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Close Knit: An Investigation of the Therapeutic Consumption Tribe

Thesis presented by

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For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Declaration:

This is to certify that the work I am submitting is my own and has not been submitted for another degree, either at University College Cork or elsewhere. All external references and sources are clearly acknowledged and identified within the contents. I have read and understood the regulations of University College Cork concerning plagiarism.

Máire O Sullivan

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Abstract:

Close Knit: An Investigation of the Therapeutic Consumption Tribe

This thesis interrogates the nature of and meanings behind consumption practices in a female-led and -dominated consumption community, specifically Knitters. Informed by the data, the study focuses on the therapeutic nature of such a group.

The literature on consumption communities has grown extensively in recent decades. However much of this literature has, in effect, focused on male-led and male-dominated communities. Furthermore, many of the major studies in the area of consumption communities have taken place in environments described as 'hyper-masculine' (Martin, Schouten and McAlexander, 2006). Rather than consider women in 'a man's world' as in Martin et al. (2006), here female and feminine consumption is considered in a 'feminised sphere' (Jantzen, Ostergaard, and Vieira, 2006). The issue of whether female- or feminine-orientated communities of consumption manifest characteristics and orientations different to those of male-dominated communities had not previously been examined.

This thesis gives the results of a longitudinal, ethnographic study, based on participant observation, depth interviews and netnographic research. The broad nature of the research question supports an emergent design approach with an iterative and continuous transition between analysis and data collection, gradually narrowing the scope of the work.

The key finding of this study is that there exists a further type of therapeutic consumption, distinct from those described by compensatory consumption (Moisio 2007, Woodruffe 1997, Woodruffe-Burton 2001, Woodruffe-Burton and Elliot 2005) and the spiritual-therapeutic model (Moisio and Beruchashvili 2010). This has been termed therapeutic group consumption. Further, there exists a new typology of consumption community, with characteristics distinct from the Consumer Tribe (Cova and Cova, 2002), the Subculture of Consumption (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995), and the Brand Community (Muniz and O' Guinn 2001); the name suggested for this community is the Therapeutic Consumption Tribe.

While sharing similarities with the Consumer Tribe (Cova and Cova 2002), the Therapeutic Consumption Tribe is neither playful nor transient; rather, members display a deep socioemotional commitment to each other. Therapeutic well-being is a key benefit of the female-dominated contemporary craft community with some members clearly articulating this as their primary motivator for involvement in the community. Socioemotional support (or socioemotional helping) and tangible assistance, features of a therapeutic support group, emerge as key features of the community.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Summary

This chapter opens the thesis and situates the research in the appropriate context for the reader. Initially, presenting a summary of the research, the author goes on to identify the conversation in the literature to which she hopes to contribute, that is, female consumption communities and, in particular, therapeutic consumption within a female-led and dominated consumption community. Key research aims and objectives of the study are identified and the research methodology is briefly discussed. The key findings of this study, the existence of therapeutic group consumption and a therapeutic consumption community, are introduced. Finally, an outline of the structure of the thesis is presented.

1.2 Summary of the Research

This thesis gives the results of a longitudinal, ethnographic study of a female-led and -dominated consumption community, specifically Knitters. It follows an inductive, emergent design approach to research. It interrogates the nature of and the meanings behind consumer activities and consumption as part of membership of such a group. Informed by the data, the study focuses on the therapeutic nature of the group.

The Research Question for this study is:

What is the nature and meaning of consumer activity and consumption in a female-led and -dominated consumption community?

Other research questions arising from the literature and data are:

- What purpose does the female-led group fulfil for its members?

- What meanings are given to consumption activities within the group?
- Do members derive benefit from involvement in the group and, if so, what kind of benefit do they derive?
- How does this affect their consumption choices?
- Is the craft consumer identity an appropriate lens to examine this group?

Ultimately, the aims of the study are:

- To develop a clearer insight into the meanings of consumption within a female-led and –dominated consumption community
- To develop a greater level of understanding of femininity and feminine group consumption

And, as determined inductively from the data:

- To develop a clearer insight into consumption, particularly group consumption, as therapy
- To understand the role of brands in the therapeutic consumption process
- To determine what exactly is a therapeutic consumption community

The contribution to knowledge of this study is that there exists a previously unexplored type of consumption community, a Therapeutic Consumption Tribe, which may be specific to female-led and –dominated environments.

1.3 The Research Context

This thesis aims to add to the conversation around consumption communities. A consumption community is one in which "*consumption activities, product categories or even brands may serve as the basis for interaction and social cohesion*" (Schouten and McAlexander 1995, 43).

Following on from Maffesoli's (Maffesoli and Foulkes 1988) work identifying microcultures, three distinct types of consumption community or Marketplace Culture (Arnould and Thompson 2005) have been identified in the literature; Consumer Tribes (Cova and Cova 2001, 2002; Cova, Kozinets, and Shankar 2007), Subcultures of Consumption (Martin, Schouten and McAlexander 2006; Schouten and McAlexander 1995) and Brand Communities (McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig 2002; Muniz and O Guinn 2001; Muniz and Schau, 2005; Schau, Muniz, and Arnould 2009). These terms have, at times, been used interchangeably but Goulding, Shankar and Canniford (2013) unpicked the tangled web of terminology to define the boundaries between Consumer Tribes, Brand Communities, and Subcultures of Consumption.

Many of the major studies in the area of consumption communities or Marketplace Cultures have taken place in environments described as 'hyper-masculine' (Martin et al. 2006). Martin et al. explore women's experiences and consumption in the highly masculine environment of the Harley Davidson Owners group. This study was largely inspired by that paper. Rather than consider women in 'a man's world' as in Martin et al. (2006), the author was inspired to look instead for 'a woman's world' and consider female and feminine consumption in a 'feminised sphere' (Jantzen, Ostergaard and Vieira 2006). The issue of whether female- or feminine-orientated communities of consumption manifested characteristics and orientations that were different to male dominated communities had not previously been examined. Thus, it seemed past time to examine the characteristics and practices of a female-led and –dominated consumption community with a view to seeing if they are reflective of, or differ from, those in the male-dominated communities.

Femininity and feminine consumption have previously been identified as *'decidedly under-theorized'* (Schippers 2007, 85) and poorly defined (Dahl 2012). It was thus considered useful to examine if the underlying motivators identified in a 'masculine' consumption community would be similarly apparent in a more 'feminine' community.

Femininity is an important area for study, as the question of what a woman is fundamentally, is a topic of much debate in today's society. Since Simone de Beauvoir's seminal work, The Second Sex, drew a distinction between sex and gender, between female biology and femaleness or femininity (de Beauvoir 2014), this topic has been much debated in feminist circles and, more recently, with the rising awareness of trans-rights, in political circles.

It is a topic that has caused schisms in feminist movements and made unlikely allies of right wing activists and Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists who adhere strongly to the idea of gender as entirely socially constructed, and not as something one who was not gendered as female from birth can ever understand.

Judith Butler (1999) would argue that woman is not something we are, but rather something we do – we perform our genders. She further suggests that we are imitating an idealised model of gender which does not, in fact, exist.

Intersectional feminist theory would further suggest that there is no single answer to the question 'what is a woman' as there are many experiences of womanhood.

Against this backdrop of these multiple and often conflicting views of what femininity (or femininities) might look like, the expression of femininity through consumption is a fascinating topic. As Catterall, MacClaren and Stevens (2000, 2) point out, all too often, previous work in marketing which focused on women resulted in "*overgeneralised, essentialised and trivialised accounts of women as consumers.*"

The field site identified for this study was that of a contemporary craft community, the Knitting community. When searching for a female-led and –dominated consumption community, a craft or fabriculture group immediately came to mind. As Pristash (2014, 3) says, *"It may only be a slight overstatement to say that the history of craft is a history of femininity."* Knitting, in particular, while traditionally linked to female and feminine identity (Abrams 2006; Myzelev 2009), has enjoyed a resurgence (Craft Yarn Council of America, 2005) and a restyling (Stoller

2003; Wills 2007) in recent years. A Stitch 'n' Bitch group was thus identified as an appropriate location for the study, with Ravelry.com providing a suitable accompanying netnographic site. Stitch 'n' Bitch is an ostensibly third wave feminist movement, with the stated aim of reclaiming the good of traditional femininity. Ravelry.com is, at this point, the hub of the Knitting community with approximately seven million members.

1.4 Research Aims and Questions

The aim of this study is to contribute to the field of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), particularly in the area of consumption communities. Specifically, this study investigates the motivators for participation in a female-led and –dominated consumption community and, informed by the data, explores the potentially therapeutic nature of such communities.

The stereotypical image of a crafting circle is of a warm, nurturing environment for women who support each other through thick and thin. This expectation of a "caring community" is reflected in the literature (Green 1998; Minahan and Cox 2006; Piercy and Cheek 2004; Prigoda and McKenzie 2007; Schofield-Tomschin and Littrell 2001). However, there has been little critical interrogation of how such laudable constructs manifest in practice, and a dearth of research on the potentially therapeutic role such a consumption community might have.

Thus, a critical scrutiny of a female orientated community is undertaken, to explore the degree to which this role is manifested in consumption behaviours and to establish if membership of such a community could be considered a therapeutic consumption experience.

The major research question is:

What is the nature and meaning of consumer activity and consumption in a female-led and -dominated consumption community?

1.5 Methodology

Due to the exploratory and inductive nature of the work being undertaken, ethnography was selected as the most appropriate methodology, with participant observation, depth interviews and netnographic research being carried out. The use of interpretivist ethnography as a methodology is widely accepted in the Consumer Culture Theory and consumption community literature (Belk and Costa 1998; Celsi, Rose, and Leigh 1993; Kozinets 2001, 2002b; Schouten and McAlexander 1995).

The broad nature of the research question supports an emergent design approach with an iterative and continuous transition between analysis and data collection gradually narrowing the scope of the work. As the members of the offline Local Stitch 'n' Bitch group were also extremely active online in the online Knitting community centered around Ravelry.com, a netnography was also carried out for the purposes of completeness and triangulation (de Chernatony, Drury, and Segal-Horn 2005).

1.6 Key Findings and Contributions

The key finding of this study is that there exists a further type of therapeutic consumption, distinct from the previously described compensatory consumption model (Moisio 2007; Woodruffe 1997; Woodruffe-Burton 2001; Woodruffe-Burton and Elliot 2005) and the spiritual-therapeutic model (Moisio and Beruchashvili 2010). This has been termed therapeutic group consumption. Further, there exists a new typology of consumption community, with characteristics distinct from the consumer tribe, the subculture of consumption, or the brand community; the name suggested for this community is the therapeutic consumption tribe. The 'tribe' element of this title is due to the identification of several key similarities to the consumer tribe, however, the therapeutic consumption community also differs from the identified

characteristics of the consumer tribe in fundamental ways. In particular, it is neither playful nor transient, but rather, members display a deep socioemotional commitment to each other.

The 'therapeutic' part of this title arises due to the many similarities that emerge between the characteristics of a therapeutic support group and those of the female-driven consumption community. Therapeutic wellness and well-being is a key meaning behind the female-led contemporary craft community with some members clearly articulating this as their primary motivator for involvement in the community. Socioemotional support (or socioemotional helping) and tangible assistance, features of a therapeutic support group, emerge as key features of the community and this therapy is accessed through consumption.

1.7 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is structured into six chapters. This, Chapter 1, serves as an introduction to situate the reader in the work. It identifies the conversation in the literature to which the author wishes to contribute, it introduces the research question, and it explains the purpose of this thesis.

Chapter 2 contains a literature review into the theoretical background to this thesis. This aims to contextualise the study by referencing the body of literature around consumption communities, gender, craft consumption, and therapy.

Chapter 3 is a methodology, explaining the research design and providing an overview of decisions taken to facilitate the study. It explains to the reader both the philosophy behind, and the process of, data collection and analysis.

Chapter 4 contains the findings of this study. It is arranged to demonstrate how each finding iteratively led to the development of the main theoretical contribution of this study, the therapeutic consumption tribe, a new typology of consumption community.

Chapter 5 situates the findings in the extant literature and discusses the findings with respect to other relevant research in the fields of consumer culture theory (CCT), marketing, psychology and psychotherapy, and sociology.

Finally, Chapter 6, the concluding chapter, discusses the contribution of this study to both theory and practice, discusses some limitations of the research, and outlines further avenues of research stemming from the limitations of this study.

Appendices include a glossary of terms commonly used in the community being studied, a note on the feminist positioning underlying the study, participant profiles, the interview outline and prompts used, and a timeline of the group and sample data.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Summary

This chapter aims to situate the research in the literature and to identify those academic conversations to which the study can make a contribution.

Initially, the development of conceptions of community are traced through to the ideas of consumption communities (sometimes termed Marketplace Cultures). The benefits of and motivations to membership of such a community are discussed. A gap in the literature in relation to the motivations of women to join 'feminine' communities is identified, leading to a review of masculinity(ies) and femininity(ies) in consumption community literature.

The Craft Consumer as a consumption identity is explored, as is craft as therapy. Compensatory consumption is considered as a possible motivation to consumption community membership. A therapeutic motivation is considered and therapy as a construct is examined and defined. Its constituent parts, social support and task helping, are considered.

Ultimately, a resultant research question is developed:

What is the nature and meaning of consumer activity and consumption in a female-led and -dominated consumption community?

2.2 Community

The drive to belong and to form relationships is fundamental and pervasive in humans (Baumeister and Leary 1995; Maslow 2013). This need for "*lasting, positive and significant interpersonal relationships*" (Baumeister and Leary 1995, 497) is innate in humankind and is frequently expressed as Community.

Bell and Newby, as cited by Urry (1995), give three different senses of the concept of community. The first is geographic in nature, referring to the boundaries of a physical settlement, the second implies a social system, again local in nature but defined by personal connections and links between members, and the third is "*communion, a particular kind of human association implying personal ties, a sense of belonging and warmth*" (Urry 1995, 10).

These three concepts of community correspond to the evolving paradigms of thought around community. Initial conceptualisations of community were as a function of the traditional village or urban enclave within a city. In 1887, Ferdinand Tönnies, one of the founding fathers of sociology, contrasted the traditional community (Gemeinschaft), based on family bonds or strong social groups like churches, with his increasingly industrialised world. He characterised this new way of life as society or association (Gesellschaft) based on superficial self-interest rather than the mutual aid and "*subliminal shared morality*" (Tönnies and Harris 2001, xix) of Gemeinschaft. This distinction is echoed in Durkheim's work, which explores the move from collective consciousness to interdependence as a homogenous, traditional community gives way to an industrialised and specialised society (Durkheim 2014). He describes this loss of shared values and morality as "anomie", resulting in the loss of discipline and attachment to social groups (Marks 1974).

This functionalist view of community and society was a sociology built on the foundations of Darwinian ideas, and as social Darwinism fell out of favour (particularly as a reaction to the fall of the Third Reich) a new lens was required to view community.

The positivist paradigm of Durkheim was thus replaced with a view more in keeping with social constructionism. Turner (1969) and Cohen (2013) moved the conception of community beyond locality and shifted the focus to meaning and identity instead. Community is symptomatic of a search for belongingness, useful to engage in identity projects, and "*an expression of communitas*" (Delanty 2003, 32). Community is both cultural (the idea) and social (the practices), a symbolically constructed reality (Delanty 2003).

It is this third type of community focused on identity and meaning which has inspired much work in the field of Consumer Behaviour, and, particularly, in the area of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT). CCT *"refers to a family of theoretical perspectives that address the dynamic relationship between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meanings"* (Arnould and Thompson 2005, 869) and is more fully explored in Section 3.4.

2.3 Consumption Communities

As traditional geographically-bound communities are in decline leading to increased social isolation (Bauman 2013; Field 2016; Putnam 1995, 2001), people can now choose the communities they want to be aligned to, rather than being defined and segmented more traditionally by demographic, race, class or religion (Cohen 2013). Despite the decline of the traditional community, we still seek what Cova and Cova (2002) describe as "*quasi-archaic values: a local sense of identification, religiosity, syncretism, group narcissism and so on*" (Cova and Cova 2002, 4). This has led to people searching for alternative means of achieving socialisation processes and of forming bonds.

Several theories of contemporary consumption communities have been suggested, most notably Tribes, Subcultures of Consumption, and Brand Communities.

It was Maffesoli (Maffesoli and Foulkes 1988) who first drew the academic community's attention to the development of microcultures which he called tribes. Membership of these new societies or tribes is by choice rather than by birth and each individual can belong to multiple tribes, playing many different roles and wearing many masks. *"Tribes exist in no other form but the symbolically and ritually manifested commitment of their members" (*Cova and Cova 2002, 5).

Schouten and McAlexander (1995) introduce the term "Subculture of Consumption" in their discussion of a contemporary consumption community, that is, bikers in the Harley Davidson

Owners' Group. Membership of this group, the subculture of consumption, is a way of life for participants. Bikers, in particular, see themselves as outlaws, in opposition to mundane society.

In 2001, Muniz and O Guinn introduced the term "brand community," a community based on shared admiration for a brand. They identify all key markers of a community within the Ford Bronco, Macintosh, and Saab groups: consciousness of kind, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility to the community and to other members.

Most recent work on consumption communities focuses on those in the virtual world (Weijo, Hietanen and Mattila 2014); online Consumer Tribes (Fyrberg-Yngfalk et al. 2014), online Subcultures of Consumption (Quintao, Brito and Belk 2016), and, especially, online Brand Communities (Brodie et al. 2013).

A meta-analysis of the literature on the consumption community/ marketplace cultures was carried out by Thomas, Price and Schau (2013). They note that these communities and cultures particularly vary across a broad spectrum of dimensions from focus (on brand, consumption activity, or ideology), duration (from temporary and transient to enduring), appeal (from limited to broadly appealing), access (ease of joining including both barriers to entry and community welcome), dispersion (localised, dispersed (often online) or hybrid), marketplace orientation (collaborative, neutral, or oppositional), structure of resource dependency (how resources flow), collective belonging (degree of communitas), to heterogeneity. Their work, however, while exploring the differences between various consumption communities, fails to clarify further the differences between the concepts of Consumer Tribes, Subcultures of Consumption and Brand Communities.

Goulding et al. (2013), using a similar meta-analytical method, developed a typology finally defining the boundaries between the concepts of Consumer Tribes, Subcultures of Consumption, and Brand Communities. These findings are shown in Table 2.1.

Consumer Tribes:	**Subculture of Consumption:**	**Brand Community:**
A consumption community which does not locate their socialisation around a single brand	Self-selecting micro communities	Set of social relationships structured around the use of a focal brand
Multiple (not dominant)	Ritualised modes of expression	Shared use of product and services gives interpersonal connections
Flow between different tribal identities	Subvert dominant institutions (Goulding et al. 2002) but rarely display political resistance (Martin et al. 2006)	Generate shared rituals, ways of thinking, traditions, sense of moral responsibility to other members, religious zeal towards the focal brand (Muniz and O Guinn 2001, Muniz and Schau 2005)
Playful (can be devoid of long term moral responsibilities or zeal)	Strong interpersonal bonds	Can lead to co-creation of value by consumers and firms
Transient	Beliefs that preclude other social affiliations	Not multiple (dominating)
Entrepreneurial	Not multiple (dominating)	
Not enduring subversion of dominant institutions		
Development of shared repertoire		

Table 2-1: Typology of Consumption Communities (Marketplace Cultures) from Goulding et al. (2013)

Thus the definition of a Brand Community is a consumption community situated around the locus of a commercial brand to the exclusion of other brands. A Subculture of Consumption is a consumption community which engages in subversion of dominant institutions and that precludes other social affiliations. A Consumer Tribe is a consumption community which does not locate its socialisation around a single brand and is multiple, allowing flow between different tribal identities (Canniford 2011).

So, unlike a Brand Community, a Neo-Tribe/Consumer Tribe or Subculture of Consumption does not have to be based on the explicitly commercial (Cova and Cova 2002) brand concept. Tribes or subcultures can also be organised around an activity or passion such as skydiving (Celsi et al. 1993) or céili dancing (O'Connor 1997).

One key difference identified is that, unlike Tribes, Brand Communities and Subcultures of Consumption are dominating, meaning membership is a way of life which precludes membership of other subcultures, and is even oppositional in some cases. Oppositional brand communities may regard rival brands in the same market as inferior and even as 'enemies' of a sort. For example, the Harley Davidson riders of the HOG (Harley Davidson Owners' Group) dismissively refer to Japanese racing bikes as "Rice Rockets" (Schouten and McAlexander 1995). Apple has drawn on this oppositionality in its marketing with the "I'm a Mac, I'm a PC" series of ads, mocking users of its main rival. Consumer tribes, on the other hand, are multiple; membership of one does not preclude membership of others (Canniford 2011; Cova and Cova 2002; Goulding et al. 2013).

As consumers are participants in multiple tribes, they may choose to embrace a particular way of life for just a few hours in a week. Firat and Venkatesh (1995) suggest that, "*in this world of shifting images there is no single project, or no one lifestyle, no sense of being to which the individual must commit*" (Firat and Venkatesh 1995, 253). Nevertheless, these few hours may serve an important purpose for tribe members, despite Goulding et al.'s (2013) evaluation of it as transitory and playful. This time may represent for the member an opportunity to both

(re)assert beliefs about aspects of the self and have a particular aspect of the self-concept affirmed by their peers.

This possibility of duality can be seen in Goulding, Shankar and Elliott's (2002) paper entitled "Working Weeks, Rave Weekends" which describes the shifting identities of professionals who embraced the rave culture for a few hours a week. The authors describe how participants engage in extremely hedonic behaviour "*to forget about the problems of 'the real world'*" (Goulding et al. 2002, 278). Shankar, Elliot and Fichett (2009) also discuss duality around conformance and non-conformance in everyday life versus music consumption, and McAlexander et al. (2014) discuss the conflicted identities of religious consumers.

Authors such as Cova and Cova (2002) and Goulding et al. (2002) identify the distress and confusion of post-modern life as the primary motivation for tribal membership. The era of post-modernity is, by its very definition, a period of change and adjustment. This period is a transition from the modern era to a coming, future, time as yet undefined. Cova and Cova (2002) believe that ours is a "*period of severe social dissolution and extreme individualism*" (Cova and Cova 2002, 4). This "*fragmentation of society*" has resulted in old models of community and individual roles being questioned. Goulding et al. (2002) state that "*the postmodern individual is characterised by identity confusion and a sense of rootlessness brought about by the demise of traditional notions of authority and community*" (Goulding et al. 2002, 279).

The "Information Society", as some have termed the current era, is a fascinating study in contradictions. Despite being constantly connected by means of modern technology, people frequently experience feelings of isolation. While experiencing connectivity, even at a global level, there exists, perhaps, a lack of connection at a deeper, more personal level.

The consumption community offers an empowering safe space (Urry 1995) where one can "*enhance social connectedness and wellbeing ... to counter the alienation that can be experienced in life and work*" (Minahan and Cox 2006, 4). Despite increased social isolation

(Putnam 1995; 2001), humans still crave social connection. Brewer (1991, 475) states that the *"human species is highly adapted to group living and not well equipped to survive outside a group context."* This need for group social connection can be obtained through collective consumption as highlighted by Goulding et al. (2002) when they refer to consumer tribe members actively questing *"for alternative social arrangements and new communities based around common bonds"* (Goulding et al. 2002, 279).

However, the study of social connectedness, and, by extension, the research on consumption meanings in the consumer culture literature, has been dominated by research on predominantly masculine, even 'hyper-masculine,' communities. The dearth of studies into feminine identity and feminine consumption, if such consumption exists, is now explored.

2.4 Masculinity and Femininity in the Consumer Culture Literature

The most esteemed papers in the area of consumption communities have overwhelmingly focused on male consumers and most gender and consumer behaviour work focuses on "*masculinities rather than femininities*" (Maclaran 2015, 1734). The Harley Davidson Owners' Group (Schouten and McAlexander 1995), the Mountain Men (Belk and Costa 1998) and the Beer Pong Community (O Sullivan 2013a) for example, all represent hyper-masculine pursuits, tapping into these ideals of hegemonic masculinity and symbolically constructing these identities as rugged, powerful and slightly dangerous. Even seminal work on female identity in consumption communities has focused on women's roles within these "hyper-masculine" environments (Martin et al. 2006). R. W. Connell (1990, 1992, 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) theorised that this hegemonic masculinity is a social position or location in gender relations, a set of gendered practices and the effect of those practices. Hegemonic masculinity subordinates both femininity and other 'lesser' masculinities. It is usually characterised by desire for the feminine object, by physical strength and the willingness to use it, even to the extent of a propensity for violence, by authority and by superior athletic ability

(Schippers, 2007). Hence while the literature on masculinities comprehensively documents the nature of male identity and its relationship to consumption, the absence of studies in female-led and –dominated consumption communities has led to agreement that femininity is still decidedly under-theorised (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Martin 1998; Pyke and Johnson 2003; Schippers 2007).

This gap in the literature means that the explored meanings behind and nature of consumption community affiliation are still limited to the meanings ascribed to male consumers, or at most, male and female consumers in male-led and -dominated tribes. It appears that consumer motivations with respect to affiliation with female-dominated consumption communities have hitherto been largely ignored (Maclaran 2015) with the notable recent exception of Thompson and Üstüner (2015). Martin et al. (2006) describe the female members of a 'hyper-masculine' subculture of consumption when they discuss female bikers in the Harley Davidson community. In their pioneering work *"Claiming the Throttle: Multiple Femininities in a Hyper-Masculine Subculture,"* Martin et al. (2006) explore "*what attracts women to a consumption subculture which is rife with machismo*" (Martin et al. 2006, 189), finding that riding motorcycles allows these women to take control over their own bodies and the risks they will take with them, as well as embracing the fun of riding a motorcycle. Rather than engaging in the expected gender tourism put forward by Thompson and Holt (2004), they use the hyper-masculine culture to "*expand, complicate and empower their own femininities*" (Martin et al. 2006, 190) while subverting traditional femininities. Within some of these hyper-masculine consumption communities "*men refuse to share their masculine identity markers with women*" (Avery 2012, 333), relegating them to the status of 'outgroup' and rejecting any attempt to 'feminise' product designs, features or brand narratives. Despite such perceived marginalisation, female consumers may still experience empowerment and sisterhood within the brotherhood of masculine consumption (Thompson 2012). However, little examination has taken place of what these consumer identities might look like without the dominating brotherhood.

Two studies located within the realm of more traditional femininities are Minahan and Cox's 2006 paper "*Making up (for) society? Stitch, Bitch and Organisation*" and Avi Shankar's 2006 book chapter *"A 'Male Outsider' Perspective".* Minahan and Cox (2006) take a preliminary look at a crafting community, a Stitch 'n' Bitch group, composed entirely of women. They use their data to develop an agenda for future research which is explained further in Section 4.6. Shankar (2006) looks at women's book groups, relying on Hartley and Turvey's (2002) work to provide the data for a consumer culture based analysis. Hartley and Turvey (2002) tell us 69% of book groups in the U.K. are all-female. Shankar (2006) determines that the book group members experience "the aesthetic and the ethic", shared sentiments and a collective bond, as well as "puissance", increased enjoyment through social consumption, thus beginning to touch on potentially therapeutic themes.

Thompson and Üstüner (2015) examine a female-led and –dominated culture, roller derby. However, roller derby is a challenge to orthodox gender boundaries through parody, irony and subversion (Thompson and Üstüner 2015). This community is attempting to "*jam the cultural hegemony*" (Thompson and Üstüner 2015, 237) and engage in gender resignification. In contrast to this, Carlson's (2010, 436) participatory research on women's roller derby observes a fetishisation of "*an aggressive physicality that is usually associated with masculine sports*", suggesting a "*privileging of masculine signifiers over feminine ones*" (Thompson and Üstüner 2015, 260). Carlson as a derby competitor herself offers a more emic perspective on the community than Thompson and Üstüner, thus her conflicting interpretation demands attention. In some ways, roller derby participants may be akin to the female bikers (Martin et al. 2006; Thompson 2012) as gender tourists in a hyper-masculine world, in this case aggressive sport.

Giesler (2012) touches on a female consumption community when discussing Botox parties held by *'Baby Boomer women'* but rather than examining these in terms of gender, feminine or feminist identity, consumption, and its meanings, he considers the construction and evolution of the brand image of Botox through advertising. His adoption of the term 'brand community' in this paper is also questionable, as although Botox is a brand, it has also become a genericised

term for the drug; it is unlikely these partygoers would be upset or offended should the attending doctor arrive with an alternative brand of Botulism toxin.

Harju and Huovinen (2015) give us a rather tantalising glimpse into a female-led and -dominated online community in their work focused "*on the discursive practices with which fatshion bloggers construct their intersectional identities as plus-sized consumers*" (Harju and Huovinen 2015, 1604). The paper is focused on examining individual "*postfeminist identity projects*" (Harju and Huovinen 2015, 1604) but touches on the influence of and importance of the online fatshion community to its membership. References are made to the importance of 'peer support' and 'unity' which are a source of strength to the women of this marginalised consumption community. The structure of the blogosphere however may limit the depth of these connections. *"Readers are able to comment on the blog posts and thus participate in the creation of the blog and the space fatshion blogs inhabit in the wider blogosphere"* (Harju and Huovinen 2015, 1609). While readers may comment on the blogs and co-construct the fatshionista narrative in this way, these communications are relatively superficial and unidirectional. This has given rise to debate as to whether or not the blogosphere can truly be considered a community (Blanchard 2004). Scaraboto and Fischer (2013) discuss development of a collective identity by the 'fatsionistas' as a means of communal action for great marketplace choice and for Fat Acceptance, but still refer to these women as "the bloggers" and "their audience". Where the fatshionistas talk about community, it refers to the Fatshionista LiveJournal community, which is not examined in Harju and Huovinen's paper. Scaraboto and Fischer (2013) carried out a netnography in this online female-led and –dominated community; however, while at the time of this work the Fatshionista LiveJournal was described as "*particularly lively*" (Scaraboto and Fischer 2013, 1242), it now appears to be defunct, with the last posts in May 2016. Their focus is not on the community or communal consumption, but rather on community strategies for institutional change and market change.

Much of the research on female consumption, however, addresses consumption in a way that excludes feminine identity issues rather than engaging with them. Many studies focusing on

female consumers do so to focus on a target market or demographic, rather than to provide insight into potentially meaningful gender-related issues such as a sense of feminist or feminine identity. For example, in contrast with Jantzen et al.'s (2006) phenomenological work on lingerie and intimate apparel, Tsarenko and Strizhakova (2015) "*examine how the demographic characteristic of age affects the gendered consumption of intimate apparel*" (Tsarenko and Strizhakova 2015, 41). They acknowledge the gendered nature of lingerie consumption as well as its potential meaning for women in terms of body image and self-concept, but revert back to women as a demographic. This 'women as target market' type of research has the potential to create the "*overgeneralised, essentialised and trivialised accounts of women as consumers*" of which Catterall et al. (2000, 2) warn. Stokburger-Sauer and Teichmann (2013) obtain as their main finding that "*women attach more importance to their physical appearance*" (Stokburger-Sauer and Teichmann 2013, 891) in order to attract a mate, and thus have a more positive attitude to luxury brands. Hudders et al. (2014) similarly consider luxury consumption but find that women's motivation for consumption was '*intrasexual competition*" (Hudders et al. 2014, 570). This non-critical perspective on gender leads to an oversimplified understanding of male versus female target markets.

The recent abundance of studies of online brand communities often reflects this treatment of gender issues as merely a demographic concern (Carlson, Suter and Brown, 2008; Jang et al. 2008; Munnukka, Karjaluoto and Tikkanen 2015). Hur, Ahn and Kim (2011) conduct a study of female members of an online brand community, but in their conclusion call for sampling of male members of the brand community rather than considering questions of gender identity beyond very basic demographic characteristics.

This clarifies the extent of the previously identified gap in the literature with respect to femininity. Femininity clearly remains very much under-theorised. However, if we propose to study a feminine consumption community, first, we must clarify what we mean by a feminine and a feminist identity. Only then can we be confident that we have a conceptual base suitable

for the scrutiny of feminine community as distinct from the masculinised communities that dominate the consumption community literature.

In parallel with the fragmentation and re-composition of community, there is also an "*increased absence of traditional gender roles*" (Dunne, Freeman, and Sherlock 2006, 1) and greater tolerance for gender identity projects. "*Postmodernists argue that gender is one of those universalising and unhelpful dichotomies that typify modern Western thought*" (Catterall et al. 2005, 493). Judith Butler, for example, rejects the more traditional view that 'sex' is a biologically predetermined state and, instead, favours the idea that sex and sexuality "*are discursively constructed over time and from culture to culture*" (Salih 2002, 8) and that gender is not inevitably linked to one's physical sex (Butler 1993). Rather then, "*Gender is the cultural definition of behaviour defined as appropriate to the sexes in a given society at a given time. Hence gender is a set of cultural rules that may be applied at a subcultural level*" (Arthur 2006, 106). This leads to Butler's (1999) theory of performativity, where gender is a "doing" but, unlike "performance" with which she draws a distinction, there is no doer of the deed, no free agent standing outside of gender. Nayak and Kehily (2006) use the example of *"the seemingly straightforward act of a girl putting on lipstick. Rather than attribute this action to a knowable female subject, in* Bodies that Matter, *Butler describes such activities as 'girling' (1993) through which the subject is only made intelligible through action"* (Nayak and Kehily 2006, 460) Consumption of that lipstick then is a means by which gender identities can be affirmed and reassured. Thus the performance of gender and the performance of various consumption activities can be linked.

Femininity itself is poorly defined. Indeed, most identity literature avoids the real issue by referring to multiple femininities without clarifying what these may be, or by listing feminine and masculine characteristics. Connell (1990, 1992, 2005, Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) holds that there is no ''hegemonic femininity' as all femininities are subordinate to masculinities. Connell instead refers to 'emphasised femininity' as the form of femininity most in '*compliance with this subordination and … orientated to accommodate the interests and*

desires of men' (Connell 1987, 187). Schippers (2007), however, argues this point, suggesting that there is indeed a femininity which is ascendant over other femininities and proffers a definition of hegemonic femininity as consisting of *'the characteristics defined as womanly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women*" (Schippers 2007, 94). This hegemonic femininity serves the interests of and emphasises compliance with the established gender order. Other forms of femininity explored by Schippers (2007) include 'pariah' femininities; those where women are "*promiscuous, "frigid", or sexually inaccessible, and … aggressive"* (Schippers 2007, 95) and are, thus, "*stigmatised and sanctioned*" (Schippers 2007, 95).

