in the fields of nursing and childcare as homosexual, "asexual, "feminine" or having pedophilic tendencies may be contributing to the lack of men entering female dominated fields (Williams, 1992, pg. 261). Furthermore, Williams states that "unlike women who enter traditionally male professions, men's movements into these jobs are perceived by the 'outside world' as a step down in status (Williams, 1992, pg. 262). As such, the stigma that men may experience from outsiders as a result of their career choices may lead some to exercise their male "privilege" within these fields and move into more administrative roles which are seen as more fitting to "proper" male gender performance.

William's study on the "glass escalator" has contributed greatly to the literature on the subject of men in women-dominated fields, and serves as a starting point for analysis on the subject of men who knit. Her research clearly outlines that although heterosexual, White men tend to reap multiple benefits as a result of being a minority in different fields of women's work, they are not exempt from experiencing stigma from individuals outside of their given profession. However, as William's points out, the financial benefits associated with their rapid advancement in their professions far outweighs the potential damage of the stigma they experience, which may explain why the individuals she interviewed continued to choose these professions despite garnering negative public perception (Williams, 1992, Williams, 2013).

Several other studies have examined the manner in which men have come to negotiate issues of stigma with regards to the feminized activities they have chosen to engage in. Sevier and Ashcraft's article on male elementary school teachers illustrates the manner in which male teachers have come to negotiate their own masculine performances while engaging in work that is deemed

to be feminine. In their article, they explore the implications of the prevailing public discourse of "male teacher as role model", and how this discourse heavily shapes the manner in which male elementary school teachers formulate their own understandings of their roles as men within a highly feminized workplace. Through interviews with several male teachers, they were able to glean a first-hand understanding of how these teachers construct and reinforce already existing rhetoric around men as role models to young boys. Many of the male teachers explained that they were seen by others (staff and parents) as being the disciplinarian or "tougher" teachers, while the female teachers were often characterized as "nurturers" (Sevier & Ashcraft, 2009). These characterizations are clearly constructed from societal understandings of appropriate masculine and feminine gender performances. However, when the male teachers were interrogated about the validity of these gender constructions, they often chalked up these performances to "personality" differences between male and female teachers (Sevier & Ashcraft, 2009). As such, these teachers were not necessarily interrogating how pre-conceived gender roles actually play out in the classroom, and considered that these differences in interaction with students was due to them inherently not being as "nurturing" as the female teachers (Sevier & Ashcraft, 2009). This, of course, highlights that gender constructions around appropriate masculinity and femininity are still evident in Western society in the teaching profession.

Furthermore, Willet's (2008) study on male babysitters examines the manner in which young men historically had reformulated the concept of childcare into one that more easily coincided with traits that were regarded as traditionally masculine.

Willet's (2008) examination of male babysitters highlights the manner in which this particular activity was reformulated as a result of an increase of women in the workplace and a lack of young, female babysitters. She states that after World War Two, fathers were heavily

involved in child rearing and childcare (Willett, 2008). Men who were depicted as caregivers of their children were seen as balancing male-appropriate careers (e.g.: lawyers, businessmen or engineers) (Willett, 2008). They were heralded as balancing both the demands of male-appropriate work and children, which, in turn, resulted in women being characterized as deficient in balancing their parenting/working duties (Willett, 2008). At this time, a rise in what was named the “boy sitter” was greatly celebrated, and was seen as a necessity during a time that was seeing an increase of women in the workforce (Willett, 2008, pg. 276).

Although young women were still engaging in childcare during this time, young male babysitters were beginning to reformulate babysitting as business ventures (Willett, 2008). Young men were touted as preferable babysitters to teenage girls, who were depicted as irresponsible and self-centered (Willett, 2008). As a result, young male babysitters were characterized as far less distracted than their female counterparts, and were far more likely to pay attention to the children under their care than to “gossip over the phone” (Willett, 2008, pg. 278). Furthermore, the employment of male babysitters was seen as contributing to “a young, organizational man in the making”, and was seen as a positive way of contributing to the economy (as many young men took up babysitting so that they could purchase their first cars) (Willett, 2008, pg. 278). As such, Willett clearly outlines that although young men were engaging in an activity that was gendered as “female”, the reformulation of male babysitters as more desirable due to their innate abilities to be responsible and organized illustrates the manner in which young men defined their engagement in this activity. This act of re-definition can also be examined when looking at the manner in which the Boy Scouts have re-formulating cooking, an activity that is traditionally gendered as female, into an activity that is highly masculine.

Mechling's study on the subject of young men's cooking in the Boy Scouts also outlines the manner in which the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) has come to reformulate the activity of cooking, largely seen as a female activity, into one that is more aligned with masculine ideals. The BSA was initially formed in the early 20th century as a result of the "softening" of young boys, the aimed to create a space for young men to come together and bond (Mechling, 2005). The author states that although cooking has been gendered as a feminine practice, it has been re-conceptualized by the BSA as a "manly art" (Mechling, 2005). The BSA therefore constructs cooking for a camp in the outdoors not as an everyday task, but an art form. This involves the building of their own cooking fires, and preparing meals for the troop without using traditional cooking utensils (Mechling, 2005). This added challenge of creating cooking tools from found items in the woods asserts that a boy who knows how to cook in those conditions is truly demonstrating proper masculinity (Mechling, 2005). The element of competition is also present, as boys compete with one another in order to obtain badges that demonstrate which cooking skills they have acquired and can accomplish in a wilderness setting (Mechling, 2005). Furthermore, boys tend to bond over the consumption and play with food, and the author found that many boys, in his experience, would throw cans of food into a camp fire to see which ones would create the largest explosions (Mechling, 2005). As such, playing with not only food, but fire, contributes the manner in which cooking has been reformulated as legitimately masculine within the BSA.

Interestingly, these works highlight the manner in which certain feminized activities have come to be reformulated and re-negotiated by men in order to make their participation in certain types of feminized work more acceptable within a masculine framework. The male knitters I interviewed also indicated that there are certain aspects of their practice of knitting that they have either reformulated or chosen not to participate in as a result of the de-masculinization that they

may experience. For instance, one respondent stated that he had “*no interest in doing baby clothing or any other cutesy stuff like that*”, claiming that he preferred to knit items that were more challenging and required more skill. What this respondent demonstrates is that certain aspects of knitting are touted as requiring more skill than others, and as a result, he has decided to dedicate his time to improving his skills within this craft, which can be characterized as a masculine practice. Another respondent, Nathan, echoed his sentiments, stating that he “*[doesn't] do things that are really safe too much of the time...I do renegade things. And my specialty is cutting [my] knitting, which people are very afraid of...I knit blocks of fabric and totally cut them up and tailor them into men's vests*”. What Nathan demonstrates in his statement is that he, like several other men I interviewed for this project, approaches knitting with a sense of fearlessness, and a drive to try new things that the average knitter may be nervous or unwilling to try. Furthermore, considering Nathan's statement, it can be said that not only are some men finding interesting ways to participate in knitting that more easily fit with connotations of masculinity, but that the act of cutting into knitting may symbolize a destruction of one aspect of the activity of knitting and the creation of something more masculinized (e.g.: men's vests) in the process. These statements demonstrate that some men who knit are attempting to create niches for themselves within the craft of knitting, and as a result, are re-formulating certain types of knitting as more appropriate for men to engage in.

Certain knitting companies have caught on to the changes that male knitters are bringing to the craft and the knitting community as well. Several of the men I interviewed stated that companies, like Skacel, have reached out to groups of men at the male knitting retreats in an effort to capitalize on the shift that male knitters are presenting. The respondent above, Nathan, stated that he often teaches his “cutting” techniques to other knitters at these retreats, and three other

respondents stated that they have designed original works for this company during the retreats, and have even been published and compensated financially for their creations. Interestingly, these experiences echo the “glass escalator” effect that Williams’ work has outlined. Men who engage with knitting are negotiating which certain aspects of knitting and this serves to inform what projects they will and will not partake in. Some men are also choosing to look at knitting as a form of skill building as opposed to knitting for hobby, and approach knitting with a sense of fearlessness and reformulation that can be characterized as aligning with masculinity. Furthermore, although men are considered a minority group within the knitting community, attending retreats has granted some men the opportunity to design for a knitting company (an opportunity that is not necessarily afforded to many knitters) and in return, has allowed them to rise within the community from knitters who copy other designs to knitters who create and publish their own original works. Therefore, much like William’s findings with regards to the glass escalator effect in male nurses, men who knit experience some levels of preferential treatment and can be granted opportunities to become more prominent within knitting communities.

As such, much like the studies on male nurses and teachers, male knitters are engaging in an activity that is commonly gendered as female. However, what the research above and the statements from the men in this study demonstrate are that men are engaging in the process of reformulating not only their roles in their chosen activities, but in the case of the men in this study, what types of knitting projects may more readily coincide with their own masculine identities and performances. Furthermore, their engagement with the craft and their ability to come together during men’s-only knitting retreats allows not only companies like Skacel to capitalize on innovative new knitters, but grants those knitters the opportunity to design and rise within the ranks of the knitting community.

Several of the men interviewed discussed issues of negotiating their performances of masculinity while engaging in an activity like knitting, which is still socially regarded as a feminine pursuit. Although the men's knitting retreats provide a safe space for them to openly discuss and display their skills in the field of knitting, some of the respondents had varying accounts of what they believed it meant to be masculine, and to be a man who knits. Tom, a 45 year-old married father of 3 children stated:

Personally, I try not to differentiate. It's person, entity, you know? You're a person, you do what you as a person want to do. If you look at it as masculinity, I believe I'm male enough to do whatever I want to do. I say I wear kilts. Well around here in Pennsylvania, it's a, I hate to say this negatively, redneck group, so walking around with a kilt you get looked at as if you're wearing a skirt. And if I have enough nerve to wear a skirt in public, I can knit in public. But again, if I want to do it, I do it. And if you're male enough to be able to do whatever you want that's all that matters.

In Tom's case, his masculine gender is linked to his confidence and ability to engage in whatever type of activity he chooses to do. As he clearly stated, he's male enough to do what he wants to do, and therefore, it can be understood that his construction of masculinity is linked to the idea of independence, confidence and ability to knit. Much like Tom, Andrew, a 38 year old heterosexual man, also stated that his masculinity is linked to confidence and feeling comfortable with oneself:

"I would say that masculinity is whatever a person feels about themselves. And whatever they feel represents being a man. It's very hard to come up with an answer that either doesn't sound overly politically correct, and not particularly true. I mean, in my case, masculinity is just feeling comfortable with the fact that I am a man. And whatever I do is what I do. Since I'm doing it, a man is doing it. I don't feel that I have to do certain things or can't do certain things because I'm a man."

As such, masculinity in these two cases is clearly linked with a sense of self-confidence and assuredness that they can engage in any activity they wish without their masculine gender being questioned to a point of extreme discomfort. Considering my own interest in masculinity and understanding that the construction of identity has many intersections, these responses are not

entirely surprising from two middle-class White men. One response worth noting was from Nathan, a 31 year-old trans-man who also knits. When asked what masculinity meant to him, he responded:

Oh, I have no idea. I just, whatever part of my daily life...I don't really think about it much. It's interesting for me because I'm transgender, I used to think about it all the time, "oh what does this mean? Oh what can I do to fit into my own life?". And having transitioned now I don't have to think about it anymore, and that's really kind of a relief. I can just do whatever I want to do, and people say "oh there's a guy, he must be masculine, and that is fine". You know, it's a complete non-issue for me. So I guess whatever I do is masculine enough, but the way I tend to look at...there are no two men who will experience masculinity in the same way, so the fact that I have a different history is really, it doesn't make me any more different from other men than other men are from each other. I notice what's masculine or feminine sometimes if people are self-conscious about it, but I figure the things that I do are masculine enough just because I'm a man doing them. But I don't feel like I'm an activist or political in any way, I'm just, you know, [knitting] in line at the post office.

Nathan's response to this question, although very similar to that of Tom and Lucas's constructions of masculinity, adds a bit of nuance to the manner in which some men experience masculinity. His comment with regards to how every man experiences masculinity differently serves to fuel the need for further interviews with men on the subject of how they construct their own ideas of what it means to be a man in Western society.

Although these re-negotiations and shifts that are occurring for men in female dominated fields are assisting certain men to negotiate their masculinities within these activities, undoubtedly, men still experience stigma as a result of engaging in these activities. The next section will explore further studies on the subject of men in women-dominated hobbies and sports (activities that connote leisure, and therefore choice), which will serve to inform the manner in which I examine how men who knit experience varying levels of stigma and how homophobia informs the manner in which they choose to engage their craft.

Men in Female-Dominated Hobbies: Negotiations of Masculinity and Stigma

Men have been involved in feminized activities throughout history. Research on men in figure skating and boys in rhythmic gymnastics highlights key issues that men and boys contend with as a result of choosing to participate in certain sports. What the findings of research on men in feminized sport have in common is that men are consistently having to reinforce their masculinity and sexuality if they participate in either figure skating or gymnastics (Adams, 2007; Adams 2011; Chimot & Louveau, 2010). Sport in the 20th century has been constructed as a way of forming boys into men, and as such, certain sports are not seen as appropriate avenues for the construction of masculinity (Adams, 2007; Adams 2011, Chimot & Louveau, 2010). Sports like rugby and football are more readily accepted and gendered as male activities, and sports that are gendered as male have socially been touted with their ability to create athletic prowess and virility - two very fundamental attributes of masculinity (Chimot & Louveau, 2010). As a result of the social importance placed on masculinity and sport, men who participate in activities which are deemed feminine are often seen as "effeminate, and presumed gay" (Adams, 2007, pg. 874). Taking into consideration Connell's theory of masculinity, male homosexuality is considered a subordinate form of masculinity, one which is not deemed as desirable in the social construction of what it means to be an "appropriate" man. Therefore, participation in activities that are gendered as "female", like figure skating, gymnastics, or even knitting, garners some levels of social stigma which serve to regulate what forms of masculinity are accepted in society and which ones are not.

These regulatory practices with regards to feminized activities take place not only within society at large, but also by people that are close to men and boys. Research on feminized sport demonstrates that men and boys have to negotiate certain aspects of masculinity within their chosen activity. In the case of feminized sport, men and boys are encouraged to remain physically

flexible and supple, which in turn translates to body projects which discourage the building of large amounts of muscle (Chimot & Louveau, 2010). Because of the discouragement of muscularity among boys and men in these activities, many contend that in order to adopt more acceptable male physicality, they understand that leaving their chosen sport is inevitable in order to embody a more masculine physique (Chimot & Louveau, 2010). Furthermore, some men and boys indicate that masculine figures within their families, like fathers, play a key role in regulating which types of masculinity are deemed socially appropriate. Several men in studies on figure skating and gymnastics stated that their fathers were not necessarily pleased at their engagement in these activities, and as a result, many of the respondents stated they would eventually leave their sport to pursue activities that more readily coincided with appropriate manhood (Adams, 2007; Chimot & Louveau, 2010). Therefore, not only do some of the men in these studies contend with issues of stigma from the public at large, but they also indicate that they are receiving pressures from some of their family members to leave the sport in order to pursue activities that are characterized as more “appropriate” to their masculine gender.

Several of the men I interviewed stated that they also experience stigma from their families and members of the public with regards to their knitting. One of the men I interviewed, Oliver, a 48-year old homosexual man from the mid-west, recounted a recent story of a gathering with his family, and while they were watching a sporting event on television, he decided to pull out his latest knitting project. He states: *“yeah, so I was knitting a swatch, and one of my brothers said something off, and I just...laughed at him, like whatever...I can’t remember what he said, but it was definitely a dig at my masculinity. But he’s homophobic anyways”*. Oliver’s recounting of this story indicated that his brother was openly involved in the regulation of his masculinity, and he goes on to state that it became difficult to sit in the same room with his brother because of the

homophobic comments that were being launched at him as a result of his engagement with knitting. Oliver's experience of masculine gender policing is not unique. Several other men I interviewed stated that they experienced very similar comments, but mostly from strangers. Many explained that they often received funny looks in public, often from women. One of the more telling instances of public stigma came from one 38-year old respondent named Andrew who identified as heterosexual recounting a time when an adverse reaction really took him by surprise in a public place:

Probably the worst adverse reaction I had was in the airport and a 5 or 6 year old boy was watching me while I was knitting. And finally he spoke up and said "my dad told me only gay boys knit". And I said "well, dad may not be right about everything". And he kind of looked at me and said "well, are you?". And I said, "Well, does it matter?". And he kind of shook his head and walked away. It made me really sad that that stereotype is being passed on.

Andrew's story clearly indicates that policing of masculinity not only still occurs among adults, but that young boys are still being taught that their gender has boundaries of acceptable activities and behavior, and that reinforcing those boundaries serves to ensure that masculinity is performed in a very rigid and regimented manner. The comment does serve to demonstrate that policing of masculinity is a practice that is learned (in this case from his father) and that violating boundaries of appropriate masculinity is met with claims of subordinate and feminized masculinity, in this case, being a gay man.

Liam, an openly gay, 43-year old man from Philadelphia, commented on his experience of knitting in public. Liam stated that:

In public I get...people either look at me, I've never had off comments, I've had either positive remarks, or, I have had strange looks, but, it doesn't bother me, I just zone in on what I'm doing and ignore them. You know, I'm in a safe place when I'm doing it, so it's not like anybody's gonna, you know, I don't feel offended, so you know...I like what I do, I love it.

Liam's comments on knitting in public illustrate that not all social stigma is voiced in the same manner as what was experienced by Andrew. In Liam's case, social stigma can entail receiving unwanted looks and attention from individuals in a public setting. Although Liam indicates that these negative looks from others don't necessarily bother him, his statement regarding being in a "safe place" clearly signifies that stigma and issues of violence with regards to policing masculinity are still prevalent. Although this part of the comment is short, Liam's statement with regards to "*it's not like anybody's gonna, you know...*" is telling of the potential for violence that some men experience as a result of embodying forms of masculinity that are deemed socially inappropriate, and the social stigma that men continue to face with regards to their performances of masculinity.

It is therefore clear that there continues to be a pattern of social regulation with regards to masculine gender performance. However, it is important to note that many of the men in the study who indicated that they had experienced elements of stigma have developed methods for coping with this type of gender policing. One particular respondent, 55-year old Ben from Montreal indicated that he had a prepared answer for times when he is met with derision from others in public:

Then there's another pathway where they'll say "oh, my God, I've never seen a man knit before", and generally, my prepared answer for that is, and it's purely theatrical, I'll say "well, I like to break a gender stereotype every day before breakfast, don't you?". That's my stock answer to that query. And then if somebody, you know, really has got iron cladding on that day and they laugh and they say "oh yeah, you know, that is kind of a dumb question isn't it?" and I'll say "no, it's not dumb, [gender] social [ization] is just something you're a victim of, that's all.

This particular response, not only serves as an interesting way to address stigma in a humorous manner, but also serves to illustrate that, as a direct response of continued comments about their

gender performance while knitting, men are attempting to make new definitions of masculinity and challenge traditional notions of what it really means to be a “man” in Western society.

Much like the findings in the literature on men in gymnastics and figure skating, men who knit state that they experience varying levels of stigma as a result of their choice to engage in a feminized activity. The literature on gymnastics and figure skating demonstrates that men’s choices to participate in these feminized sports are regarded as a transitory process, and one where they will later leave the sport for more appropriately “masculine” pursuits, while the men I interviewed did not indicate to me that the derision they experience affects whether or not they will stop or continue to knit.

Other studies on the subject of men in feminized sport indicates that although men experience derision and develop coping mechanisms that assist in lessening the stigma they face, some men are beginning to reformulate new ways of performing their masculinity through the inclusion of some aspects of femininity. Studies on men in cheerleading demonstrates that certain men are referencing new forms of masculine gender performance while engaging in an activity that is not only gendered as a feminine pursuit, but also straddles the line between sport and hobby.

Studies on men in cheerleading identified trends in the manner in which men negotiate their masculinities on a daily basis: some referencing hegemonic masculinity, others referencing a new form of masculinity which Eric Anderson calls inclusive masculinity. The majority of the men in cheerleading experience some levels of stigma from their peers (Anderson, 2005; Bemiller, 2005). Their involvement in this activity brings about the perception that they are homosexual and transgressing masculine gender performance due to the fact that they are involved in something that is not perceived as a “real sport” (Bemiller, 2005, pg. 213). Furthermore, they experience stigma and labelling as un-masculine because they are seen as “‘crossing over’ into a

female domain” (Bemiller, 2005, pg. 213). As a result of this perpetual stigma, men who participate in cheerleading have developed coping mechanisms to counteract the reactions they receive from others and to reassert their masculinities (Bemiller, 2005). These coping mechanisms involve engaging in behaviors that connote “saving face”, whereby the men make reference to characteristics of hegemonic masculinity as a way of asserting their masculine dominance (Anderson, 2005; Bemiller, 2005). The behaviors demonstrated include territoriality with regards to not only the female cheerleaders, but also by consistently indicating that men were historically seen as the first cheerleaders, and that they are in the process of reclaiming the sport as a masculine endeavor (Bemiller, 2005). Some male cheerleaders stated that they are aware that they are regarded as more “girlie men” and stated that although this stigma exists, men were beginning to reformulate their roles on the squad as essential for national competitions because they were able to demonstrate more physical prowess than their female counterparts by doing “what women can’t” (Anderson, 2005, pg. 344). Much like the findings from William’s study (1992), the presence of men on the team is constructed as essential. They are regarded as such because they were able to support the women in pursuing more daring stunts, and references to the fact that their physical strength far outweighed that of their female counterparts clearly demonstrates how some men are equating their physicality with hegemonic masculinity, even though their chosen activity is not regarded as appropriately masculine. This negotiation of masculinity can also be seen in interviews with female cheerleaders, who indicated that the men on their team were not only regarded as their “brothers”, but that they also considered these men to be the “biggest perverts” because they consistently referenced heterosexuality and the pursuit of female sexual conquests, as well as engaged in behavior that sexualized their female teammates. (Bemiller, 2005, pg. 217). The sexualization of their female teammates also serves as a reference to sexual prowess, a key