In general, however, femininity is simply defined as in dyadic opposition to masculinity. Thus where "*boys and men are socialised in masculine ideals of toughness, competitiveness, killer instincts, an indefatigable work ethic, and the hierarchical dynamics of win-lose outcomes"* (Thompson and Holt 2004, 317), feminine ideals must then be supportiveness and sisterhood (Martin et al. 2006), non-competitiveness, empathy (Stacey 1988), motherhood and peaceableness (Mascia-Lees, Sharpe, and Cohen 1989), warm, kind and compassionate (Shea and Wong 2012), emotional, nurturant and dependent (Tong 2008), and friendly, timid, creative, obedient, affectionate, romantic, talkative and sympathetic (Caterall and Maclaran 2001). Here, as in Schippers (2007), masculinity and femininity are defined only by their relationship to each other and not as independent of each other.

It has further been suggested that in this changing world, male identity has undergone a crisis which has promoted membership of these hypermasculine (Martin et al. 2006) tribes. Moisio (2007) and Holt and Thompson (2004) explore male consumption in a compensatory light as an attempt to counter "emasculation" and "gender disorder". The same factors identified by them as impacting male self-concepts, socioeconomic change rendering "*jobs less fulfilling, less secure and workplaces increasingly dominated by women"* (Moisio 2007, 1) and evolving gender roles, may also be affecting women. Since female identity has undergone similar crises, a

corresponding motivation should inevitably arise. O'Brien Hallstein (2011) for example, suggests that there is "*a post-second wave [feminism] crisis in femininity*" (O'Brien Hallstein 2011, 111), particularly in relation to motherhood. While masculine identity may be undermined by the gains of second wave feminism and the concurrent changes to gender roles and assumptions, women's roles and femininity are similarly altered by being the beneficiaries of these changes. The crisis in femininity is characterised by a balancing act between the acceptance of second wave gains and the backlash against it, sometimes termed postfeminism. The term postfeminism itself is used confusingly with two distinct and almost diametrically opposite meanings in various scholarly works (Butler, 2013). Postfeminism has been used to describe the backlash against second wave feminism, but it has also been used as a contraction of postmodern feminism. Thus it can mean both an anti-feminist stance and a third wave feminist stance. Douglas and Michaels (2005), for example, when discussing 'the new momism', declare that, *"Postfeminism means that you can now work outside the home even in jobs previously restricted to men, go to graduate school, pump iron and pump your own gas, as long as you remain fashion conscious*, *slim, nurturing, deferential to men, and become a doting selfless mother"* (Douglas and Michaels 2005, 25). This tension between acceptable modes of femininity can provoke existential or identity crises (O'Brien Hallstein 2011).

Burman (2005) suggests that it is contemporary feminist debates which have "*shifted emphasis to discuss gender and sexuality as plural, fluid and situated, rather than as fixed identities*" (Burman 2005, 17). Additionally, acceptable modes of feminine expression have changed over time under the influence of the feminist movement. Perhaps these conflicting understandings of how female identity might be expressed explain why it is difficult for theorists to define femininity. At times, symbolic markers of female identity have been undermined while other markers, previously viewed as too feminine in a traditional or subjugated sense, (including activities like knitting or baking), have been reclaimed.

Craft activities, for example, have been traditionally associated with women and femininity, with textile crafts such as knitting, spinning and embroidery being identified as 'women's work'

and associated with the feminine domestic sphere. These crafts have moved in and out of fashion over time as the 'feminine arts' have waxed and waned in acceptability (Parker 2010; Stalp 2015; Stalp and Conti 2011; Turney 2009). A fresh consideration of craft consumption may be particularly well suited to the exploration of feminised forms of consumption community, in particular, as craft activities can frequently be performed in a communal setting (Piercy and Cheek 2004). Thus a craft consumption community may offer an ideal setting for studying a female-led and -dominated culture.

2.5 The Craft Consumer

Campbell (2005) suggests that the "craft consumer" needs to be explicitly recognised as a consumption identity as these consumers have an "*active and creative role*" (Watson and Shove 2005, 11). Campbell believes that much of the consumption undertaken by individuals in contemporary western societies can be conceived of as craft activity in addition to simply exercising control over the consumption process, where individuals "*bring skill, knowledge, judgement, love and passion to their consuming"* (Campbell 2005, 27) in the same way that it is assumed traditional craftspeople approach their work.

Viewed from this standpoint, consumers are seen to be *"manipulating commodities to produce symbolic meanings and constitute identities*", thus "*DIY [or any craft consumption] is seen as a means of realising effects which convey individuality and self -identity*" (Williams 2008, 315).

Campbell (2005) defines a craft consumer as one "*who takes any number of mass-produced items and employs these as the 'raw materials' for the creation of a new 'product', one that is typically intended for self-consumption*" (Campbell 2005, 28). While self-consumption is certainly the target of some of the 'product' Campbell comments on such as DIY and gardening, others such as cooking, pottery and weaving may be quite commonly carried out for others, particularly for the purpose of gifting.

Both Campbell (2005) and Watson and Shove (2005) see strong comparisons between the craft consumers studied by them and "*craft production of the type valued by thinkers such as Marx, Veblen and Morris"* (Watson and Shove 2005, 3), who viewed such production as an authentic expression of humanity, contrasting this with the alienating production processes of industrialisation, potentially damaging to the human soul (Watson and Shove 2005). In this way, these authors identify an existential therapeutic benefit to craft production [see Section 2.5.1].

Watson and Shove present a two-by-two matrix of what they see as the archetypes in DIY and, by extension, in craft consumption:

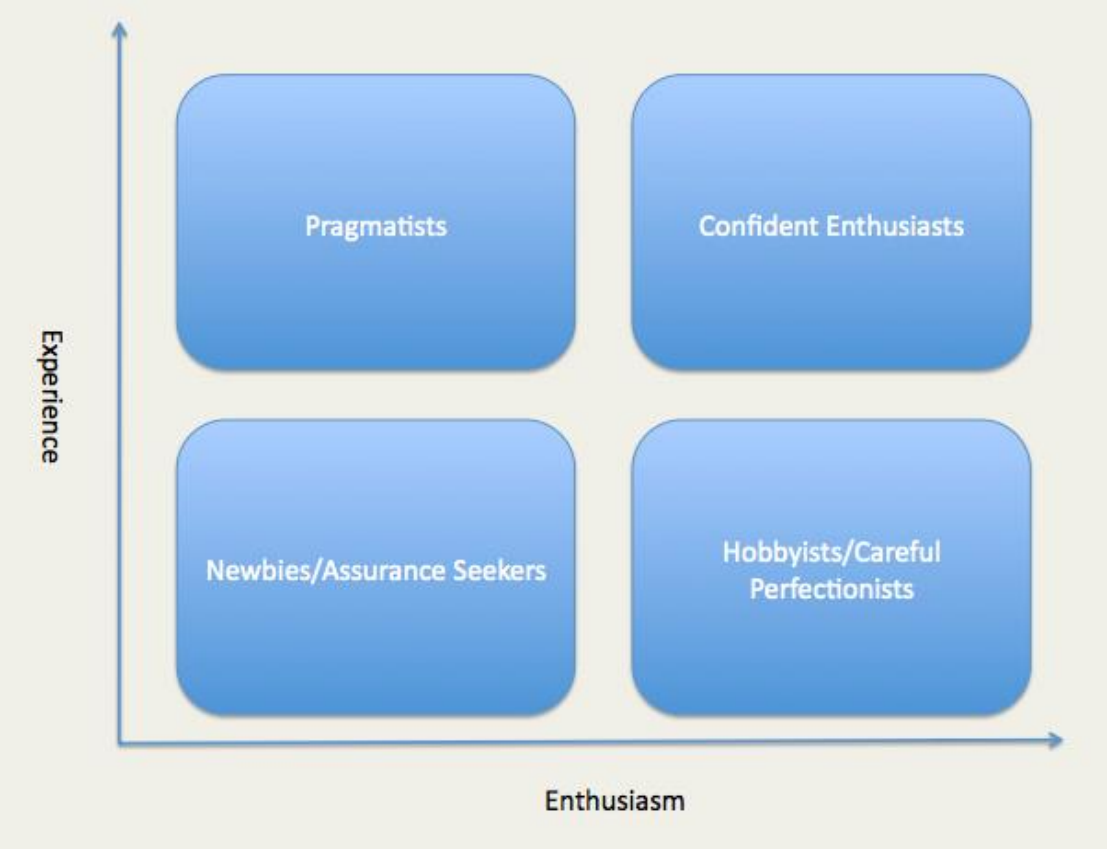

Figure 2-1: Watson and Shove (2005) Two-by-two Matrix

This typology is potentially extremely useful for identifying the consumption practices of crafters. Watson and Shove suggest, for example, that 'pragmatists' will choose the lowest priced item that will achieve the end goal, while 'confident enthusiasts' and 'hobbyists,' on the

other hand, will choose quality and longevity, perhaps a high-end consumer product, or even an item designed for use by a professional (Watson and Shove 2005).

The main potential fault in this typology is that Experience and Enthusiasm may not be independently linear variables as is supposed by Watson and Shove. Often, new practitioners and experienced practitioners will display the highest peaks of enthusiasm with a trough in the middle as the initial excitement of novelty wears off. This represents the area where many hobbyists may drop the pursuit and move on to other crafts or pastimes.

Dahl and Moreau (2007) briefly discuss how a craft is acquired and developed but say that opportunity for "*learning often involves a community of crafters meeting a social need*" (Dahl and Moreau 2007, 659), thus, suggesting, once again, a social element to crafting.

"*The most traditional way to learn a craft is through apprenticeship, watching a master craftsman and receiving feedback as the skills are practised over time"* (Torrey, Churchill and McDonald 2009, 1371). Many current craft consumers do not wish to become proficient to a professional level however, and are happy "*supporting craft as a satisfying hobby"* (Torrey et al. 2009, 1378). Despite technological alternatives to the traditional apprenticeship, as "*the internet has become a vibrant place to find pictures of craft projects, watch videos illustrating techniques, and communicate with craft enthusiasts of all types*" (Torrey et al. 2009, 1372), the social element of crafting nevertheless persists.

It is this social element which suggests that identity construction may be taking place in the craft consumption community. The process of acquiring identity within a consumption community has been examined by Schouten and McAlexander (1995) in a subcultural context. They identify three distinct phases through which a consumer passes on the path to internalising a new identity. First, the consumer experiments with the identity, then, as they begin to identify with the subculture, they start to conform to its norms and expectations. Finally, they master the new identity and internalise it. In the case of Schouten and McAlexander's 1995 paper, the consumers become Bikers.

While Schouten and McAlexander's research was carried out in a "*hyper-masculine*" (Martin et al. 2006, 171) environment, this identity internalisation process is paralleled in Meyer and Allen's (1991) conceptualisation of the organisational commitment of employees. The three components of commitment are identified as affective commitment (the desire), continuance commitment (the need) and normative commitment (the obligation). Affective commitment is the strength of identification with or involvement with the organisation (or in this case with the subculture or tribe). Continuance is due to the perceived costs of leaving the group. Participants in "brandfests," for example, express anxiety about losing friends if they move away from the brand of the Brand Community (McAlexander and Schouten 1998; McAlexander et al. 2002). Without this "linking" product they feel they will become isolated from their chosen community. With normative commitment, we see that employees (or members) develop a sense of obligation to the organisation, believing that staying in the group is morally right as a commitment has been made, or that membership has become an internalised personal norm.

The process of 'becoming tribal' is similarly structured, with tales of transcendent consumer experiences (Arnould and Price 1993) and mastery of skills, as in the work of Celsi et al. (1993) in the skydiving community. Likewise, in the subculture, "*Status is conferred on members according to their seniority, participation and leadership in group activities, … expertise, … specific knowledge and so forth – in short the results of an individual's commitment to the groups commitment values"* (Schouten and McAlexander 1995, 56). The opportunity to assert the self-concept, an image of who one 'really is', can be accompanied by a profound sense of ownership leading to a deep commitment.

These stages are also strongly reflective of the literature on membership of therapeutic groups. The internalisation of the therapeutic identity is discussed in terms of 'Affiliation with' or `Commitment to'. Ullman, Najdowski and Adams (2012) believe the difference between the concepts is poorly defined with no "*clear conceptual or empirical distinction*" (Ullman, Najdowski and Adams 2012, 449). In their paper on Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), a therapeutic group, affiliation is conceptualised as a longitudinal process, while commitment is '*the degree*

to which one is invested in the program' (Ullman et al., 449). The suggestion here seems to be that affiliation is a function of time rather than of internalisation. Internalisation, on the other hand, signifies commitment and is defined in terms of actions. In AA, this action is the number of steps of the programme worked; in the tribal environment of Skydiving, commitment is measured by the number of jumps performed (Celsi et al. 1993). Other aspects of therapeutic groups are dealt with in further depth at a later stage [see Section 2.7.3].

Minahan and Cox (2006) is one of the few published papers to consider this aspect of craft consumption; they carried out a self-described *'preliminary'*, *'exploratory'* (Minahan and Cox 2006, 3) study of young women's motivations for membership of a Stitch 'n' Bitch knitting group. The potential motivations they see for their participants are Nostalgic, Ironic, Progressive, Resistance, or Remedial. They suggest the use of these five themes as an agenda for future research.

In discussing 'nostalgic' themes, they suggest that participation may offer a romantic return to the past and an idyllic pastoral. In direct contrast to this, they suggest an 'ironic' theme where Knitters may be parodying this past, playfully expressing melancholy for a life which they would not actually want to experience. In another contradictory turn, they suggest that members of Stitch 'n' Bitch might in fact be engaged in a much more serious and meaningful 'progressive' Cyberfeminist phenomenon focused on women's expression and creativity, or even in a political struggle of 'resistance', using craft to protest issues around gender and marginalisation. They finally suggest a remedial theme, with a focus on community *"remedying the individualism of the present Information Society with collective recreation*" (Minahan and Cox 2006, 13). However, they themselves suggest this theme is too limited as it suggests a rejection of technology which is antithetical to the wholesale embrace of technology by Knitters.

While 'remedial' is the least developed of Minahan and Cox's (2006) themes, it potentially offers an interesting avenue for exploration as it is widely understood that craft itself is

therapeutic (Collier 2011; Corkhill et al. 2014; Kingston 2013; Morton 2011; Riley, Corkhill and Morris 2013; Standard and Sanders 2015). Thus the 'remedial' theme, though limited, suggests that therapy is a possible theoretical lens with which to examine the consumption community.

2.5.1 Craft as Therapy

Crafting is widely considered to be therapeutic. Handcrafts such as knitting or weaving have been used in occupational therapy since early in the last century. Early occupational therapists saw handcrafts as a means to make the injured or handicapped productive, with saleable goods a path to self-sufficiency, and as a means *'to generate healing through the virtuous labour of handwork"* (Morton 2011, 322).

However, knitting and textile crafts have been used not merely as a treatment for physical dysfunction but as a means of healing the whole person, mental and physical (Morton 2011). Crafts may provide an emotional therapy, for example, "*Knitting has significant psychological … benefits"* (Riley et al. 2013, 50). Reynolds (2002) in particular, has studied textile arts in the treatment of depression and chronic illness and disability (Reynolds 1997, 2002, 2004).

Studies have shown that activities such as knitting, quilting, crochet and embroidery produce feelings of calm and happiness (Corkhill et al. 2014; Kingston 2013; Riley et al. 2013; Standard and Sanders 2015), lead to stress reduction (Utsch 2007), manage anxiety (Clave-Brule et al. 2009) and that, in addition, craft can be used to navigate the ageing process (Piercy and Cheek 2004) as crafters report improved cognitive function (Riley et al. 2013)**.** *"Textile arts allow women to cope with grief, with depression, and with a range of physical impairments to express, restore, and manage their illnesses, while simultaneously experiencing joy [and] confidence"* (Collier 2011, 34).

This belief in the healing power of knitting has crept into the popular press with newspaper articles bearing titles like "Knitting: Meditation, with a jumper at the end of it" (Carey 2013),

“From DIY fashion statement to the 'new yoga' - why knitting is hot again” (Hampson 2013) and “Why knitting and yoga are perfect bedfellows” (Lewis 2013) all focusing on the therapeutic benefits of knitting.

In contrast to this, Seregina and Weijo (2017) found that cosplayers (those involved in costumed role-playing often at fan events and conventions (Winge 2010)), who are predominantly female due to the requirement for skills in patterning, sewing and make-up artistry, may begin to find the crafting element of their hobby a source of stress, as they struggle with time and financial constraints. One of the methods for performers to negotiate these difficulties is collaboration and joint projects, suggesting that collaborative crafting may offer a benefit of its own.

While acknowledging that the practice of craft is therapeutic, it has also been shown that consumption itself can be therapeutic. The idea of retail therapy or therapeutic consumption has previously been explored through the lens of compensatory consumption.

2.6 Compensatory Consumption

Grunert (1994) defines compensatory consumption in deceptively simple terms, “*the phenomenon is that a lack of x could be cured by a supply of x, but may also be cured by a supply of y. If y is used, this process is called compensatory consumption*” (Grunert 1994, 76). She then goes on to explain that loneliness could be cured by getting together with friends and socialising, or, alternatively, by engaging in emotional eating.

Literature on female compensatory consumption is mainly focused on how women use consumption to “*repair negative emotional states*” (Woodruffe-Burton and Elliott 2005, 461). Examples include Grunert (1994) on emotional eating and Woodruffe-Burton (2001, 1) on “*retail therapy*”. Consumers in bad moods shop to cheer themselves up and may be particularly

prone to impulse buying to make themselves feel happy, good, and satisfied (Rook 1987; Woodruffe 1997, Woodruffe-Burton, Eccles and Elliott 2002).

In contrast, the literature on male compensatory consumption is far more focused on the quest for 'authentic masculinity' (Rinallo 2007). Holt and Thompson (2004) discuss how men, "*emasculated by recent socioeconomic changes, construct themselves as masculine through... consumption*" (Holt and Thompson 2004, 425). Dunne et al. (2006) go further in explaining these changes, *"Whereas once a man could be assured of his masculinity by virtue of his occupation, interests or certain personality characteristics, many women now opt for the roles. An indirect consequence of these changes appears to be a growing questioning of what it means to be a man*" (Dunne et al. 2006, 1).

Here, in the literature on male compensatory consumption, Grunert's definition becomes problematic. If we say that X, the lacking element, is certainty regarding gender roles and a sense of comfort or even pride in masculinity, then, what is to be supplied to cure the lack of X? And, what is Y? It seems that the activities undertaken, which symbolically reinforce the masculine identity (for example, in Dunne et al., 2006, bodybuilding), are the alternative solution, the Y value. In that case, what is the non-compensatory solution to a perceived emasculation?

Rather than suggest that the goals of compensatory consumption as engaged in by women are significantly different to its goals when engaged in by men – the quest for 'authentic masculinity'- we might explore the possibility that women engage in compensatory consumption in an effort to construct an authentic feminine identity, a possibility, which to this point, has been largely ignored in the literature.

An exception is Jantzen et al. (2006), who report that as "*gender distinctions apparently become more and more obsolete, impractical or simply irrelevant*," women feel the need to "*define a special feminine realm*" (Jantzen et al. 2006, 178). Their study, however, does not progress this idea beyond a cursory acknowledgement of compensatory consumption. It may be the case

that women's need to assert a feminine identity gives a specifically compensatory meaning to some acts of consumption.

It seems that in spite of the potential importance of compensatory consumption as a means of understanding female consumption, there is no body of work on how women, rather than men, "*cultivate their distinctiveness*" in the "*increased absence of traditional gender roles*" (Dunne et al. 2006, 1). Jantzen et al.'s (2006) finding, that women also feel the need to reassure and reassert themselves in a feminine identity, suggests that there is a form of female compensatory consumption that serves a similar purpose to what has been so far regarded as a classic and exclusively male form of compensatory consumption.

Another possible area where compensatory consumption is more complicated than acknowledged by Grunert is in the sphere of what McCracken (1988) describes as "*displaced meaning*" (McCracken 1988, 112), a kind of nostalgia for an archetypal past which may only exist in the mind of the consumer. If this archetypal past is X, how can this lack be satisfied in anyway but symbolically?

Perhaps, for consumers seeking this reassurance about identity, consumption community engagement offers a solution. Goulding et al. (2002, 261) argue that "*our ability to construct and maintain our identity(ies) is aided by the symbolic resources we have at our disposal*". One of these symbolic resources is the ability to join consumption communities and have our identity(ies) reinforced through group membership and shared consumption. Thus it may be possible that some women join neo-tribes in an effort to collectively resolve their feminine identity through shared consumer behaviour.

However, based on the advantages of consumption communities highlighted by other authors (Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry 1989; Cova and Cova 2002; Goulding et al. 2002; Minahan and Cox 2006; O Connor 1997; Urry, 1995), it seems that something more than just compensatory consumption is offered by consumption community membership. Perhaps therapeutic consumption practices are what serve to remedy the distress that compensatory consumption

seems to fail to address. The compensatory consumption literature in some ways illustrates the failures of consumption to fulfil the underlying needs associated with social fragmentation, identity, and challenging personal circumstances experienced by consumers. This potentially leads to the search for something more intrinsically meaningful than compensatory consumption as defined in the current literature. Woodruffe (1997) describes her participants experiencing guilt and buyer's remorse after purchasing their 'treats'. This discovery that shopping when fed-up fails to address their underlying existential needs may drive a search for something that will.

Knowing that membership of a consumption community can offer emotional benefits to its membership (Algesheimer, Dholakia and Herrmann 2005; Goulding et al. 2013; McAlexander et al. 2002; Muniz and O Guinn 2001), it is possible that this is one route to fulfilment of these existential needs and a quest for authentic femininity and feminine consumption. As we already know that crafting itself can be therapeutic, it is therefore worthwhile examining what is meant by the terms 'therapeutic' and 'therapy' in order to consider whether therapy offers a more rounded view of this quest.

2.7 Therapy

Therapeutic discourse is pervasive in Western (particularly American) society (Illouz 2008). Daytime (Peck 1995) and `reality' TV (Aslama and Pantti 2006), in particular, rely on confessional and therapeutic narratives (White 1992), making a star of practitioners like "Dr. Phil" and resulting in a population well versed in concepts such as closure, denial, ego, self-esteem, compulsions, and catharsis, for example. It has been described as both "*a pervasive cultural trope and a marketplace icon*" (Golpaldas 2016, 264). And yet Therapy itself is a quite vaguely defined concept.

Most definitions of therapy in literature come not from psychotherapy or psychological literature, but rather from those less well established fields such as Art (Edwards, 2014) or

Music Therapy. The relative youth or newness of these fields may lead to a more defensive standpoint in which researchers and practitioners need to clearly define what therapy actually is in order to prove that they are providing it.

Dalley (2008) describes therapy as involving "*the aim or desire to bring about change in human disorder*" (Dalley 2008, xi). She further quotes Ullman (2001), "*A therapeutic procedure is one designed to assist favourable changes in personality or in living which will outlast the session itself."* (Dalley 2008, xi). Levine and Sandeen (2013) define psychotherapy *"as the deliberate and conscious use of psychological technologies to treat emotional distress or lack of adequate function"* (Levine and Sandeen 2013, 13). Therapy, then, is a treatment for emotional distress which outlasts the treatment itself.

Levine and Sandeen (2013) stress that what separates them as professional psychotherapists from laypersons who can also render help is the use of psychological technologies. Psychological technologies are the techniques and devices used to investigate and treat psychological phenomena. Classic examples are the meditative and contemplative practices of religious traditions, but more recent examples include Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) techniques or psychometric testing (Stein 2008). Though academics argue the effectiveness and distinctions of different schools or traditions of therapy from Freud's original psychoanalysis to the emerging field of positive psychotherapy (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2014), in practice most clinical psychologists use an integrative or mixed approach (Golpaldas 2016).

In conjunction with the many schools of therapy, there has also been a "*proliferation of therapy formats*" (Golpaldas 2016, 266). Therapy can be one-on-one, for couples, families or groups. In couples or group therapy, the focus is on interpersonal dynamics. Group therapy focuses on shared individual problems. These group therapies can be led by a professional medical practitioner or can be "self-help" (Levy 1976; Powell 1994). Most self-help groups dealing with problematic behaviours will still have a leadership structure, however, as in Weight Watchers (Moisio and Beruchashvili 2010). Not all those seeking therapy are 'patients' seeking treatment

for and rehabilitation from a problematic behaviour or illness. Golpaldas (2016) suggests that users of the therapy industry can be found on a spectrum from 'patients' with severe mental illness to 'consumers' seeking therapy as "*a consumer service, not unlike personal training or life coaching*" (Golpaldas 2016, 266). Such diversity exists even within the self-help format (Markowitz 2015).

With such a diversity of approaches and consumer desires, it is easy to lose sight of what exactly a self-help group is. Jacobs and Goodman (1989) and Shaffer and Galinsky (1989) both attempt to define the characteristics of a self-help group. Each pair of authors, writing at the same time, draws attention to different aspects of the self-help group without benefit of the other's conclusions.

Jacobs and Goodman (1989) place emphasis on the following criteria:

- Power residing within the membership
- Equal rights within group processes
- Leadership vesting in selected indigenous and/or professional representatives who serve at the pleasure of the group
- Idealism about de-emphasising rank and privilege
- Free expression of thought and feeling, provided such expression does not unfairly pain others
- Can be fierce about independence from external rule
- Capable of shifting from early isolationism towards cautious cooperation with foreign powers
- Sharing a common predicament or concern
- Minimal fees

Shaffer and Galinsky (1989) describe a self-help group as:

- Involving a reciprocal process of help-intended activity

- Having a shared belief in the power of the group
- Avoiding professional leadership
- Having open-ended membership where the group's composition is rarely constant
- Providing an informal social network that often involves the participant in a large variety of informal member-to-member contacts, sometimes viewed as more therapeutic than the formal group meetings.

Moisio and Beruchashvili (2010) suggest that the therapeutic model may have stronger resonance with women "*due to its underlying feminine vernacular of emotionality*" (Moisio and Beruchashvili 2010, 859) however, self-help in particular has proven to be popular with female consumers (Ernst and Goodison 1981; Taylor and Van Willigen 1996).

2.7.1 Therapy and the Female Experience

The literature on therapy and feminism provides useful insights into the derivation of therapeutic outcomes from the sharing of female experience. Therapy, in particular, psychotherapy and second wave feminism, reached critical mass in the same time period, "*possibly due to the great concern over social adjustment and well-being in the post war era*" (Illouz 2008, 163).

While their aims may not have been the same, both movements achieved complementary results, that is, an exploration of female sexuality and satisfaction, and a focus on individualist 'self' projects as opposed to self-sacrificing collectivist practices for women (Illouz 2008). Both the feminist movement and the therapy movement offered a woman of the time the opportunity to explore and reclaim herself (Illouz 2008).

Through this move away from a 'family first' mentality, women found the freedom to discuss their previously 'forbidden feelings' (Ernst and Goodison 1981) and private dilemmas. This led to a realisation that issues initially perceived as individual problems, unsuitable for open

discussion, were, in fact, issues faced by many. Feminism offered a path to accept and direct 'forbidden feelings' in a positive way (Ernst and Goodison 1981) as does therapy (Illouz 2008; Moisio and Beruchashvili 2010).

However, despite these emancipatory moves, the medical establishment has a long history of patriarchical dismissal of women's issues (Gannon 1998; Munch 2004). With an eye to diagnosis and treatment of 'hysteria' (ailments caused by a wandering womb) of the past, '*therapy suggests male therapists telling women they are sick; it suggests a process aimed at adjusting women to conventional and restrictive roles*' (Ernst and Goodison 1984, 4). Although few therapists today can fail to be aware of gender politics and "*gender inequality as [it impacts] on women in treatment*" (Denman 2006, 59), a recognition among women of a male dominated therapeutic process and a subsequent resistance to it may help account for the emergence and popularity of self-help groups or support groups among women (Ernst and Goodison 1981; Taylor and Van Willigen 1996).

Pearson (1982, 1983) and Heller and Swindle (1983) discuss the use of therapy providers as a 'surrogate support system' where 'kith and kin' are harmful, and Pearson further posits that support groups may be more needed by populations undergoing developmental changes. His example is college students who are suddenly isolated from previous support networks. This would also apply to immigrant populations. Taylor (1999) examines "*post-partum support groups*" (Taylor 1999, 11) for new mothers suffering from post-partum depression and found that they provided an outlet for feelings women did not feel free to discuss in other settings due to societal expectations of and around motherhood. Women who failed to feel joy or 'bonding' with their children felt isolated by cultural narratives around birth and new motherhood. The social support required by these populations finding themselves in new or liminal states may need to be provided by a non-traditional support network.

2.7.2 Therapeutic Motivations

Over time, as a society, we have moved away from believing that we have no right to happiness in this mortal realm, in this 'valley of tears'. The belief that suffering is desirable as it brings one closer to God and to salvation was replaced after the Enlightenment by the assertion that we have, in fact, a right to pursue happiness (a right enshrined even in the U.S. Declaration of Independence). Positive psychologists give subjective wellbeing, life satisfaction (Van Deurzan 2008) or even the more ephemeral "*authentic happiness*" (Seligman 2004, 14) as their objective. Pascal Bruckner, when discussing the changing attitude to happiness over time, suggests that we have now arrived at a point where we perceive feeling happy as a duty, a duty which, in his view, breeds much discontent (*Philosophy Bites* 2011). His belief is that happiness is by its very nature fleeting, 'a moment of grace'. Bruckner goes so far as to suggest that success '*leads to boredom and apathy the moment it is realised*' (Bruckner 2011, 4) and, thus, being happy will, in fact, lead to unhappiness. This duty to be perpetually euphoric places a '*burden*' (Bruckner 2011, 2) on us, and this pressure to be happy prompts us to seek a '*therapeutic ideal*' (Bruckner 2011, 54) which has become an obsession with perfection (Bruckner 2011; *Philosophy Bites* 2011).

Madsen refers to self-help, and, in particular, the self-help publishing industry, as *"the opium of the people in a secular age"* (Madsen 2015, 2), obviously echoing Marx's description of religion as 'the opium of the masses'. Bruckner suggests that '*the constant summons to euphoria … makes those who do not respond to it ashamed or uneasy*' (Bruckner 2011, 5).

Both authors ultimately seem to be saying the same thing: that postmodern, fragmented society, with its lack of traditional support structures like kith and kin and religious community, leads to loneliness and unhappiness. Golpaldas (2016) suggests that traditional support structures of family and community are disintegrating into more dispersed social networks with a decreased number of strong ties despite an increasing number of weak ties. Weiss, who produced a typology of loneliness (DiTommaso and Spinner 1997; Heinrich and Gullone 2006;

Russell et al. 1984), similarly believed "*people experience loneliness because of perceived deficits in relational provisions which refer to companionship and emotional support provisions*" (Rosenbaum 2006, 65). So the absence of these emotional supports leads to a quest for therapeutic wellbeing.

How does therapy function to provide this emotional support which may be lacking due to the absence of traditional kith and kin strong ties?

2.7.3 Social Support: The Provision of Therapy

Moisio and Beruchashvili (2010) particularly focus on storytelling as the mechanism by which therapy is provided. The learning of the "*curative and cathartic code of emotionality*" (Moisio and Beruchashvili 2010, 859) involved in expressing one's feelings to the self-help group is discussed in terms of confession, accountability, surveillance and punitive agency. In a self-help group for problematic, even pathological, consumption, these spiritual and Kyriarchal mechanisms perhaps fit well with the 'sins' of overeaters. However, this group differs significantly from the consumption community in terms of orientation; members are seeking therapy and seeking treatment for a pathology. This seems a less likely model for a marketplace culture and Moscato (2014) uses this model to dismiss the suggestion that the Red Hat Society (a positive ageing group for older women) is a support group. However, it may meet many of the criteria put forward by Jacobs and Goodman (1989) and Shaffer and Galinsky (1989). Within the therapy literature, there is far more emphasis on socioemotional support as a mechanism by which therapy is delivered, although Moisio and Beruchashvili (2010) only fleetingly mention emotional support as an important component of therapy.

Finn (1999), in considering how therapy is provided, identifies the existence of two types of helping in a support group – '*socioemotional helping*' (Finn 1999, 223) and '*task helping*' (Finn 1999, 224). In the case of Finn's field site, online disability support groups, task helping referred to information provision around medical issues, rights, and assistance provision. These types of

medical support groups have been widely studied as they have been found to be beneficial and empowering for participants (Høybye, Johansen and Tjørnhøj-Thomsen, 2005). Task helping can be used to describe the 'community of practice' style information and skill transfer, but the socioemotional helping is identified as the primary motivation for attending (Finn 1999).

Socioemotional helping is more commonly termed social support. The benefits of social support are widely acknowledged in the literature (Nabi, Prestin and So 2013; Taylor 2011; Thoits 1995). Social support offers many benefits; it *"reduces, or buffers, the adverse psychological impacts of exposure to stressful life events and ongoing life strains*" (Thoits 1986, 416), can be beneficial to physical and mental health during periods of lower stress, and even contributes to longevity (Taylor 2011). While Barrera (1986) believed that social support is too poorly defined as a concept and should be broken down into components, nonetheless, now, even 30 years after he expressed this opinion, the original term is still widely used in the literature. Certainly, vague definitions exist, for example, "*social support was defined as being akin to helping in social situations*" (Page-Gould 2012, 464). However, if we use Barrera's components to clarify the concept, social support, and, indeed, support itself are useful lenses to examine both the tribal and therapeutic movements. Further to this, research suggests that women provide more social support, draw more on socially supportive connections and networks during periods of high stress, and may indeed derive greater benefit from social support (Taylor, 2011; Taylor et al. 2000; Thoits 1995). Thus, social support may be of more importance in a female-led and -dominated consumption community.