component of hegemonic masculinity. Furthermore, some male cheerleaders recounted experiencing varying levels of stigma, but they often quelled these unwanted comments with threats of violent retaliation towards their defamers (Bemiller, 2005). Again, references to physical violence as a result of stigma can also be associated with hegemonic masculinity. Therefore, it is clear that men in cheerleading do experience levels of stigma, but consistent referencing of hegemonic masculinity with regards to athletic ability, sexual prowess and threats of violence serve to ensure that although these men are participating in an activity that is feminized, they are still to be regarded as performing legitimate and acceptable masculinity. However, some men who participate in cheerleading do not demonstrate behaviors that are entirely consistent with hegemonic masculinity. As stated previously, one key manner in which hegemonic masculinity is reinforced is through the denigration of male homosexuality. Anderson's study on male cheerleaders found that men engaged in a different form of masculine gender performance with regards to their homosexual team members. Anderson observed a form of masculinity which he calls inclusive masculinity, whereby homosexuality is not regarded as incompatible with masculine gender performance. He observed that several heterosexual male cheerleaders regularly interacted with homosexual men on their team, and found that on one particular evening out, many of the heterosexual men preferred to go out to gay clubs with the homosexual counterparts because they found the experiences in those environments to have a better "vibe" (Anderson, 2005, pg. 346). When Anderson questioned the men about fears of being perceived as gay, the heterosexual men often stated that they did not care what others thought of them, and that in some case, they found it flattering when gay men would flirt with them in these environments (Anderson, 2005). Furthermore, denigrating comments with regards to male homosexuality were not tolerated among the heterosexual men, that these men also did not feel that they needed to align particularly with

any specific forms of masculine gender performance, and openly stated that they were not concerned with “associating with femininity” (Anderson, 2005, pg. 347). Therefore, Anderson’s study demonstrates that inclusive masculinity is transgressive to current ideas of hegemonic masculinity in that masculine gender performance in these cases is openly accepting male homosexuality. The men I interviewed for my study on men who knit did reference this notion of inclusive masculinity with regards to how outsiders may view them as homosexual, and how they negotiate that transgression of masculinity as a result of being men who knit.

Among the population I interviewed for this piece, several of the men I spoke to also expressed similar experiences and responses to their own practice of knitting as the men in the studies listed previously. What proves most interesting is how the men in my sample discussed negotiating their own masculinities and managing stigma while knitting. Many of the men explained that they experience varying levels of stigma around this activity, especially when they are knitting in a public setting. One example of this is when Lucas, a 65 year old man, explained that he’s encountered some individual’s undesirable glances: *“I’ve gotten negative looks that were uncomfortable, but, I could care less. I don’t care what anyone thinks of me. Honestly, I’m too old to worry about what people think”*. Another respondent, Jacob, has had experiences similar to Lucas, who identifies as heterosexual and is part of the US Navy, and specifically recounted a time when he experienced stigma from a woman in a knitting store:

I was in a shop, I was on my way home from work so I was in my uniform, and this older lady in her 60’s or 70’s came up to me, she put her hand on my arm, and she said “I think it’s so wonderful that they let you people in the military now”. And I’m like “what, knitters”? I really didn’t know what she was talking about at first, but she assumed that because I was knitting I must be gay. She was kind of taken aback. And I just kind of chuckled and said “well, it takes all kinds”.

Both men in this case stated that they’ve experienced some levels of what can be deemed as “lesser” stigma associated with their knitting in a public setting. What proves interesting in these

two cases in that the men both claimed that although they get negative looks and comments from strangers with regards to their knitting in public, they both demonstrate that this does not deter them from knitting, let alone knitting in a public setting. These respondents also clearly demonstrate that they understand that stigma is somewhat expected as a result of engagement with this activity, and have both managed to find coping mechanisms to prevent internalization of this stigma. In another case, 30-year old Will explained that people are usually curious about what he's doing, and that his encounters are typically mitigated by the fact that he has what is deemed to be a typically "masculine" appearance: "*I mean, I'm a bearded man...they very often will ask questions about what it is I'm doing, or whatever. I don't have any problem with that*". Will may, in some ways, mitigate the amount of stigma from strangers as a result of his societally accepted masculine appearance.

In other cases, some of the men interviewed claimed they had encounters with strangers that led them to moments of shame with regards to their knitting practice. For instance, Liam, who openly identifies as gay, told a story about having knit a poncho that he very much looked forward to wearing. When he went hiking wearing his poncho for the first time, he encountered a woman who gave him a look that made him feel uncomfortable. His response was to say "*Yes, I am wearing a poncho, yes, I made it and I'm proud.*" He stated that:

For a moment, I let myself feel ashamed, but then the comment came out. I couldn't wait to wear this poncho, I was so proud. If I'm not emotionally comfortable wearing it, I won't wear it. At times, I feel that people are judging me that way, but again, it's none of my business what that woman thinks of me. I spent my life worrying what people think of me, it doesn't get you anywhere

Although several of the men interviewed stated that they've had similar experiences, only Liam spoke about having a moment of shame with regards to something he had proudly produced

himself. As such, although many of the men experience some levels of stigma, most stated that they had all reached a point where they chose to no longer care what others thought of them.

These sentiments are clearly demonstrated when I asked each of the respondents to tell me what masculinity meant to them. Considering that this thesis is about how men construct their own masculine identity, it seems fitting to allow for a space in this work for the men interviewed to voice what they think masculinity is and how they feel they are challenging current constructions of masculinity in the West.

What does Masculinity Mean to You?

When asked how they felt they challenged traditional notions of masculinity, most of the men interviewed stated that they felt they directly transgressed predominant constructions of masculinity. For instance, 28-year old Brandon stated that:

I probably challenge them more than I meet them. Of course, what I think of as stereotypical masculine attributes are, like, the big, braggadocio kind of guy that are always hitting on each other or putting each other down. That kind of negative stereotype. I'm not very much like that. I'm quieter in a group setting, I'm less physical, and I'm not super competitive in a physical way. If I go out to play a game of pick-up basketball, I care more about whether or not we had a good game than if my team wins or loses.

Brandon clearly states in this particular passage that elements of masculinity, such as demonstrating power and domination over others, and masculine competition are traits that he feels he does not possess, and as a result, has formulated his masculinity in opposition to those particular masculine traits. Another respondent, Will explained that being in touch with his emotions is the manner in which he challenges current notions of masculinity:

If it means that you've had a loss and it's time to cry, then you can cry in public. If it's time to be tender and help somebody, you be tender and help. Which is not necessarily true in a general scheme of things, especially in this area. Don't be John Wayne.

His comments with regards to John Wayne are in direct reference to the idea that masculinity is linked to a sense of hardened toughness, and that this can be incredibly emotionally limiting to men. As such, Will challenges masculinity by allowing for emotionality to be present, and to feel comfortable expressing those emotions. Oliver claims that he challenges masculinity in the way he constructs his appearance:

I walk around wearing shawls, and they're Stephen West type shawls, so they still have a somewhat masculine appearance, but most guys, you know, they put on just a plain scarf and they feel like they're pushing the boundaries, and I'm wearing shapes and stripes and colored shawls or wrist warmers, that kind of stuff definitely pushes the boundaries for most people. And then, you know, I have earrings and, you know stuff like that.

For Oliver, the act of wearing knitted items that may typically be deemed as more “feminine” items is the manner in which he chooses to challenge traditional notions of masculinity. Given his statement, he clearly associates the notion of wearing color and shapes as being a more “feminine” practice, and therefore, by adopting this sense of style, he is challenging traditional and commonly understood notions of masculinity.

This chapter demonstrates that the constructions of masculinity while engaging in a “feminized” activity are nuanced and constantly shifting. Many of the men interviewed stated that they felt that they challenged traditional notions of masculinity through their engagement with knitting, but also in other areas of their lives as men. Many of the men also stated that stigma in association with this activity is somewhat expected, and as such, some have adopted deflecting mechanisms so as to not internalize stigma from individuals who don't engage in this practice or who see it as inappropriately “feminine”.

The literature also echoes the nuances that men have to navigate in working or participating in activities that are associated as “feminine” activities. More specifically, the studies on cheerleading demonstrate that although men experience stigma as a result of their chosen activity,

many reference inclusive masculinity as a way of counteracting stigma that is homophobic in nature. In many cases, the men in these studies also make reference to hegemonic masculine attributes like physical and sexual prowess in an effort to mitigate some of the stigma they face.

It is clear that William's findings with regards to the "glass escalator" effect are still prevalent for men who are participating in different fields of feminized work and activities. This was also found in the interviews I conducted with men who knit, who state that they purposefully don't knit certain more "feminized" items, like baby clothes, and can also be seen in the manner in which certain knitting companies are capitalizing on the men's knitting retreats by granting men the opportunity to publish their knitting patterns, an opportunity that may not necessarily be granted as easily to women.

However, it is imperative to note that incremental changes are taking place with regards to how men are negotiating their performances of masculinity and adopting a more inclusive form of masculinity. Many of the men in the studies cited here have either coopted or reformulated feminized activities to be more appropriate for their own masculine performances, while others accept that the activities they have chosen will garner some elements of social stigma. Several of the men I interviewed echoed the sentiments found in Anderson's study with regards to stigmatization around homosexuality. In certain cases, some of the men made reference to hegemonic masculinity by adopting physical attributes that read as more "masculine", while others stated that they no longer cared what others thought of them, and demonstrated that fear of being labelled as homosexual was no longer a mitigating factor in determining which activities they would and would not participate in. As such, it is clear that masculinity as a gendered performance is in a constant state of flux, and requires ongoing negotiation.

The next chapter on the subject of homosociality will discuss the manner in which men engage with other men, and how this affects their performances and understandings of masculinity. Similar to the findings with regards to stigma and participating in a feminized activity, the results of my interviews with men who knit demonstrate that inclusive masculinity with regards to a lessened fear of homosexuality is allowing men to reference more nuanced forms of masculinity, which in turn, creates a space for men to form meaningful relationships with other men, regardless of their sexual orientation.

***“Oh yeah, I might turn for him”*: New Trends in Homosociality Among Men Who Knit**

"Homosociality" was initially coined by Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick in her book "Between Men: English Literature and the Male Homosocial Desire." She examined themes within non-sexual, friendship relationships between men in literature, and created this word to depict the bond that occurs in male relationships, now colloquially known as "male bonding" (Kosofsky-Sedgwick, 1985, pg. 1). Her work examined the manner in which men in literature create these bonds, and argued that homosociality serves to further the patriarchal purpose of social domination over women (Kosofsky-Sedgwick, 1985). Furthermore, she claims that heterosexuality is implied within these bonds of friendship, and so the presence of certain elements of homophobia are referenced to create parameters appropriate for male friendships (Kosofsky-Sedgwick, 1985). Similar to what has been seen in the literature on men who engage in feminized activities, references to hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality serve as the benchmark for appropriate masculine gender performance, and often dictate the manner in which men interact with one another in homosocial settings. Within the framework of homosociality, homophobic attitudes arise and therefore regulate the manner in which men form non-sexual friendship relationships with other men. Kosofsky-Sedgwick's work is greatly referenced within the literature; however, it is not the first instance of the examination of male relationships. Her theory of homosociality had been examining the nuances of men's friendships, with literature on this subject dating back to the mid-1970s (Lipman-Blumen, 1976).

Current research on this subject outlines the manner in which men have come to reference elements of hegemonic masculinity and consistently disparage homosexuality as inconsistent with appropriate masculine performance. However, my research on men who knit outlines the manner

in which men are actively reformulating their own masculinity by referencing what Eric Anderson (2005) has termed as inclusive masculinity, and in turn, men are beginning to change their perceptions of male homosexuality. Furthermore, these shifting attitudes are causing changes in the manner in which men are defining their own masculinity, which in turn allows for more nuance in the manner in which they interact and form homosocial relationships with each other.

Homosociality and Patriarchy

Jean Lipman-Blumen's study on male friendships in the mid-1970s examines how men used these homosocial relations as a way of dominating women. Homosociality among men is the preferred state of being, which becomes explicit in the manner in which boys exhibit homosocial play in early childhood (Lipman-Blumen, 1976). Homosocial play patterns are inevitably what leads men to seek bonds with each other throughout their lives, reinforcing patriarchy through the monopoly of resources in adulthood (Lipman-Blumen, 1976). Homosociality is used to ensure that men control higher access to resources, since heterosexual partners with similar access to economic means would cause great dis-balance within a patriarchal economic system (Lipman-Blumen, 1976). Because men have access to more economic and social resources within a patriarchal society, women become a form of commodity for men (Lipman-Blumen, 1976). As such, attaining and possessing attractive women is a part of successful masculinity, and women are often traded among groups of men, further validating modern perspectives that manhood is inextricably linked to sexual prowess (Lipman-Blumen, 1976; Connell, 1995). Women lacked the same access to resources afforded to men, and are inevitably obliged to sexualize themselves in a patriarchal society in an effort to convince men that heterosexual relationships are required (Lipman-Blumen, 1976). This, in turn, forces men to move away from their naturalized and preferred state of homosociality (Lipman-Blumen, 1976).

Lipman-Blumen clearly takes a Marxist perspective when examining the gender inequalities with relation to access to resources and the manner in which men and women negotiate their gendered existences within a patriarchal system. Homosociality is the dominant manner in which men seek to control access to economic resources, and that in turn, this preference for homosocial bonds is what has led to the absence of women within certain economic sectors of Western society. Research from the mid-1980's serves to build upon Lipman-Blumen's and Kosofsky-Sedgwick's research by examining how men interact with one another in homosocial relationships and what subjects are actually discussed in male friendships.

Intimacy in Friendships: Homosociality as Gender Regulation

Studies on homosociality indicate that male friendships are examined through the lens of four types of interactions: competitiveness, sexual oppression of women, reinforcement of heterosexuality and withholding expressions of intimacy (Bird, 1996; Felmlee & Muraco, 2009). Although relationships with men were regarded as typically rare, when they did occur, they were often formed as a result of shared interests, mostly related to sports or other physical activities (Bird, 1996; Phillips, 1985). Later studies indicate that young men's lives tend to be organized around homosocial relationships between men, and that these bonds take precedence over relationships with women (Flood, 2008). These relationships are also centred on the notion of competition and winning on teams, and men specifically stated that competition among men was more favorable than competition with women (Bird, 1996). Men regard competition with women as being less desirable because the intensity and importance of competition between the genders is viewed differently (Bird, 1996). These negative views regarding women among homosociality can be seen when examining how men use male friendships as a way of sexually oppressing women.

Studies highlight that the denigration of women is a key component in the process of bonding within homosocial relationships with other men (Bird, 1996; Phillips, 1985). Sexual objectification of women is viewed as commonplace within homosocial relationships between men, and often served to reinforce the notion of competition as relevant to masculine gender performance (Bird, 1996). Men often share sexual exploits with women who were not their intimate partners, and these conversations would result in men engaging in a form of one-up-manship, which resulted in sharing stories that would top the other men's previous shared exploits (Bird, 1996; Flood, 2008). As a result, sexual storytelling takes precedence in homosocial relationships and women are used as a way to cement bonds between men (Flood, 2008). Homosocial bonds may therefore create environments whereby male sexual oppression of women continues to be commonplace. The recounting of sexual conquests and references to sexual prowess, as well as negative views regarding women within male friendships also serve to reinforce the importance of heterosexuality in homosocial bonds.

The recounting of heterosexual exploits is key in the regulation of appropriate male behavior within homosocial settings. Studies indicate that the sexual orientation of friends plays a role in homosocial bonds, and individuals tend to value heterosexuality over homosexuality within their friendships (Felmlee & Muraco, 2009). Several men reported negative reactions around the idea of being kissed hello by a male friend: an action that connotes a violation of heterosexual boundaries among men (Felmlee & Muraco, 2009). In turn, these negative reactions and regulations of heterosexuality among men serve to denigrate homosexuality and create an environment that fosters homophobic attitudes. Sharing of emotions is also regulated within homosocial bonds, as they are regarded as linked to homosexuality and feminization among men.

Women have been found to seek out friendships that allow them to evolve as individuals, while male friendships are largely based on shared similar interests and the practice of sharing emotions and insecurities with their friends was deemed to be an unacceptable activity, as it was characterized as something that is performed solely by women and gay men (Phillips, 1985; Sherrod, 1987). As such, sharing of intimate details is regarded as a feminized practice, and one that should be avoided in order to maintain the heterosexual status within homosocial relations (Bird, 1990). Studies indicate that when some men attempted to talk to their friends about trouble within a heterosexual relationship, it was often regarded as a "toothache" that needed to be extracted, otherwise "you will have to live with the bitch" (Bird, 1996, pg. 126). This comment illustrates that experiencing and expressing of feelings among men is often discouraged, and within homosocial bonds, ending the pain of emotion is highly encouraged as opposed to actually feeling and processing their emotions (Bird, 1996). Furthermore, "talking about personal matters or sharing feelings frequently constituted a small portion of all friendship interactions" (Walker, 2010, pg. 314). As such, men who were somewhat intimate with their friends did not divulge this aspect of their friendships to others, as they tended to want to focus on the other areas of their relationships with their friends that they found more important (Walker, 2010). This lack of divulging to others regarding emotionality within homosocial relationships may also be the result of male gender regulation, whereby recounting emotionality among homosocial bonds may constitute homosexual behavior. However, some men indicate that this lack of emotionality and gender regulation was troublesome, and they wished they were able to discuss their emotions more openly with other men (Bird, 1996)

These studies on homosociality and masculinity form the baseline for current knowledge on heterosexual male homosocial relationships. Interestingly, the findings from all these studies

are all quite similar, in that men in friendship relationships with other men tend to form bonds through shared interests, competition, reinforcement of heterosexuality and denigration around women and sharing of emotions. However, further research on the subject of heterosexual men forming friendships with gay men illustrates that homophobic attitudes may no longer be such a large factor within homosocial bonds.

Muraco's (2005) study examined the manner in which heterosexual men evaluated hypothetical friendships with homosexual men. Heterosexual men who interact with homosexual men and women were far more likely to be in favour of homosexuality than those that did not (Muraco, 2005). What proved the most interesting component of this particular study was that due to the fact that previous studies on the subject of male homosociality imply a great deal of internalized homophobia, friendships between heterosexual men and gay men allow for the possibility to challenge homophobic beliefs. As such, this challenge of homophobia allows for the creation of a space that fosters more intimacy and sharing in this type of homosocial relationship (Muraco, 2005). In turn, homosocial bonds between gay and straight men lead to a diminishing of homophobic attitudes, which may allow not only for more emotionality to be present among men, but may in fact grant men the opportunity to explore new ways of formulating their own masculine gender performance that does not necessarily coincide with homophobia and hegemonic masculinity.

Homosocial bonds between men are incredibly nuanced and precarious. Men tend to bond over mutual interests and activities, and these play a central role in dictating the manner in which men interact with and alongside one another. Homosocial bonds also serve as a way of maintaining patriarchal power among men, as it allow them the space to exercise power not only with other men, but especially over women in society. Furthermore, homophobic tendencies largely dictate

the rules of interaction among and between men, and often serve to block opportunities for sharing of emotions and insecurities, which are deemed to be the foundations of truly intimate homosocial relationships.

However, as can be seen in other studies, homosocial relationships between heterosexual and homosexual men lead to diminished homophobia, and may allow for the creation of spaces that are not only more inclusive, but allow men to transgress traditional notions of what it means to be a man in Western society. My study on men who knit and their stories of their shared experiences at all-male knitting retreats indicates that homophobic attitudes and constructions of masculinity are shifting.

“I’m the only guy there”: Men who Knit and the Seeking of Homosocial Bonds

Some of the men I interviewed stated that they found being the only man they knew who knit to be somewhat difficult. For instance, Oliver stated that whenever he goes to local knitting groups he is often the only man present. *“Anytime I ever go, I’m the only guy there. So yeah, at times it’s hard to walk in there and be the only guy, and it’s not that they’re not welcoming to me...”*. Oliver’s story is emblematic of the experiences of the other men I interviewed for this study. Many of the men interviewed stated that they wanted a form of community. Another respondent stated that although he was the only man he knew who knit, *“most people I know who knit want to knit collectively”*. As such, it is clear that this particular group of men wanted some form of community centered on a shared interest in knitting.

Interestingly, several of the men I spoke to stated that they had taken part in men’s-only knitting retreats in the United States. I was informed that there are two that take place annually in the U.S.: one on the East Coast and the other on the West Coast. Every year, this particular event attracts roughly 30-40 men of all ages, and the retreat typically lasts about four days. Respondents

reported that these gatherings are a way for men to learn from other men who knit, and allow for the opportunity to network with knitting companies. Fred, a 43-year old actor living in Los Angeles, states that “*we teach ourselves, we interact, we share knowledge, we work with Skacel. And so we just have a ball with these guys...you see what they do and you get motivated to want to keep going yourself.*” These gatherings allow for the opportunity for men to work together and share ideas, but also allows for an outlet to have their original works and patterns published by a major yarn distributor. Robert, a 79-year old man who has been a knitter for most of his life states that he really enjoys the knitting retreats because it allows for a space for men to really admire and challenge each other’s work:

When a man goes to a knitting group, there are usually one of two responses. The first is that he’s treated like the outsider who should not be there because he’s a man and he’s infringing on women’s territory. Or the other thing is “oh my God, it’s so amazing that a man can operate two sticks and a piece of string” and someone goes “oh my God, look at what he’s doing!”. When what the truth is what he’s doing is a garter stitch square with worsted weight yarn on two plastic double pointed needles, while beside him is a woman doing this incredible lace shawl...that she hand-dyed herself and no one is paying attention to her. And I would say, who cares what he’s doing? Let’s take a look at what she’s doing because she’s the one with the skill. And so what happened when we did the men’s only retreat is that no one fussed about you because you were a guy. It wasn’t there. They looked at what it was that you were doing. What were you doing this year that you hadn’t been doing last year?

Robert’s comments on the reactions received from women in knitting groups are not necessarily uncommon. What proves interesting is that both comments coincide with one particular aspect of homosociality that is in the literature: the notion of competition. The knitting retreats allow for a space to build upon their skills and see what other men are working on and potentially learn from them. Furthermore, knitters at the retreat are offered the opportunity to become published by a company, and Brandon noted, the interactions typically take on the form of “*here’s a ball of yarn. What can you do with it? And we said ‘ok’ and we came up with some interesting projects*”. As

such, the notion of competition between male knitters at the retreat is clearly demonstrated through the process of creating something that may eventually become published by a major company. That said, it is unclear if there is any outright skill competition taking place during the retreat, or if these men are simply in admiration of the work and skills that have been developed by their fellow knitters.