Barrera believes social support is composed of three elements, social embeddedness, perceived social support and enacted support:

Social embeddedness is the opposite to social isolation and alienation. This is a measure of support based on the quantity of connections of an individual but, as Barrera cautions, it cannot be assumed that every social linkage an individual possesses provides support.

Perceived social support is the individual's appraisal of being reliably connected to others. This immediately seems to improve upon embeddedness as a measure of support in that it measures the quality of relationships over the quantity, not equating, for example, deep personal connections with fleeting casual acquaintances. However, perceived social support then presents a further difficulty in that it is based on perception and, not necessarily, on reality. The individual must assess if they can confidently access support when it is needed. In fact, it has been found to be only moderately related to received (or enacted) social support (Melrose, Brown and Wood, 2015).

Enacted support is the actual rendering of assistance to a person in need. In this case, we finally see the mechanisms of support but its measurement usually depends on retrospective evaluation.

Support is defined by Pearson as "*assistance that seeks to bolster deficient persons by the provision of such material and non-material resources as comfort, encouragement, advice and environment manipulation"* (Pearson 1982, 83).

This is a "deficiency amelioration model" which operates on the premise that people need to be fixed or prevented from breaking further and that once the crisis has passed the need for support is at an end.

However, Pearson also suggests an alternative "positive interpersonal relationship" model in which support is "*a continuing interpersonal resource upon which persons depend for the development and maintenance of their effectiveness rather than an extraordinary intervention to remove deficiency"* (Pearson 1983, 362).

Also termed an effectiveness maintenance and enhancement view (Pearson 1983), this is more reflective of the kind of ongoing support and affirmation a therapeutic support group provides as seen in members' long term or even lifelong affiliation with and commitment to groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous. This could also be the case in a consumption community.

Hirsch (1980) and Pearson (1982; 1983) have examined the mechanisms of therapy provision by analysing the nature of social support. Table 2.2 shows Hirsch's elements of social support and Table 2.3 shows Pearson's categories of social support.

Hirsch (1980) theorised social support as five elements:

Element	**Definition**
Cognitive Guidance	Providing information, advice, explanation
Social Reinforcement	Offering praise or criticism for specific actions
Tangible Assistance	Helping or refusing to help
Socialising	Activities external to the group
Emotional Support	Making someone feel better or worse

Table 2-2: Hirsch's Elements of Social Support

Pearson (1982) suggested 13 elements called categories:

Categories	**Definition**
Admiration	Praise, interest, attention
Satisfaction	Pleasure derived from being able to contribute to another
Love	Caring, emotional sharing, affection, warmth
Intimacy	Intimate physical contact and pleasure, sexual satisfaction
Companionship	Sharing of activities, belonging, togetherness
Encouragement	Expression of confidence, affirmation of one's competence
Acceptance	Respect, empathy, understanding, trust, a receptive ear
Comfort	Reassurance, forgiveness, someone one can lean on
Example	A model of how to be, an example of how to live
Guidance	Advice, direction, spiritual assistance
Help	Material assistance, the doing of things for one
Knowledge	Intellectual stimulation, provision of expertise, information or instruction
Honesty	Honest feedback, a sounding board, perspective on one's self.

Table 2-3: Pearson's Categories of Social Support

However, Pearson's 13 categories present some ambiguities. If a participant offers an opinion based on recounted personal experience to assist another member, is that categorised as Example, Guidance, Knowledge or Honesty? It is perhaps better represented by Hirsch's Cognitive Guidance element which encompasses the provision of information, advice, and explanation. This removes the need to draw artificial distinctions between very similar categories. Indeed, in his 1983 paper, Pearson describes using both his own categories and Hirsch's schema to analyse his data.

A synthesis of both systems is thus proposed to enable the construction of a framework of therapeutic consumption with which to examine the data. This synthesis is therefore proffered, not as a new conceptual framework for formal therapy in a medical sense, but as a means to illuminate the findings of this study with respect to consumer behaviour.

Pearson's categories of Example, Guidance, Knowledge, and Honesty are very closely linked, and, perhaps, better defined by Hirsch's Cognitive Guidance.

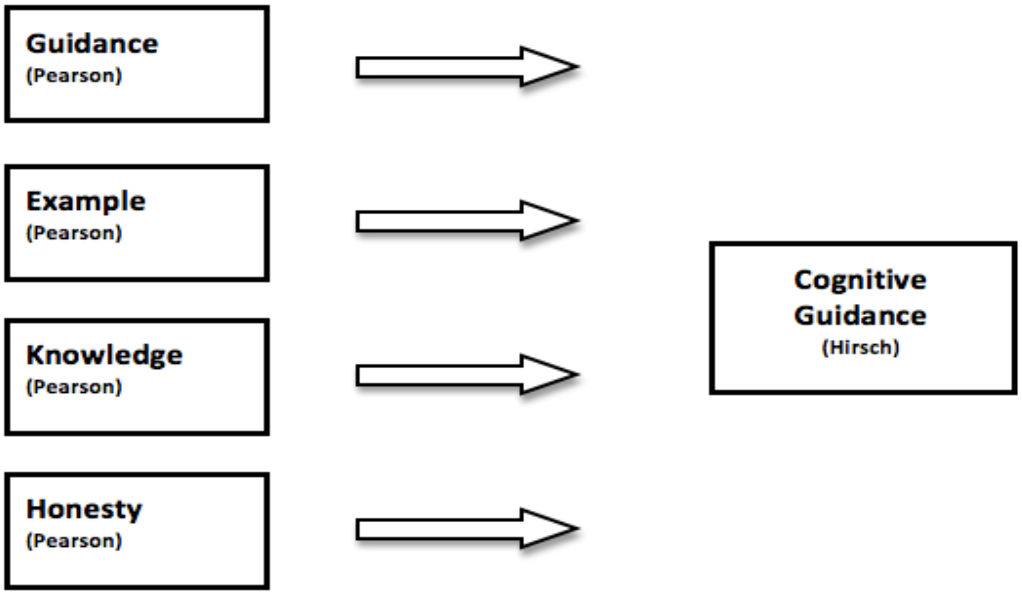

Figure 2-2: Pearson's Categories Mapped onto Hirsch's Elements 1

His categories of Love, Acceptance, and Comfort seem best summed up as Emotional Support.

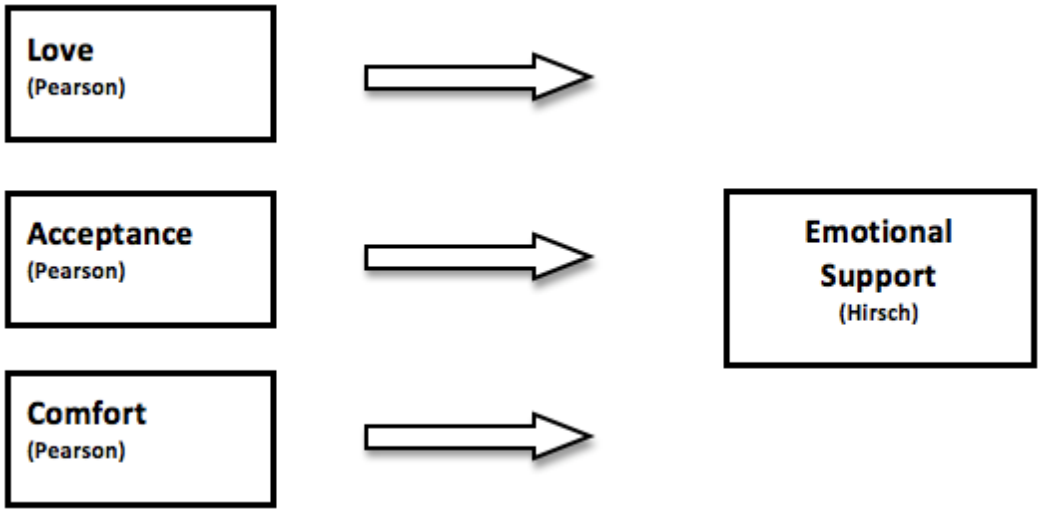

Figure 2-3: Pearson's Categories Mapped onto Hirsch's Elements 2

Pearson's categories of Encouragement and Admiration are included in Hirsch's Social Reinforcement; however, the definition put forward by Hirsch is broadened. Hirsch defines Social Reinforcement as praise for specific actions, but, in this synthesis, it is defined to include praise also for ongoing behaviours.

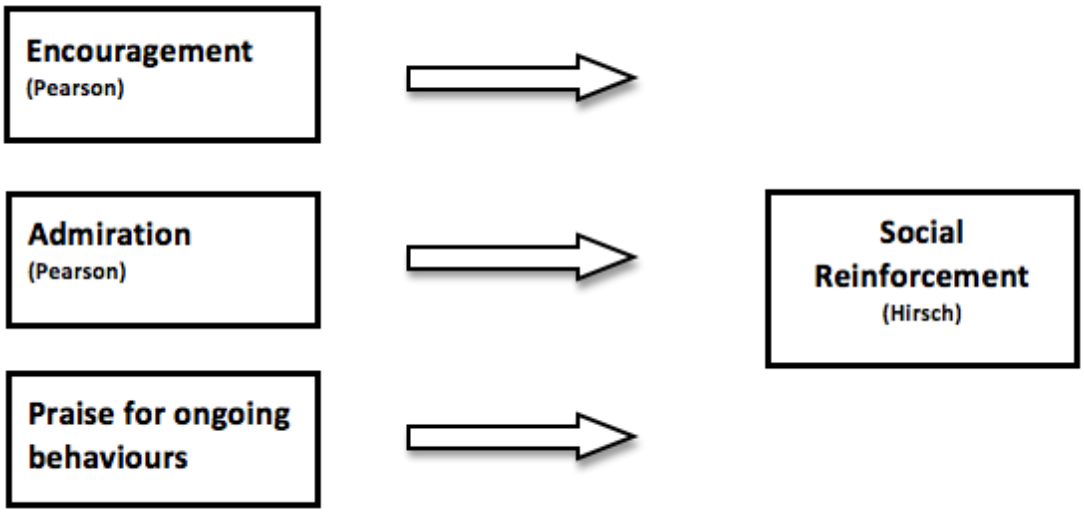

Figure 2-4: Pearson's Categories Mapped onto Hirsch's Elements 3

Pearson's Help is directly comparable to Hirsch's Tangible Assistance and his Companionship corresponds to Hirsch's Socialising.

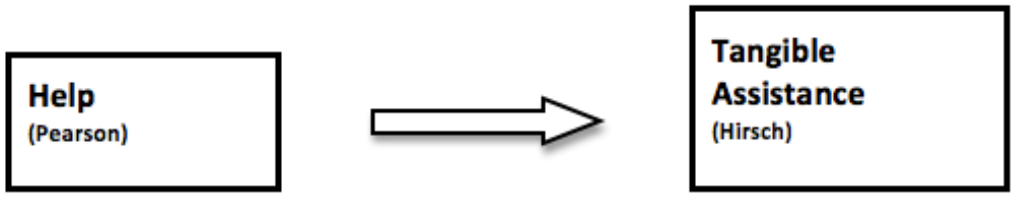

Figure 2-5: Pearson's Categories Mapped onto Hirsch's Elements 4

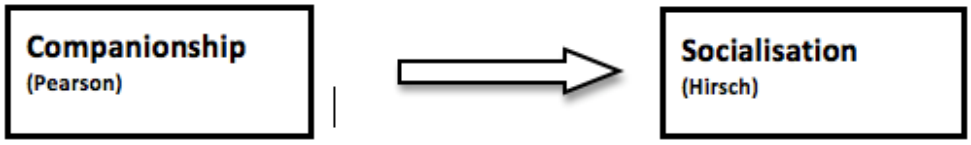

Figure 2-6: Pearson's Categories Mapped onto Hirsch's Elements 5

However, Pearson identifies two new categories which do not map as easily onto Hirsch.

'Satisfaction' or 'Pleasure in being able to contribute to another' is not identified in Hirsch's work. This altruistic benefit is similar to the helper-therapy principle as seen in Taylor and Van Willigen (1996) and Reismann (1965). They found that the 'helper' lessens his feeling of dependence on others, gains increased interpersonal confidence, behaves in a new role, and, thus, embodies that new role. In essence, becoming part of the therapy is itself therapeutic.

Figure 2-7: Pearson's Satisfaction

'Intimacy' is also absent from Hirsch's schema. Pearson defines this as intimate physical contact and sexual satisfaction. In a formal self-help group, intimate physical contact is usually very much frowned upon if not banned outright, but at a more platonic level, human touch is very

important to emotional well-being. In this situation, intimacy is perhaps best described as a high degree of comfort, resulting in decreased normal societal taboos, including increased physical contact.

Figure 2-8: Pearson's Intimacy

In addition to the mechanisms of therapy identified by Finn (1999), Pearson (1982, 1983) and Hirsch (1980) from the therapeutic consumption literature, we see that Moisio and Beruchashvili (2010) emphasise the importance of story-telling, celebration and encouragement in the therapeutic process. The narrative nature of human understanding means that story-telling is nonetheless an important component of therapy provision. Thus, this category of story-telling, celebration and encouragement is added to the new model by which to consider the mechanisms of therapy in a female-led and –dominated consumption community.

There seem to be instances of these practices in some of the consumption groups in the literature, but the idea that these could be fundamental to the community has not been previously examined. This suggested schema could be used to identify the modes and mechanisms of therapeutic practice being accessed by those who require therapy and thus, identify what is and what is not therapeutic in a consumption context.

2.8 Development of Research Question

Two key papers have identified the need for further theorisation of

i. Feminity in a CCT context (Martin et al. 2006)

And

ii. Therapy in a consumption context (Golpaldas 2016)

While both craft and consumption have been found to be therapeutic, the mechanisms of that therapy have not been considered. Further, it has yet to be considered that membership of a consumer community itself may convey a therapeutic benefit, although we know that both therapy and consumption communities can be used to overcome social isolation and alienation, and contribute to wellbeing (Moscato 2014). Belk et al. (1989, 62) describe '*transcending comraderie'*, Urry (1995) talks about empowering people and providing safe social spaces, and McAlexander et al. (2002, 51) go so far as to call these communities '*instrumental to human well-being… people share essential resources that may be cognitive, emotional or material in nature.*" Similar communities are seen in Celsi et al.'s (1993) skydivers and Arnould and Price's (1993) river rafters. These descriptions seem to be clearly referencing a therapeutic aspect to the consumption community but there has been little investigation in this area.

Two pieces of work in the literature have been identified which could be considered similar to this study in marrying theories of therapy and consumption, Moisio and Beruchashvili's 2010 JCR paper '*Questing for Well-Being at Weight Watchers: The Role of the Spiritual-Therapeutic Model in a Support Group*' and Susan Dunnett's 2009 Ph.D. thesis "*The Transformed Consumer: collective practices and identity work in an emotional community*". Mosio and Beruchashvili's work examines a self-help community and proposes a model to explain the therapeutic model of the self-help community. In Dunnett's work, she identifies consumption practices observable in a therapeutic self-help community. As in Moisio and Beruchashvili (2010), the focus is on those who attend a support group to address a particular difficulty. In some ways, Dunnett's work represents the inverse of this study. In this thesis, therapeutic practices are to be

examined within a consumption community, which is not, explicitly, or originally, self-help intended.

Thus, we arrive at the research question:

What is the nature and meaning of consumer activity and consumption in a female-led and -dominated consumption community?

A secondary, related research question is concerned with the location of this community in relation to existing concepts of consumer community; specifically, should such a community be regarded as a consumer tribe (Cova and Cova 2002; Maffesoli and Faulks 1988), a subculture of consumption (Schouten and McAlexander 1995), a form of brand community (Muniz and O Guinn 2001) or a previously undescribed phenomenon?

The contribution to the literature of the study would thus be:

- Developing a theory around the therapeutic nature of a consumption community.
- Developing a greater level of understanding of contemporary craft consumption and expanding on the work of Minahan and Cox (2006) and Campbell (2005) in this field.
- Developing a clearer understanding of the relationship between craft consumption and gender/gender-related issues
- Understanding the role of brands in the therapeutic consumption process – Is there a therapeutic brand or a therapeutic brand community?

These questions and aims will guide data collection and give rise to a detailed study of consumer culture, gender, craft, and therapy, and the links between these. The methodology employed to seek answers to these questions will be outlined in the following chapter.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Summary

This chapter explores the theoretical underpinnings informing the methodological choices in this thesis.

This thesis is the result of a multi-sited ethnographic study of a female-led and -dominated consumption community. This methodology is widely accepted in Consumer Culture Theory work and its appropriateness to this study is asserted.

The research context is identified and discussed. Methods used: participant observation, depth interviewing, and netnography, are identified. The specific processes and experiences of both recording the data and data analysis are discussed. Finally, some ethical concerns and limitations are considered.

3.2 Introduction

This research project consisted of a multi-sited ethnographic study of an almost entirely female consumption community. While the study is informed by feminism, it is not a critical ethnography but, rather, an interpretivist ethnography situated under the academic brand (Arnould and Thompson 2005) of Consumer Culture Theory.

Crotty (2009) posits four questions which provide the basic elements of the research process:

"What methods *do we propose to use?*

What methodology *governs our choice and use of methods?*

What theoretical perspective *lies behind the methodology in question?*

What epistemology *informs this theoretical perspective?"* (Crotty 2009, 2).

He further suggests that as each question informs the next, the four elements can be represented as flowing from one to another (Crotty 2009). For this study, the elegantly simple schema would be:

⇒Epistemology – Subjectivist (Section 3.4)

⇒Theoretical perspective – Interpretivist (Section 3.4)

⇒Methodology – Ethnography (Section 3.6)

⇒Method – Participant Observation, Depth Interviews, Netnography (Section 3.7)

Each of these choices is explained in further detail in this chapter as shown in parentheses.

3.3 Statement of Research Objectives

This study aims to make a contribution to the field of consumer research by exploring the nature of female-led and female–dominated consumer communities.

As outlined in Chapter 2, most of the seminal papers in the field of Consumer Culture Theory dealing with contemporary consumption communities focus on the areas of male-dominated consumer tribes, subcultures of consumption, and brand communities (Celsi et al. 1993; Cova, Pace, and Park 2007; Kozinets 2001). Many focus on hyper masculine communities (Holt and Thompson 2004) which embrace and celebrate hegemonic masculinity (Belk and Costa 1998; O Sullivan 2013a; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). Even those studies which have examined femininity have done so in the context of a "masculine" subculture (Martin et al. 2006). As Schippers (2007, 85) says *'Femininity is still decidedly under-theorized'* (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Francis et al. 2016; Martin 1998; Pyke and Johnson 2003).

The aim of this study was to identify a female-led consumption community engaged in a pursuit associated with idealised or emphasised femininity and to examine its workings, its role in the lives of the members, and their perceptions of its nature.

In pursuit of this aim, the initial objectives of the study were to discover how gender identity is constructed in a predominantly female subculture of consumption and to identify to what extent the feminist underpinnings of the group resonate with the members.

To this end, an iterative and inductive methodology was used (Spiggle 1994). This was done to facilitate an emergent design approach to the research. The author wished to ensure she would retain a sensitivity to the data that would result in a more insightful, truthful and meaningful interpretation of the culture (Stewart 1998) than the original speculative lens of feminist identity, should that lens prove inadequate for interpretation-building. Emergent design involves "*build[ing] an understanding of the phenomenon as it occurs in situ later testing the veracity of that understanding, also in situ"* (Belk et al. 1989, 3). As a result of this emergent design approach, the direction of the study shifted to those issues which were most relevant to the group members themselves and were most prevalent in the ethnographic field notes and interviews. The model of a conceptual funnel (Marshall and Rossman 2014) was used to narrow and refine the focus of the study.

The following is the research question, developed from both the literature and, inductively, from the pilot data:

What is the nature and meaning of consumer activity and consumption in a female-led and -dominated consumption community?

3.4 Theoretical Perspectives

Subjectivists believe that reality itself is subjective and, therefore, differs from person to person; the world does not exist independently of our knowledge of it. This belief that

knowledge is culturally derived and historically situated stands in stark contrast to Objectivism. Objectivists hold that there is an independent, absolute truth which can be discovered. The physical sciences follow this paradigm, using experimentation to provide truths about the world.

Following from these two epistemologies, two fundamental philosophies are apparent in Social Science research – Interpretivism (associated with Subjectivism) and Positivism (associated with Objectivism). 6 and Bellamy state that Positivism and Interpretivism "*differ fundamentally only on one question. That is, the issue of whether scientific judgements about which theories to accept can be the outcome of independent reasoning, or whether they are essentially matters of convention that are influenced by the prevailing paradigms of the day"* (6 and Bellamy 2011, 59). The difference between the two theories essentially boils down to this: positivists believe that truth is absolute and interpretivists believe that truth is subjective, that *"reality is individually constructed; there are as many realities as individuals"* (Scotland 2012, 11). Weber describes this as the difference between Erklären, meaning explaining, and Verstehen, meaning understanding. Where a positivist seeks to explain the world, often in a nomothetic way, an interpretivist seeks to describe and understand, often, at a more idiographic level (Bouterse 2014).

This study adopts an interpretivist approach and, thus, *"looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world"* (Crotty 1998, 67).

In 2005, Arnould and Thompson examined the preceding 20 years of consumer research, focusing on "*sociocultural, experiential, symbolic, and ideological aspects of consumption*" with a view to developing a "*synthesising overview*" (Arnould and Thompson 2005, 868). Based on this overview, they suggested an overarching academic brand to identify this research tradition, Consumer Culture Theory or CCT. This 'family of theoretical perspectives" may be used to study consumers, the market and marketplace, and cultural contexts, as well as the relationships between them. This brand covers wide-ranging topics which have expanded consumption

studies to include illicit consumption (Goulding et al. 2002; O Sullivan 2013a, 2015), anti-consumption (Kozinets 2002b), and experiential consumption (Arnould and Price 1993; Holbrook and Hirschmann 1982), but which still maintain a cohesive theoretical commonality. The CCT perspective is ideal for this study as the research objective is essentially to examine "sociocultural, experiential, symbolic, and ideological aspects of consumption" within a female-led consumer culture.

3.5 Research Context

To attempt to fill the gap in the literature around a female-led and female-dominated consumption community, and to investigate if findings from the hyper-masculine environments might be generalisable to a "feminine" context, a consumption community which is overwhelmingly female was identified. The context chosen was the knitting community.

Craft presents an ideal location to study a female-dominated consumption culture. Pristash (2014, 3) states, "*It may only be a slight overstatement to say that the history of craft is a history of femininity*." Roszika Parker, on the other hand, reminds us that at many points in history knitting was practised by all members of the family, and, indeed, controlled by male-dominated guilds. Nonetheless, needlework, in particular, became an essential part of gender performativity as well as a 'suitable' and viable means of financial support for women (Parker 1984; 2010). Currently Ravelry.com, the lynchpin of the global Knitting community, has an estimated membership of around 99.9% female and 0.1% male (Cherry 2016).

Though it is suspected that human knowledge of knitting predates the earliest known knit fabric samples found in the Pyramids, several factors make a current study of the world of knitting particularly timely. The years just before the start of this study saw an "*explosion in the popularity of knitting*" (Wills 2007, 4) resulting in a 51% increase in the U.S. in women who know how to knit (Minahan and Cox 2006). This emergent (or perhaps re-emergent) phenomenon seems to appeal particularly to young women. "*Since 2002, participation in*

[knitting and crochet in the U.S.] *increased more than 150% in the 25–34 age category jumping from 13% to 33% and representing 6.5 million knitters*" (Craft Yarn Council of America, 2005). The upward trend was not exclusive to knitting. Bratisch and Brush (2011) use the term '*fabriculture*' to describe the resurgence among younger women not just in knitting, but in crochet, sewing, dressmaking, embroidery, quilting, and scrapbooking.

Knitting, however, experienced a particular renaissance, as well as an image rehabilitation. Knitting was being repositioned as both "*cool, as well as quiet, comforting and communal*" (Parkins 2004, 429) and, in addition, as a feminist, subversive pursuit. Based on the rejection of the idea that "*women should view the masculine as normative, that is, as the goal to be achieved*" (Hughes 2002, 34), embracing a traditional feminine craft is seen as a way to openly state that one values "women's work". Much of this development was down to the success of the "Stitch 'n' Bitch" books, "Stitch 'n' Bitch Handbook" (2003), "Stitch 'n' Bitch Nation" (2005), "Stitch 'n' Bitch Crochet: The Happy Hooker" (2006), "Son of a Stitch 'n' Bitch" (2007) and "Stitch 'n' Bitch Superstar" (2010) by Debbie Stoller. Stoller, a prominent third wave feminist also promoted craft in her role as editor of BUST magazine. Stitch 'n' Bitch groups are collectively understood to be predominantly female, 'third place' (not home or work), social spaces (Minahan and Cox 2006).

This surge in the popularity of knitting may have been a fad or a passing interest for some but for others fabriculture has become an important part of their sense of self. While Kozinets (2001, 68) entreats us to "*avoid granting subcultural status to what are essentially American leisure activities*", it is clear that for many knitters, the hobby has become an integral part of their identities. From referring to themselves as "Knitters with a capital K" as opposed to "someone who knits" (Ravelry.com > forums > patterns > Are you someone who knits or a Knitter) to permanently immortalising their craft with knitting themed tattoos (Ravelry.com > forums > tattooed knitters & crocheters > discussion board > Knitting tattoos), for these consumers knitting is a way of life. The Knitting consumption community is thus suitable as a site within which to study consumption within a female-led and -dominated community.

Knitting's portability as a hobby may offer an advantage over some other 'fabriculture', quilting or dressmaking for example, but it is clear that practicality is no longer what drives the average knitter. While, in the past, knitting was pursued largely for economic reasons, (it was cheaper to make a garment than purchase it), this is no longer the case. Kelly (2014, 137) observes, "*a central component of knitting as a leisure activity is shopping for yarn, patterns, and supplies*."

This pro-consumption orientation presents an interesting conflict with the idea of knitting as a feminist pursuit, particularly in terms of intersectional feminism [see Appendix 2]. Based on their observations of knitting clubs and the knitting supplies' market, Bratisch and Brush (2011) argue that feminist knitting practices often occur within a cultural context in which knitting is not overtly recognised as a privileged activity. For many, knitting is a luxury they cannot afford, in both time and money. "*Thus the exclusionary aspects of knitting need to be considered and accounted for when knitting is employed as a feminist tool*" (Alkenbrack 2010, 16).

Recently, craftivism once again saw increased visibility and a resurgence in the public consciousness with the phenomenon of the 'Pussy Hat'. Designed to be worn to the Women's March on Washington and in response to President Trump's infamous 'grab them by the pussy' quote, the simple knitted pink hat became a symbol of resistance to the Trump administration, appearing on the cover of both Time Magazine and The New Yorker (Feb 6th, 2017 issues) and causing a shortage of pink yarn in the U.S. (Lekack, 2017). A Pussy Hat was added to the Victoria and Albert Museum by their Rapid Response Collecting Team in March 2017, with Corinda Gardener, Acting Keeper of the V and A's Design Architecture and Digital department, acknowledging that as well as the social and cultural importance of the hat that "*knitting, craft, 'craftivism' is quite topical as well*" (Russell, 2017).

The question thus arises as to how to best approach the study of this contemporary consumption community. Cova et al. (2007) discuss how a global consumption community is constituted of multiple "local sub-tribes". For this study, a local sub-group is chosen as a representative sample of a wider global consumption community. The local Stitch 'n' Bitch

group is a sub-group both of the global Stitch 'n' Bitch movement and of the modern knitting consumption community. It is expected that the local sub-group will share some common meanings with the global consumption community but will also develop its own meanings and, consequently, have a specific local subculture (Cova et al. 2007). The local sub-consumption community thus represents an appropriate choice as a research site for the study of consumption experience within a female-led and –dominated community. To determine which aspects of the consumption community were local and which were global, Ravelry.com, the lynchpin of the global Knitting community, was studied for purposes of triangulation (Denzin and Lincoln 2008; Mathison 1988). Ravelry.com is a knitting database and social networking site with over seven million members and since its establishment in 2007, has become and continues to be the central online organisational, social, and often, ecommerce hub for Knitters.

3.6 Methodology: Ethnography

Ethnography has its origins in the anthropological tradition. The word literally means 'a portrait of a people' and a good ethnography needs not just to achieve credibility (Wallendorf and Belk 1989) and relevance (Hammersley 1992) as with any research but also to be deeply descriptive and evocative, "*rendering scenes, sights, smells, feelings, experiences and people as lifelike as possible"* (Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008, 150). Early ethnographies focused in particular on the remote natives of 'primitive' peoples, and works of this genre by Malinowski, Durkheim and Mead are still well known today. In the 1930s, Chicago school critical sociologists began to explore ethnography as one of the methods applicable to the study of urban environments and subcultures (Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008). Although they may not have treated ethnography as a philosophical paradigm but rather as a method (Atkinson and Hammersley 1994), nonetheless, this paved the way for ethnographies of the familiar rather than just of the 'foreign'. *"One no longer has to travel a great physical distance in order to encounter cultural and social distance or to engage in the rite de passage that is anthropological fieldwork"*

(Atkinson 2001, 2). The practice of ethnography has been much changed by globalisation and technological developments to the point that even the most traditional anthropologist would acknowledge that there is now a much more porous boundary between the field and the home (Wilk 2011).

Ethnography is said to be limited only by the boundaries of the ethnographer's gaze. To expand these limits, ethnographers must cast their gaze as widely as possible. By using multiple, complementary data-gathering methodologies, diverse data can be captured and a wider range of phenomena identified for consideration, thus broadening the scope of that gaze (de Chernatony et al. 2005). As such, ethnographers may carry out observations, interviews, analysis of spoken discourse and narratives, collect and interpret site documents and visual materials, collect oral histories and 'life history materials' (Atkinson 2001; Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008).

Van Maanen (2011) gives three potential outputs of ethnography: realist, confessional and impressionist. Confessional tales are those in which the researcher and their experience are most prevalent in the text. Impressionist tales are more focused on 'striking stories'. The most common form of ethnography is the 'realist account' which is narrated in a "*dispassionate, third person voice*" (Van Maanen 2011, 45).

This ethnographic account is presented largely as a realist account, however, at times the first-person voice is used to clarify that the author herself experienced a particular issue. For example, when discussing Knit Camp at the University of Stirling, the author felt that it was helpful to conclude with her own online summation of the event, a summary which was widely supported by the wider community.

3.6.1 Ethnography in Consumer Culture Theory

Having performed an initial Literature Review, it became clear that work in this area of craft consumption in a female-dominated and –led consumption community was at an early stage. Minihan and Cox's 2006 paper, "Making up (for) society? Stitch 'n' Bitch and Organisation", which offers several suggestions for future work, functioned as a starting point for the research. However, as they suggest five themes for investigation, it seemed clear that a broad, longitudinal approach was called for. Three main qualitative methodologies were then considered, grounded theory, phenomenology, and ethnography.

Grounded theory, developed by Glaser and Strauss (2009), is an inductive method, though not necessarily a qualitative one, where a theory, grounded in the data, is generated by following systematic coding steps. There has been a significant schism between what is now termed Glasarian grounded theory which is more formulaic, and Straussian grounded theory which is more flexible. While grounded theory may present an attractively prescriptive methodology, it is *"more efficient if one cares about concepts, but not about context"* (Stewart 1998, 9). In this study, since the research is very much concerned with the context, exploring the specific attributes of a female-dominated consumption culture, the grounded theory approach which is in some ways abstracted from the actors can be discounted. Additionally, Grounded Theory requires approaching the field with a '*Tabula Rasa*' or 'blank slate' approach (Goulding 2005) which some have argued is akin to a positivistic neutral observer (Bryant and Charmaz 2007). Once the field site was identified, this choice to reject a grounded theory approach was reaffirmed due to the author's familiarity with the group chosen. This familiarity made a Tabula Rasa approach impossible and would inevitably have raised methodological concerns around true neutrality.

Having discounted grounded theory, the choice between phenomenology and ethnography as methodology was then considered.

While there are many different forms of phenomenology (Heidderian, Gadamerian and Hussrlian for example), broadly, phenomenology is an exploration of "*the meaning the participant in the study gives to particular facets of reality*" (Nicholls 2009b, 588). Phenomenology is a critical reflection of conscious experience, intended to uncover the essential features of that experience (Goulding 2005) embedded in the words of the narrative (Maggs-Rapport 2000). Though some phenomenological prompts and methods were used in the data collection, an ethnographic methodology was adopted.

Many seminal papers in the fields of Consumer Behaviour and Consumer Culture Theory (Kozinets 2001; Martin et al. 2006; Schouten and McAlexander 1995; Sherry et al. 2001; Thompson and Holt 2004) use an ethnographic approach. This is unsurprising as ethnography as a methodology is largely concerned with culture (Nicholls 2008, 2009a, 2009b), as "*in ethnographic studies meaning is cultural*" (Maggs-Rapport 2000, 220) and is thus ideally suited to CCT work.

Under the auspices of the Association for Consumer Research (ACR) there stand what are described as academic sub-brands (Association for Consumer Research). Two of these which appealed to the author for this work are Consumer Culture Theory and Transformative Consumer Research. As subsets of the work of ACR academics, the 'brands' have many commonalities, including researchers who cross the rather porous membrane between them from paper to paper or topic to topic.

Consumer Culture Theory refers to a diversity of approaches and includes qualitative methods that might previously have been overlooked; it examines relationships among consumers, consumption practice and marketplace culture (Arnould and Thompson 2005), and draws on the traditions of anthropology, sociology, and the humanities to advance marketing theory (Mick et al. 2012).

Transformative Consumer Research (TCR), was coined by Mick (2006) and is a research initiative which "*seeks to encourage, support, and publicise research that benefits consumer welfare and*

quality of life for all beings affected by consumption across the world" (Association for Consumer Research). In other words, TCR is concerned with addressing and resolving societal problems through academic work (Mick et al. 2012; Davis and Pechmann 2013).

This study is situated in the tradition of Consumer Culture Theory and was ultimately chosen as the study sought not so much to "*address the most pressing social and economic problems*" (Davis and Pechmann 2013, 1168) but rather to examine the culture and consumption practices of a group with a view to theory building.

An examination of 14 of the most cited consumption community papers in the field of CCT revealed that most used an ethnographic approach. These papers, methodologies and methods are outlined in Table 3.1.

Paper	Methodology	Method	Field Site
Celsi, Rose and Leigh, (1993), "An Exploration of High Risk Leisure Consumption through Skydiving"	Ethnography	Participant observation, cultural immersion, media analysis, 100 informal interviews, photographs, videos, 35 depth interviews	Skydiving – "a high-risk subculture"
Schouten and McAlexander, (1993), "Subcultures of Consumption: An Ethnography of the New Bikers"	Ethnography	Non-participant observation evolving to part-time participant observation, then to full-time ethnographic immersion. Formal and informal interviews and photography, close reading of subcultural media.	Harley Davidson Subculture (Motorcyclists)
Belk and Costa (1998), "The mountain man myth: A contemporary consuming fantasy."	Ethnography	Participant observation, interviews at events and depth interviews, photography	Temporary consumption enclaves of historical re-enactors of fur-traders in the American West
Kozinets (2001), "Utopian Enterprise: Articulating the Meanings of Star Trek's Culture of Consumption"	Ethnography	Participant observation at 32 randomly related events and 5 conventions, online ethnography (netnography) on message boards and fan sites (pseudonymous), 2 personal interviews, 65 email interviews	Star Trek fan clubs (Subculture)
Muniz and O Guinn (2001) "Brand Community"	Not overtly stated but appears to be both ethnographic and netnographic	Interviewing, non-participant observation, analysis of online fan sites	MacWarriors (devotees of Apple products), Midwest Saab Club and Saab community and Bronco community.

Paper cont.	Methodology cont.	Method cont.	Field Site cont.
Kozinets (2002b) "Can Consumers Escape the Market? Emancipatory Illuminations from Burning Man"	Ethnography	Participant observation, netnography, videography, semi-structured interviews	Attendees at 'Burning Man' – a week long 'anticonsumption' festival
Cova and Cova (2002), "Tribal Marketing: The Tribalisation of Society and its impact on the Conduct of Marketing"	Netnography and Ethnography	Participant observation, netnography, semi-structured interviews advocated though paper is based on meta-analysis of the authors' past work	Lomo fans, Magic The Gathering players, Citroen 2CV fans
Goulding, Shankar and Elliott (2002), "Working Weeks, Rave Weekends: Identity Fragmentation and the Emergence of New Communities"	Phenomenology	Participant observation, 23 depth interviews	Club culture, the rave tribe.
Muniz and Schau (2005), "Religiosity in the abandoned Apple Newton brand community."	Netnography	Analysis of forum posts, fan sites, email, phone and face to face discussion	Brand community around the Apple Newton (a handheld computing device)
Martin, Schouten and McAlexander (2006), "Claiming the throttle: Multiple femininities in a hyper-masculine subculture"	Ethnography	Participant observation, depth interviews, consultancy for Harley Davidson	Women in the Harley Davidson brand community
Cova, Pace and Park (2007), "Global Brand Communities across Borders: The Warhammer Case"	"Mixed Methodology"	Depth Interviews, non-participant observation, photography, audio recording, projective techniques	Sub-tribes of the Warhammer Brand Community

Paper cont.	Methodology cont.	Method cont.	Field Site cont.
Schau, Muniz and Arnould (2009), "How Brand Community Practices Create Value"	Ethnography and Meta-analysis	Depth Interviews, participant observation, netnography, meta-analysis of 52 papers	9 brand communities, including 2 predominantly female – Xena: Warrior Princess and StriVectin
Goulding, Shankar and Canniford (2012), "Learning to be Tribal: Facilitating the Formation of Consumer Tribes"	Although not directly stated, multiple references to Glaser and Strauss (2009) imply grounded theory	Participant observation, Depth Interviews	Club culture tribe
Thomas, Price and Schau (2013), "When Differences Unite: Resource Dependence in Heterogeneous Consumption Communities"	Not directly stated, but references Strauss and Corbin (1990), possibly grounded theory	Depth interviews, participant observation, online forum observation (netnography)	Distance runners
Martin and Schouten (2014), "Consumption Driven Market Emergence"	Ethnography	Prolonged prior engagement, participant observation, interviews and analysis of archival and online sources	MMSX (Minimoto Super Cross)

Table 3-1: Methodologies and Methods in Key Papers Relating to Consumption Communities in Consumer Culture Theory

Of particular relevance among these papers was Martin et al. (2006) which examined femininity in an ultra-masculine community, the Harley Davidson Owners' group. This paper was key to inspiring the identification of the gap in the literature which this work attempts to rectify: femininity and the nature and orientation of female consumption in a female-dominated consumption community.

Ethnography as methodology in the case of this study was further considered particularly appropriate as ethnographers are encouraged to draw on personal, cultural, and social experiences as a lens through which to view the culture under examination. The researcher is expected to engage in introspection and reflexivity around their own biases and beliefs and the presence of the author is explicitly acknowledged and discussed (Wallendorf and Brucks 1993). As the author was already a member of the community under study, it would have been almost impossible to manufacture distance as advised by McCracken (1996) or become the '*Tabula Rasa*' of a grounded theory approach (Goulding 2005). Instead, rather than attempting to suppress the author's role in the collection process, a methodology was adopted where the author's own thoughts and feelings would comprise part of the data. Peer debriefing with other academics in the field was used to prevent any shortsightedness resulting from proximity to and familiarity with the field site. Although this falls somewhat short of the "*devil's advocacy*" (Schouten and McAlexander 1995, 47) possible in a research team, critical self-examination can also provide the intentional skepticism required to scrutinise proposed themes and prevent premature theorisation (Schouten and McAlexander 1995). Personal reflection was required at various points in the data collection and even in writing and structuring the thesis in order to ensure a sufficient degree of scholarly detachment.

3.6.2 Ethnography as a 'Feminist Methodology'?

In addition, the ethnographic method was chosen since the method itself has been widely discussed as a potential 'feminist methodology'. As the culture under consideration is

ostensibly a third-wave feminist one (Stoller 2003; Kelly 2014), it seemed worth considering a feminist standpoint. While some scholars have expressed the view that "*qualitative work, particularly the semi structured or unstructured work ... is quintessentially feminist*" (Maynard and Purvis 1994, 3), it is the broad nature of the research question which justifies an exploratory method.

Both Stacey (1988) and Abu-Lughod (1990) have asked, "*Can there be a feminist ethnography?"* Stacey's main concern is that "*precisely because ethnographic research depends upon human relationship, engagement, and attachment, it places research subjects at grave risk of manipulation and betrayal*" (Stacey 1988, 24). This she sees as a contradiction of feminist ethics. She feels that "*ironically ... the ethnographic method exposes subjects to far greater danger of exploitation than do more positivist, abstract, and 'masculinist' research methods*" (Stacey 1988, 27). As a possible solution to this privileging of the researcher's position, Lisa Tillmann-Healy, Kath Browne and Jo Brewis have suggested working within established relationships.

Tillmann-Healy (2003) coined the term "*friendship as method*." In her 2003 paper, she discusses how, as ethnography has moved from the fieldwork study of far-flung "others" to work with the writer's own peer group, "*total immersion of both our academic and personal selves can foster multi-faceted bonds"* (Tillmann-Healy 2003, 736). Browne (2003, 134) also discusses how in her field work "*research can be incorporated into relationships rather than relationships being developed 'in the field*'". Being an 'insider' has both advantages and disadvantages for a researcher.

Oakley (1981, cited by Browne 2003), argues that being an 'insider' *"enables researchers to understand and empathise with participants' viewpoints."* In the case of Brewis (2010) and Browne (2003), the issues being studied are around sexuality and, thus, prior friendships may have facilitated discussion of potentially difficult and private subject matter. Brewis (2010) says that "*Access is simply easier if one approaches people with whom one already has some kind of*

bond" and that in the case of her research "*the relevant group of friends talk about these issues as a matter of course.*" Tillmann-Healy also feels that sensitive topics such as "*divorce, serious illness, or the birth of a child probably lend themselves best to friendship as a method because the more emotional and multifaceted the topic, the more appropriate it becomes for researchers and participants to share emotional and multifaceted ti*es" (Tillmann-Healy 2006, 745).

However, using friends in a study presents ethical issues on which all three of these scholars have reflected and Gordon (2002, cited in Browne 2003) asks "*whether ties of friendship can be a form of coercion*", and whether friends will feel compelled by a sense of duty to participate in research which may not be in their own best interest. Browne (2003, 137), on the other hand, suggests that friends may find it less difficult to decline an invitation to participate in research, "*just as they might decline an invitation to dinner or the pub*." She further suggests that within the bonds of friendship, she was able to "repay" those who participated in her research and "*negotiate potentially one-way exploitative relationships*." This reciprocity may lead to an egalitarian approach which resonates with many of the objectives of feminist research, "*authenticity, reciprocity, and intersubjectivity between the researcher and her subjects*" (Stacey 1988, 27).

There are several recommendations made in particular by Tillmann-Healy (2003), to conduct research among friends without "*using people*" (Brewis 2010). Tillmann-Healy believes it is imperative to allow respondents to see drafts of the work in progress and to invite commentary. Likewise, Brewis (2010) asks her participants to review her work and ensure that they are comfortable to reveal any data she has used. Thus, she encourages her participants to become "*as some feminists propose ... full collaborators in feminist research*" (Stacey 1988, 22). Brewis suggests, however, that even with collaborative editing, unless participants are actually listed as co-authors, a status divide exists. Again, in keeping with feminist principles, this collaborative process prevents elevating the researcher to a position of power over respondents. Interestingly, Brewis finds that some respondents prefer not to review the work

stating instead, “I trust you”. This suggests the privileging of the academic’s position by the respondent which Brewis posits may be due to the “*mystique of research*” as much as to friendship.

While “*friendship has an obvious importance to feminist aspirations as the basis of the bond which is (ironically) called sisterhood*” (Friedman 1989, 286), this would not satisfy Stacey (1988), and, in fact, might discomfit her further. She believes “*the greater the intimacy, the apparent mutuality of the researcher/researched relationship, the greater is the danger*” (Stacey 1988, 22).

Having weighed the arguments on both sides, ultimately, it was decided to follow Tillman-Healy and Brewis’s suggestions for an ethnography conducted among friends. As outlined in Section 3.10, members of the group were consulted on what approach they preferred. The researcher was confident that the ‘*mystique of research’* would not affect this participant group too greatly as most had at least a third-level education and many held or were working towards Ph.D.s themselves, in diverse fields such as Quantum Physics, Ecology and English Literature.

3.7 Method

In Cova and Cova (2002), the authors suggest that a method for researching tribes should involve:

- Desk research including monitoring the media and netnography
- Semi-structured or unstructured interviews with group members singly or together
- Participant and/or non-participant observation at group events

In the case of this study, all three of these suggestions were followed. In an effort to identify Knitters, a Local Stitch ‘n’ Bitch was studied. This group overlapped and interacted with multiple other knitting and fabriculture groups in the city and these were also explored to give a full and rounded picture of the culture. The Local Stitch ‘n’ Bitch group in question was founded in

January 2007 [see Appendix 4] and initially used text messaging to arrange weekly meetings. Later Facebook was adopted for this purpose.

3.7.1 Participant Observation

Participant observation was undertaken over a number of years beginning in 2010 and concluding in 2016, semi-structured interviews were carried out with group members on a one-to-one basis, and a netnography was undertaken for data triangulation.

Over the course of five years, the author attended a weekly Stitch 'n' Bitch meeting and engaged in netnography within the online community of Ravelry.com. These were the two main sites for the research. In this thesis, 'the group' refers to Local Stitch 'n' Bitch and 'the community' refers to the wider Knitting community, largely centered on Ravelry.com and termed by its members the 'Knitworld'.

Participant observation involves immersing oneself in the culture being studied and participating fully as a member of that community. The author attended Local Stitch 'n' Bitch meetings held every Wednesday night, originally in "Chambers" bar and, later, in "The Abbot's Alehouse" in Cork City.

Initially Chambers was a cocktail bar, themed around textiles including bolts of fabric as decorative panels. It takes its name from its location, directly across the street from the main courthouse, and next door to the courthouse chambers, an administrative building. The group met on Wednesdays at around 8pm though it was not unusual at this stage for the time to be changed or for the meeting to be cancelled by text due to lack of numbers. The group occupied a large booth at the front of the bar to the right of the door with windows onto both Washington St and Hanover Place. This prominent position in the bar sometimes drew unwanted attention from drunk passers-by who on observing the Knitters, entered the premises to request socks, scarves etc. The problem was dealt with by the bar staff ejecting the

interlopers. About a year after the Knitter's move to Chambers, the bar rebranded as a gay bar. While the bar management and staff were happy to continue hosting of Stitch 'n' Bitch, a change to dim red lighting in the venue after a number of months made knitting almost impossible, especially when working with fine or dark coloured yarn [see Appendix 4 for Group Timeline].

Sarah suggested relocating to the Abbot's Ale House, just off the north quays of the city. 'The Abbots' operates an off-licence at ground floor level and a very small bar upstairs. They had been selling craft and specialty beers and trendy spirits long before their current rise in popularity. The off-licence also sells out-of-date cans and bottles to the down-at-heel and to students. The stairs is very rickety and narrow. At the turn in the stairs there is a step up to a ladies' room. At the top of the stairs is a door into the bar. The bar is a very small space, the decor is a bit rough – beer mats on the wall, old damaged furniture. There are books which are free to take away stacked on the window sills. The clientele is very mixed, with a lot of regulars.

The bar might be described as quite "hipster". Many of the patrons are not Irish, often German, French or Italian groups (probably employees of Apple) gather there. On any given night, there might be people playing chess on a board that belongs to the bar, groups chatting, and men sitting at the bar discussing various beers with the bartender. Amelia, who was extremely interested in beer, had long chats with staff about various Belgian and Bavarian breweries she had visited, and about what new products they might have for her to sample. While hipster is often quite a derogatory term, it is quite trendy in a downmarket way. The guys wear skinny jeans and band t-shirts from obscure indie outfits, blazers or fitted jackets, fedoras and scarves, sometimes Palestinian Keffiyehs – and the hats and scarves don't come off indoors. The look is quite androgynous and pale and interesting looking. The girls wear vintage, possibly with skinny jeans or leggings, blazers and scarves. Every Wednesday two girls come in and put Freakscene (an alternative club night) fliers on the tables. It seems as though the Abbots enjoys hosting Stitch 'n' Bitch as Knitters are weird and interesting too; much like the chess players and the book swap, it adds to the bar's quirky nature. Additionally, the bakers within the Stitch 'n' Bitch

group regularly bring cakes and treats for the barmen. Meetings start officially at 7.30pm, as with most timekeeping in Ireland, that is a very optimistic guideline. Most members who are attending will have arrived by 8.30pm. Many of the members drive to the meetings and will have either only one drink or a soft drink. Others will have a few of the beers on offer, ciders, gin and tonics, or hot whiskeys in the winter. By this time, the size of the group and the level of commitment meant that after the move to The Abbots, the meetings were rarely cancelled.

The author had no difficulty achieving "*entrée*" (Kozinets 2010, 69) into the Stitch 'n' Bitch group and the Knitworld community, as she was already a member prior to enrolling in the Ph.D. programme. It would be too much to suggest that 'prior ethnography' had been engaged in (Celsi et al. 1993) but the groundwork for the study had been laid. The community values skill and commitment to the group (similar to Celsi's skydivers or Thompson and Üstüner's roller derby grrrls) and as the author had already demonstrated those, she commanded a high level of social capital in the local community. Her association with Dyad Fibres, a high status brand within the knitting tribe, gave her even greater access and status within the wider culture. For example, the author published patterns on Ravelry under the Dyad Fibres brand, communicated and collaborated privately and publicly with many well-known designers and stores and acted as a gatekeeper of sorts for the brand on social media, all of which added to the author's status with online and offline Knitters. Schouten and McAlexander (1995, 44) found that they were "*made to demonstrate [their] own commitment to the subculture before [they] could be taken into the full confidence of its adherents*." As in Celsi et al. (1993), the author's social capital enabled full access to the community.

In an attempt to access additional potential informants, the author attended the Vibes and Scribes knitting group, generally an older demographic, who meet in a craft shop in the city. The group does not meet during school holidays, and the storeowner has changed the times and days of meetings several times. This has led to an inconsistent attendance. Many Stitch 'n' Bitch members attended this group initially in addition to their regular Wednesday night meetings, however, interest declined over time. Other problems which militated against the

success of the Vibes and Scribes group included the fact that the seating arrangement in the store was extremely cramped and shop displays allowed members to see and interact with only a small portion of the group. Some members of this group ultimately joined Stitch 'n' Bitch.

To interact with the larger group within the fabriculture community, the author also attended Sit 'n' Spin, a monthly meet-up held at the Dyad Fibres' studio where she learned how to spin using a spinning wheel. Sit 'n' Spin continued for several months but then fizzled out. Unsuccessful attempts were made to revive it, but its demise stands in interesting opposition to the commitment of some Stitch 'n' Bitch members to their local group.

The author attended events in the Knitting community, both national and international. She twice attended the annual Yarn Tasting event in Dublin at This is Knit, Ireland's most prestigious yarn store. This is a ticketed event comprising talks from designers, viewing of samples (the finished product of knitting patterns), sampling an assortment of yarns and an in-store sale.

Knit Camp was a weeklong international educational event the author attended in Stirling, Scotland. A member of another local knitting group, a well-known designer, went there as a tutor. Knit Camp has, unfortunately, become somewhat infamous within the community, due to mismanagement or even fraud, particularly around the treatment of the tutors. For the researcher, however, it presents an interesting case study of how the community, both global and local, deals with members perceived as disingenuous or even dishonest.

3.7.2 Netnographic Observation

Ravelry.com has over seven million members, contributing millions of forum posts, avatars and photographs of knitted items from tens of thousands of patterns. The sheer volume of netnographic data on the site had the potential to overwhelm. For this reason, Ravelry was used for triangulation purposes only. Once initial themes in the data were identified, appropriate search terms were selected and applied to the Ravelry forums to identify relevant

posts. While this is slightly different to Kozinets' guidelines for netnography (Kozinets 2010; 2014), the methodology is designed to be "*flexible and adaptable*" (Kozinets 2010, 5) and in particular, that a "*blended ethnography/netnography could take many forms*" (Kozinets 2010, 65).

While the author monitored the Local Stitch 'n' Bitch group Facebook page, this was largely used for administrative purposes. A typical post would involve, for example, members discussing whether or not they would attend that night or what time they expected to be at the Abbot's Ale House. Occasionally it might include a link to Ravelry.com, often a pattern, or a knitting related media story that had been discussed the previous night. This page therefore does not comprise part of the netnography as it was not a rich source of data. Hence, the two main ethnographic sites were Local Stitch 'n' Bitch for offline community participant observation and Ravelry for netnography.

3.7.3 Interviews

The final stage of data collection was in-depth interviews conducted with local Knitters, spinners and crocheters who identified with the Stitch 'n' Bitch movement and with Local Stitch 'n' Bitch. These were recruited through purposive sampling using the Local Stitch 'n' Bitch Facebook page. Interviews started with a standard opening question and then followed a semi-structured approach. An interview template was followed to ensure all major topics were covered in each interview while preserving the open-ended nature of the conversation (McCracken, 1996). Informants were also asked to choose some pieces of knitted work to discuss during the interview. Some phenomenological type questions were asked, for example, "Tell me about a good experience with the group." This type of question was particularly useful for topics the interviewee felt more uncomfortable with, such as negative experiences around infighting. For local participants, the interviewees were asked to choose a location; most chose their own home. The interviews were recorded on both audio and video to ensure full data

capture. For members who had relocated, Skype interviews were conducted; both a video camera and Skype recording software were used (Hanna 2012; Deakin and Wakefield 2013).

A full timeline of group membership is outlined in Appendix 4 and a full profile of informants is given in Appendix 3, but interviewees for the study are listed in Table 3.2.

Pseudonym	Nationality	Craft(s)	Attended…
Aryanna	American	Knitting Spinning	Defunct Suburban Stitch 'n' Bitch Knit Up Member of Stitch 'n' Bitch group Facebook page though not an attendee
Beth	American	Knitting Crochet	Stitch 'n' Bitch Vibes 'n' Scribes
Charlotte	American	Knitting	Stitch 'n' Bitch
Cosima	Irish	Knitting Crochet Spinning	Stitch 'n' Bitch Vibes 'n' Scribes
Danielle	New Zealander	Knitting	Stitch 'n' Bitch
Jennifer	American	Knitting	Stitch 'n' Bitch Vibes 'n' Scribes
Rachel (Pilot)	American	Knitting Crochet	Stitch 'n' Bitch
Sarah	Irish	Knitting Crochet	Stitch 'n' Bitch Vibes 'n' Scribes
Siobhan	Irish	Knitting	Stitch 'n' Bitch

Table 3-2: Depth Interviewees

McCracken goes so far as to suggest "*formal dress, demeanor and speech*" for such interviews, but does allow that some variation in the degree of formality may be required (McCracken, 1996, 26). In the case of this study, the interviews were conducted more informally, generally in the interviewee's own home, on a relaxed basis. As is common in an Irish home, the author was offered a cup of tea, and some 'friendship work' was often done before the interview, asking

about family, work etc. While attempting to follow good interviewing protocols, it was found that normal speech patterns reasserted themselves quickly, and the interviewer's language and mode of conversation began to mirror that of the participants. For example, in Danielle's interview, both interviewer and interviewee speeded up and began to speak over each other, cut each other off and finished each other's sentences. In Sarah's interview, both engage in gentle mocking of each other. To an outsider this could potentially appear as a hostile interview environment; on the contrary, however, this facilitated putting Sarah at her ease by making the conversation more natural. Indeed, in Jennifer's interview, more data was gained once the interviewer began to give more of herself. Once the recorder was switched off, Jennifer asked several questions about the Ph.D. process and the interviewer's work. The ensuing dialogue, even after the recording devices were switched back on, resulted in more interesting data than most of the rest of the interview.

Table 3.3 outlines the specific methods undertaken and each location studied, however, it should be noted that there was significant overlap of participants between the various 'locations'. Even in the events in Dublin (Yarn Tasting) and the U.K. (Knit Camp), other Cork Knitters were in attendance.

Method	Location	More Details	Date
Participant Observation	Stitch 'n' Bitch Meetings	Full ethnographic field notes (See section 3.8 for details on when full notes were taken and when partial notes were taken)	Example: 17/02/10 [Appendix 7]
Participant Observation	Stitch 'n' Bitch Meetings	Notes taken when interesting topics arose. See section 3.8 for details on when full notes were taken and when partial notes were taken)	Examples: Discussion around pregnancy (20/04/11, 27/04/11) Baby Shower (8/10/11)
Participant Observation	Knit Camp U.K.	Notes taken (not full), Reviewed others' blog accounts.	09-15/08/10
Participant Observation	This Is Knit Yarn Tasting	Notes made after event	08/09/11 14/09/12
Participant Observation	Vibes 'n' Scribes Knitting Group	Found to be unsuitable	
Participant Observation	Sit 'n' Spin Spinning Group	Limited notes before found to be unsuitable	
Depth Interviewing	Stitch 'n' Bitch Members	Semi Structured following McCracken's Long Interview techniques	Rachel – Pilot Interview (19/09/11) Aryanna (16/05/13) Beth (31/05/13) Jennifer (04/06/13) Danielle (11/06/13) Sarah (13/06/13) Siobhan (11/07/13) [Appendix 6] Cosima (11/12/13) Charlotte (18/07/14)
Member checks	Stitch 'n' Bitch members	Online discussions of themes arising, via group chats and private messaging	Example: Discussion re: ACR Gender paper (9/2/12)
Netnography	Ravelry.com	Searching for emergent themes in forums for triangulation	Ongoing for the duration of the study
Close reading of media	Online and Offline	Examination of popular media's perception of the community	Ongoing for the duration of the study

Table 3-3: Methods of Data Collection

3.8 Details of Data Collection

Local Stitch ‘n’ Bitch, a local knitting group with which the author was already familiar, was selected for study. While other groups were considered, and even attended speculatively, (Douglas Stitch ‘n Bitch, Vibes and Scribes Knitting, Knit and Natter at the Wandsworth Quay gallery), Local Stitch ‘n Bitch members were often central to these groups as well but identified them as their ‘secondary’ groups. Ultimately, it was clear that Local Stitch ‘n’ Bitch was the most vibrant group and had the largest membership of those who described themselves as ‘Knitters with a capital K’ or ‘hard-core knitters’; in other words, for this cohort, knitting was a meaningful part of their identity and not merely a hobby.

3.8.1 Participant Observation

Initially, the author endeavoured to keep full ethnographic notes of each Local Stitch ‘n’ Bitch meeting (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 2011; Van Maanen 2011). However, two issues soon emerged. It became clear that full participation in the group while keeping such notes was almost impossible and that from a data management perspective the task was impractical. Instead, the author randomly chose in advance some Local Stitch ‘n’ Bitch sessions to describe in full, and for the others simply recorded her own thoughts and impressions and any particularly interesting exchanges or phenomena which occurred. Occasionally, the author ‘took the night off’ from being a researcher and simply enjoyed the experience of being just a member of the group. Emerson et al. (2011) refer to this maximising immersion, by engaging in full participation in the experience, and conducting other field visits with more of an emphasis on observation. Inevitably, however, the unrecorded data will still inform the work.

The author also regularly photographed the group, the tools being used, the projects being worked on and the food on offer. As in Schouten and McAlexander (1995, 47), these photos were used to “*reliv[e] the lived experience*” rather than for any in-depth analysis as they were

usually taken unobtrusively with little thought behind the "*classifying, composing and clicking*" (Schroeder 1998, 5). Many "irregular events" were also attended, from annual Thanksgiving dinners, 'girls' nights' and get-togethers, to baby showers, children's christenings and birthday parties.

3.8.2 Interviews

Preliminary themes emerging from the data were used to develop a semi-structured pilot interview. This template was later significantly revised following participant observation and netnography. When sampling for participant interviews, members of Local Stitch 'n' Bitch were selected based on the researcher's wish to obtain as much variance as possible within the relatively homogenous group; this would be especially important when searching for disconfirming observations. This study used a purposive sampling approach. It is expected that in large quantitative (and potentially positivistic) studies researchers will seek to obtain a probability sample, that is one in which all members of a population of interest have an equal chance of being selected. However, in a small population, and in ethnographic research, non-probability sampling is commonly used.

For the pilot study, the author simply asked at a Local Stitch 'n' Bitch meeting if anyone would be interested in doing an interview. Rachel agreed to be interviewed at her home. When the time came to move into the main interviewing portion of the study, a post was made on the Stitch 'n' Bitch Facebook group asking for participants.

> *"Well Bitches, I really need to finally finish this PhD*
>
> *….*
>
> *As you know, you guys are my squirrels, so I need to trap you all. I need to sit down and record about a one hour interview with each of you.*

All it will involve is talking to me about knitting and drinking tea, wherever and whenever you want. I would also love if you could choose 3 or 4 special projects (or pictures of them if they were gifts/got eaten by moths/etc.) and tell me about them.

That's it. And then maybe I can finish this thing and get back to knitting..."

The request was casual and light-hearted in keeping with the tone of the group. The reference to squirrels is an insider joke, (one of the group members, Beth, was working towards a Ph.D. in Ecology which required her to trap squirrels at the boundaries of Red and Grey Squirrel territories.) The response to the post was immediate and very positive, for example Beth replied "*I'll be your squirrel anytime! But specifically can it be an evening next week? Also there are no words to describe the awesomeness of how you wrote this post [wink emoticon]»* The public, positive response resulted in numerous private messages to arrange interviews. This serves to affirm the usefulness of friendship as method.

Every effort to achieve maximum variation within the rather homogenous sample was made. Eight members of the group were interviewed. Sarah, Siobhan and Jennifer were, at that time, all extremely active members of the group. Beth was a less active member due to the demands of her Ph.D. Danielle was a member who had stopped attending the group as it no longer suited her schedule. Cosima and Charlotte were members who had left Ireland but continued to strongly identify with the group. This gave a degree of variance in group experiences, despite the relatively homogenous sample. Aryanna was chosen as, despite being a member of the Local Stitch 'n' Bitch Facebook group and self-identifying as a member, she had never attended a meeting and attends a different group, Knit Up. Her inclusion represented an attempt to obtain a somewhat deviant case within the narrow parameters of the study. One way in which the study failed to achieve variation was that Leda, the only member from a non-Western background, declined to be interviewed. Delphine, the only other woman of colour, while not available for a depth interview, did contribute.

The semi-structured “interview guide” (Seidman 2013, 94) touched on several emergent themes, such as therapy, feminism and consumption practices. Using McCracken's (1996) long interview method as a guide, the interview used open-ended 'starter' questions and the aim was to allow subsequent questions to “*follow, as much as possible from what the participant is saying*” (Seidman 2013, 59).

Participants chose the time and location of the interviews. Rachel, Sarah, Jennifer, Siobhan, Danielle and Aryanna were interviewed in their own homes. Beth asked to be interviewed in her laboratory at University College Cork. Two of the interviews (Cosima and Charlotte) were carried out via Skype calls. All were recorded by both a video and voice recorder. All participants signed a consent form which clearly identified the purpose of the study as well as its possible outputs (thesis, journal articles and conference proceedings).

The opening question, “How did you first learn to knit?” was designed to relax and situate interviewees, recalling a memory rather than probing deeply into personal matters. Some questions were more phenomenological in nature, “Can you tell me a story of a positive experience with the group?” Other questions used prompts such as a verbal summary of newspaper articles on knitting (Carey 2013; Lewis 2013) and sections of The Stitch 'n' Bitch Handbook (Stoller 2003) [see Appendix 5]. Participants were also asked to show some Finished Objects (FO) that held significance for them.

The Skype calls offered a way to interview participants who could no longer be involved in the group in person due to emigration. Hanna (2012) and Deakin and Wakefield (2013) have discussed the merits of Skype interviewing which provides many of the benefits of face-to-face interviewing; it allows synchronous interviewing while observing visual cues for geographically disparate participants who would otherwise be inaccessible. Minimal technical issues were encountered during these interviews. The call to Cosima did drop out but was easily reconnected. The prompts [see Appendix 5] were emailed to the participants at relevent points in the interview as the Skype file delivery system was found to be unreliable.

3.8.3 Netnographic Observation

Netnography was carried out continuously throughout the project, including both before and after interviewing (Kozinets 2002a; 2010). Netnography, or online ethnography, offers an economical and efficient way to investigate global culture by monitoring and participating in social media. Essentially, it is a type of participant observation unbounded by temporal or spatial concerns. While remaining active on the Local Stitch 'n' Bitch Facebook group and the Ravelry forum, in order to gain a more complete picture of the activities and communications of the group, Ravelry.com was also used to situate and triangulate the data in the global knitting community.

Ravelry has an initial landing page with a cartoon of yarn-producing animals (sheep, goats, rabbits, alpaca etc.) emerging from a pile of yarn and a log in screen. On logging in members are taken to a blog type feed called "Where my stitches at?" with posts on Ravelry tips, news and "Eye Candy" – themed posts highlighting projects and patterns. For example, the theme might be a colour (all yellow items), a holiday (Christmas ornaments) or the beach (beachy colours, patterns for coverups, fish or shell based patterns). Along the top of this screen are the tabs: notebook, patterns, yarn, people, forums, groups, help, and a magnifying glass for searching. Those members who have paid for advertising or uploaded patterns also have a 'pro' tab. A member's Ravatar (the photo they chose to represent themselves) is also visible. This page also shows how many Ravelers are on the website at any given time, helpful links and some yarn related advertising in a column on the right. Clicking on the number of Ravelers online leads to user statistics. There are over 7 million members on Ravelry and almost 1 million of those visited the website in the past 30 days (April 2017). Approximately half the Ravelers online within U.S. daytime hours are American. The rest are made up of dozens of countries with Canada, Germany, Nordic Countries and Western European Nations always appearing near the top of the list. Iceland has the highest number of Ravelers per capita (Forbes 2014). All members are auto-subscribed to the main discussion boards when they sign up for Ravelry. Initially there were six default boards that all members were subscribed too. There are now

seven, but members still often refer to these collectively by the now nonsensical title “The Big 6”. These boards are For the Love of Ravelry, which contains questions about Ravelry, suggestions, bug reports etc., Techniques, Patterns, Yarn and Fiber, Needlework News & Events, Tools and Equipment and Loose Ends for any discussions that don’t fit on the other main boards. Groups or individuals then set up their own forums on any topic they see fit.

For this study, search terms were chosen based on the offline participant observation data, on preliminary and emergent research themes, as well as on media articles about knitting. Terms such as ‘feminism’, ‘feminist’, ‘craftivism’, ‘therapy’, ‘therapeutic’ etc. were used to search the forums on Ravelry using its own search tool. Threads which dealt with these topics were then identified and hard and soft copies of these were made for safekeeping as data can be deleted from Ravelry. The data from these threads was then coded using Spiggle’s (1994) constant comparative method. In this way, the global knitting consumption community was examined through the lens of a local sub-community as previously discussed (Cova et al. 2007).

3.9 Data Analysis

The volume of data generated by participant observation and, particularly, by netnography had the potential to be overwhelming. Implementation of the emergent design (Belk et al. 1989) orientation of the research was attained using an iterative process as laid out in Spiggle (1994). The study was gradually focused on the therapeutic nature of the consumption community.

Spiggle (1994) sets out a framework for data analysis and abstraction based on the work of Glaser and Strauss (2009), Strauss and Corbin (1994) and Miles and Hubermann (1984). Her framework entails seven processes: categorisation, abstraction, comparison, dimensionalisation, integration, iteration and refutation.

Initial Categorisation or Coding was carried out inductively, examining and re-examining data to identify those ‘units’ which belonged to a more general phenomenon. These categories (for

example, practical help or emotional support) were then abstracted to conceptual classes (such as social support). Following this, the resultant concepts were used deductively both to compare current data and to guide future data collection, particularly, after the pilot phase.