Several men interviewed stated that the knitting retreats allowed them the opportunity to interact and communicate with men they may not have had the chance to meet otherwise. For Dave, a 61-year old heterosexual man living in Denver, it offers the chance to meet like-minded individuals in a safe space that fosters creativity and solace:

Where I live is a big hunting and fishing area, and you know, I used to feel put-off because I don't own a gun, I do fish occasionally but I'm not great at it. I guess I used to feel left out because I wasn't the hunter or fisher or whatever...but about five years ago, my wife won me a trip to Seattle to the men's knitting retreat. So I got to fly to Seattle and spend four days with almost 40 guys who knit. Gay, straight, it didn't matter. We were 40 men in the room together, we could talk about fashion, knitting, whatever and nobody felt like they were left out, put out or whatever. It's a great feeling to be around other men who share the same thing, even though it's a little different, cause you know, we're men who knit, it's not the norm I guess. But knowing that we all have this in common, is just great.

Dave's comments indicate that in the area in which he lives, he at times does not feel like his performance of masculinity coincides with the social norm. This quote also echoes what is stated in the literature about homosociality as the retreats allow men to enjoy the prospect of meeting and connecting with other men who share similar interests around the same activity. However, what proves most interesting about the respondent's stories about the knitting retreat is how these spaces allow for interactions between different types of men, and how they foster room for acceptance and transcendence of homophobic attitudes. 40-year old James from Detroit, stated that the knitting retreats allowed the opportunity to interact with men that were different from him, and this permitted him to see other perspectives. He states:

Being a male knitter, I'm very much a minority in that the fact that there are not that many men, let alone any straight men that knit. And prior to making friends in the knitting community, I was really uncomfortable with the whole homosexual community in general. I grew up in a very strict, conservative, religious background...I was just really uncomfortable with the lifestyle because I didn't understand any of it. But being at these retreats, this past year there were 40 guys at the retreat and I think eight or nine of us were straight, and I'm very much a minority. Of course, conversations all revolve around who the cute guys are, and I think they were talking about Ryan Gosling and I was like 'oh yeah, I might turn for him'. I found that I've become more accepting, more comfortable not just hanging around men who are gay, but around people who are different in general. Because with knitting, at least we have that much in common.

James' comments indicate that the knitting retreats allow for a space where men of different sexualities and backgrounds can converse, interact and form homosocial bonds. Although he states that he found himself to be a minority in this group with regards to his heterosexuality, his heterosexuality does coincide with the current societal norms. However, what his comment clearly indicates is that interactions within these groups of men foster an environment that allows for the transgression of homophobic beliefs, and potentially transgression of heteronormativity. His comment with regards to "turning" for a celebrity male indicates that the space created by these men does allow for a certain amount of play with regards to heterosexuality.

Another respondent, Kevin, a heterosexual father of two daughters, stated that interactions with gay men at knitting retreats also contributed to changing his perception regarding transgender individuals in his own life. He states:

I had a really interesting realization with a friend of mine recently who, I knew he was transgender, and I assumed he was transgender getting ready to become female. Actually, he was female and has transitioned to male. And it kind of blew my mind. Previously, I think that would have really creeped me out, and I probably would have not actively stopped being friends, but would have stopped talking and making contact and things like that. And that's when it really hit me, [knitting retreats] really [have] changed the way I interact with friends of mine who are gay. Or with anybody for that matter. It doesn't affect me as much. That's the biggest thing that I've noticed.

Kevin's statement indicates that the homosocial bonds he was able to make with gay men at knitting retreats heavily influenced the manner in which he regarded other individuals who did not

fit a heteronormative framework. Furthermore, not only have the bonds created during knitting retreats changed his friendships, but they have also served to change the manner in which he has interacted with his own family members. He recounted during his interview that one of his daughters has chosen to identify as gender fluid, and that although this may be an issue for some parents, he claims that “*the biggest difficulty I have around that is what pronoun to use*”. He stated that as a result of being exposed to individuals who identify different from himself, he has been able to become more accepting and open not only within his friendships, but also as a father.

What has been demonstrated in this chapter is that the men I interviewed, through their interactions at the knitting retreats, have allowed for the transgression of traditional notions of masculine heterosexuality. They have allowed for the formation of homosocial bonds with other men who knit that, in turn, creates a space for creativity, competition and new ways of forming homosociality that are not currently expressed in the existing literature. Although initial literature on the subject of homosociality highlighted that male social bonds were initially formed as a way of monopolizing resources away from women, current literature demonstrates that homosocial bonds are largely based on shared interests among men, and that competition within those shared interests plays a role in male bonding. Most importantly, however, the existing literature on this subject indicates that homosocial bonds are largely based on sharing stories of heterosexual sexual conquests, which serve to denigrate not only women, but discourage overt male homosexual behavior within those friendships. Within these studies, the denigration of homosexuality through overt references to sexual prowess, one of the key aspects of hegemonic masculinity, serves to establish appropriate masculine behaviors and gender performance within homosocial relationships.

Considering these key themes with regards to the existing homosociality literature, my findings among men who knit illustrate that homosocial bonds among men may actually be shifting away from the denigration of male homosexuality towards a more inclusive form of bonding. Several of the men interviewed stated that knitting retreats offered them the opportunity to interact with both heterosexual and homosexual men in a setting where a shared interest in knitting was implied. Many of the men who knit clearly indicated that through their shared interest in knitting, they were granted the opportunity to interact with men at these retreats that they may not have normally associated with. Some of the men stated that their perceptions of male homosexuality changed as a result of attending those knitting retreats, and that the bonds created between heterosexual and homosexual men granted space for them to begin to transgress and play with their own male gender performances. In turn, the men I interviewed demonstrate that they are reformulating new ways of engaging with other men in homosocial bonds that do not rely on the denigration of homosexuality. Furthermore, what these men have demonstrated is that current attitudes towards homosexuality in men are shifting, and that these men are engaging in activities that are permitting them to re-define masculinity and homosociality for themselves.

The last chapter of this thesis will examine links between knitting culture and media fandom. The exploration of the nuanced relationship between both cultures will serve to demonstrate similarities with regards to homosociality and masculine gender performance among these two groups, and show how men are employing Anderson's theory of inclusive masculinity in their everyday lives by placing a great deal of importance on more marginalized forms of masculine gender performance.

***“The Geek-a-long”*: Knitting and Geek Culture**

This chapter will explore the congruencies between the construction of geek culture and identity and knitting culture. In keeping with the literature on masculinity, this piece will explore the manner in which the perceived masculinity of those that engage in fan culture and of knitters is actually quite similar. Furthermore, this chapter will also explore the manner in which fandom and media fandom is heavily involved in the production and re-production of artifacts from favorite shows, and how the male knitters I interviewed have incorporated their craft as a way of creating and re-creating these artifacts. This re-creation as a form of identity construction will also be examined, as well as the manner in which different enthusiasts develop homosocial groups and self-organize as a way of creating communities around their shared interests.

Fandom and Masculinity

Much of the literature on the subject of fan culture examines the manner in which men are perceived as performing a form of marginalized masculinity. Authors, such as Henry Jenkins, examined the manner in which fans were perceived as “brainless consumers” who would buy anything associated with a show or movie they found of particular interest (Jenkins, 1992, pg. 10). Fans were regarded as cultivators of useless information and were often characterized as “social misfits” whose masculinity implied a level of “emotional and intellectual” immaturity and was depicted as feminized and desexualized (Jenkins, 1992, pg. 10). Examples of this can be seen in films like “Rebel Without a Cause”(1955), where characters depicted as “geeks” were shown to aspire to embody the traits of characters which displayed a more tough and rugged masculinity, like James Dean's character (Bell, 2009). The depiction of geeks in this form of media served as a warning to young men that “nerd identity will come at a price, threatening [the] masculinity of

its participants” (Bell, 2009, pg. 51). As such, the nerd, or geek was depicted as a marginalized form of masculinity that young men should not aspire to or want to embody in any way. This limited depiction of the “geek” has shifted somewhat in the last thirty years with the rise in popularity of computers and the creation of the internet. For instance, the concept of “tinkering” has historically been framed as behavior that is un-masculine when compared to other pursuits, such as athletics (Bell, 2009, pg. 100). However, with the technological changes that have occurred in recent years, an appreciation of the male “nerd” and his ability to understand the minutiae of computer systems has proven to be useful within the greater society. Despite technological advances having re-framed the “nerd” as a more masculine figure, this trope is still characterized as occupying some level of marginalized masculinity (Bell, 2009).

In some cases, studies have shown that this perceived marginalized masculinity is at times internalized by the members of geek communities, and that although these men are aware that they do not fit the model of hegemonic masculinity, they still work to distance themselves from femininity through their depictions of how their knowledge and skill set can be considered masculine (Kendall, 2000). Within certain studies, men who were interviewed understood that their interests and practice in geek culture is devalued by the larger society. Individuals who identified as geeks or nerds clearly displayed their alignment with masculinity by discussing how their involvement in the geek culture required a great deal of intellect (as they are required to remember a number of facts about their favorite TV shows or that they had to problem solve to fix a computer) and that they rejected the notion of paying attention to their appearances and body projects that are associated with femininity (Kendall, 1999). Therefore, although their masculinity was still considered marginalized in a larger societal view, these men demonstrated that they embody some form of marginalized masculinity as a result of their interests, and their alignment

with certain aspects of hegemonic masculinity (intellect and rejection of body projects) allows them acceptance as “legitimate” men in society.

The historical depiction of the “nerd” and the recent reframing of this trope as a form of marginalized masculinity has allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the manner in which masculinity is performed and perceived within society. Authors like Bell have found that “geekiness is mediating personal identities in a way that both maintain normative boundaries of power and offer sites of intervention” (Bell, 2009, pg. 101). As such, the construction of geek masculinity allows for a space to challenge aspects of hegemonic masculine performance, while at the same time, allowing its participants to continue to align with other traits within hegemonic masculinity. These nuances can also be seen when examining the manner in which men who knit negotiate their masculinity.

Much like the individuals depicted in the studies on geek culture, men who knit are creating nuanced ways of negotiating masculinity while engaging in an activity that is, at times, deemed un-masculine. This may involve embodying a masculinity that is outwardly traditionally masculine, or even rejecting aspects of hegemonic masculinity in order to re-create a new form of manhood. For instance, when Dave, was asked if he felt that he challenged aspects of masculinity in any way, he stated *“No, in fact, I’m careful not to do that. I’m not at all flamboyant, I appear to be very conservative, although, I do wear bright colors. I dress in a tasteful and conservative way. But the things I do are anything but conservative. And it’s fun to be that kind of contradiction.”* Although Dave is aware that his appearance and the manner in which he presents himself in a public setting are outwardly masculine, he recognizes that certain aspects of his dress (for instance, wearing bright colors) may draw attention to a form of marginalized masculine performance. Furthermore, his view of traditional masculinity can be tied to elements of

conservatism. He is aware that dressing in a way that is more “conservative” may draw less outward social attention, an idea that is linked to elements of traditional masculinity. Interestingly, Dave recognizes that the activities he engages in are not necessarily traditionally masculine, and that the juxtaposition of his outward appearance and his actions are contradictory in some senses. As such, he is able to negotiate his masculinity despite his involvement in an un-masculine activity by maintaining an outward, socially acceptable masculine appearance. Much like Dave, Fred stated:

I mean, being sort of burly and bearded, I look like a guy for sure. In terms of my career choice, again, being involved in the arts, I suppose it's not typically what your average consumer would consider a super masculine thing. But being a singer, I have a guy's voice. I sing like a guy, so that means fulfilling the masculine stereotype in that respect.