Pilot data garnered from early participant observations and from a pilot interview made it clear that the concepts of therapeutic benefit and therapeutic consumption were far more evident in the data than were femininity and feminism, the issues the author had initially been interested in exploring.

Interview questions and the purposive sampling undertaken were based on exploring the dimensions of these key concepts and examining their attributes. A theory of the therapeutic tribe began to emerge (integration). However, the constant comparative method is not a simple linear process but rather an iterative one. This iterative process requires the researcher to move back and forth between the steps allowing provisional constructs and theories to be refined by further data and by further study.

Refutation, or the search for disconfirming observations, entails looking for those data or observations which may refute the emerging findings. In this case, disconfirmation was sought in three ways; firstly, through purposive sampling (ex-members, knitters who had never attended the group), secondly, through negative case analysis or searching the ethnographic material for data which contradicted emergent findings (Wallendorf and Belk 1989) and, finally, by using Ravelry.com to examine the same phenomena in different contexts (Belk et al. 1989).

A specific difficulty of studying a field already familiar to the author is highlighted by McCracken (1996, 12), *"This intimate acquaintance with one's own culture can create as much blindness as insight".* Behaviours accepted without question within the tribe can become internalised and normalised, as for example, in the case of handcrafters, where the hiding of 'stash' or hobby materials from others, including from family members, is common (Stalp and Conti 2011; Stalp and Winge 2008). In an effort to prevent any unintended omissions or errors brought about by researcher biases and assumptions, regular peer debriefing sessions, both informal and formal,

were held. Reading the data, including field notes, interview transcripts and supplemental materials like photographs, with peers enabled the generation of findings from an emic perspective that were still rigorously scrutinised by a less familiar academic eye. In the earlier data collection stages of the thesis, weekly meetings were held with Dr. Brendan Richardson and Dr. Stephen O Sullivan, then a fellow doctoral candidate. Later, Dr. Brendan Richardson and the researcher met on a more ad-hoc basis to fit in with teaching and other work commitments.

By personal preference, data utilised in the research was stored and coded using hard copy printouts rather than a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) such as nVivo for data management (Rodik and Primorik, 2015). The author made this choice somewhat naively due to a preference for reading from paper rather than from a screen. While holding and reading a tangible copy is undoubtedly a more pleasant, tactile experience, the author failed to anticipate the volume of data this project would generate. Ultimately, a separate folder was created for each interviewee with multiple copies of the interview coded for different emergent themes. The Ravelry.com forum posts and the participant observation notes necessitated the creation of several additional folders. These became particularly unwieldy on occasion when full ethnographic field notes were taken and pictures added for reference [See Appendix 7]. While the author became something of an expert at identifying folders at a glance, this choice of hard copy undoubtedly caused a lot of extra, unnecessary work.

3.10 Ethics

The members of Local Stitch 'n' Bitch were advised of the intentions of this study initially in 2010 and were kept appraised of the progress of the work throughout the study. The issue of ethics in ethnography is one which has been deeply debated. The advantage of ethnography, the emic perspective offered by deep immersion by the ethnographer, presents an inevitable ethical dilemma. As Van Maanen (quoted in Arnould 1998) says, the ethnographer is "*part spy, part voyeur, part fan, part member."* This can give rise to the causing of offence or hurt among

community members on the publication of ethnographic accounts that divulge sensitive information or portray the community in an unflattering or controversial light. The author was conscious of the very deep personal hurt caused by ethnographies of rural communities in the vicinity of Cork (Brody 1973; Campbell 2016; Scheper-Hughes 2000). The communities of "Inishkillane" and "Ballybran" felt misled and used by the ethnographers in question, as they believed they had not been made aware of the researchers' intentions at the outset.

In the case of this study, as previously mentioned, the author explored several ethical perspectives and concerns, particularly around the idea of 'Friendship as Method'. Ultimately, a senior academic, on hearing the tortured deliberations around boundaries, advised that the participants should be asked for their opinions. When this was done, the members of Local Stitch 'n' Bitch expressed surprise at the idea that they might be considered to have been exploited, they confirmed their willingness to participate and brushed aside all of the aforementioned concerns.

Over the course of the participant observation portion of the study, some of the participants, in particular those in academia themselves, expressed an interest in reading publications arising from the study. While the author found the idea deeply discomfiting, as she worried about their reactions as both academics and friends, she did provide papers from conference proceedings to those who asked. The author received no feedback, and, therefore, is not aware of how many availed of the opportunity to read the papers. If they did so, they did not seem to be affected by the work.

Conscious of the ethical dilemma associated with ethnography, immediately in advance of the interviews, each participant was again reminded of the purpose of the study and its future outcomes such as a thesis and possible publications. It was explained to participants that while videos would remain confidential and transcripts would be seen only by academics as required, the content of these interviews would comprise the data for a Ph.D. thesis and possible subsequent publications. They were advised that their contributions would be anonymised

through the use of pseudonyms. The names used for anonymisation are the names of the 'sestra', the clone sisters, and other major characters in the BBC show Orphan Black. The names were assigned largely at random, although the author reserved the name Helena, the serial killer clone, for herself, lest it cause offence. Again, the members of Local Stitch 'n' Bitch showed little concern for anonymity and Sarah and Siobhan for example, on finding out their pseudonyms, immediately shared them with each other. At this point, armed with all the relevant information, participants willingly signed the consent forms.

Ultimately, the author does not wish to infantilise her subjects or remove their agency by suggesting they are incapable of deciding for themselves to participate in the study.

3.11 Researcher Subjectivity

In interpretivist research, researcher effects and bias are minimised but acknowledged, taking a reflexive approach rather than attempting to deny subjectivity (Stewart, 1998). Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Wallendorf and Belk (1989) recommend that readers examine ethnographic work in terms of:

- *"credibility (adequate and believable representations of the constructions of reality studied)*
- *transferability (extent to which working hypotheses can also be employed in other contexts, based on an assessment of similarity between the two contexts)*
- *dependability (extent to which interpretation was constructed in a way which avoids instability other than the inherent instability of a social phenomenon)*
- *confirmability (ability to trace a researcher's construction of an interpretation by following the data and other records kept)*
- *integrity (extent to which the interpretation was unimpaired by lies, evasions, misinformation, or misrepresentations by informants)"* (Wallendorf and Belk 1989).

The methods suggested to achieve these, similar to those Stewart (1998) espoused to verify "*veracity*" (Stewart 1998, 15), include prolonged engagement or persistent observation, triangulation of sources and methods, debriefings by peers, member checks, seeking limiting exceptions and negative case analysis, and purposive sampling. As Section 3.7 outlines, all of these methods were used in this study. Although the members of Local Stitch 'n' Bitch provided no feedback for 'member checks' when provided with academic papers, they were nevertheless afforded the opportunity to do so. In a more informal sense, ideas were often run by members of the group, both verbally and through digital communication in the process of gathering data (Wallendorf and Belk 1989).

Issues around researcher effects were most immediately obvious in the interviewing stage of the study. Two issues particularly arose; the author's involvement with Dyad Fibres and her close relationship with one informant who proved to be a contentious member of the group.

Most of the informants praised Dyad Fibres immediately on being asked about consumption items. This response may have been influenced by their knowledge of the author's involvement with the brand. Jennifer, for example, directly praised Dyad several times during her interview,

> I(nterviewer): "If you were choosing for yourself what would be your first choices?"
>
> Jennifer: "*I definitely like Dyad, I definitely like Malbrigo I like expensive stuff as you can tell from my bag of yarn, of expensive yarn sitting right there*" (Jennifer, Depth Interview)

Beth was more subtle in her reference to Dyad,

> I: "But you did say you buy yarn on line, what kind of, or where do you do that from?
>
> Beth: "*Wherever, if I had a sort of a specific yarn in mind I would search around for it, there's lovely yarn on Etsy or independent, local dyers''* [raises eyebrows knowingly] (Beth, Depth Interview)

However, as all the informants who mentioned Dyad are in fact among its long-time customers, and as the Local Stitch 'n' Bitch group is proud of its relationship to the brand, it is probable the brand would have been mentioned in any interview.

Additionally, at various times, Rachel, Sarah, Beth and Danielle have worked for Dyad. Interviews with Sarah and Beth were conducted prior to their employment there. Danielle worked with Katja only briefly and the author had no interaction with her during her hiring or employment. She was no longer working for Dyad at the time of the interview. Rachel, the pilot interviewee for the study worked, with the researcher at Dyad for several years, inclusive of the date of the interview. Unlike other Dyad employees, however, she was not subordinate to the author in the workplace.

The second issue, which possibly presented more potential to affect the data, was that many informants were reluctant to speak ill of one particular member due to her close friendship with the author. This member seemed to be at the centre of much of the conflict within the group. With some reassurance about confidentiality and a light-hearted approach, the informants did open up, but it is possible that they tempered their opinions in order to protect the author's feelings,

I: "And do you have any negative experiences with the group?"

Siobhan: (pauses)

I: "Bearing in mind that this is confidential if you say anything."

Siobhan: (nervous laugh)

I: "You can say that bitch [Author] if you like!"

Siobhan: (laughter)

[Proceeds to answer question]

One of the advantages of complete immersion in the group under study is that the true feelings of participants are revealed over time. Any pretence that is attempted cannot hold over many years and in multiple social settings. Ultimately, the feelings of the group about the disruption caused by this member were revealed through both words and actions, such as declining to socialise with her outside the group.

3.12 Conclusion

This chapter outlines and explains the decisions taken by the author in developing a strategy for inquiry into the research question. Based on a subjectivist epistemology and an interpretivist paradigm, it was determined that ethnography, with its concerns for cultural context, was an ideal methodology to study a female-led and female-dominated consumer culture. In keeping with the tenets of Consumer Culture Theory, fieldwork included participant observation, netnography, depth interviews and deep reading of media focused on "*sociocultural, experiential, symbolic, and ideological aspects of consumption*" (Arnould and Thompson 2005, 868).

The next chapter deals with the key findings from the resultant data.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Summary

This chapter outlines what the author believes to be the key findings from the study and provides the answers to the research questions posed in Chapter 2:

What is the nature and meaning of consumer activity and consumption in a female-led and -dominated consumption community?

The key finding of this study is that members of the Knitting community are facilitating each other in what will be referred to as therapeutic consumption.

Therapy is a key meaning behind this female-led and -dominated consumption community. Members of both the offline field site, Local Stitch 'n' Bitch, and the online netnographic site, Ravelry.com, express a belief that membership of the Knitting community provides therapy. True saturation of data is achieved in the case of the offline Local Stitch 'n' Bitch. With respect to Ravelry, though an extensive netnography was carried out, it would be presumptuous to assume all 7 million members of Ravelry.com are similarly minded and are seeking a therapeutic outcome from membership. However, where possible, examples are taken from the online sphere to show how attitudes online seem to reflect, and add veracity, to the offline findings.

The members of Local Stitch 'n' Bitch tell us that the group has a therapeutic meaning for them. They have all encountered a similar predicament, loneliness and isolation, which leads to a shared desire for therapeutic consumption. The group serves as a surrogate support system for the members and shares many characteristics with a self-help group. Members engage in reciprocal helping and tangible assistance, not only with respect to knitting activities but organically extending outwards into non-knitting related activities. In addition, the members

provide each other with emotional support and provide cognitive guidance and social reinforcement. The members also socialise with each other beyond the boundaries of the Knitting group and celebrate not just each other's Knitting achievements, but also life events and mundane experiences. The group engages in storytelling to construct a group identity. Through consumption, an intimate bond is created between the members, reflective of the intimacy usually found in a therapeutic self-help group.

Therapy is not ubiquitous however, and can be disrupted. In the local field site, impending or new motherhood caused tensions within the group and later a 'war' broke out between two members disrupting the therapeutic process. In the online sphere, several scandals rocked the 'Knitworld' during the study. One particular representative example, the scandal resulting from Knit Camp UK 2010, is presented here. Therapy was, however, ultimately re-established through consumption and through reasserting the therapeutic behaviours seen previously, particularly tangible assistance and emotional support.

Attempts were made to seek disconfirming observations, and other potential meanings are explored as suggested by the literature, however, no alternative interpretation strongly supported by data emerges. For example, with respect to the possibility of a clear feminist orientation within the community, the group feels little affinity with the feminist identities or ideologies suggested by the work of other authors.

Finally, this type of group therapeutic consumption represents a new type of consumption community, the therapeutic consumption tribe, which is discussed in Chapter 5.

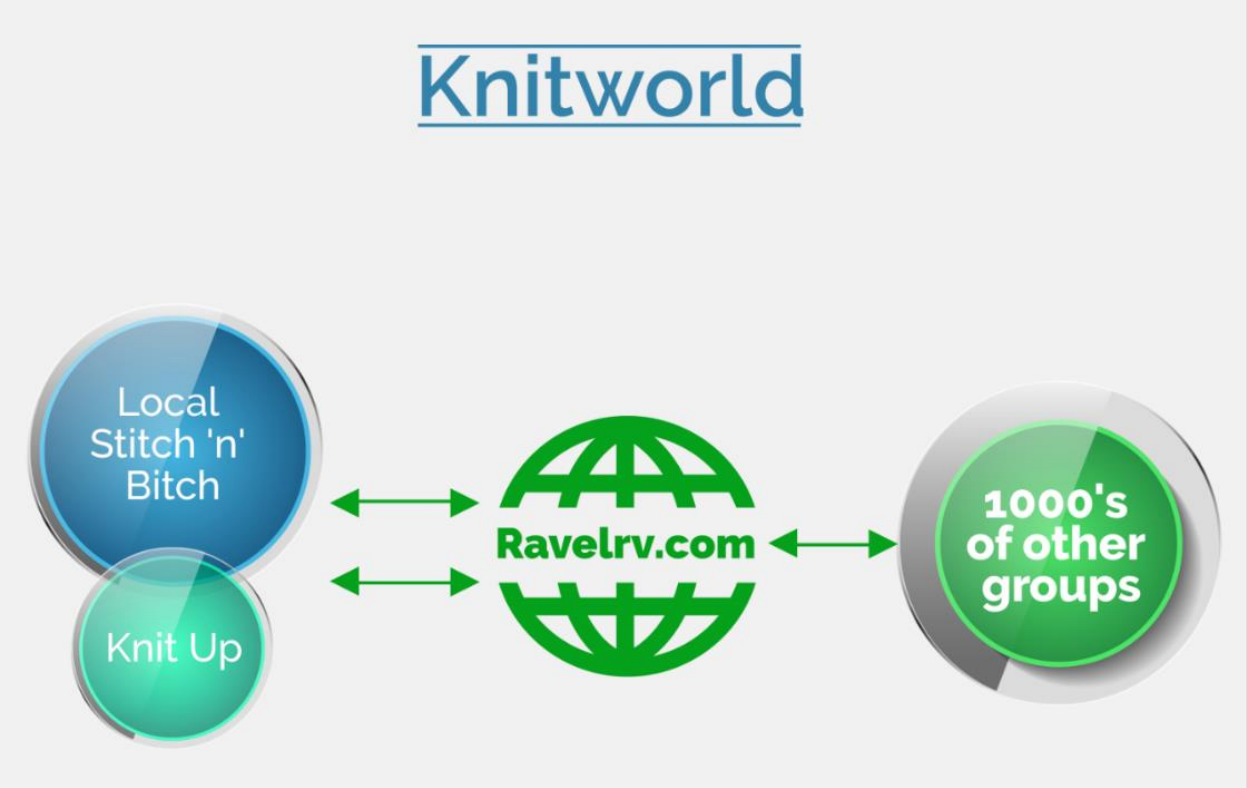

Figure 4-1: A Map of the 'Knitworld' with Arrows Representing a Constant Flow of Information and Commerce.

Fig 4.1 reminds the reader of the groups of Knitters from which the data is drawn. Local Stitch 'n' Bitch is the primary offline ethnographic field site. Some mention is made of another smaller Knitting group, Knit Up, whose membership includes some former members of Local Stitch 'n' Bitch and some who still identify as Stitch 'n' Bitch members, however this group was not researched in depth. Online netnography was carried out on Ravelry.com, the commercial, social and informational hub of the Knitworld. The members of Local Stitch 'n' Bitch (and indeed thousands of other knitting groups world-wide) use Ravelry.com extensively and constantly. It is common to have an internet connected device such as an iPad open to Ravelry.com during local Stitch 'n' Bitch meetings. In a sense, the online knitting community centred on Ravelry.com, is viewed as an extension of Cork Stitch 'n' Bitch by the members. Although Ravelry.com was not exhaustively researched due to its sheer scale, it is important to

iterate between the online and offline portions of the findings. As Ravelry.com has become so ubiquitous in the Knitworld, it is impossible to separate the nature and meaning of consumer activity and consumption in the offline female-led and -dominated consumption community from that in the online female-led and -dominated consumption community.

Each major finding is now discussed in detail.

4.2 Therapeutic Consumption in a Female-Led and -Dominated Consumption Community

"It is a therapy" – Sarah, Depth Interview

Therapy is provided and accessed in multiple ways by members of the Knitting community. The Local Stitch 'n' Bitch group displays many of the characteristics of a therapeutic support group as discussed by Jacobs and Goodman (1989), Levine and Sandeen (2013), and Moisio and Beruchashvili (2010). It is observed that both task helping and socioemotional helping (Finn 1999) are offered by Local Stitch 'n' Bitch and by the wider Knitworld community. The group members provide and receive therapy, using mechanisms described in Barrera (1986), Hirsch (1980), and Pearson (1982, 1983).

However, the Knitting community differs significantly from the groups described by these authors in that it is a consumption community, rather than an explicitly help-intended support group. Hence, therapy is delivered and experienced through consumption rather than by means of formal therapeutic intent or practice. These types of therapeutic behaviour are thus unexpected in this context and represent a novel finding which has not previously been addressed. Further, this is a female-led and -dominated consumption community which as discussed in Chapter 2 addresses a significant gap in the literature. This form of consumption, therefore, differs from the consumption forms observed elsewhere in other female-dominated

communities, differing even from the form of spiritual-therapeutic consumption found in Moisio and Beruchashvilli (2010).

4.2.1 Shared Belief in the Therapy Provided by a Female-Led and -Dominated Consumption Community

The group demonstrates a shared belief in the powers of, and acknowledges the therapeutic benefit of, the Local Stitch 'n' Bitch group (Katz, 1981; Shaffer and Galinsky 1989):

> *"It is a therapy"* (Sarah, Depth Interview).
>
> "*She mentioned as well that she learned it in school, and she had quite a bad experience with regards to the school and the nuns, so yeah that was, I only learned about it as she was knitting at the group and she was suddenly knitting and talking about her experience so I guess she said it was lovely, it was very therapeutic"* (Danielle speaking about her friend's experience, Depth Interview).
>
> *"It's for my mental health I think"* (Sarah, Depth Interview).

A shared belief can create a strong group bond and an 'ingroup' and 'outgroup' mentality (Avery 2012). In the therapy literature, shared belief in the power of the group, and in the therapeutic narrative itself, facilitates therapy. The members do not view themselves as *"trangressors"* as in Weight Watchers where *"submission of members to the watchful eye of the support group originates from the shared belief that Weight Watchers as individuals lack the internal psychological resources needed for maintaining discipline within the Weight Watchers program"* (Moisio and Beruchashvili 2010, 866).

In the wider Knitting community, there is also an acknowledgment of the therapeutic nature of the consumption community. One user states, *"There's a very friendly and enthusiastic support group here on Ravelry"* (Jinxnit55, forums > techniques > What's your favorite heel to

knit/wear?, Monday, July 28 2014), another started a thread on the 'For the Love of Ravelry' boards called *"Love Ravelry – Great therapy",* and in a more tongue-in-cheek acknowledgement there is a group called *"Sox therapy: the joy of heeling."*

There are many boards on the Ravelry forums with the word Therapy in the title although, interestingly, most are for yarn brands or stores that have names such as Stitch Therapy (a shop in New York), Yarn Therapy Inc (a dyer in Florida) or The Stitch Therapy Podcast. It is widely established in the Occupational Therapy literature that knitting itself is therapeutic, as discussed is Section 2.7. It seems more common for individual discussion threads or forum groups to be described as *"therapeutic"* for and by the participants:

> *"This thread has been v therapeutic for me"* (yllacaspia, forums > remrants > discussion board > What the what?, Monday, September 19 2016)
>
> *"This thread is terrific and therapeutic"* (ptboyd, forums > loose ends > Unpopular Opinions/Practices - Yarn Confessions, Tuesday, July 12 2016)

However, we also see people describing membership of the Ravelry community itself as therapeutic:

> *"I overheard her telling someone at church that she considers Ravelry therapy for me :)"* (sandiwiseheart, forums > friends of abby's yarns > discussion board> ArgleBargles, Crabbinesses, Funks, Gargles, Groans, Grouches, Grumps, Grunts, Irascibilities, Kvetches, Lugubriosities, Moans, Peeves, Pettifoggeries , Pouts, Sadnesses, Snarls, Tantrums, Vapors, Wharrgarrbles, Whimpers, Whines, Whinges, Whispers, Yawps, Thursday, November 14 2013).

This expectation of therapy provision, this shared belief in the power of the group, is itself a powerful therapeutic mechanism. There exists a "psychological placebo effect" discussed as early as the 1950s (Rosenthal and Frank 1956) and it is believed that in many cases, those "*who genuinely believe in the effectiveness of counseling are likely to improve regardless of the*

validity of the counselor's approach" (Bednar 1970, 647). Merely believing one has access to a source of therapy provides *"additional security and self-confidence"* (Bednar 1970, 647). As such, believing that the group is therapeutic, in fact, causes the group to be therapeutic for those who share this belief.

4.2.2 A Desire for Therapeutic Consumption in a Female-Led and – Dominated Consumption Community

The data from Local Stitch 'n' Bitch reveals that a common predicament, problem or concern (Jacobs and Goodman 1989) emerges as a key reason for membership of the Local Stitch 'n' Bitch group. That reason is loneliness and social isolation. Danielle explains:

> "*I was missing my peer group and I wanted to find people that I had something in common with*" (Danielle, Depth Interview).

Danielle is a young mother in a foreign country. Alison, Rachel, Amelia, Leda, and Jennifer are ex-pat wives, not only far from their families, but unable to work outside the home because of visa restrictions. Beth, Charlotte, Delphine, and Crystal have greater connections to Ireland than the ex-pat wives through marriages to Irish men and through employment, but are, nonetheless, outsiders. Kira suggests that, *"Expats, by definition, know what it's like to be lonely"* (Facebook message, Feb 9, 2012). Even those group members originally from the area, like Siobhan and Sarah, identified changes in their lives leading to social isolation as an issue in the period immediately prior to joining the group and describe finding themselves lacking a peer group:

> *"… basically just before I joined Stitch 'n' Bitch most of my friends left Cork so they were all in Dublin and I also had just broken up with someone so I had a lot more free time and then I joined the group …"* (Siobhan, Depth Interview).

Pearson (1982; 1983) points out that self-help groups may be needed more by populations undergoing developmental changes which might include leaving college, relocating, emigrating and motherhood. The members of Local Stitch 'n' Bitch are using the group as an aid to overcoming 'life-disrupting problems' (Mosio and Beruchashvili 2010) or to aid transition through liminal zones (Turner 1974, 1979).

Many of the participants identify feelings of alienation, isolation and loneliness in their own lives. Danielle, Rachel, Jennifer, Kira, Charlotte, and Siobhan all describe finding themselves isolated and lonely as they undergo life changes which separate them from their past support networks. Rachel, Jennifer, and Danielle all describe using the group to treat loneliness:

> *"I wanted to find people to connect with"* (Rachel, Depth Interview).

> *"I hoped that I would get some friends and some contacts. People that I could, you know, start friendships with and kind of so I wouldn't be so lonely"* (Jennifer, Depth Interview).

In response to these liminal states, these participants sought out companionship in an effort to aid their transitions. These transitional states resulted in a distance (a physical distance for the expats) from their traditional support systems.

4.2.3 The Surrogate Support System of a Female-Led and –Dominated Consumption Community

In Stitch 'n' Bitch, we see the consumption community function as the 'surrogate support system", often where kith and kin are absent. Pearson (1983), and Heller and Swindle (1983) discuss the use of a professional therapist as a "surrogate support system" where the "kith and kin" are harmful. The physical practice of knitting is widely agreed to have benefits (Riley et al. 2013), and Minahan and Cox (2006) identify "knitting together" as a social capital building exercise unlike Putnam's "bowling alone" (Putnam 1995, 2001). However, the group experiences a deep therapeutic benefit from the consumption community and consumption

practices beyond what could be explained by the relaxing nature of knitting. Sarah specifically describes the group, rather than knitting itself, as her *"therapy*" (Sarah, Depth Interview). Minahan and Cox (2006) suggest that becoming involved with a craft consumption community may be an effort to compensate for the alienation of the information era. They term this a 'remedial' use of the group. However, this "remedial" understanding covers only one aspect of what constitutes therapy, the "deficiency amelioration model" but ignores the second and equally important aspect of therapy, the "positive interpersonal relationship" model. Both aspects are apparent in the data, as seen in Section 4.3.8 in particular.

So, while there is no shared pathology underlying the group as in AA or Weight Watchers, the shared problem (loneliness and isolation), and the socioemotional helping provided by the group, result in a shared belief that the group is therapeutic and has great value in the members' lives as a surrogate support system.

4.2.4 Reciprocal Helping and Tangible Assistance in a Female-Led and – Dominated Consumption Community

The support system within this female-led community is at its most apparent and tangible in the many practices of reciprocal helping and tangible assistance that exist in relation to all aspects of community consumption. While at the outset the Local Stitch 'n' Bitch group was not officially help-intended, it is clearly evident that reciprocal helping (Shaffer and Galinsky 1989) exists within the study group.

Gifting of both supplies and unwanted finished objects (FOs) to other members is common. Members support each other's personal and entrepreneurial endeavours, teach each other non-crafting skills, and engage in charitable knitting. Members of Ravelry have expressed similar sentiments in the Forums, some of which are 'officially' help intended, such as "Helping Hands for Homeless Animals", "AMV/Aneurysm Survivor Gifts", "Pray for Preemies" or even "Random Acts of Kindness" where members simply do nice things for each other.

Danielle, who has a low-income family, receives lots of tangible assistance to enable her to pursue her craft; Danielle then uses the yarn to make practical items for her children. These gifts may come from within Stitch 'n' Bitch or from friends and family who understand her love of knitting:

> "*Most of the yarn I have I got as gifts or maybe people clearing out some stuff and they say do you want some and I say yes sure, great you know, I'll take some of that"* (Danielle, Depth Interview).

> "*These are from my Mum and these ones here are from a friend, she was working in a craft shop at the time and she was able to get discounts and she would send it over for the babies to make something nice for them*" (Danielle, Depth Interview).

Yarn is often gifted between members, if it is more suitable to another member's planned pattern or, often, if the colour is felt to be more suited to another member. When Sarah was unable to travel to Dublin to claim a competition prize, Siobhan went out of her way to provide assistance and facilitate Sarah's craft while on an unrelated trip to the capital:

> *"Siobhan was picking out the yarn for me, cos I'd won it from This is Knit"* (Sarah, Depth Interview).

Siobhan went even further and chose alternate colours to the ones selected by Sarah. As an example of cognitive guidance (further explored in Section 4.2.6), Siobhan told Sarah that she would "*look like a crazy sailor*" (Sarah, Depth interview) in the original blue and cream colours chosen. Luckily, Sarah was ultimately delighted with Siobhan's choice of grey and cream.

When Cosima wanted to learn to spin yarn, Katja, in addition to giving her the tangible assistance required to learn a new skill by providing her with the spindles and fibre necessary for the task, also provided cognitive guidance by teaching her how to use the spindle:

> *"I wanted to try spinning and [Katja] brought in some stuff for me to give it a go"* (Cosima, Depth Interview).

Entrepreneurship is one of the characteristics of a consumer tribe (Goulding et al. 2013), and the members of the Knitting group receive and provide tangible assistance from and to the group when engaging in these practices. Dyad Fibres was started by Katja and its association with the brand forms an integral part of the group's identity. Local Stitch 'n Bitch members receive a friend discount and have access to many 'left over' exclusive colourways which cannot be sold on the open market.

Aryanna received tangible support from the Knit Up group when setting up her business, Prolethean Yarns:

> *"I was talking to [Grace] about what I was trying to do when I was trying to start Prolethean Yarns and she got me in touch with a yarn shop owner in Dublin who let me come to the big Knitting and Stitching Show and let me show my stuff at the show for nothing, like I just kind of worked for her to show my stuff"* (Aryanna, Depth Interview).

Outside the knitting sphere, members of the group have continued to assist each other, with Leda providing vegan-cooking lessons to Sarah for example. On one memorable occasion, the author provided tangible assistance to a member of the group who was being assaulted by a drunk in the pub. This story has become part of the shared repertoire of the group and, of course, has been enhanced over time, but several interviewees mentioned it as an example of the group being there for each other:

> "*She* [Jennifer] *really appreciated you defending her honour at that time"* (Sarah, Depth Interview).

This ethos of caring and tangible support extends outwards into charitable acts for the wider community. In the case of Local Stitch 'n' Bitch, this has involved knitting little hats for Innocent Smoothies Age Action Ireland campaign, knitting blankets for premature babies for the Cork

University Maternity Hospital, and wraps for deceased babies for Féileacáin, the Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Association of Ireland. This caring is mirrored in the online world where Ravelry both enables, and often promotes, charitable knitting.

Online, many forums on Ravelry, such as "Patterns," are largely given over to Tangible Assistance, helping people to resolve issues in their knitting. There is also a "Random Acts of Kindness" group dedicated to "*giving without expecting anything in return*". Wishes posted are, predictably, mostly for yarn (often yarn ends) or patterns, but also for chocolate and confectionary, buttons or beads or, even, a pizza delivery. Many groups, for example, Crooked House, an Agatha Christie fan group, and HiyaHiya Patterns KAL, a brand community, have their own Random Acts of Kindness threads for members.

Indeed, multiple opportunities for charitable acts are offered on Ravelry. Charitable Knitters have the option of taking part in making items for those in need, or buying patterns which donate some or all of the proceeds to charity. An example of the first is that three patterns are available in the Ravelry database to make prosthetic breasts for mastectomy patients, 'Tit Bits', 'Knitted Knockers' and for crocheters, 'Breast Cancer Survivor's False Breast'. Groups like Knitty Titty Committee and Karma Yarn Swap Group have organised drives for these prostheses which were also featured in Knitty's (an online knitting magazine) Breast Cancer Issue.

In the second case, many designers donate a portion of their income from specific patterns to charities special to them. An example is the James Cowl, where the designer states:

> *"The James Cowl was inspired by my son, James, who was diagnosed with Alternating Hemiplegia of Childhood around his 1st birthday. This rare neurological disorder affects 1 in 1,000,000 children. For James, this disorder causes paralysis in his limbs at any given time.*

All proceeds for this cowl will go directly to the research and treatment for his disorder. To learn more about James and other kids with this disorder please visit CureAHC.org or AHCF.org."

It is also common, in the wake of major natural disasters, such as the 2010 earthquake in Haiti or the 2011 Tsunami in Japan, for many members of the Ravelry community to "destash" by selling yarn for charity, or for designers to offer specific patterns for sale with the proceeds or part of the proceeds going to charity. The Ravelry "Powers That Be" facilitate this; for example in the case of the Haiti Earthquake, a special "tag" was used to promote patterns that were pledging sales to a relief organisation:

> *"Folks, I wanted to let everyone know that thanks to Casey* [One of the Ravelry Founders], *the main patterns page now features a "Help for Haiti" search. The designers of these patterns have pledged a chunk of their sales this month to the Haitian relief organization of their choice.*
>
> *If you would like to donate part of your sales this month to Haitian relief, it's easy - and you'll really help out! To do so, simply edit your pattern, add the "Help for Haiti" tag, then detail your pledge at the top of the pattern description. Your pattern will then appear in the "Help for Haiti" search. (Be sure to let people know about this, too - please spread the word!)"* (retroknit, (Saturday, January 16 2010), forums > designers group > discussion board, > Help for Haiti Patterns - call for designers).

Designers have also designed patterns specifically for charity. Examples of this are, Doctor Carebear (a teddy bear in a white coat in aid of Doctors Without Borders) or Charity the Crane Amigurumi (an origami style crane in aid of the Red Cross following the Japanese Tsunami). All proceeds from the sale of these patterns are gifted to the charity involved with the additional suggestion that knitters sell their finished items to further increase donations.

In both the online and offline community, the commitment to charitable knitting is just one element of the 'helping' behaviour that would be typically expected within a therapeutic self-help group; the difference here is that the expectation is clearly tied to the central consumption activity. However, the Knitters also provide each other with forms of tangible assistance that extend far beyond the boundaries of knitting activities.

Knitters provide tangible assistance to each other in multiple ways, engaging in gift giving, financially supporting member businesses (yarn and otherwise), and assisting with childcare and other everyday tasks. This tangible assistance is perhaps easier to demonstrate through consumption practices than is its more intangible counterpart, emotional support. However, much of this tangible assistance is rooted in the desire to be supportive of fellow members and to provide proof of emotional involvement.

In terms of supporting members' business enterprises, members of the group continue to shop from and even to evangelise for Prolethean and Dyad Yarns, taking pride in the dyers' association with Knit Up and Local Stitch 'n' Bitch, respectively. Cosima has designed patterns for a Prolethean Yarns pattern book which Alison is publishing, and Alison used both Prolethean and Dyad Yarns for patterns in her own, self-published book. Katja has also hired several members of the group (Rachel, Danielle, Sarah, Beth, and the author) to work for Dyad as it has grown, and has also commissioned another member, Angie, to make cupcakes for her studio opening.

The group members also try to support the wider Knitting community, particularly, through Ravelry. Aryanna states that when she has good fortune, she 'returns the favour', supporting the community that has provided enjoyment and support to her:

> *"[I] was making good money and so I said I'm going to pay for a pattern and support the .. the community [*deliberate emphasis*] cos I'd been taking free patterns for years so I'll pay for this one"* (Aryanna, Depth Interview).