Although Fred is involved in a more artistic career, much like Dave, which can be read as a more feminine activity, he states that his involvement in this activity is mitigated by the fact that his outward appearance is clearly masculine, and that his performance of that activity is also done in a more “masculine” fashion. Both Fred and Dave appear to, in part, negotiate their masculinity in similar ways: by maintaining the socially acceptable appearance of masculinity while engaging in an activity that is gendered as more feminine. Their outward appearance and ability to be socially read as masculine may, in fact, overshadow their involvement in seemingly un-masculine activities.

However, other respondents in this study reported choosing to reject traditional notions of masculinity in favor of creating a new form of inclusive performance. One respondent, Lucas, asserted:

Well, I'm a gay man, so I'm not particularly good at being masculine. I have the male stereotype in my head of a guy who sits around watching football and goes to work and does yard work and that kind of stuff. But I think where I connect with that masculine side is, well guys tend to be

interested in history and in mechanics and how things are made, so that's where I think I connect with it. To be interested in what is stereotypically a feminine art, certainly challenges [stereotypical notions of masculinity]. I walk around and I'm wearing shapes and stripes and colored shawls or wrist warmers, that kind of stuff definitely pushes the boundaries for most people.

Considering Lucas's statement, it is clear that he perceives himself as challenging traditional notions of masculinity more than actually meeting them. In his case, his outward appearance reads as more transgressive of masculinity because he chooses to wear colors and patterns and shawls, which are items not typically tied with the traditional Western notion of masculinity. Interestingly, Lucas sees himself as engaging in masculine behavior through his interest in mechanics and how things are made. Much like the individuals interviewed in the studies on geek culture, in this statement, Lucas ties his masculinity to the ability to use his intellect to problem solve and "tinker". Both Lucas and the individuals in the geek study see their performance of masculinity through specialized knowledge in mechanics; however, the men in the geek study rejected notions of body projects, which is not the case for Lucas, and some other men who knit. Lucas has made it clear that his outward appearance does entail some level of feminized projection, and considering his talent for knitting and his identification as a gay man, this can be seen as a form of potentially marginalized, or transgressive masculinity.

Although it is easy to see Lucas as embodying a form of marginalized masculinity, it is important to consider that masculinity among men who knit may be far more nuanced than simply marginalized or hegemonic. I posit that masculinity, for some men, is being actively reframed in everyday life and taking on a more subtle or inclusive form of gender performance. For instance, James offered:

I'm certainly not your typical manly man. I've just been going through some stuff and learning about myself and learning about my sensitivity levels to things. If there's a lot of auditory stimuli, I'm really sensitive to it. And I

like my alone time and I don't like to party. The stereotype of a manly man is strong and big, sort of really assertive and not afraid of confrontation, fairly sure of himself and confident. I'm more quiet, I don't like confrontation, and I try to be diplomatic about things instead of confrontational. I'm in tune to my feelings and other people's feelings more than a typical manly man.

When I interviewed James, he read as traditionally masculine in appearance, and yet, considering his statement, it is clear that his performance of masculinity is far more nuanced than what can be claimed as marginalized masculinity. James is a White, heterosexual man, and so most would look at him and agree that his outward performance of masculinity aligns with society's traditional notions of what it means to be a man. But James frames his own performance in comparison to what he sees as traditionally masculine, and how he negotiates his behavior as being “un-stereotypical” of what masculinity is. He regards his masculinity as being more in-tune to others' feelings and being sensitive to his surroundings, as opposed to possessing a more reactionary form of traditional masculinity. In this case, James's masculine performance is quieter, and can be deemed as a form of more considerate and nuanced masculinity. James goes on:

There's all the news about rape culture, and I think it's upsetting that it still exists, because my view of a man is someone who is responsible, someone who is really in-tuned with making sure that, almost in a traditional sense, that they're protective of other people's feelings and considerate of other people in terms of being an example of that kind of behavior instead of violating it or showing what not to do. That's not a role model of a man I would like to see.

This statement reinforces James's engagement in a variant or inclusive form of masculine gender performance. It is clear from his statement that he values the reframing of masculinity in a more positive light; one that is linked to caring about others and holding regard for the individuals around him. As such, James demonstrates the increasing complexity and subtlety of masculinity in today's Western setting, compared to what has previously been imagined in both media and academic literature. Much like the individuals engaging in geek culture, male knitters are engaging

in a culture allowing them to “both maintain normative boundaries of power and offer sites of intervention” (Bell, 2009, pg. 101). As such, the men engaging in these cultural forms are beginning to reframe masculinity in new and exciting ways that I think will greatly contribute to academic and social understanding of masculinity and its performance in modern Western society.

(Re)Creation and Identity Formation

Since many men who participate in fan and knitting cultures are creating more nuanced forms of masculine gender performance, as seen throughout this work, they often form groups around their shared interests. However, the groups differ in the manner in which they engage in forms of production and consumption, which are separate from the larger economy. This section explores both groups' engagement with their interests and will demonstrate that elements of male homosociality, which were detailed in the previous chapter, are present with these groups. Furthermore, I will illustrate how their ability to produce goods for their own consumption actually solidifies their sense of identity and belonging to their particular group.

Media fandom, much like knitting culture, is made up of fans coming together to create groups around their shared interests. As has been stated in the previous chapter on homosociality, male knitters in the US have organized knitting retreats where men can bond over their shared interest of learning about their craft, and sharing that knowledge with other men. The same is seen in the geek community, where individuals form groups around their shared interest in certain TV shows, and/or other forms of media (e.g., movies, comics, video games, etc.) (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998; Jenkins, 2006; Hills, 2002). In fact, there are several conventions that take place all over the world (e.g., Comic-Con, BronyCon⁶), and Comic-Con is now attended by more than 300,000 individuals (Weisberg, 2010).

⁶ BronyCon is a convention created and attended by male fans of the show “My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic.”

Authors Bishop and Hoggett have examined the manner in which certain groups come together around shared interests. They claim that individuals with common interests come together as a form of “mutual aid” and that this provides a “vehicle” for social and information exchange around a common activity (Bishop & Hoggett, 1986, pg. 33). They also state that creating these collectivities allows for individuals to collaborate on projects and provides them with the opportunity to meet like-minded people and create friendships (Bishop & Hoggett, 1986). This emphasis on shared interests and creation of friendships was also observed in my interviews with male knitters. Brandon, stated that although his mother is a knitter, he decided to take a class to learn to knit because he “*was looking to expand [his] social circle*”. He goes on to state that he has “*friends who knit*” and that he has found that “*most people I know who knit want to knit collectively*”. Brandon clearly wanted to engage in an activity that would allow a space for shared learning and shared experiences with others, within a social setting and around a common activity. Several other knitters I spoke with explained that they also liked to knit collectively, and many have joined local knitting groups at some point. Another respondent, Kevin, stated:

It's hard to make friends in general in life. For anybody. And the knitting tends to be the entry point, 'oh, we can talk to each other because we both knit'. You know, a lot of my other close friendships are with men who knit. And mostly online, because I don't know anyone in person who knits. It's become an extended social circle because that was the entry point.

Kevin's statement affirms and echoes the sentiment of many of the men I interviewed, that a shared interest in knitting has facilitated the formation of friendships with other men. Therefore, the reasons behind the formation of knitting groups runs parallel to those of individuals within the geek community.

Similar to the findings in the homosociality chapter, several of the men I interviewed stated that they preferred forming groups with other men who knit as opposed to joining existing knitting

groups that are primarily populated by women. Within literature on geek culture, this trend is also apparent, and is often coupled with the denigration of fandom that is associated with women's geek interests. For instance, Busse's (2013) research indicates that female fandom is growing and women's presence at conventions, like Comic-Con, are increasing every year. Her research indicates that female fans are coming together in their shared interest for Twilight, and that these congregations at Comic-Con are regarded as potentially infringing on a space that was initially populated by men (Busse, 2013). As a result, there is a certain amount of backlash occurring from men⁷ indicating that female fans of Twilight are not "real fans" and that their displays of fandom, like fan fiction, are considered a lesser form of fandom that is "too obsessive, too fanatic and too invested"(Busse, 2013, pg. 73). This type of hierarchical thinking in terms of male and female fandom is also referenced by several other authors, and some state that it serves as a way of reinforcing geek subculture as "fundamentally masculinist" (Haenfler, 2014, pg. 71; Woo, 2012). As a result, the inclusion of female fans and their interests at Comic-Con are met with levels of derision from other male fans, which therefore creates a space that is inclusive to "real fans" and exclusionary to female fans and their interests.

I noticed similar findings among the men I interviewed, although the role that gender played in these cases was actually reversed. One respondent stated that when he tried to join an online forum for people who knit, he experienced derision from some female members:

I've gotten more negativity, especially lately, on some of the online forums. You're obviously aware of Men who Knit, and, you know, that's a very encouraging group. But there's another group of Facebook called Knitting <3, I've gotten quite a few comments through there, that, um "well we don't have male knitters here". True, we're the smaller proportion, but we're there. And I recently got a rather negative comment when someone said "okay ladies, give me your opinion on..." and I said "why don't you want to hear from the men" [and they replied] "well there are no men that live here or are part of the group" and I said, "yes, but they are, we're

⁷ Men holding up signs saying "Twilight ruined Comic-Con. Scream if you agree!!"

here” and basically got told to get over it. You ever see the Men who knit [page], we always invited the women, and asked them to be an active part.

This statement clearly illustrates that although men are actively taking on knitting as an activity and want to associate with others who share their interests, they are, at times, less accepted than their female counterparts who engage in the same activity. As a result of these exclusionary practices, some men who knit decided to organize men’s-only knitting retreats as a way of creating a space to practice knitting with other men. Robert, who was quoted in the previous chapter on homosociality, indicated to me that he was one of the individuals who organized the first knitting retreats for men in the United States. Although these particular gatherings were designed as a way for men to come together in an environment where gendered stigma would not be present, he indicates that some women felt excluded from these groups:

When we started doing the men’s knitting retreats, one of the things that happened, because it was a men’s only group, which some women felt was really really discriminatory and it was unfair that women couldn’t go to a men’s group...think that one through. I would support those women to have a women’s only knitting group, most groups tend to be women only anyway, but set that aside. One of the things that happened, was because when a man goes to a knitting group, there’s one of two responses: he’s immediately treated like the outsider who shouldn’t be there, because he’s a man, he’s infringing on women’s territory, so he’s treated with a certain level of hostility. Or the other thing is: Oh My God it’s so amazing that a man can operate two sticks and a piece of string and “omg look at what he’s doing”. When the truth is, what he’s doing is a garter stitch square. ...And so some guys will be uncomfortable at the groups simply because everyone’s fussing about them. And so what happened when we started doing men’s knitting retreats, because it was a male only group, nobody fussed about you because you were a guy. It wasn’t there

Robert’s comment indicates that the creation of men’s knitting groups occurred as a response to the exclusionary practices that exist within knitting groups that are primarily populated by women. However, what proves interesting in this case, is that although men experienced stigma from their female counterparts, when they created men’s-only groups as a way to counter that stigma, they have encountered further derision by women; describing these gatherings as discriminatory.