With respect to the online context, the charitable events on Ravelry (Haiti or Japan Red Cross Funds, for example) seem to allow Knitters to indulge themselves without guilt in the purchase of patterns, feeling that purchases are more justified when they also provide tangible assistance:

> "*Anecdotally, I had a* huge *surge in pattern purchases when I was donating proceeds for relief after the Haiti earthquake"* (bowerbird, Friday, October 3, 2014, forums > for the love of ravelry > Poll: Hot Right Now & promotions).

Ysolda Teague, a very popular and well-known Scottish knitwear designer, ascribes this "surge" as a response from people who would have purchased the pattern anyway but who were prompted to do so while the fundraiser ran:

> *"My current total donation to MSF, in a bit more than 24 hours, is £2883.50 / $4688.30. This response is so overwhelming, I love knitters."*
>
> *edit: I've sold a LOT more patterns than I usually do, so I think this is turning out to be a really effective fundraising idea. People are buying patterns they wanted now rather than later, which is wonderful. Of course, I do sell quite a lot of patterns normally, but the thing this is showing more than anything else, is that every small bit counts and builds into something huge. Every designer doing this is doing something amazing, whatever their sales volume"* (Ysolda, Sunday, January 17 2010, forums > designers group > discussion board > Help for Haiti Patterns - call for designers).

While Ysolda's theory of people treating themselves to purchases during the fundraiser may be true in some cases, others apparently purchase patterns that they have no intention of knitting. One knitter who purchased the "Brandywine" shawl pattern from designer Romi to support a fundraiser had no intention of knitting the garment until she saw it months later at a show:

> *"I bought the Brandywine pattern just to contribute to raising funds for earthquake relief in Haiti. Months later, I was at the lUnique Sheep Retreat and saw it "in person" and was*

captivated!" (tamsie, (Wednesday, November 17 2010), forums > @ romi's studio group > discussion board > Welcome and Introduce Yourself!).

Sales of the Brandywine shawl have raised over USD $26,000 for Medecins Sans Frontiéres (MSF) / Doctors Without Borders since 2010. While most fundraisers run for a limited time, Romi has not put a time limit on the purchase of her pattern and has continued to donate all its proceeds to MSF. Similarly, others purchased items that they would not have bought had it not been for the benefit of a charitable cause:

> *"I would never have bought stitch markers this weekend had it not been for the offer to donate to Haiti. I don't regret doing it, because they're awesome stitch markers that I will be happy to have. But it's not true that I merely bought a donation-providing version of something I would have bought otherwise"* Whirlygirl, (Sunday, January 17 2010), forums > yarnthropology group > discussion board > Commercial Charity.

Thus we see how the Knitters engage in 'tangible support' through this charitable consumption, as well as in more intimate emotional support at the local level. This online promotion of charitability and helping behaviours echoes, and may even amplify, Local Stitch 'n' Bitch's members sense of what it means to be part of a therapeutic, mutually supportive, female-led and –dominated consumption community.

4.2.5 Emotional Support in a Female-Led and –Dominated Consumption Community

The presence of emotional support (Hirsch 1989) is strongly identifiable in the data. Danielle, for example, is very clear that she used the group as an emotional support, to help her cope with the loneliness and isolation of being a young mother in a foreign country:

"Just loneliness, em yeah 'cos that was what I got out of it, what I needed to get out of it when I first started going, [Danielle starts to cry] *wow well, emotional response, because I suppose that was a particularly difficult period*

[Of course, do you want me to stop the tape for a while]

no, no it's all right, it's all real and gritty damn it.

[Well it's great for me but if you'd like me to stop the tape..]

…

So yeah, that social contact for feeling less alone was something that I definitely benefited from, from the group and yeah, I don't know if I particularly contributed anything to it, but I felt .. talking to people and that's what I got from it and that's what I got from it and that's what it gave as well. Good feelings yes I attribute to that" (Danielle, Depth Interview).

For Danielle, having emigrated to Ireland and fallen pregnant at 19, the group represents access to a peer group and a support structure that she is missing. She begins to cry when discussing this difficult time in her life and her use of Stitch 'n' Bitch as a resource to navigate it. She goes on to say that though she is currently not attending the group due to family commitments, knowing that Stitch 'n' Bitch is ongoing gives her peace of mind, if she "*needs it*", it is there.

As discussed previously, many of the group members are without 'kith and kin' and they turn to Stitch 'n' Bitch and the relationships they build there as an emotional support system.

Amelia, a new arrival in the city, had little interest in knitting but met members of the group through an American ex-pat group and tagged along to Local Stitch 'n' Bitch. By purchasing some pink chunky yarn and a set of knitting needles, she gained access to a peer group and an emotionally supportive community. She attended every week that she lived in the city, often carrying her unchanging 'knitting project' of a few rows of plain stitch.

Online, people are equally clear that they are using the Knitting community as an emotional support, echoing the offline community:

> *"I honestly couldn't do it without y'all and my counselor. Y'all lifting me up and rooting me on really gives me courage to be strong like I know I can!"* (scarletjack, Saturday, November 15, 2014, forums > remrants group > discussion board > I May be overreacting).

> *"For me, Ravelry is the community that I don't have locally"* (Cvanmid, Saturday, October 25 2008, forums > for the love of ravelry > Identity, Community, and Technology).

Some boards on Ravelry are entirely dedicated to emotional support, for example "MKHCHII", which stands for 'my knitting has cat hair in it.' The description of the group reads:

> *"❤This thread started out when I (Mokihana) was going through a really hard time; my husband, Nolemana, suddenly had to have open heart surgery. People in this group were so incredibly supportive, and when he began to get better, I thought of archiving the thread. But by that time, it had turned into the most incredible support group, not just for me, but for everyone here. So think of this thread as a group of cat lovers who also are wonderfully supportive no matter what you're going through and feel free to post your hurts or joys here"* (Ravelry.com > forums > my knitting has cat hair in it group > discussion board).

This group discusses, in over 8000 postings over three years, family issues, health, pets, legal problems and any other issues for which they need emotional support. The consumption of knitting and knitting items facilitates access to this emotional support. The 'correct' consumption items and indeed, supportive behaviours, are promoted through cognitive guidance and social reinforcement.

4.2.6 Cognitive Guidance and Social Reinforcement in a Female-Led and –Dominated Consumption Community

Cognitive guidance is defined by Hirsch (1980) as providing information, advice or explanation, while social reinforcement is offering praise or criticism for specific actions (Hirsch 1980; Pearson 1983). Both elements are apparent in the Local Stitch 'n' Bitch group. The group has a socially negotiated leadership structure based on social capital derived from skill and commitment to the group (See section 4.5.3). While in many cases the group engages in joint cognitive guidance and social reinforcement, Sarah occupies a particular position of authority. However, on occasion, when approached by group members in times of crisis (see Section 4.3.1), Sarah has rejected this authoritative role. As an informal leader, she feels able to abdicate responsibility. While the group can take a collective approach to leadership, as in the appointment of Sarah as socially negotiated leader, in the absence of a formal leadership figure who directs the group that therapy can be disrupted (see Section 4.3.1).

Sarah is termed '*the Mammy'* of the group due to the high level of cognitive guidance (Hirsch 1980) she provides, particularly in terms of 'task helping' (Finn 1999). This type of task helping is reflective of the Community of Practice (Wenger 1998) type of the consumption community where knowledge is passed from 'senior' members of the group to newer or less skilled members. This guidance has also led to Sarah being teasingly, but affectionately, called '*Knitler*' by Marian, one of her close friends in the group.

Sarah's strong opinions on the best tools for use have spread throughout the group:

> "You've converted a lot of people to different, say for instance *[dogged determination yeah],* from straight to circulars and all that stuff" (The author in conversation with Sarah, Depth Interview).

Beth describes the process of learning to be a 'Knitter' from other members of the group:

> *"People would be more excited about choosing projects to talking about yarn and em, learning new skills really and I know Sarah and Kira were doing these little knit alongs where they'd be figuring out how to make a sweater kind of without a pattern from scratch"* (Beth, Depth Interview).

Again Sarah's role in the learning process is notable and adds to her informal authority over the group.

Through this task helping, the group functions as a community of practice spreading knitting knowledge. Sarah, in particular, is regarded as a font of knowledge and 'converts' others from what she believes to be an inferior form of knitting (on straight needles) to using circular needles. She functions as a maven (Schau et al. 2015) and is proud of her role as a source of new ideas, help, and education. Essentially, Sarah is not the therapist of the group, but by fulfilling the maven role, she gives a sense of direction to the group without which the therapy could not continue. Jennifer discusses how the group helps to make decisions for her:

> *"It was between these two … and then we decided this didn't really go with my skin tone, so we went with this one"* (Jennifer, Depth Interview).

When asked exactly who guided her, however, it emerged that it was only Sarah and Siobhan who expressed strong opinions.

Cognitive guidance around appropriate knitting materials is strongly observed in the Local Stitch 'n' Bitch group. Acrylic baby yarns are dismissed as '*granny yarns'*, and members are left with little doubt as to what Sarah's opinions, in particular, are while she provides '*task helping'*.

Sarah uses social reinforcement (Hirsch 1980; Pearson 1983) to spread her ideas through the group. The members copy Sarah to affirm their group identity. Sarah, in her role as a maven and trendsetter, provides cognitive guidance to the members with regard to what items are desirable and fashionable within the Knitting community. The "correct" purchases and actions are then praised, providing social reinforcement. Sarah is the first to change to circular

needles, then interchangeable needles. Almost all members of the group now use interchangeable needles, most commonly KnitPicks/KnitPros. Sarah herself has since moved on to Hiya Hiyas, needles which she believes to be superior as they have a swivelling join between needle and cable. She describes converting the other members to her way of thinking through *"grim determination."*

When Jennifer was at home in Arizona, she drove over 150 miles to find a complete set of Hiya Hiyas:

> *"I saw [Sarah] and her Hiya Hiyas and I don't know I just wanted them … I drove all over Phoenix looking for these god damn needles, sorry, and about two hundred dollars later I had them … I probably drove a hundred and fifty miles in my Mom's car by myself with the radio and I was delighted to do it"* (Jennifer, Depth Interview).

This 'pilgrimage' demonstrates Jennifer's commitment to the group as well as reinforcing Sarah's role as maven and trendsetter. Using the right tools affirms one's identity as part of the group and underpins the sense of the group as a well-structured therapeutic haven.

Siobhan also discusses Sarah's influence on her purchasing decisions:

> *"My Hiya Hiyas, I love them,* [you're a Hiya Hiya convert as well?] *She* [Sarah] *always gets her way, em yea she, I started off in the group with like, fixed circulars she rolled her eyes at and then I got the Knit Picks cause that was the thing to do and then I resisted Hiya Hiyas for about a year and a half and then I got them and she's going onto something else now* [oh really?] *no I'm actually putting my foot down"* (Siobhan, Depth Interview).

Siobhan displays some resistance to this socially reinforced consumption, refusing to consider the new brand Sarah is recommending. However, she also describes being previously "broken down" by Sarah's opinions over time:

I: “How long did it take her to “break you down”?

S: “Yeah over a year but you’d be broke from her, I bought three pairs of Knit Pros, the plastics that I bought first that I really shouldn’t have bothered with, the metal ones, the nickel and then I got the limited edition the rosewood, well I don’t think they’re actually rosewood, I think it’s a rosewood effect [yeah I’ve heard that too]*, so I have a presentation box and everything and the different coloured cables so yeah I’ve got five sets of interchangeable needles* (and now it’s Hiya Hiyas all the time?), *I’ll go for them first and then if I don’t have the size I’ll go for my Knit Pros”* (Siobhan, Depth Interview).

Sarah describes shopping online as part of a group with Kira who now lives in the U.K., and with Siobhan. Sarah describes how they “*egg each other on*”:

“Kira has a bit more restraint than we do ‘cos Kira ends up making me buy stuff, ‘cos she goes oh that’s really pretty? Oh I’m thinking of going for it. Will I go for it? It’s bought, do you want it?” (Sarah, Depth Interview).

In terms of the group providing a sense of collective leadership in the form of cognitive guidance and social reinforcement, the group also placed multiple ‘joint orders’ with U.S. brands in order to cover the cost of shipping, or in the case of Knit Picks, to take advantage of one member travelling to the U.S. when international shipping is unavailable. The members would discuss the items being purchased during meetings and often mentioned ending up spending more than they had initially intended due to group encouragement. They are validating and affirming each other, and strengthening the bonds which exist between them by consumption.

Members of the group or the Knitting community will occasionally “Cold Sheep” (See Appendix 1 for glossary) and swear off new knitting purchases for a defined time period. This expression is taken from the common phrase “going cold turkey” which refers to the painful physical withdrawal from hard drugs such as heroin, but despite painting the yarn purchaser as

pathological in their consumption, it is used in a tongue in cheek sense. The 'cold sheeper' will often be tagged by friends in posts about updates by beloved dyers, will be sent information about sales and limited time offers and will be celebrated, rather than shamed, if they 'crack'. Certain purchases, for example, limited edition colourways, are declared to be exempt. Even the most active 'cold sheeping' group on Ravelry (Ravelry > forums > Knittit Cold Sheep 2017) has an "allowance" for new purchases. However, even within this minimal consumer resistance there is a commitment to consume. An integral part of cold sheeping is an effort to 'stash bust' by maximising the use of existing stash within the cold sheeping time frame.

There is a very thin line, however, between this tongue-in-cheek 'addiction', which is to be celebrated, and actual problematic consumption. For example, Sarah criticises Jennifer's consumption practices and attempts to discourage her from further purchases:

> *"Jennifer has gotten really bad lately, we're really tempted to take her credit card off her… It's like you're not working, where did you get the money for that and she says I put it on the credit card. What does she think, the magic credit card, you've got to pay that off"* (Sarah, Depth Interview).

It is possible that Sarah's judgemental opinion here may be due to the fact that Siobhan and Kira, with whom she regularly online shops, are employed, while Jennifer, as an ex-pat wife, is not. However, at the time of the interview, Sarah was, herself, a stay-at-home-mom. Jennifer displayed some near compulsive behaviour around knitting, as in this quote:

> *"And then it's six hours later and it's four o clock in the morning and then you've fallen asleep with your needles in your hands and your husband comes out and prises them from your hands and says 'go to bed' and you're 'but I'm knitting"* (Jennifer, Depth Interview).

She also mentions shopping online in the early hours of the morning. Cognitive guidance can, of course, also involve correcting 'bad behaviour' which seems to be the case when Sarah tries to 'correct' Jennifer's (perceived) over-spending.

Aside from social reinforcement of knitting norms, the group also reinforces societal and cultural norms. Jennifer, in particular, irritated many group members by displaying "*immaturity*" and being overly brash. She was described as a "*loud American*" even by another American member of the group. Jennifer was 'put in her place' on several occasions when members' "slagging" (good natured mocking) became a little more cutting, pointing to Guendouzi's (2001, 29) suggestion that women's conversation may be competitive rather than cooperative, particularly in relation to "*socially acceptable images of femininity*". While this may seem contrary to the expected emotionally supportive nature of therapy, in fact, Hirsch (1980) and Pearson (1982, 1983) explain that both praise and criticism of actions form part of the social reinforcement element of therapy. It also points to an element of co-leadership and joint cognitive guidance and social reinforcement. The group performs some of this leadership-work collectively; Sarah may be the maven but leadership is established by consensus.

In contrast to the criticism of Jennifer, many of the group express admiration for Katja, a successful tribal entrepreneur:

> *"I'd like to copy Katja if I was copying anyone. God, she has an innate style damn her. She's kinda got a lot of stuff that's really classy. You're too young to be that classy!"* (Sarah, Depth Interview).

Cognitive guidance and social reinforcement are echoed in the online Knitting world, where advice and information is sought and given on Ravelry, not just in relation to knitting but also on relationships, landlords, legal issues etc. on the "Remrants" Forum as well as 'guidance' specific forums like "Positive Pets" (animal training), "Casting Off" (Divorce) or "PhD procrastination" (Issues facing Ph.D. candidates). Of course, multiple forums on Ravelry.com

focus on knowledge transmission, particularly the boards "*Yarn & Fiber*", "*Patterns*", "*Techniques*", "*Tools & Equipment*", four of the "Big 6" main Ravelry boards.

Online, social reinforcement is clearly visible when people seek advice about relationships, in particular by the use of the 'love' button to show support for opinions. In a thread entitled "Rocky Marriage" (forums > remrants group > discussion board > Rocky marriage, Friday, October 17) for example, the first post by a woman engaging in a trial separation received 367 'loves' within a few hours. After dozens of supportive messages, the original poster decided that her marriage was over and thanked her therapeutic community:

> "*Thank you all for all of the support. RAVELRY RULES!*" (Taterpie, Friday, October 17, 2014, forums > remrants group > discussion board > Rocky marriage).

The Ravelry community, here, is treated as a therapeutic safe space in which to seek advice and 'praise or criticism for specific actions' (Hirsch 1980), reflective of the therapeutic consumption of Local Stitch 'n' Bitch. The high level of emotional support provided and the ability to seek this guidance results in an environment of intimacy.

4.2.7 Intimacy in a Female-Led and -Dominated Consumption Community

Intimacy (Pearson 1982; 1983) is by its nature a difficult characteristic to identify. Demonstrations of intimacy may be so subtle as to be missed by all but those who exchange them (for example touches of the hands after hugging goodbye, quiet conversations within the main group chatter, or even 'knowing' smiles). Additionally, online intimacy may be achieved via private message. Even in the offline context, technology was used in this way; the author, for example, has received messages during Local Stitch 'n' Bitch meetings via mobile phone from members who were seated at a distance that did not allow for a private conversation.

Small intimacies such as a pat on the knee or on the arm are common in the group (Fieldnotes). Knitting lends itself to such intimacies as tiny stitches are studied side by side when, for

example, looking for the source of a mistake, or in the cramped pub environment where as many of the group as possible will squeeze together into the more comfortable booth seating. The tactile nature of the activity promotes this physical intimacy.

Emotional intimacy is also observable, generated perhaps by the emotional support offered by group members (see Section 4.2.5). This intimacy extends to openness in conversational topics. Delphine refers to the freedom to talk about intimate matters, "*body issues, joke about sex, and the grisly minutiae of pregnancy and giving birth*". She refers to this as "*"Balls out" conversations"* before wondering if there is *"a female equivalent to this expression"* (Delphine, Facebook Message). This recalls Green's (1998) work around female conversation, picking up on the idea that often the heavier topic is dealt with in a light-hearted way with the use of humour to introduce and develop topics which would otherwise be taboo. She references a willingness to talk frankly about many topics but joke about sex. For example, when discussing several members' partners who were training for a marathon, one group member mentioned that she was sexually frustrated due to her boyfriend's energy being diverted to race training, "*I've never been so frustrated in my life*." Another member joked "*Do you know what I would do for a night off?!*" as she was trying for a baby at the time. She told a funny story about having a heated argument with her husband which he then followed with, "so are we doing this?" (meaning having sex) (Fieldnotes). While the group laughed, sympathy was also expressed by means of light-hearted comments about the cluelessness of men and the closeness of the marathon. Affirmation is given to the women, their concerns are heard, and they are reassured.

Intimacy can also be seen in more subtle ways. Danielle states that in a knitting group based in a Back to Education/Adult Learning environment, she was the youngest person and felt quite out of place, describing it as '*dull and old-fashioned'* and causing her to feel like an '*awkward and rebellious teenager who was doing really weird things that the adults didn't understand."*

The author pointed out to Danielle that she was usually the youngest person at Stitch 'n' Bitch as well:

> *"No I didn't feel like the youngest, I felt the same age as you all, no I never felt young at Stitch 'n' Bitch … I assumed everyone was around my age, though I was probably one of the youngest ones there too, come to think of it. But I never felt that people who were really old, say in their thirties* [Interviewer interjects in horror and a quick discussion of how young 30 really is follows] *I would never have thought of, I would have assumed they were roughly 24 or 25"* (Danielle, Depth Interview).

Despite some members of the group being in their late thirties and early forties, Danielle feels that the Stitch 'n' Bitch women are her peer group. The emotional intimacy and comfort she feels in the group leads her to build her own image of them accordingly.

In the online sphere, the topic of intimacy is more difficult to assess, as internet-mediated communication presents a paradoxical intimacy through anonymity and yet distance, both geographic and through the use of the keyboard and screen (Kozinets 2006; Kozinets, Deolbec and Earley 2014). Nonetheless, we can certainly see that strong emotional bonds are formed within *"the [Ravelry/Knitting] community"* which then lends itself to emotional intimacy, up to an including welcoming 'strangers from the internet' into your home:

> *"Something which I find really amusing is that Flarkin and I met when she was soliciting opinions about online friendships and whether the internet leads to a lack of social interaction. Last summer, we shared side-by-side cabins in a park 2,000 miles away from my house with our families and had a wonderful time together. Her father was convinced we were nuts and that I might have been an axe murderer, as we hadn't previoiusly* [sic] *met in person. On that same trip, DeeDeeKnits, whom I had never previously met face to face, opened up her home to us and stayed up really late to welcome us in when we arrived, late and shaky, after traversing some extremely mountainous terrain"* (SquidWidget, Ravelry.com > forums > bubbo's pants group > discussion board, Sunday, May 26 2013).

The freedom to discuss potentially taboo topics and to be totally open is vital to the therapeutic process and both are evident in the Local Stitch 'n' Bitch group where both physical and emotional intimacy are apparent.

4.2.8 Socialisation in a Female-Led and –Dominated Consumption Community

Members of the Stitch 'n' Bitch group regularly socialise outside set meeting times. Hirsch (1980) and Pearson (1982; 1983) suggest that this is vital to the provision of therapy in a group context. Shaffer and Galinsky (1989) suggested that in self-help groups "*informal member to member contacts [were] sometimes viewed as more therapeutic than the formal group meetings*." In Local Stitch 'n' Bitch, smaller groups or pairs meet for shopping trips, yarn related or otherwise, for coffee and meals, as well as for larger life events such as weddings or christenings. For many years, an annual potluck Thanksgiving dinner was organised by the American members of the group.

Cosima states that socialising with friends is her primary motivation for joining the group; she is "*contented*" with her knitting but wants the "*social interaction"* of the group:

> *"Well I was quite contented from the knitting side, you know, to kind of use Youtube and the internet, Ravelry, and that, but I wanted to get to know people outside of the research department so it was a kind of a way of getting to know people who weren't in my workplace"* (Cosima, Depth Interview).

Sarah believes that the socialisation within the group is special and that not all knitting groups experience this bond:

> *"I've heard that it doesn't happen with a lot of groups, that they become friends outside the group"* (Sarah, Depth Interview).

However, Aryanna, who attends Knit Up, a different group, describes much the same socialisation occurring there:

> *"I suppose part of it is just socialising with like-minded people of a similar age you know and also in the Knit Up group there's other Americans or Canadians which is good for me like we can share experiences"* (Aryanna, Depth Interview).

Beth expresses an interestingly contradictory view when she initially states that she wishes the group could be more about the knitting as opposed to the '*drama*' she perceives to have permeated the group of late. Nonetheless, she longs for the earlier organised social events she enjoyed which were not specifically knitting related:

> *"One of my favourite things that we did as a group was a while ago, were the Thanksgiving dinners that we had at one of the group founder's apartments … it wasn't actually based around knitting, I can't even remember if people brought knitting…"* (Beth, Depth Interview).

In Section 4.2.7, we have already seen how online relationships in which intimacy is established can lead to socialisation in real life or "IRL", to use a common term in internet shorthand. There are many examples of off-line knitting meet-ups for those who meet through Ravelry including official Ravelry Meetups, but as in SquidWidget's experience in Section 4.2.7, sometimes these simply involve sharing, belonging and togetherness outside of knitting activities.

Often, meet-ups for Knitters centre on consumption experiences or SAE (Stash Acquisition Experiences) in the Knitting parlance (see Glossary of Knitting terms, Appendix 1). Group outings to the Dublin Knitting and Stitching show and the This is Knit Yarn Tasting have taken place. Sarah plans her family holidays around a large knitting show in the U.K.'s Lake District, Woolfest. Far from being problematic, as in AA or Weight Watchers, consumption is celebrated and shared. Sarah's dedication to knitting consumption is not viewed as fanatical or deviant, but rather reinforces her status as a maven. She acquires fresh knowledge and fresh

enthusiasm for the craft that further reinforce the enthusiasm of the whole group, thus reinforcing the therapeutic consumption experience.

Thanksgiving dinners often involved the production and consumption of traditional American foodstuffs as a form of both socialisation and emotional support for the home sick American ex-pats. Clothing swaps, where members brought clothes they no longer wore and offered them to the group, were also a favourite aspect of these events. As these swaps took place in the latter part of the evening when wine had been consumed and members were a little drunk, the 'fashion show' to lay claim to the articles of clothing was loud and giddy. Members would often wear the claimed items to Stitch 'n' Bitch in the following weeks and months and draw the former owner's attention to them thereby demonstrating their ongoing commitment to the group. Wearing each other's clothes could potentially be regarded as quite intimate by some, although, within the group, thrifting was something of a hobby and even a necessity for many members.

The socialising element of the therapy builds a deep loyalty to the brands that facilitate the social interactions of the group. Stitch 'n' Bitch members are loyal to 'their' pub, the Abbot's Ale House. When Kira, who now lives in the U.K., returned to Cork briefly, the group met for dinner. They then moved on to the Abbot's Ale House where they were greeted with confusion by the bar staff as it was not Wednesday, their usual meeting night. Similarly, when a member of KnitUp, now living in the U.S., visited, lunch was held at Electric, their usual knitting location. Members of KnitUp collaboratively created a jumper for the owner of Electric, the bar/restaurant at which they meet, at his request. Sweaters in particular are acknowledged to be something of a labour of love in the Knitting community, due to the investment of yarn and time (see The Curse of the Boyfriend Sweater in Section 4.2.9). This gift, therefore, has particular meaning for the Knitters and shows the high value they place on the business owner's facilitation of their group's socialisation.

4.2.9 Storytelling, Celebration and Encouragement in a Female-Led and – Dominated Consumption Community

Storytelling is often an important part of the therapeutic process. It has been suggested that humans have been wrongly categorised as Homo Sapiens (wise man) and should instead carry the species name Pan Narrans or the storytelling chimpanzee (Pratchett, Stewart and Cohen 2003). Narratives are how we make sense of the world around us and of ourselves; it is quite natural then that they would therefore take a pivotal role in therapy. Moisio and Beruchashvili (2010) when discussing Weight Watchers mention several types of confession (confession of pathology and confession of failure) and storytelling (autotherapeutic testimonials). However, the confessional model is tied to the spiritual and religious framing of overconsumption as sin in Weight Watchers, Alcoholics Anonymous and similar programmes. Without this sin, there is no need for confession.

Storytelling and testimonials in a different form, however, are observed within the group. Cognitive guidance is sought on yarn, tools, and patterns. This guidance is often provided in the form of consumer testimonials. A shared repertoire of tales from the group's past are retold time and time again – when Sarah couldn't stand to be around wool when she was pregnant, how Charlotte only ever made squares, how quickly Jennifer took to knitting, producing expert level projects within weeks. These anecdotes are used to entertain, to reassure, and to build a sense of community. Beyond the personal, knowledge of the Knitworld is passed on. New knitters are warned of the Curse of the Boyfriend Sweater, an urban legend that states that knitting a man a sweater will result in a breakup, and they are introduced to the vital vocabulary and slang of Knitters (See Appendix 1) through storytelling.

As in the world of AA and Weight Watchers, achievements are celebrated and encouragement is given for good Knitting behaviour. Knitters are asked to bring in finished objects (FOs) to show off to the rest of the group. Their hard work is praised, their identity as a Knitter is affirmed, and therapy is amplified by this. In contrast with many consumer cultures, and indeed

with most global cultures, there are no specific rites of passage or membership rites in the Knitworld. While a first sweater or first lace project may be praised or celebrated, a decision not to undertake such a project does not result in a lack of acceptance by the group. As seen in the Ravelry thread “Are you someone who knits or a Knitter”, the Knitting identity is defined by each Knitter for themselves, rather than by the community using an established task or rite (Ravelry.com > forums > patterns > Are you someone who knits or a Knitter).

Therapy is generated by and accessed by the members of the group through therapeutic consumption, by the provision of both tangible and emotional support. Both Local Stitch ‘n’ Bitch and the online Ravelry.com community have acknowledged the therapeutic benefit of the community they access through consumption. Knitters provide tangible assistance to each other in ways that go far beyond mere task-helping with knitting and extend into areas such as child-care, employment, relationships, and housing issues. Emotional support is also provided to deal with the stresses and upsets from these same issues. Through cognitive guidance and social reinforcement, an acceptable mode of being is established which facilitates the therapy. Extra-group socialising reinforces the close bonds and the therapy on offer, going far beyond that offered by crafting alone. The therapeutic process in the group is closely linked with consumption practices which facilitate the therapy. This consumption is not just of knitting-related products and brands but also includes local venues and other non-knitting brands.

4.2.10 Using Brands to Facilitate Therapy in a Female-Led and -Dominated Consumption Community

Stitch ‘n’ Bitch members use several brands to facilitate therapy. A selection of examples is given in Table 4.1 These, in keeping with the entrepreneurial spirit suggested by Goulding et al. (2013) as characteristic of a neo-tribal consumption community, include brands created by members of the community itself. Support of these brands, Dyad Fibres and Prolethean Yarns, while providing tangible assistance to the founders also affirms one’s commitment to the

group. In the case of Dyad, a much sought-after and rare commodity in the Knitworld, association with the brand and access to the product added significant social capital to group members. Other local non-fibre brands such as the Abbot Alehouse and Electric are adopted by the group and used to show affiliation and commitment. When Kira visited briefly after moving to the U.K., group members had dinner and then walked as a group to the Abbot's, as Kira felt no visit was complete without a trip to the bar. The barman greeted the group's arrival with mock confusion, calling *"It's not Wednesday!"* as the women filed in (Fieldnotes). This greeting makes it clear to both the group and the other patrons of the bar that these women belong. Similarly, the members of Knit Up collaborated to make a sweater for the owner of Electric, a huge investment of time and resources in knitting terms.

American brands such as Ravelry.com are used to demonstrate affiliation with the wider Knitworld. Purchasing the 'right' tools such as Knit Pro needles, and now Hiya Hiyas, demonstrate both financial commitment to the Knitting identity, and an acceptance of and reinforcement of Sarah's superior skills and knowledge and informal leadership.

Brand	Mechanism of Therapy	Examples
Dyad Fibres	Tangible Support, Social reinforcement	The group shops extensively from Dyad, and promotes the brand through social reinforcement. In turn, some of the cachet of the brand is transferred to the group.
Prolethean Yarns	Tangible Support	Alison and Cosima co-authored a pattern book with Aryanna to promote Proleathean Yarns, again in an exchange of tangible support. All parties receive additional social capital as published pattern authors as well as monetary compensation.
Abbot's Ale House	Socialisation	The Abbot's provides a location for the Knitters to meet and becomes an integral part of the Local Stitch 'n' Bitch experience. When Charlotte and Kira visit, it is not enough to merely knit together, the knitting must take place in the Abbot's Ale House.
Electric	Socialisation	Members of Knit Up display a similar loyalty to and affection for the Electric Bar and Restaurant which hosts their meet-ups.
Knit Pro needles	Cognitive guidance, Social reinforcement, Story-telling	Megan initially impressed Sarah with the use of Knit Pro needles. New members were gently guided to purchase these 'correct' tools to assume the Knitter identity. Their use was socially reinforced by re-tellings of Jennifer's pilgrimage across Arizona. Her determination to consume the correct brand is celebrated.
Hiya Hiya needles	Cognitive guidance, Social reinforcement	Sarah later guides members to see that, in fact, Hiya Hiyas are a superior tool and that to progress as a more serious Knitter, this brand must now be adopted. Again, this is socially reinforced consumption as more and more of the group switches over.

Knit Picks	Cognitive guidance, Social reinforcement, Celebration of consumption	Shopping from Knit Picks, a U.S. website which does not ship to Europe, was usually a joint online shopping experience relying on an intermediary located in the U.S. As shipping was free over $100, members encouraged each other to 'spend up'. The parcel would then be brought to the meeting to be opened and its contents dispersed, with consumption being celebrated.
Events such as WonderWool, Knit Camp, Yarn Tasting	Task helping, Cognitive Guidance, Social Reinforcement, Socialisation	Events such as Wonderwool, Knit Camp, and The Yarn Tasting, are Stash Acquisition Experiences (and potentially skill and knowledge acquisition experiences too). However, they also allow socialisation between diverse groups of knitters and facilitate the spread of knowledge from one group to another in the form of task helping (teaching new techniques and ways of being a Knitter). Members return from these events with new knowledge to share and to reinforce the other members' connection to the Knitworld.
Ravelry.com	Task helping, Tangible Support, Socialisation, Cognitive Guidance, Social Reinforcement	Ravelry.com is a social network and therefore offers opportunities for socialisation. More than this, it offers access to tangible support, cognitive guidance and social reinforcement from the whole Knitworld.

Table 4-1: Examples of Brands Used to Facilitate Therapy and the Associated Mechanism of Therapy.

The use of these brands certainly facilitates the craft of knitting, but using the right tool also serves as a marker of the Knitters 'in-group' status. Much in the same way that other communities might identify each other by a certain tattoo, jacket or ring, the Knitter can spot another by her insider knowledge of knitting needles. Within the Knitting community specifically, the brands serve an important role not just in affirming the Knitter identity but also in providing access to the therapeutic well-being on offer. The Hiya Hiya needles, for example, represent not just the highly skilled and discerning Knitter identity, but also the positive experience of social reinforcement. In this way, the brands come to symbolise and embody the sense of therapy that the members associate with the community.

4.3 Disruption of Therapy in a Female-Led and –Dominated Consumption Community

While all of the above aspects of therapy have been found to be present, the therapeutic consumption experience was not constantly present. Disruptions to the therapeutic nature of this female-driven consumption community were observed on several occasions throughout the fieldwork. Group cohesiveness broke down on occasion and for some members the break down disrupted access to the therapy otherwise provided by the group. Examples are provided in both the Local Stitch 'n' Bitch context and in the wider Knitting Community. In both cases, members experienced conflict which *'tainted'* (Beth, Depth Interview) the therapeutic effectiveness of the group.

Though conflict and, thus, disruption of therapy arose in both the offline and online contexts, it seems that given the strong social ties within the Local Stitch 'n' Bitch group, the experiences of disruption affected members of this group more deeply. In the Local Stitch 'n' Bitch group, a falling out between group members, Alison and Jennifer, was brought up by several members as their most negative experience with the group. It was, thus, an obvious choice as an illustrative example of therapeutic breakdown in the local field site. Issues around motherhood

were also a major source of tension within the group during the course of the study (O Sullivan and Richardson 2012c).

In choosing an illustrative example for the online context, several events which had scandalised the online knitting community, and were extensively discussed on Ravelry.com, were considered and investigated in some depth. Ultimately, the case of mismanagement and possible fraud around the 2010 Knit Camp at Stirling, in the U.K., was chosen as the primary example explored in this thesis. This event offered several advantages over others in that it was large scale and well publicised giving rise to large amounts of netnographic data. In addition, as an attendee, the author possessed contemporaneous notes and observations of the experience. Victims of other scandals and conflicts were often eager to talk about their experiences and to provide as much data as possible (in one case, supplying confidential legal documents), but, ultimately, it was found that the same processes of disruption and re-establishment of therapy were observed across incidents. The presentation of the Knit Camp example is intended to demonstrate this process in the online context.

4.3.1 Disruption of Therapy within the Stitch 'n' Bitch Group

The falling out between Alison and Jennifer, described by Jennifer as *"a big misunderstanding, blown out of proportion"* and by other members as "*a war*" (Beth, Depth Interview), seriously disrupted the therapy for some group members. Within a small group, any falling-out may upset the group dynamic, however, both these women were also highly active members of the group. Both women were ex-pat wives who could not work and who, at the beginning of the study, had no children. This left them with a large amount of free time and a relatively empty social life. Both women also lived in the City centre so it was natural for other members to meet with them while shopping for craft items. Both women displayed a high level of commitment to the group and were well regarded for that commitment.

When Jennifer and Alison had a falling out, the tension was palpable within the group. Members felt there was nowhere to turn to resolve the issue. Alison, at that time, felt she was in a leadership position as she was in charge of the text messaging account. Many of the group looked to Sarah for assistance; however, she seemed content to ignore the situation and remained friendly with both Alison and Jennifer outside the group. As there was no formalised authority figure to approach, much of the discontent simply found expression as private '*bitching*' (Sarah, Depth Interview).

For some members, this dispute led to disillusionment and to the loss of the therapeutic benefit of the group. For Beth, it '*tainted*' the group:

> *"[Jennifer] and [Alison], it seems like that's just a war and I don't want to be involved in it, I don't want to know about it, I don't want to deal with the drama that comes out of it, but I think that that has tainted a lot of the meetings of the knitting group so for a while I was not going because I was just like I have enough like issues in my own life I don't want to take on other people's and I don't want to see it play out in public" (*Beth, Depth Interview).

Eventually, the issue resolved itself without intervention. The birth of Alison's son and subsequent health issues led to her setting up an alternative day-time, weekend knitting group, Knit Up. Jennifer established friendships outside the group and, in time, moved outside the city and also cut her attendance. Later, she too became a mother. Beth describes the gradual re-establishment of therapy due to the abandonment of the 'war':

> *"I think it's calmed down recently, mostly because the two of them don't attend so much anymore"* (Beth, Depth Interview).

However, according to Beth, the therapy was not as accessible as previously:

> *"but the way that the group is now I think, I don't know I think people are more, given the drama there was, people hold themselves a bit more separate and we would by*

> *convention now talk about stuff of less substance when we're meeting"* (Beth, Depth Interview).

While, in this case, motherhood, inadvertently, helped to resolve the issue, it had previously proven to be a highly divisive matter in the group. This seemed to come to a head when there were three overlapping pregnancies in the group. Naturally, the topic of conversation between these women, Leda, Sarah and Delphine, was somewhat focused on this major life event. Indeed, as previously quoted, Delphine found this freedom to discuss the grisly details of pregnancy to be one of the most enjoyable aspects of the group.

However, some of the other women found this to be quite alienating. One member who was experiencing fertility issues felt that this was very insensitive to her, as she and one of the now pregnant women had shared a lot about their problems around conception. During one meeting she removed herself from sitting near them, explaining out of earshot that:

> *"I couldn't sit there,* [between two pregnant members and a recent mother] *and listen to that."*

While that member felt isolated due to her desire for a child, others found themselves left out by the lack of this desire. Some of the women (largely those in their 20's) began to refer to themselves as the "*non-breeders*" – to separate themselves further from those who longed for a baby or, indeed, from those who expressed any interest in the subject. Amongst themselves, the non-breeders began to express their resentment at being alienated in this way, for example, *"I can't believe I have to knit more baby crap"* [to another 'non-breeder' on being shown an ultrasound] (Fieldnotes). While delivered in a light-hearted way, the comment, nonetheless, illustrated a frustration at the perceived obligation to display interest in new motherhood. More vitriolic and blatant was the muttered *"You'd think she was the first person ever to have a baby"* delivered behind a first-time mother's back.

When Alison started her afternoon group, Knit Up, in a restaurant/bar, it was described dismissively by some as 'The Mom Group.' Designed to cater to those who couldn't stay out late or who needed somewhere kids were welcomed, it did resolve some of the tensions, allowing some members to both maintain an 'affiliation' with Stitch 'n' Bitch but also attend a group seen as more family friendly. When Alison engaged in recruiting for her group, others, including mothers, seemed baffled by the idea, saying:

> *"I don't want to spend my Saturday with toddlers."*

Some of the group expressed hurt at Alison's trying to 'poach' members (Field notes).

A perceived lack of cohesion, or *'a war'* (Beth, Depth Interview) within the group had the effect of diminishing the emotional support component of the therapeutic process. Members no longer felt assured of respect, empathy, and understanding within the community. To date there has been no 'forgiveness' between Alison and Jennifer. This then impacted on the socialisation aspect of the group as members had to decide which group members could be invited to various 'activities external to the group'. Inevitably, this led to an absence of the feelings of 'togetherness' and 'belonging' previously instrumental to therapeutic benefit.

4.3.2 Disruption of Therapy within the Wider Knitting Community

In the wider community, several scandals and frauds in the Knitting world have disrupted therapy. Interesting examples which emerged during the data-gathering phase of the study include Kerrie Allman publications, Mystical Yarns Creations and a Knit Picks hack (see Section 4.4). The scandals range from simple ineptitude to outright fraud and left members of the Knitting community hurt and shocked. Our group was personally touched by one of the largest scandals as the author and two Knitters who later joined Knit Up attended Knit Camp in 2010 in Stirling, Scotland. One of these Knit Up members who taught at the event is reported to be among those who suffered a financial loss.

Knit Camp attracted several thousand attendees from over 26 different countries over the course of a week-long event. In the weeks leading up to the event, two tutors dropped out and refunds or replacement classes were offered. Then, on July 26th, the Ravelry founders, Jess and Casey, failing to agree terms with the organiser, withdrew from the planned "Ravelry Weekend". This occurred one day before they were due to travel to the U.K. for a tour.

In her post in the Ravelry forums > For the Love of Ravelry > Site Announcements, Jess (FreckleGirl) stated:

> "*We're sad to say that we won't be attending Knit Camp in Stirling this August. Last month, we had to cancel Sarah and Mary-Heather's trip to the UK because things were still uncertain (and airfare is expensive!) and now Casey and I aren't going to be attending the event either. We received the first draft of our contract only recently and although we attempted to find a happy medium, in the end we were unable to resolve open issues in the contract to the satisfaction of both parties. As a result of these unresolved issues, it will be impossible for us to attend the event…"*

Despite these initial warning signs, participants remained hopeful as is evident in the following post from Donna Druchunas, an expert in Estonian and Latvian lace and a tutor at Knit Camp, in response to Jess's post:

> "*Hey, this will be a great event. I'm teaching there! Well, I plan to have a great time and some other wonderful teachers AND bunches of great knitters will be there. Those of us on Rav should meet up even though it's not an "official" event and not be too frustrated that everything is not working out exactly as planned. It's a huge amount of work to pull off something like this and glitches are to be expected. Just my 2-cents*" (druchunas, forums > for the love of ravelry > UK Knit Camp 2010 & UK Ravelry day 2010).

Others felt resentful towards those tutors who dropped out:

> *"Whatever their reasons, many people have based their holidays on this event and going to feel most let down. Bad business practice for all those who were supposed to appear. What happened to commitment?"* (LizzieD, forums > kilmarnock knitters group > discussion board > UK Knit Camp 2010 & Ravelry Weekend).

It was not until the day before the event was due to start, when the author arrived in Stirling, that it became apparent that even as attendees were travelling, major cracks in the organisation of the event had appeared. Whispers began that evening about some of the tutors having visa issues on arrival. As wifi was unavailable in the college and pay access to the internet was limited, it appeared that people on the ground in Stirling had far less access to information than those on Ravelry.

It gradually became clear that, in fact, two of the knitting teachers on arriving from the United States, Lorilee Beltman and Debbie Stoller (Author of The Stitch 'n' Bitch Handbook), had been deported, Lorilee back to the U.S.A. and Debbie Stoller to the Netherlands. Immigration officials had made an exception for Stoller by allowing her to travel to the Netherlands as she has Dutch citizenship and, in addition, has an intense fear of flying. The rest of the tutors had rerouted to Dublin to await further instructions. On hearing of their fate from her fellow tutors, Knitty Editor, Amy Singer, declined to board her flight to the U.K.

Fieldnotes taken at the time reflect both the anxiety and the optimism of attendees who were already onsite:

> *"There is a lot of stress, strife and worry here, as there is still confusion over the visas. While people are sort of determined to make the best of it and put on a brave face, it keeps coming up. The abiding sentiment is "it's so exciting, if it works"* (Fieldnotes).

And later, after visas were obtained and classes rescheduled:

> *"Some people are very angry but most are just happy the rest of the week is sorted"* (Fieldnotes made on Monday, August 9th, 2010).

It seemed that people were attempting to console and reassure each other as attendees bonded quickly to spread information and offer a space to vent. Unfortunately, issues continued all week, with poor communication, insufficient materials and handouts, unsuitable teaching space, cancellations, and rescheduling, leaving some attendees in "*tears of upset and frustration*" (heathwitch, Tuesday, August 31 2010, forums > uk knit camp rav day 2010 social group group > discussion board > Tutors deported?):

> *"There are lots of signs but it's a very confusing layout and not at all logical. And some classrooms were changed so folk were in rooms wondering where their tutor was while the tutor was in a room with no students! Oh and one room number on the schedule didn't actually exist!"*(allybea, Tuesday, August 10 2010, forums > uk knit camp rav day 2010 social group group > discussion board > Thread for classes actually happening and tutors).

> *"That whole thing was like watching a slow-motion train wreck. It was painful and embarrassing on so many levels - and, I was just a bystander"* (smorancie, Saturday, October 9 2010, forums > yarnthropology group > discussion board > kindness of knitters-knitting is srs bidnez).

The organiser, Jo Watson, made several unapologetic statements online, on Ravelry, and on the Knit Camp 2010 Blog. Most of these have since been deleted. She heavily moderated the "uk knit camp and ravelry weekend 2010" forum, locking and deleting threads and posts. This resulted in the setting up of a "uk knit camp rav day 2010 social group" forum. In response to her repeated legal threats, including one against Lorilee Beltman for discussing her deportation, Jo Watson was referred to as "The Disorganiser", "She who must not be named" or simply "Her".

In September, it became clear that most of the tutors had not been paid for their work, nor had they been refunded travel expenses:

> *"My understanding is that only 1 tutor has so far been paid but they are unwiling to say*

> *anything here or on any public forum as it may jeapordise their chances of actually getting paid at some time in the future*" fibreclaireUK, Thursday, September 9 2010, forums > uk knit camp rav day 2010 social group group > discussion board > Refunds and orders thread only [mistakes in original].

The community began to feel increasing anger towards Jo Watson, feeling that she was not so much '*over-ambitious'* (http://knitcamp2010.blogspot.ie/2010/08/reflections.html) as incompetent:

> "*This has been described by various ravellers as a 'car crash'. It isnt - its a Hit and Run..."* fibreclaireUK, Monday, September 13 2010, forums > uk knit camp rav day 2010 social group group > discussion board > Refunds and orders thread only.

The attendees who were not owed money began to express guilt:

> *"I am on the edge of feeling guilty, perhaps as in survivor guilt, because I'm okay and there are people who really are not okay as a result of the event"* (PatMS, Saturday, September 18 2010, forums > uk knit camp rav day 2010 social group group > discussion board > Refunds and orders thread only).

Thus, the therapeutic benefit of this event, even for Knitters who had enjoyed Knit Camp, was retrospectively voided. The disorganisation and issues at the event disrupted the expected therapeutic benefits of the event; the aftermath even more so. On finding out that Knit Camp had, at the very least, been a financial disaster and, potentially, a fraud, those who had enjoyed the event found their memories tainted.

In both the online and the offline context, we see a breakdown in the therapeutic value for group members after these events which were extraordinary and traumatic for those involved. Offline, the war between Alison and Jennifer led to a loss of trust, and a breach of what had previously been considered a safe space "*tainted*" (Beth, Depth Interview) the group, resulting in a loss of intimacy. Beth describes people being more standoffish, "*hold*[ing] *themselves a bit*

more separate" (Depth Interview). This awkward dynamic resulted in less socialisation. For the Local Stitch 'n' Bitch members, smaller sub-groups were invited to non-knitting meet ups. In the online realm, several of those most affected by Knit Camp describe how it altered their attitude to Ravelry and to the online and offline Knitting community. Users describe feeling "vulnerable", "hurt", "angry" and "guilty":

> "*Embarrassed, shading into feeling really bad and into the edges of guilt*" (PatMS, forums > uk knit camp rav day 2010 social group > discussion board > Refunds and orders thread only Saturday, September 18 2010).

> *"It leaves everyone in a bad place. Feeling a bit vulnerable too, I imagine"* (EmmaCo, Monday, August 9 2010, forums > uk knit camp rav day 2010 social group > discussion board > Tutors deported?).

Members expressed discomfort with communicating even within the previously therapeutic space of Ravelry:

> *"The hurt and betrayed part of me wants to be childish and selfish and keep quiet"* (JaneKAL, forums > uk knit camp and ravelry weekend 2010 > discussion board > Yarngathering rides again, Tuesday, November 16 2010).

or even on their own personal blogs:

> *"This follow-up post is a hard one to write"* (Deb Robson, October 01, 2010, UK Knit Camp: the parts I don't want to think about, http://independentstitch.typepad.com/).

As with the offline Local Stitch 'n' Bitch community, the wider Knitting community experienced an erosion of trust which reduced the therapeutic effect of group interactions:

> *"I think it's really* sad *that, as a result of this debacle, we're all a little less trusting*" (EmmaCo, Monday, September 20 2010, forums > uk knit camp rav day 2010 social group > discussion board > This and That (was Refunds?)).

Just as the '*war*' between two members resonated throughout the Local Stitch 'n' Bitch group, the scandal of Knit Camp affected even those not directly involved in the event:

> *"The knit-world is a community. Hurt one branch, the whole tree suffers"*
> (Niseema, Saturday, August 7 2010, forums > uk knit camp rav day 2010 social group > discussion board > Tutors deported?).

In both cases, there is less socialisation due to an awkward dynamic (avoidance of certain members or disinclination to post in the community) and in the online realm particularly, many participants voiced concern that there would be less inclination towards tangible assistance in terms of being '*less trusting'* of new enterprises or future events.

4.4 Restoration of Therapy in a Female-Led and –Dominated Consumption Community

Therapy is restored by the Knitters in two ways, through non-knitting consumption and through knitting. The mechanisms used to re-establish therapy are similar to those used initially to provide it. The lack of a formal leadership structure presents a problem and delays the restoration of therapy when the socially selected informal leader abdicates responsibility. Consumption of craft items and socialisation played a large role in re-establishing therapy disrupted by tensions. However, in the case of the more explosive and extraordinary disruptions (the 'war' or Knit Camp), therapy was re-established through tangible assistance, followed by social reinforcement and emotional support. The craft of knitting also provides a safe space and common ground to retreat to during conflicts. Knitting itself has been shown to be soothing and therapeutic and also is a 'safe' topic of conversation if things become heated.

In the Local Stitch 'n' Bitch group, therapy was re-established over time. Ultimately, the departure of both Alison and Jennifer from the group resolved the tension, but, even prior to their leaving, some evidence of 'healing' was already apparent. It was made clear, though in

subtle ways, to the 'warring' parties that their behaviour was upsetting and inappropriate (social reinforcement). In many cases, this simply presented as a refusal to acknowledge the feud and dismissiveness towards the anger of its parties. In doing this, members may, once again, have been following the example of Sarah, who continued to socialise with both Alison and Jennifer and who, when approached by other members seeking guidance on how to deal with the matter, advised others to 'stay out of it' and declared that it was 'nothing to do with' her.

Management of '*conflict and cooperation'* is one of the key roles for leaders within the therapeutic self-help group (Schaffer and Galinsky 1989, 260) and in the case of the conflicts outlined, the lack of this management has impacted the groups' therapeutic process. The conflict between Jennifer and Alison in Stitch 'n' Bitch would, in a conventional support group, have been resolved by a leader or moderator. Nevertheless, the group rejects attempts to impose a more formal leadership structure (described more fully in Section 4.5.3). The socially selected leader, Sarah, when approached, rejects responsibility in this situation.

The tension surrounding motherhood has also been largely resolved, in this case through socialisation. Jennifer and Amelia threw American style baby showers for Sarah and Alison respectively, attended by many other group members in each case. Similarly, almost all group members were present at the party to celebrate the Christening of Sarah's second son. This inclusion of the non-breeders helped to repair intra-group unity and, thus, therapeutic benefit. Thus shared consumption of food, drink and, in the case of the baby showers, craft items, helped to re-establish therapy. The strong bonds previously established between members through their therapeutic consumption resulted in harmony re-emerging over time through careful observation of socialisation rituals.

In the case of wider knitting scandals, the Knitting community rallies to help victims where possible, and to console them, if help is not possible. In the case of Knit Camp for example, Ravelry users rendered tangible assistance by fundraising and "*doing something constructive*"

(Lizzy39, Wednesday, October 6 2010, forums > uk knit camp rav day 2010 social group group > discussion board, Message about Jo's health). One attendee, "Jane KAL" on Ravelry, set up a Tutors' Fund through an accountant whose fees she personally paid. The fund was to be provided to the tutors with no strings attached, and they determined amongst themselves how the money would be divided and distributed:

> *"Many people have expressed a wish to help with the situation regarding non-payment of teaching fees and travelling expenses to most of the Knit Camp Tutors (Instructors), so a fund account has now been set up. Respect & privacy for tutors and security & confidence for donors are paramount. Therefore the fund is being managed by Accountants, the cost of which has been donated, so every penny/cent donated will go straight into the Tutor Fund.*
> *The Knit Camp Tutors have got together as a group and all money donated and raised will be paid by the accountant directly to each individual within the group. The group as a whole will decide distribution and this information will remain private*" (JaneKAL, Monday, October 4 2010, forums > uk knit camp rav day 2010 social group group > discussion board > KNIT CAMP TUTOR GROUP FUND (cross posted to several forums).

Although the dispersal of funds was confidential, one of the affected tutors, Lucy Neatby, gave an insight on her blog as to what her priorities were:

> *My hope is that contributions could be made to first and foremost clearing the travel debts and interest on credit cards for those in this dire situation* (http://happystitches.wordpress.com, Sept 21, 2010).

Through this tangible assistance to those most affected, the Knitters could assuage their guilt and, perhaps, access therapeutic benefit again. Others offered assistance through consumption, 'destashing' prized skeins with the express intent of donating the proceeds to the fund, and several indie dyers auctioned yarn on eBay with all proceeds going to the fund:

> *"Jen from Fyberspates , QueenieAmanda , Poshdee , Joy knitgoddessyarns and Debbie skeinqueen and myself have all got together and will donate a skein of yarn each to be put together in a lovely squishy bundle and auctioned on eBay, for the tutor fund :)"* (Babylonglegs, Tuesday, October 5 2010, forums > uk knit camp rav day 2010 social group group > discussion board > Indie Whip round for Tutor Fund).

For some, this charitable tangible assistance and assistance through consumption resulted in a repair of the damaged trust in the community; however, not all of Ravelry responded positively to the idea of financial support for the out of pocket tutors. In general, while U.K. knitters were very much in favour of the Tutor Fund, most U.S. knitters were very much against a "*bail out*":

> *"There is a clear split between people living in the two countries that form the majority of posts and pm's. As suggested by GreenMaggie, most of those who are very enthusiastic about being given a conduit to safely send a gift/present to a number of individuals are from the UK, and most of those who have expressed strong views on the 'morality/concept of personal gifting from one group of individuals to another are from the USA. (although some of the latter has turned out to be due to terminological differences between countries for such words as 'fund', and once that has been explained some have indicated a change in their view). There have been a few people from each country with the opinions shared by a number of people from the other country. Some of the loveliest pm's I've had, that have been a real balm to my soul after a number of not nice to read pm's, have been from Americans"* (JaneKAL, Monday, October 11 2010, forums > yarnthropology group > discussion board > kindness of knitters- knitting is srs bidnez).

The fund closed in November 2010 with enough money to cover the tutors' out of pocket expenses but not their teaching fees. Additionally, members with expertise in law and bankruptcy provided both tangible assistance and cognitive guidance as to how to proceed in

reclaiming lost money. Once the community had contributed what they could financially, they then switched to providing emotional support:

> "[*C]onsider yourselves Knit Camp Veterans..I hope most of you made it through unscathed and for those who sadly didn't I hope the wounds have healed*" (Littlelou1975, Wednesday, August 3 2011, forums > uk knit camp rav day 2010 social group group > discussion board > Yarn Gathering / Jo rides again).

The author refrained from posting her thoughts on the whole saga until March 2011, when Jo Watson posted a further 'apology' which sought once again to deflect blame onto others. It was suggested later that she was attempting to gauge the response to a possible appearance at the 'Wonderwool' event as a vendor. It was further rumoured that Wonderwool management refused to allow her take part:

> *"Firstly, I can't believe that Jo Watson would think it was a good idea to come on here and open up this can of worms again. But then clearly Jo's idea of normal or acceptable behaviour is different to most people's.*
> *I feel like i have a confession to make. I went to knit camp and had a wonderful time. And I feel terrible about it. Because my good time was had at other people's expense. It makes me feel awful that the tutors for the classes I enjoyed so much were not paid. Or that the friends I made are still left without refunds for goods and services not received. Even though none of that is my fault, and even though I got several people to fund my trip as a birthday present, and used savings to pay for additional classes and buy things at the market, I still contributed the very small amount I could to the tutors' fund.*
> *I would suggest that this is a normal, empathetic response, and if I was responsible for this FIASCO I would not be able to live with myself until every single person was repaid, even if I was paying out pennies per week.*
> *It was not until I read this thread that I realised the University was not paid either. How on earth could that have happened? I understand the books coming up short, or doing*

the maths wrong or whatever, but I paid a lot of money for my accommodation, my meals and my classes - as did every other attendee. If this money didn't go to those providing the accommodation and food, and didn't go to the tutors - Where the hell did it go?

Poor planning is one thing, perhaps we could write off the visa issue (though those who were detained by immigration probably cannot), or the handicapped-unfriendly accommodation and campus, or the fact that those with special dietary needs occasionally went without meals (!), or the constantly moving venues, or the lack of yarn for classes, the fact that notes weren't being printed out, all the many problems at the event…. Those things, they are screw ups. They could be resolved by good communication and open and available organisers on the ground. But the level of missing money is not a screw up. It seems like either gross mismanagement, willful negligence or even fraud." [Errors in original] (Helena, Monday, April 4 2011, forums > uk knit camp and ravelry weekend 2010 group > discussion board > An apology, again).

This statement received strong support from the Ravelry community expressed through 'agree's and 'love's. Thus, both emotional support and social reinforcement were offered. The Ravelry brand provided a locus for this re-establishment of therapy in the wider Knitting community, facilitating both the socioemotional support required for consumers to negotiate their complicated emotional responses to the crisis and the charitable tangible assistance provided to the tutors.

This approach, tangible assistance followed by emotional support, is mirrored in the Knitting community's response to other scandals surrounding a yarn dyer who faked her own death (Mystical Yarn Creations) and a publisher who failed to pay bills or return samples and who sold on patterns without permission (Kerrie Allman Publishing). It is interesting to see that though initially Ravellers voiced concern that tangible assistance would no longer be available, particularly, to those getting started in the industry, they, nonetheless, offered tangible assistance to rectify the issues as best they could. Similarly, the 'non-breeders' of Local Stitch

‘n’ Bitch ultimately attended the baby showers and produced the expected “*baby crap*”, in order to celebrate their pregnant members.

Of course, it is impossible to observe those things that failed to happen due to the disruption – for example, it is possible that social events in the pre-planning stages in both the online and offline communities were abandoned due to a lack of confidence in the groups. What is clearly observable, however, is that rather than allow the ‘trust’ to be eroded and the therapeutic benefit of either community to be destroyed, members re-engaged in the therapeutic processes and refocused on the community, particularly through the therapeutic mechanisms of gift-giving, tangible assistance, and social reinforcement. In many cases, this occurred through consumption, either by hosting elaborate baby showers at the local level or purchasing items which benefitted the ‘tutor’s fund’ at the online level.

It is also clear that knitting itself functions as an important mechanism to negotiate the divides in the Local Stitch ‘n’ Bitch group and in the Knitworld community.

The author recalls a conversation with Crystal in which they discussed their respective issues with housing at the time. Both were seeking a new home. Crystal laid out her ‘wish list’ for a home – a bathtub and a downstairs toilet, both to facilitate children, and in the vicinity of the town north of the city where she currently lived. The author’s wish list focused on a garden suitable for her dogs and a good aspect, ideally south facing, in the southern suburbs. Despite these different priorities, the conversation covered much common ground including the convenience of a real estate app and the many failings of various estate agents. The conversation came to a sudden awkward halt when Crystal raised the issue of budget, and the author gave her preferred price range as a number in the low hundreds. Crystal became confused and asked, ‘per month?’ Crystal had simply assumed the author was looking to rent a property, while the author had assumed Crystal was purchasing a home and would automatically know to add ‘thousand’ after the figure she had given. The economic disparity between the two women had suddenly been laid bare. After a brief pause, Crystal referred to

the WIP (Work in Progress, see Appendix 1) in the author's hands and asked a question about it. The conversation resumed. Knitting is a safe space to retreat to in order to avoid potential conflicts or embarrassments.

Potentially, more than this, the ongoing sharing of knitting issues ensures that the context for sharing other issues is perpetuated. A knitting project may represent a significant investment of both money and time to the knitter, and even carry quite a strong emotional attachment. Having asked for advice or proffered opinions on a high-value knitting item, it becomes far easier to now share more personal problems. This creates an ongoing self-perpetuating process of knitting leading to therapy which in turn re-contextualises knitting and makes it more meaningful to the members of the group. As the group knits together, they become more 'close knit' on an emotional level.

Figure 4.2 shows how shared consumption of knitting creates an environment where members build trust and then confer therapy on each other in a cyclical process.

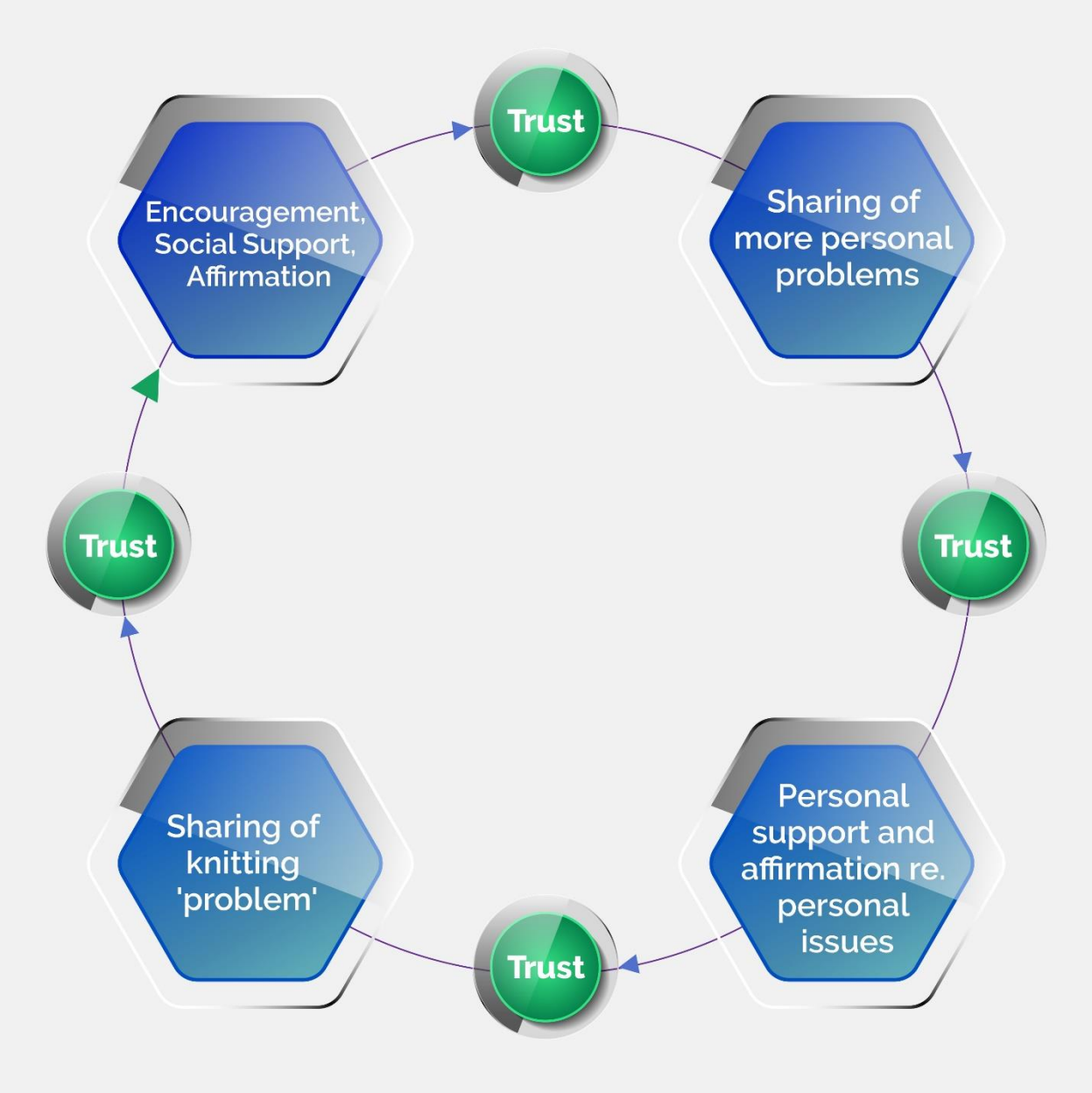

Figure 4-2: Therapy Embedded Within and Reproduced by Shared Consumption of Knitting

Jessica Forbes, one of the founders of Ravelry.com, describes a similar process in the online environment. In a 2011 interview, Jessica describes her dislike of pregnancy websites where she

could not relate to the other women. She contrasts this with the intimacy she perceives on Ravelry:

> *"The people in the pregnancy groups on Ravelry, I get them—we have a connection via craft that makes a first impression, and that gets us comfortable enough to start talking about other things"* (Manjoo, 2011).

The commonalities of knitting result in an intimacy and trust which promotes the discussion of deeper, more personal issues. The tangible and social support received then deepens the bonds in the community serving to reinforce the group's therapeutic nature.

4.5 Other Characteristics of the Female-Led and –Dominated Consumption Community

There are other characteristics of the Knitworld which although not directly linked with therapeutic provision are recognisable as key characteristics of a self-help support group (Jacobs and Goodman 1989; Shaffer and Galinsky 1989). Local Stitch 'n' Bitch, therefore, as well as the wider Knitting community, appears to meet many of the criteria for a self-help community. The community has open-ended membership and no fees, the power resides in the membership, and the structure is egalitarian although some members possess more social capital than others. There is also some evidence of fierce independence, although this is limited by a lack of attempts at external rule. These characteristics, though not directly linked to the provision of therapy, nonetheless provide us with further examples of ways in which this consumption community resembles a therapeutic support group.

4.5.1 Open-Ended Membership

Membership is open ended (Shaffer and Galinsky 1989) but rarely constant; members may or may not attend on a given week and membership of the group changes over time due to the liminal nature of the lives of many of the group members. Cosima and Kira, for example, finished their Ph.D.s and took postdoctoral positions in the U.K. Jennifer and Danielle moved to towns further from the city and felt unable to commute on a weeknight. The group timeline confirms that [see Appendix 4] membership composition has altered significantly over time. Members emigrate, move away or have less time due to family commitments; however, their departure does not disrupt the therapy. Danielle takes comfort in the fact that the group continues without her:

> "*I can pick it up anytime I need to and go back any time, there isn't anything stopping me except inconvenience, travel or time.*"

Indeed, as previously indicated, when Kira visited from the U.K. in 2013 and when Charlotte visited from the U.S. in 2016, the group arranged dinner and Stitch 'n' Bitch sessions on days other than Wednesday to facilitate their attendance.

Membership of Ravelry is also open-ended. As with any other social network site, one can simply sign up and forget about it. Indeed, in the early days of Ravelry, there was a waiting list system in place as the demand for membership outstripped the server capacity of the website which was still in Beta testing. Many members, including the author, reported having forgotten what they had signed up for by the time they received membership. Members can be as involved or uninvolved in the community as they wish.

4.5.2 No Fees

There are *no fees* to join the Local Stitch 'n' Bitch group. The Vibes and Scribes knitting group did ask for a suggested 20 cents donation towards tea and biscuits, however, most of the groups attended have been held in locations where refreshments could be purchased. Joining Ravelry is also free, although a small annual fee (currently $5) can be paid to gain access to extra services on the site. These include the ability to upload photos directly in forum posts rather than using an external hosting service.