There are clearly links between group gatherings in both knitting culture and geek culture with regards to how certain genders are treated within these group settings. Within geek culture, women tend to experience more derision and are regarded as lesser fans, while in knitting culture, although at times men are openly welcomed, they are still considered a minority population and experience levels of stigma from women in knitting groups. What is not clear in the geek literature, but that I have clearly demonstrated here, is that although gendered discrimination occurs in both types of cultures, when men who knit create their own groups in order to lessen the stigma displayed by women, they are regarded as engaging in a practice that is discriminatory towards women.

One recurrent theme in my research was the overlapping engagement of the knitters in geek culture. The literature on geek culture asserts that fans “appropriate and re-use television texts” to create fan 'zines and to re-create story lines or images from their favorite show (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998, pg. 124). What Abercrombie and Longhurst found was that fans actively take texts and items from television and movies, and critically engage and appropriate them in a “material sense” (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998, pg. 125). The authors have also found that fans are not only active in engaging with texts and artifacts from shows, but they also use a critical understanding of the material to create meanings around particular items from media (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998).

Evidence of this appropriation and re-creation of artifacts from shows was seen among the men I interviewed for this study. Several of the male knitters I spoke with had knit items from some of their favorite television shows; at least two of the men have knit Doctor Who scarves⁸, and one of the respondents stated that creating this project was his first initiation into knitting. The

⁸ Doctor Who is a British television show about an anthropomorphic alien who travels through time and space to solve crime. The fourth incarnation of the Doctor wore a knitted, absurdly long, but iconic striped scarf.

knitting website Ravelry currently has 189 patterns available for Doctor Who related items, and over 3000 individual Doctor Who scarf knitting projects have been completed and are showcased by users of the site⁹. Clearly, individuals in the fan community may also be knitters; instead of creating fan 'zines and writing fan-fiction stories, knitters are appropriating and replicating artifacts from their favorite shows in their own way. Furthermore, Doctor Who scarves are not the only way in which knitters engage in media fandom. One respondent, Robert, told me that he was participating in a “*knit-a-long on Ravelry called the ‘Geek-a-long’*,” whereby he was knitting a double knit blanket where each square would have some sort of geek reference. At the time of the interview, he stated that his current square was “*referencing the new Sherlock*”¹⁰. What can be seen here is a blurring of identities between the fan and knitting cultures. Some of the men I interviewed were, in fact, engaging in both communities simultaneously, and these examples reinforce the active re-imagining of how knitters and geeks engage with media. The rise of knitting pattern books for individuals wishing to re-create artifacts from their favorite shows¹¹ is evidence of this phenomenon.

Furthermore, literature suggests that this type of engagement with media may actually be a form of resistance to current consumption practices. Bishop and Hoggett found that media fandom groups are:

Self-organized, productive, and by and large, consume their own products. This is why they may be more than merely a leisure group – because there is probably no other setting in our society where people can freely come together to produce something outside the market economy, primarily for consumption by themselves or their friends and neighbors (Bishop & Hoggett, 1986, pg. 40).

⁹http://www.ravelry.com/patterns/search#query=dr%20who&pc=scarf&view=captioned_thumbs&craft=knitting&sort=best

¹⁰ Another British television show, this one a contemporary adaptation of Sherlock Holmes.

¹¹ The most recent books that have arisen are to re-create knitted items from the television show “Downton Abbey” (<http://www.interweavestore.com/>).

This practice is evident not only in the literature on geek culture, but also among the men I interviewed for this study. These men are forming groups with other men who have shared interests, but they are also engaging in the practice of creating garments or other knitted items for themselves and for their friends and family. In fact, while many of the men I interviewed stated that they knit for themselves, most claimed that they often knit for others. Furthermore, the men I interviewed knitted a plethora of different items¹² and often stated that they gave these items away to family and friends as gifts. Some regard this practice as subversive, in that they began knitting as a form of counter-consumerism. One respondent, Jacob, stated:

I was going through a hippy tree-hugger phase, I was going to save the world by knitting my own clothes from reclaimed sweaters from the thrift shop. And then once I started knitting, I realized the tremendous amount of work that actually goes into it, I mean, just a single pair of socks can take twenty hours. So it's actually a full-time job to clothe yourself. I was looking for something that I could do to help reduce my environmental impact.

Jacob clearly demonstrates the ideology that some knitters possess, that engaging in this form of activity is a way of counteracting their consumption practices. Much like individuals engaging in media fandom and creating 'zines that can be disseminated among fans, knitters are engaging in a form of consumer resistance by knitting items they may typically purchase. As such, both the media fandom community and the knitting community are engaging in forms of production and consumption that are separate from the larger economy.

This chapter explored the manner in which knitting culture and geek culture run parallel, but can also intertwine. Evidence of this can be seen when looking at how knitters are engaging in the appropriation and re-creation of artifacts from their favorite television shows, and how the items they produce in general serve as a form of resistance to current Western consumption

¹² The most popular items were socks, scarves, slippers, hats, sweaters, dishcloths, and blankets.

practices. Furthermore, the knitters interviewed clearly stated that they enjoy knitting in groups, and that several of them found that they have formed bonds with others over this shared interest, similar to reports from various geek communities. Considering the literature on geek culture, I posit that many knitters are also involved in their own form of “fandom.” Much like fans of television shows, many knitters dedicate a great deal of time to the creation of items, studying and learning new techniques, and sharing that knowledge with other knitters. Almost all of the men I interviewed stated that they have attended a men’s knitting retreat, which can be considered as a parallel “Comic-Con” and other fandom conventions.

In this chapter, I also posit that men are beginning to reframe their own masculinities while engaging in activities that are typically gendered as “feminine.” Through engaging in knitting or other “geek” activities, many of these men are creating a space to explore new ways of performing masculinity in Western society. Many of the men I interviewed stated that they do not abide by traditional notions of masculinity, and this is also common in geek culture. In fact, many of the men I interviewed are beginning to formulate inclusive forms of masculinity: one in which they embody and physically read as men, but place great value on behavior that is communal, caring, and considerate of others, traditionally socially associated with femininity. This problematizes the notion of marginalized masculinity that currently exists in academic literature. By allowing men to share their stories and feelings about their formulations of masculinity, I argue that it is time to place men’s lived experiences at the center of knowledge formation on masculinity studies. As such, I posit that engagement with an activity that is gendered as female (like knitting) creates a space for men to transgress traditional notions of Western masculinity.

Conclusion

This thesis serves to contribute and build upon Anderson's theory of inclusive masculinity, while also filling the gap that currently exists on the subject of knitting in general in academic literature. Using Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity and Anderson's theory of inclusive masculinity, this thesis demonstrates that current attitudes on homophobia and masculine gender performance are changing in a Western setting. Throughout this thesis, I consistently illustrate how the men I spoke to are actively reframing their own perceptions of masculinity while engaging in an activity that is typically gendered as "feminine."

Many of the men I interviewed stated that they attended a men's knitting retreat at one point in their lives as knitters, and they enjoyed this process of knitting in groups and meeting other men in a setting where their shared love of knitting was implied. These interactions permit men to reframe their own masculinities through engaging in knitting, an activity that is typically gendered as female. Furthermore, several of the men I interviewed are beginning to formulate inclusive forms of masculinity, whereby they are regarded as physically male in society, but perform behaviors that are more characteristically associated with femininity. As such, these men are choosing to perform masculinities which are considered under Connell's theory as more "marginalized", but find that gender regulation that commonly occurs among homosocial bonds does not occur within the knitting retreat settings. Therefore, participation in knitting communities and other "geek" activities creates a space for men to explore new ways of performing masculinity in Western society.

The homosocial bonds between men at knitting retreats is one of the few documented instances of homosexual and heterosexual male interaction in academic literature. These instances of homosociality are leading to changes in attitudes and causing a shift away from the denigration

of male homosexuality towards a more inclusive form of bonding. Knitting retreats are allowing men the opportunity to interact with both heterosexual and homosexual men in a setting where a shared interest in knitting was implied. As has been demonstrated in this thesis, some of the men interviewed indicated that their perceptions of male homosexuality changed as a result of attending knitting retreats, and that the bonds created between heterosexual and homosexual men granted space for them to begin to transgress and play with their own male gender performances.

My findings with regards to changes in homosociality serve to confirm and build upon Anderson's theory of inclusive masculinity. His study contributes to an understanding of how men experience stigma as a result of participating in an activity that is gendered as female (cheerleading), and examines the manner in which interactions between gay men and straight men are contributing to a decrease in homophobic attitudes. He also demonstrates that men may at times reformulate their own roles within feminized activities as a way of coping with the stigma they face. Much like Anderson, I also found that men who knit are also actively reformulating their own roles within the knitting community: by purposefully selecting which projects they will and will not knit and capitalizing on opportunities to publish their patterns during the knitting retreats. My research not only builds upon Anderson's theory of inclusive masculinity with regards to homosocial bonds, but contributes to it by highlighting how heterosexual men's interactions with gay men are actually changing how certain men perform their own masculinities. Furthermore, my research demonstrates that not only are friendships between gay and straight men evident in knitting culture, but that those friendship bonds are sustained not only through a shared interest in knitting, but through emotional sharing and bonding at a human level that takes place during those knitting retreats. As such, I demonstrate that masculinity is not only more inclusive, but more flexible and nuanced than current literature on the subject indicates. The performances

documented in this thesis illustrate the complexity and nuance of masculinity, and demonstrate how some men are challenging traditional notions of manhood through their engagement with knitting and also in the manner in which they choose to dress, interact with others and adopt attitudes that are caring and communal. In turn, knitting allows these men the window to not only engage in a feminized activity, but allows them the space to re-define masculinity and homosociality for themselves.

Further Research and Limits to this Study

There are limitations to the scope of this particular study which need to be addressed at this point. Discussions with regards to race and class are currently the largest gaps that exist in this study. When I was seeking participants, I was deeply concerned about being able to get men to talk to me about their experiences. However, when I experienced an influx of participants, I was so deeply appreciative and excited, that issues with regards to all the participants being White and middle-class did not occur to me until all the interviews were completed. As I've stated before at the beginning of this thesis, the manner in which I recruited participants for this study greatly influenced the types of participants I attracted to this study. Unknowingly, by placing a call for participants on the Facebook group "Real Men Knit", I inevitably recruited participants from a group of individuals who shared racial and class similarities and had almost all been to a men's knitting retreat at some point. As was stated at the beginning of this thesis, one of the respondents later told me that knitting retreats tends to be a "*self-selecting group of people*" and that the Facebook group "Real Men Knit" is often used as an extension of that social circle. As such, my recruitment choice unknowingly led me to recruit White, middle-class men for this study. That said, White, middle-class men tend to be the largest of the male population within the knitting

community, and therefore the findings of this study are still relevant and contribute to an understanding of how men who knit negotiate their masculinity.

However, further research on men who knit may benefit from interviewing men from other racial and class locations. There are currently a number of studies on racialized masculinity (Baker, 2007; Gabilondo, 2006; Hooks, 2004; Hoston, 2014; Hughey, 2012; Leaks, 2010; Lemelle, 2010; Lo, 2010; Low & Louie, 2003; Manuel et al., 1994; Moffatt, 2012; Richardson, 2007; Walcott, 2014) that highlight the complexities of masculine gender performance among racialized men. This literature coupled with interviews with racialized men who knit may serve as a great contribution to literature on racialized masculinity and further enhance research how men who knit negotiate their masculine gender performances.

Another area that may require more attention consists of how men's negotiations and "play" with masculinity is affected outside of homosocial settings. Further research on how men are transgressing traditional notions of masculinity, as has been illustrated in this thesis, needs to be examined in the presence of women. I've demonstrated in this research that homosocial settings are actually creating spaces now where men can transgress traditional notions of masculine heterosexuality. Further research needs to be done, however, on whether these transgressions continue to occur and to what extent in social settings where women are present.

Lastly, a number of news articles have arisen lately on the subject of men who knit within the prison setting, more specifically focusing on one program at a correctional facility in Jessup, Maryland (Anthony, 2011; Livingston, 2014, Martin, 2012; Winick & Jesko, 2013). These articles highlight that men within prison settings are finding that knitting calms their nerves, teaches them patience, increases their ability to focus and serves to tie them to the community at large by allowing them to knit for members of the community (Anthony, 2011; Livingston, 2014, Martin,

2012; Winick & Jesko, 2013). My previous work experience has been in the field of criminal justice, and I found the idea of men knitting in prison to be amazing and very exciting. I believe that academic research on the topic of men knitting in prison can serve to further contribute to knowledge on men who knit, but also has implications for research on masculinity, criminal justice, corrections and restorative justice. I highly encourage further research to be conducted on the subject of men who knit in prison, and suggest that not only should the case in Jessup, Maryland be examined from an academic perspective, but that the media attention this initiative has received may actually encourage similar pilot projects in different facilities and in different countries.

Although my research greatly contributes to furthering knowledge on masculinity, homosociality, negotiations of stigma and identity formation among men, this thesis should serve as a starting point for a multitude of other research projects on men who knit. The implications of this and future research could serve to not only enhance academic knowledge on masculinity, but also contribute to tangible social changes with regards to gender performance that, as a feminist researcher, I hope we continue to see for many years to come.

APPENDIX A

<http://www.menwhoknit.com/community/node/13867>

study on men who knit ???

Tue, 2014-09-23 13:36 — [REDACTED]

Has anyone else responded to the call for participants by Ann Morneau?

She claims: " The aim of my study is to convey the stories and experiences of men who knit. My area of specialization in gender studies is masculinity, so the research will focus on men's experiences in an activity that is still socially gendered as a "female" activity. "

But when I suggested a text interview via email the response was:

"Yes, I am analyzing the audio in the interviews. Thanks for your interest though, I really appreciate it."

Why does one have to analyze the audio response in order to " convey the stories and experiences of men who knit.:???"

The first email also said that attached was a consent form for inspection prior to interview; which was not attached and which I never did get to see.

Something smells of old sushi to me.

- 558 reads

Comments

Sat, 2014-10-11 16:23 — [REDACTED]

"Why does one have to analyze the audio response in order to " convey the stories and experiences of men who knit.:???"

For the same reason that perfectly amiable people get into shouting matches on Facebook. Text does not have the ability to convey nuances of meaning and feeling like voice does. In person is better than audio, audio is better than text, if you want to understand the subtleties of the responses.

That's why I put a :-) smiley face at the end of this, because you can't see the twinkle in my eye. :-)

Sat, 2014-09-27 10:07 — [REDACTED]

I spoke with Ms. Morneau

I spoke with Ms. Morneau yesterday and as others have said she was friendly and she did not seem to be judgmental. I understand why it could not be stated in the beginning but it would be interesting to find out her underlying premise and if the will color her results.

I am not a statistician but have worked with numbers most of my working life and realize that numbers don't lie but number crunchers do. (I am not stating or implying that Ms. Morneau will change the results)

Is this study centered on men who knit and the problems they experience crossing "gender lines", or is there an underlying look at defining masculinity?

Did anyone else get a feel for any underlying premise.

Sat, 2014-09-27 12:52 — [REDACTED]

I suspect she was hoping I'd

I suspect she was hoping I'd had some negative comments from people who saw me knitting, but I never have.

Fri, 2014-09-26 13:31 — [REDACTED]

My interview went well. Ms.

My interview went well. Ms. Morneau was quite pleasant, bright and open. I had a good conversation with her on my attitudes about masculinity, knitting in general and knitting in my life, my other interests and how knitting has affected my life.

Very innocuous and non-threatening. My history was discussed, but not in any judgmental manner nor as a segue into other topics. I also asked to read her work when it was completed; she agreed. [REDACTED] prediction on her procedure was absolutely correct.

I had a meaningful discussion with a fellow knitter.

Fri, 2014-09-26 11:36 — [REDACTED]

Just finished my interview.

Just finished my interview.

Very pleasant young woman.

Absolutely NO slant to the questions.

...perhaps if I were uncomfortable being a man knitting it would open a different line of questions, but I'm comfortable with who I am.

I have no problem knitting in public, haven't been treated badly because of it.

Ann didn't know of this group, so I suggested she check us out.

Thu, 2014-09-25 10:52 — [REDACTED]

Interesting indeed. I don't

Interesting indeed. I don't think I got approached. I do confuse people a lot, with my knitting and my crocheting. Specially since in Spanish, knitting, weaving and crocheting uses the same word, you just have a different tool to make cloth.

•
Wed, 2014-09-24 22:13 — [REDACTED]

Ms. Morneau pulled back the

Ms. Morneau pulled back the original consent form [REDACTED] mentioned.

I had pointed out a flaw in the form...it limited the scope of investigation to male knitters in Toronto, Canada. She communicated back her thanks and said she had to re-submit the form for review...and as [REDACTED] noted, verbal consent is all that is required in live interview, which she confirmed in the same message.

Albeit, her data could be skewed with "too much information" given to participants. Carefully worded transparency statements such as [REDACTED] quoted as the thesis topic and measurement goal of the data collection would have been appreciated, in my humble opinion.

Wed, 2014-09-24 08:11 — [REDACTED]

I googled her and found an

I googled her and found an Ann Morneau at Carleton University in Canada. I think it may be the same woman, she is getting her Masters of Arts degree in Women's and Gender Studies: Masculinity Studies. She says, "My current Masters' Thesis will be examining how men negotiate their own performances of masculinity while engaging in knitting, which is an activity that is typically gendered as feminine."

I was a mentor to students writing master's theses in education for Walden University, guiding them through the process. There is a very clear process, at least in the United States that is governed by the American Psychological Association (APA). I always advised my students to inform those taking a survey, or giving an interview, exactly why they were gathering information.

Other than studying the tone of your responses to her questions, she is also likely also interested in the content of your answers. She will probably rate the tone of your response in terms of whether you are on the defensive of men knitting, or are you very comfortable and matter of fact. If I were conducting the study, I would include men knitting in public. Wasn't there a poll on this site awhile ago about that? She might appreciate that data if anyone still has it.

Here is her LinkedIn page. <http://ca.linkedin.com/pub/ann-morneau/51/5b2/9a3>

She should identify why she is asking these question, specifically to gain information to write her master's thesis. If you supplied the information in writing, using your name, she would need to have you sign a release form. If she does the interviews live, she does not. She probably has a check sheet that will record answers specific to her needs rather than quoting you, thus turning her qualitative data into quantitative data, which she can then chart or graph in order to make comparisons and thus conclusions to support her hypothesis. Your gathered information would be anonymous at this point. It's rather like Google gathering data that reveals that a million people visit their website each hour worldwide. They don't care who you are, just that you are one person needed to add up to the million.

I don't think there is anything wrong with giving her information. You might ask her if you are going to be quoted, in which case, if she is going to use your name, she will need to share in writing how she is using your words in her thesis.

I would be interested in reading her thesis once she is finished.

Wed, 2014-09-24 06:22 — [REDACTED]

I did respond...after some

I did respond...after some due diligence, I have a few thoughts.

There is a subtle clue with the choice of the word "convey."

Notice that it does not mean research, analyze, dissect, compare, contrast, collect (field data), establish baseline information, study, probe, explore, review, deconstruct nor any of several other academic procedures used in intellectual, scholarly conduct leading toward a published work of new knowledge.

Convey means transport, make known, disclose. In other words, none of the above.

I believe this is a communication investigation on HOW the interviewee imparts information, not WHAT.

If it is assumed the researcher is interested in your story, you could be wrong. Ms. Morneau's research is sanctioned and cleared by her college...but not necessarily for a folk tale investigation or history. There is another academic interest here.

Tue, 2014-09-23 14:06 — [REDACTED]

Interesting to find out how

Interesting to find out how the questions will slant...

Tue, 2014-09-23 13:43 — [REDACTED]

I have a phone interview at

I have a phone interview at 10am Friday.

Glossary of Knitting Terms

- Double knit** This is a type of knitting where the image on the front and back of the knitted piece are mirror images of each other.
- Double pointed needles** Needles that have points on either end, and are typically used to knit items in the round that are too small for circular needles¹³.
- Fair Isle** This type of knitting is also known as stranded knitting, where different colors of yarn are used in the same project to create patterns and images in the finished piece¹⁴.
- Garter stitch** This type of stitch is created by knitting every row, and can be recognized by the “horizontal ridges formed by the tops of knitted loops on every other row”¹⁵.
- Lace knitting** A style of knitting that contains “stable ‘holes’ in the fabric” and are organized throughout the work to create an aesthetically pleasing pattern¹⁶.
- Raglan** A type of sweater that can be constructed in one piece and requires no seaming of the sleeves. It is characterized by sleeves that begin at the collar and “slope down to for a diagonal effect”¹⁷.

¹³ <http://www.purlbee.com/2008/07/25/double-pointed-needles/>

¹⁴ <http://www.lionbrand.com/faq/2.html?language=>

¹⁵ <http://www.dummies.com/how-to/content/how-to-knit-the-garter-stitch.html>

¹⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lace_knitting

¹⁷ <http://www.craftsy.com/article/understanding-raglan-sleeves>

- Ravelry** An online social media site for people who knit, crochet, weave, design patterns, spin yarn and dye wool. The content on this website is entirely user-driven, and allows people who are interested in crafting with yarn to share their projects, acquire different patterns and connect with other individuals¹⁸.
- Skacel** A worldwide yarn and knitting paraphernalia distributor. This company also works with knitters by publishing their original knitting patterns.
- Skein** Yarn that is packaged in a long cylinder shape (usually purchased this way, and then wound up into a ball before use)¹⁹.
- Stephen West** Stephen West is an American man who is known within the knitting community for creating scarf and shawl patterns that are interestingly constructed, using lots of geometric shapes and colors. His patterns are quite popular because they are more androgynous and can be worn by anyone.
- Swatch** A small piece of knitting that is created before a larger project. A swatch is used to measure knitting gauge (the size and number of stitches per inch), and allows knitters to ensure that the needle size and yarn they have selected for their larger project (like a sweater) will lead to a finished product that fits.

¹⁸ <http://www.ravelry.com/about>

¹⁹ <http://www.lionbrand.com/faq/2.html?language=>

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