4.5.3 Power Residing in the Membership and Freedom of Expression

Local Stitch 'n' Bitch has an egalitarian structure, with *power residing in the membership*. Leadership within the group is informal and linked to social capital. Social power, discussed previously, is heavily weighted towards those with a high skill set and who demonstrate a high level of commitment to the group.

The group supports the *freedom of expression* of all members, and as Delphine describes, she feels free to talk about subjects like '*the grisly minutiae of pregnancy and giving birth'* which might be taboo in other places. The opinions of some members of the group, inevitably, carry more weight due to their higher level of social capital. Sarah, for example, has variously been called "*The Mammy*" (PO), "*The Knitting Buddha*" (Jennifer, Depth Interview) and even "*Knitler*" (Jennifer, Depth Interview; Siobhan, Depth Interview). However, when an attempt at establishing a formalised leadership structure was made by some members, it was gently rejected.

Charlotte occupied the most formalised leadership position within the group. Despite being one of the least skilled knitters (never progressing beyond knit squares), her commitment was undeniable. She founded the group, organised meetings via text message, hosted social events

such as Thanksgiving and despite moving to the U.S. in 2010 maintains a presence on the Facebook page where she is a moderator.

Charlotte describes giving Alison responsibility for the text message mailing list as having "*handed SnB … over to"* her in 2011 (Charlotte, email, 2014). However, many members were unhappy with Alison at this time due to her falling out with Jennifer which had been very disruptive for the group. Additionally, while Alison's commitment to the group had previously been extremely strong, she was by then expecting a baby and experiencing a difficult pregnancy. Gradually, communication had moved to Facebook and, eventually, Alison made the decision that the text messaging service was redundant. In a non-confrontational way, the group had rejected Charlotte's appointed successor.

In contrast, the worldwide Knitting community is largely centred around Ravelry.com which does have a professional leadership structure. Referred to as the Ravelry PTB (Powers That Be), Casey and Jess Forbes, the husband and wife team who started Ravelry, and their employees occupy a leadership position. There is some limitation placed on freedom of expression on the main boards at Ravelry, as there are rules against any discussion of religion or politics, and against the use of swear words. However, only the 'Big Six' main boards are restricted in this way. Members can join any of thousands of other forums which have almost complete autonomy. In fact, some users have worried that it may be too open:

> *"so I try really hard to be open-minded when it comes to other folks and their little groups on Rav, right? But I'm sorry, I just completely freaked at the submissive wifestyle that recently started. Am I being too judgemental?"* (Nancyyarnwoman, April 10, 2008, forums > this is what a feminist knits like > discussion board > new group-"submissive wifestyle"--freaking me out!).

4.5.4 Fierce Independence, Early Isolationism, Cautious Cooperation

The Local group has had little opportunity to be fierce about its independence from external rule (Jacobs and Goodman 1989), as at no point in the study has anyone attempted to impose external rule. The closest Local Stitch 'n' Bitch has come to this might have been in August 2010 when the author showed them some samples she had received of Stitch 'n' Bitch founder Debbie Stoller's new yarn line. As usual, new acquisitions were shared with the group. It might be expected that the members would revere Debbie Stoller as the author of The Stitch 'n' Bitch Handbook (2003). Instead, the yarn was universally criticised as being '*tacky*', '*boring*' and '*nothing special*' (Fieldnotes).

At Knit Camp, the author observed that in one of the initial meetings the organiser attempted to introduce a 'no-swearing rule' for the event. While the timing of attempting to impose rules on the attendees, during a meeting about the tutor's visa issues and classes being rescheduled (see Section 4.3.2) doubtless contributed to the annoyed response, Knitters bristled at being told what to do. While much of the discussion leaving the 'meeting' centred around the more serious organisational issues, many attendees also commented on what they saw as a disrespectful and infantilising diktat. In particular, the organiser's right to make such a rule was questioned, with people for example asking, 'who does she think she is to tell us what we can and can't say?' This rejection of the authority of the organiser by the attendees at this event shows a strong inclination toward independence.

On the worldwide stage, the Knitting community has had several of these experiences. An example of this is the Knitting community's 'outraged' reaction to the U.S Olympic Committee's perceived mocking of knitting on receipt from that Committee of a 'cease and desist' letter over the use of the term Ravelympics (Chen 2012). There is limited evidence of shifting from early isolationism towards cautious co-operation with external powers (Jacobs and Goodman 1989), for the same reason. In the egalitarian Knitting community there is limited example of external powers. The founders of Ravelry began the site as Jess desired a tool to communicate with

other Knitters and organise knitting knowledge. Thus even those who are arguably the most powerful players in the Knitworld have come from an internal position.

While the findings that Local Stitch 'n' Bitch and Ravelry have no associated fees, or are independent, or open-ended may seem incidental, these findings further demonstrate adherence to a pattern of therapeutic provision more commonly seen in a support group. This further supports the idea of the principal meanings of the female-led and –dominated tribe being therapeutic and of a therapeutic consumption process taking place.

4.6 Negative findings: Other Potential Meanings in the Female-Led and -Dominated Consumption Community

The literature suggests several other potential meanings behind the Knitworld and Local Stitch 'n' Bitch. A large number of papers have been published in various fields discussing the feminist underpinnings of, or political meanings behind the revival in knitting and, particularly, the popularity of Stitch 'n' Bitch (Alkenbrack 2010; Bratisch and Brusch 2011; Groeneveld 2010; Myzelev 2009; Pace 2007; Pentney 2008; Portwood-Stacer 2005; Pritash 2014; Robertson 2007; Wallace 2013; Winge and Stalp 2014). Similarly, Thompson and Üstüner (2015), in one of the few studies of a female-led and –dominated consumption community, ascribe a subversive and progressive motivation to roller derby participants (derby grrrls).

Minahan and Cox (2006, 3) produced a '*preliminary*' and '*exploratory*' paper on the meanings behind membership of Stitch 'n' Bitch. A graduate student attended Stitch 'n' Bitch meetings in Melbourne, Australia, in an effort to identify members' motivations for attending the group. Based on this student's participant observational data and interviews, five possible motivations for affiliation with the group and a suggested agenda for future research in this area were arrived at. In addition to the progressive or feminist themes proposed by others, their agenda for future research suggested that the themes of ironic consumption and nostalgic consumption deserved further scrutiny. The author had initially considered that their agenda

for future research would serve as an ideal starting point for this study and therefore examined the data using the suggested themes as lenses. However, following the in-depth, ethnographic study undertaken, little supporting evidence for most of Minahan and Cox's suggested meanings was found. The fifth suggested theme, remedial, defined by the authors as "*remedying the individualism of the present Information Society through collective recreation*" (Minahan and Cox 2006, 13), was considered to be too narrow to describe the therapeutic consumption observed in the Knitting community.

4.6.1 An Absence of Feminist, Progressive or Political Meanings

Debbie Stoller (2003) in the Stitch 'n' Bitch Handbook, explicitly explains that the meanings she ascribes to her knitting are third-wave feminist, and states that she is reclaiming markers of femininity which have been denigrated. Thompson and Üstüner (2015) similarly ascribe a progressive meaning to Roller Derby grrrls who they believe are seeking to *"jam the cultural hegemony"* (Thompson and Üstüner 2015, 237) and through parody, irony and humour engage in gender resignification. Multiple authors have ascribed a similar meaning to the Knitworld and to those who identify as Stitch 'n' Bitch members, or have similarly explored areas of craftivism and femininity in knitting (Alkenbrack 2010; Bratisch and Brusch 2011; Groeneveld 2010; Myzelev 2009; Pace 2007; Pentney 2008; Portwood-Stacer 2005; Pritash 2014; Robertson 2007; Wallace 2013; Winge and Stalp 2014).

All participants in the long interview portion of the study were given a page from the Stitch 'n' Bitch handbook to read and to comment on [See Appendix 5]. While Kelly (2014) found that over half of her research participants saw a connection between knitting and feminism, in this study, only two participants, Danielle and Siobhan, had given any thought to knitting as a feminist act.

Siobhan was aware that Stitch 'n' Bitch had a feminist objective and felt knitting had been "*recontextualised*" in a progressive way. In contrast to the other members of the group, however, Siobhan's mother has been active in feminist politics and Siobhan herself has been involved in multiple feminist groups. Siobhan states that her philosophy around 'girling' and feminism is *"Do what you want but just think about why you're doing things, you know?"* It is, therefore, possible that Siobhan, given her lifetime of involvement with the feminist movement, is simply more inclined to view life through a feminist lens.

Danielle, on the other hand, was unaware of the group's stated positioning but felt that the group presented as feminist '*more organic*[ly]'. While unaware that the Stitch 'n' Bitch movement was ostensibly expressly feminist, she felt that the group promoted feminism almost incidentally. She expressed a high degree of awareness around *"the connotations of taking up knitting and the ramifications of taking up knitting"* particularly, to assuage the guilt she felt at that time around being a homemaker and "*a traditional wife*".

Most of the Knitters who participated in the study were unaware of Debbie Stoller's feminist ideology, including Charlotte who had founded three Stitch 'n' Bitch groups:

> *'Em, I just did it because it was something I was introduced to and it seemed like a really easy way to try and create a group of friends"* (Charlotte, Depth Interview).

Sarah, the co-founder of the Local group, felt the same way:

> *"I did not think it [was a feminist movement], I still wouldn't necessarily think it"* (Sarah, Depth Interview).

Even after reading Debbie Stoller's account of her motivation, Sarah still feels that the group is not feminist in nature. For some of the participants even the idea of a feminist ideology was irrelevant:

> "*I don't spend a lot of time thinking about myself as a feminist*" (Rachel, Pilot Interview).

> "*I do not consider myself to be a feminist*" (Alison, Email, Feb 9, 2012).

While Kelly (2014) suggests that knitters could perhaps '*be participating in a larger feminist project without articulated intention'*, this strips knitters of their agency in a decidedly unfeminist way! While the personal may be political, Beth is firm in her dismissal of 'a larger feminist project':

> *"No, no, I'm just doing it for myself, I'm not doing it as a protest or whatever"* (Beth, Depth Interview).

When asked to respond to a page from "The Stitch 'n' Bitch Handbook" in which Stoller describes her philosophy, respondents were generally nonplussed:

> *"She may be over thinking it … I think she's doing people a disservice when I think she's over thinking"* (Sarah, Depth interview).

Beth, similarly, found Stoller's writing did not resonate with her:

> "*Here where she's so concerned about her feminist, like people perceiving her as feminist or not based on her doing a particularly feminine activity, I don't think that I've ever worried about that personally"* (Beth, Depth Interview).

Additionally, 'Craftivism' (Alkenbrack 2010; Portwood Stacer 2005; Wallace 2013) (activism through craft) holds little appeal for the study participants. Several of the participants expressed confusion around the very idea of or definition of craftivism (Aryanna, Sarah, Beth). When the author listed guerrilla knitting, yarn bombing and sending knit uteruses to anti-choice campaigners, (some of the examples in Wallace 2013), the participants responded somewhat dismissively:

> "*I do like the idea of yarn bombing …. I think it looks cute … I wouldn't call it political"* (Sarah, Depth Interview).

> *"I don't know that I've thought about it having a goal more of being an activity. … I'm not sure most people would see it as being, you know, pushing towards anything"* (Beth, Depth Interview).

> *"I don't know, yarn bombing seems like a waste to me … I wouldn't look down on it really but I probably wouldn't spend my time knitting a tree scarf or something"* (Aryanna, Depth Interview)

Similarly, the group had little time for what Minanhan and Cox (2005, 11) define as resistance - "*a new protest movement using craft as a subversive vehicle for comment on gender as well as on the increasing commodification of society and technology.*" In the consumption literature, however, resistance is more usually used to mean "*resistance against a culture of consumption and the marketing of mass-produced meaning*" (Penaloza and Price 2003, 123) implying an anti-consumption agenda ranging in fervour from "*reformist to radical*" (Penaloza and Price 2003, 123). Minahan and Cox's (2005) conceptualisation is closer to Kozinets' (2001) stigmatic consumption, although, in this case, it is an entire gender being stigmatised rather than an enclave as with the Trekkies. The Knitters certainly acknowledge that their hobby is marginalised and mocked. For example, the experience of 'coming out' as a Knitter is described as an embarrassing admission:

> *"The connotations of taking up knitting and the ramifications of taking up knitting and all the labels that you feel people are going to put on you or not put on you and it's all really down to the simple thing of wrapping some yarn around some sticks, yea it's really huge actually"* (Danielle, Depth Interview).

Embracing 'KIP', Knitting in Public, requires initial bravery:

> "*When I started first I did worry a little bit about how it would be seen by others*" (Siobhan, Facebook message, Feb 9, 2012).

However, as in the case of the feminist debate, any conflict on the boundaries between art and craft or the relative dismissal of traditionally feminine pursuits is not one to which the Knitters devote much time:

> *"I can see there's a whole thing on reclaiming, yeah, cos you could say that feminism went too far because we got rid of, we got everything and nothing at the same time. But once again I think it just comes down to over thinking it"* (Sarah, Depth interview).

It is interesting that these feminist and activist (or craftivist) meanings, ascribed to Knitters by studies taking a more etic perspective, are rejected by the Knitters themselves. This echoes the contrast between the findings of Thompson and Üstüner (2015) and the more emic Carlson (2010) work in relation to roller derby.

Two further potential meanings suggested by Minahan and Cox (2006) were explored, an ironic or inversely, a nostalgic, meaning. Both were explored, but yielded negative findings.

4.6.2 An Absence of Ironic Meanings

An ironic meaning would suggest that *"the desire for a return to a past is parodied"* (Minahan and Cox 2006, 14), a satirical simulacrum of a melancholic return to a past that never was, thereby commenting on the present more than the past. The *Ironic* theme was not strongly present in the data. Some crafters and Knitters cast a contemporary eye over the skills of the past, producing more subversive crafts which flirt with irony in projects such as Skull and Crossbones Tea Cozies (Winge and Stalp 2013) or a knitted uterus for a political protest (Daley 2013). However, in the Local Stitch 'n' Bitch group, there was no real sense that the past was being parodied (Minahan and Cox 2006).

On the contrary, participants expressed a sense of being part of history and appreciating the role of 'women's work'. For Sarah, memories of knitting in her childhood are a source of happiness:

> *"I was sitting in the fireplace, well in the fireplace, but it made sense in our house cos it's a tiny one, right, and my Granda would be on the one side and my Granny's on the other and the two of them'd end up arguing about who's doing it right or wrong so they'd end up doing my knitting for me.*
>
> I: [Your Granny and your Grandad?]
>
> *Yeah* (laughs) *so it was just kind of cute, so it always had happy memories for me that way"* (Sarah, Depth Interview).

Siobhan also views knitting as a connection to her immediate family and in addition to her foremothers, or women of the past:

> *"There's also a link to previous generations that I love. My mother, grandmother and great grandmother all knit. I have knitting patterns that belong to all of them and I cherish them. I love that although things have changed in the knitting world I'm still doing basic knit and purl stitches previous generations of my family did"* (Siobhan, Facebook conversation).

Both Sarah and Aryanna mention valuing practical work, experiencing it as an antidote to the more cerebrally focused elements of their lives:

> *"What I would see it as is that when everything goes modern so quickly … a lot of the people who seem to like it are people who are working a lot on computers, who want something practical, who want something in your hand and you know what I mean, 'cos a lot of this time you're in your head so it's nice to have something to do with your hands … d'you know for a lot of people it's just going back to the practical"* (Sarah, Depth Interview).

Aryanna identifies with the homesteading, self-sufficiency or "Slow" movement:

> "I *still think it has more to do with consumer culture and taking back your ability to provide for yourself from a corporation … I see it more as part of like the slow movement like not relying on mass produced stuff from China to live, like knowing how to do things for yourself"* (Aryanna, Depth interview).

No other informant, however, expressed this motivation and as in Kelly (2014), most participants' interviews support the idea that '*a central component of knitting as a leisure activity is shopping for yarn, patterns and supplies'*. Sarah, for example, has rearranged family holidays around yarn events, "*we were going over there any way and so we changed the dates so I could make that* [Woolfest]" and most participants express distaste for using cheaper *"acrylicy, plasticy"* yarn, with Jennifer describing her taste for high end yarns:

> *"I definitely like [Dyad], I definitely like Malbrigo, I definitely like expensive stuff as you can tell from my bag of yarn" (Jennifer, Depth Interview).*

Katja has a large collection of antique patterns, including traditional Slovakian lace, both from family and purchased online. Cosima created a traditional Shetland wedding shawl for her wedding in Scotland. The author herself maintains a collection of her grandmother's tools and patterns.

This appreciation for knitters' past was also evidenced when group members express annoyance at the repeated use in the media of the phrase "not your grandmother's knitting" (Hassler 2002; Hiramine 2013; Hirsch 2012a, 2012b; Vitto 2013) and its use, even, in scholarly publications (Fields 2014). The group feels no need to distance themselves from the knitters of the past and dislikes the sneering, condescending attitude implied by the phrase. Group members tend to echo Siobhan's idea that they are creating the same knit and purl stitches as generations past.

This response by the group is in keeping with the reactions of the wider knitting community. Several threads in Ravelry also debate the offending phrase. Threads such as "*Sick of Having my*

Grandmother Insulted" (Ravelry > Needlework on the Net, Monday, October 3 2011) and "*Does the Phrase "Not Your Grandmother's Knitting" Bother You?*" (Ravelry > Ends, Wednesday, May 2 2012) are recurrent and attract a lively response. Well known designers including Jared Flood, Ysolda Teague, Norah Gaughan, Cookie A and Meg Swanson have also entered the debate by contributing to a book entitled "My Grandmother's Knitting" (Brown 2011).

However, while the group is respectful of the past, they do not romanticise it as would be expected if Minahan and Cox's "Nostalgic" theme was the major motivation for Knitters.

4.6.3 An Absence of a Nostalgic Meaning

In contrast to irony, a nostalgic meaning for the group or community would suggest a longing for a romantic return to simpler times (Minahan and Cox 2006, 13). The *Nostalgic* theme was not strongly present in the data. The group is respectful, if not overly reverent, of the past, embracing new technologies and fashions as it suits them. As Siobhan says, "*things have changed in the knitting world."* They do not display the reverence of groups like the Mountain Men (Belk and Costa 1998). Traditions are adapted and used in a playful manner. The past is not over romanticised since the Knitters draw a clear distinction between, for example, subsistence knitting of the sort required to keep a family clothed and the frivolity of crafting for enjoyment embraced by the new community.

Multiple respondents (Sarah, Siobhan, Jennifer, Beth) describe irritation at being told they could sell their work. To them this is foolish in the extreme as the cost of the luxury yarns they use and the personal time commitment required would price the items far above what an average consumer might pay. They reject this traditional female source of income as having no relevance to their lives:

> *"Some drunken guy on a high stool leaned back and blocked my way to the door (I was in front). He said, "Will ye knit me a scarf?" …. I said no and tried to push past. He grabbed*

> *my arm and said, "I'll pay you." I said "it's too much work, mate, it's not worth it," took his hand off my arm and pushed his chair upright out of the way. He called after me "I'll pay you!" again so I turned around and said, "My time is just too valuable". The other two* [Sarah and Crystal] *burst out laughing at that.* [Crystal] *repeated it on the way downstairs, "My time is just too valuable"* (Fieldnotes, 10/02/10).

Despite the resistance to the phrase "Not Your Grandmother's Knitting", members of the group themselves dismiss certain yarns (particularly acrylics) as being "Granny Yarns". Both Sarah and Aryanna describe their disappointment with the Knitting and Stitching Show at the RDS, Dublin in terms of it's being old-fashioned, 'grannyish' and 'old ladyish'. They are selectively using the marketplace to construct the self as tasteful and up to date rather than old fashioned:

> *"It was a lot of, not what I was looking for anyway 'cos it was a lot of, like a lot of acrylic and d'ya know, as I say granny knitting."*

Aryanna, who attended the Knitting and Stitching show as a vendor, used exactly the same terms:

> *"So many old ladies looking for cheap yarns … no one wanted to spend 20 bucks on a ball of hand spun, they all just wanted the big balls, say 400 gram ball of acrylic."*

Sarah contrasts this with Woolfest in the Lake District in the U.K. which she believes is *"a load of like-minded people."*

There is no rejection of technology contrary to what one might expect from a group focused on a traditional craft. Rather, the group embraces the opportunities technology provides to enhance their hobby, their consumption, and their group:

> *"[Bonnie] was only talking about it last night and she said the last thing she expected out of knitters was for them all to be tech savvy and we pretty much are to a certain extent"* (Sarah, Depth Interview).

Both Katja and Aryanna sell yarn online and Dyad Yarns (Katja's brand) has gained an international reputation. All the Knitters are active on Ravelry.com and Sarah, in particular, has "*a thing for gadgets*". She describes her tablet as "*not an iPad, it's a Knitting Pad.*" Sarah embraces technology to enhance her craft and then evangelises about her 'finds' to the rest of the group. In the depth interview, Sarah spends several minutes extolling the virtues of the 'Knitting Pad' and, in particular, an app called 'Knit Companion' which is "*the best thing ever, it's amazing*." Within two weeks of the interview, the author had purchased both.

In the larger community, while designs based on traditional patterns are popular, so too are more cutting-edge, even avant-garde designers like Stephen West and Steven Be. Both make flamboyant, unisex clothing in wild colours and are considered trendsetters in the community. Katja and Dyad yarns have worked extensively with Stephen West thus adding to her social capital in the community.

Designs based on traditional stitch and colour patterns are mixed and recombined, and are worn in different ways to the originals. Lace shawls, for example, are often repurposed as scarves when worn in reverse. Hand-knit glove patterns include conductive thread in the fingertips for smartphone usage. Aran cables are arranged into skulls or modern geometric designs. Modern colours and textiles are explored and trends sweep the knitting world as in any other consumer market. Habu textiles, a Japanese company, has become famous for its unconventional yarns, including stainless steel, copper, paper and unusual plant fibres, such as pine and pineapple. The community desires to be seen as contemporary, forward thinking, and cool.

4.7 Returning to the Research Question

Having set out to explore the nature and meaning of consumption in a female-led and -dominated consumption community, the key finding is that this community confers therapeutic benefit on its members and functions by using many of the same mechanisms of a self-help

support group. Consumption practices are used to facilitate this therapy and knitting serves as both a common ground to start from and to retreat to in times of potential strife.

Other potential meanings suggested in the literature did not resonate strongly with the members of Local Stitch 'n' Bitch. The commonly suggested feminist, progressive or political motivations which the author originally set out to investigate were repudiated dismissively by members of the group and by many members of the Knitting community. Sarah felt that those who ascribed feminist or political meanings to their craft were "*over-thinking it"* (Sarah, Depth Interview). Nostalgic and ironic meanings were similarly discounted, as the Knitters are respectful of the past, while clearly recognising its deficiencies.

Chapter 5 will discuss how one might define such a community and will also explain why/ how this form of therapeutic consumption in a female-dominated community differs from both the forms of female community consumption studied previously in the literature generally, and specifically how it differs from the spiritual-therapeutic model.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the findings are discussed with reference to the wider literature.

It is apparent from chapter 4 that both Local Stitch 'n' Bitch and the online 'Knitworld' centred around Ravelry.com are therapeutic in nature, and that consumption is actively used to facilitate the therapeutic process in the group environment. The concept of therapeutic consumption is an under-explored area within the consumer literature; hence this study thus represents a significant contribution to knowledge. Specifically, while the work of Moisio and Beruchashvili (2010) on spiritual-therapeutic consumption constitutes an important foundation to knowledge in this area, the pro-consumption orientation of Knitters contrasts strongly with many aspects of their model. The lack of an underlying pathology, or 'sin', serves to remove the spiritual element and its associated quasi-religious confessions, paternalistic oversight and penance. There, therefore, exists a previously unexplored type of therapeutic consumption which goes beyond what has been encompassed by the spiritual-therapeutic model or by any understanding of therapeutic consumption in the compensatory consumption literature to date.

The therapeutic consumption community studied herein has been found to have much in common with therapeutic self-help groups as described in the therapy literature. Local Stitch 'n' Bitch shares many characteristics with a therapeutic self-help group as defined by Jacobs and Goodman (1989) and Shaffer and Galinsky (1986). Therapy is pursued in two ways, through task helping and socioemotional helping as predicted by Finn (1999), albeit that consumption is integral to the pursuit of therapy within the therapeutic consumption community. Socioemotional helping is further divided into the therapeutic modes suggested by a synthesis

of Hirsch (1980) and Pearson's (1982, 1983) work on support. In this chapter, a new conceptual framework of therapeutic consumption is developed based on these findings. This model is thus intended to serve as an interpretation of therapeutic consumption and not as an attempt to position therapeutic consumption as equivalent to professional/ medical therapy.

To situate the Knitters in the existing literature on the various forms of consumption community, the findings are examined in terms of consumer tribes (Cova and Cova, 2002; Maffesoli and Faulks 1988), subcultures of consumption (Schouten and McAlexander 1995), and brand communities (Muniz and O Guinn 2001). The group in question was found to align most closely with the consumer tribe but, yet, demonstrated marked differences from the tribe as defined in the literature (Cova and Cova 2002; Cova et al. 2012; Goulding et al. 2013). The playful and transient nature of the tribe as conventionally defined in the literature stands in marked contrast to the deep level of 'trust', socioemotional support and commitment expected by members of this female-led and –dominated group and necessary for therapeutic benefit. As such a new typology is suggested, the Therapeutic Consumption Tribe, representing a synthesis of the consumer tribe and the therapeutic self-help group.

Finally, the findings in relation to feminism in fabriculture, and indeed in a female-led and –dominated consumption community, are discussed. The previous findings of Thompson and Üstüner (2015) and Minahan and Cox (2006) are contrasted with the findings from this study.

5.2 The Female-Led and -Dominated Consumption Community as Therapeutic Consumption

As discussed in Chapter 2, the consumer culture theory literature focusing on group consumption and on consumption communities has largely focused on 'hyper-masculine' environments. Here we have explored a female-led and -dominated consumption community with the purpose of understanding the nature and meaning of consumption in this group.

The members of this consumption community:

- Seek therapy through consumer experience
- Turn to a consumption community to provide therapy and
- Attribute legitimacy to that community as a therapeutic environment.

Within this female-led and -dominated community, the therapeutic experience is delivered through consumption of goods and through consumption activities.

Despite Golpaldas' (2016) assertion that therapy itself is a marketplace icon, little exploration has occurred of therapeutic consumption beyond compensatory consumption and its connotation of 'retail therapy' (Woodruffe-Burton 2001). The findings of this study substantively address this gap. Members of this female-led and -dominated consumption community do not simply engage in impulse purchases, which they may later regret, to alleviate a negative mood (Woodruffe 1997). Rather, these consumers engage in a therapeutic consumption often entailing well-planned and considered purchases, which may involve extensive, even international, travel, informed by the cognitive guidance of the community. Further, although the group is not originally help-intended, the Knitters acknowledge the therapeutic power of the community.

In addition, while Moisio and Beruchashvili (2010) have previously examined a support group engaged in spiritual-therapeutic behaviours, the Knitworld community represents an explicitly consumption-orientated community which also functions as a support group. Several key differences are highlighted between spiritual-therapeutic consumption in a support group and the therapeutic consumption of the female-led and -dominated consumption community.

5.2.1 A Therapeutic Meaning

Members of this female-led and -dominated consumption community themselves identify access to therapy as an advantage of group membership. Attendance at the group is considered

therapeutic, and one engages in consumption practices to attend. It is therefore possible to ascribe a therapeutic meaning to consumption practices within the group.

No prior recognition of the central role therapy can play in a consumption community exists. Using therapy as a lens, we can identify therapeutic elements in several other studies set in community environments associated with the hegemonic male ideal. Therapeutically linked terms such as catharsis, flow, and communitas in the skydiving community (Celsi et al. 1993), solidarity, communitas, flow and renewal at the Mountain Men Rendezvous (Belk and Costa 1998), *"the communitas of fraternal bonding"* at the ESPN Zone (Sherry et al. 2004, 155) and in sports in general (Fischer and Gainer 1994, 89), and the concepts of personal growth and teamwork in the River Rafting group (Arnould and Price 1993) are present throughout the literature.

However, these male-led and dominated consumption communities do not appear to be fundamentally about therapy. O Sullivan (2013a), for example, identifies play as the primary purpose of the Beer Pong Community, Belk and Costa (1998) identify both transformative play and an embrace of hegemonic masculinity and nostalgia for the idyllic pastoral as the primary purpose of the Mountain Men reenactors (Belk and Costa 1998). In the extreme sports literature, motorcycling (Murphy 2016), skydiving (Celsi et al. 1993) and river rafting (Arnould and Price 1993) for example, the primary motivation is generally given as hedonic, a quest for adrenaline and excitement, as well as potentially, an edgework component.

In contrast, Shankar's (2006) exploration of female-led and -dominated book groups shows that they may share more similarities with the Stitch 'n' Bitch group. He echoes Hartley and Turvey's (2002) finding that "*empathy is the prime feature of book groups*", including empathy between group members (Shankar 2006, 119). One of Shankar's respondents states that for her the book group can act "*like a family of supporting, validating people*" (Shankar 2006, 120). This recalls the social support and the socioemotional helping apparent in the Stitch 'n' Bitch and Ravelry.com communities and, thus, raises the interesting prospect that female-led and –

dominated consumption communities, in their very orientation, may be fundamentally different to male-led and -dominated consumption communities. Within "hyper-masculine" communities, aspects of therapeutic consumption may be present but are potentially rendered subservient to other phenomena. In contrast, a much more pronounced therapeutic aspect to consumption seems evident in the female-led and –dominated communities as described in the literature.

5.2.2 Lack of a Spiritual Component

The therapeutic consumption in this female-led and –dominated group does not contain a spiritual element, but rather is secular in nature. This seems to be due to the lack of a pathology underlying the group. In AA or Weight Watchers, the member attends in an effort to curb or cure transgressive behaviours. The spiritual element seems to arise from this sinful impulse, which must be atoned for through the quasi-religiosity described by Moisio and Beruchashvili (2010). The common predicament (Jacobs and Goodman 1989) that leads to the therapeutic quest in the case of Stitch 'n' Bitch is loneliness and isolation. Siobhan's friends have moved away, Danielle has had children before her peers, and Alison's husband has been transferred internationally; these are not transgressions but an unfortunate set of circumstances. This predicament is more likely to be interpreted as happenstance than as a personal failing, in the way addiction or overconsumption are sometimes perceived.

Linked to this lack of a spiritual component is the relative unimportance of confession. Moisio and Beruchashvili (2010) believe that confession serves multiple purposes within the Weight Watchers community, with confession of pathology and confession of failure being key characteristics of the group. Similarly, in Alcoholics Anonymous, new members must confess status as sinner ("Hi, my name is ___ and I'm an alcoholic") and, to access the therapy, must acknowledge their failings (Kelly 2017: Meng et al. 2014; Ullman et al. 2012). While storytelling and celebration of goals achieved within the Stitch 'n' Bitch group are important (see Section

4.2.9), there is no requirement to confess, as there is no 'sinfulness'. As such, although the group may engage in cognitive guidance, and this may on occasion extend to rebuke as in the case of Jennifer's 'loud American'ness, there is no paternalistic or kyriarchal oversight of behaviour. In a spiritual-therapeutic group, there is a sense of the group "*as an omni- present, parental figure that oversees members' performance on support group's program*" (Moisio and Beruchashvili 2010, 864). There, (over) consumption is stigmatised and demands confession and even penance. In the Knitters community, however, consumption is to be celebrated and shared.

5.2.3 Pro-Consumption Orientation

The spiritual-therapeutic model of consumption, as proposed by Moisio and Beruchashvili (2010), specifically examines a support group in which consumption is stigmatised due to the underlying pathology. Of course, there also exist support groups for sufferers of illness, bereavement, new motherhood, and other groups in which consumption is not stigmatised. Dunnett (2009), for example, examines how a cancer support group aids identity work and facilitates informed consumption of drugs and medical treatment. However, Local Stitch 'n' Bitch, and indeed the Knitworld, differs from these in that it is not originally help-intended but, rather, has an explicitly pro-consumption orientation.

A key part of the consumption experience appears to be the sharing of new acquisitions with the group. For example, when Sarah returned from Wonderwool, or the author returned from Knit Camp, it was expected that, at the next Stitch 'n' Bitch, all new yarn would be produced to be passed around, admired, and touched by the group. This was often described as 'petting' the yarn. Similarly, after Sarah, Siobhan, and the author attended a Yarn Tasting event at This is Knit in Dublin, the samples received were brought to Stitch 'n' Bitch to be experienced by the rest of the group. This vicarious consumption of the yarn by the rest of the group is a key component of the social and purchasing behaviour. In general, it was 'special' yarns that were acquired at

these events (as opposed to 'Granny acrylics'), so purchases were admired and the purchase behaviour reinforced. In the case of the joint orders from online retailers, these would be unpacked and dispersed publicly at the meetings. The pro-consumption orientation of the community is socially reinforced and simultaneously, the therapeutic atmosphere is reinforced by praise and approval. This outlook contrasts strongly with AA and Weight Watchers, where penitential self-denial is praised.

The therapeutic atmosphere is not constant, however, and can be disrupted. The absence of a formal leadership role may allow this disruption to fester for longer than it might do in other, more structured, groups.

5.2.4 Absence of Formal Therapeutic Leadership

In most therapeutic groups, there exists a therapist to lead the session. It is the orientation of this medical professional, and the physiological technologies (Levine and Sandeen 2013) they use, which define the type of therapy on offer (e.g. cognitive behavioural therapy, positive psychotherapy, psychodrama, encounter groups etc.), although many use a mixed approach (Golpaldas 2016). Even in self-help therapies, where there is no therapist present, it is usual for a group leader to be appointed. Within Alcoholics Anonymous, for example, leaders are elected from the membership and are *"trusted servants"* of the group (The Twelve Traditions, 2012). With Weight Watchers and other similar programmes like UniSlim or Slimming World, leaders choose to undergo training and pass an interview with the organisation. They then receive a portion of the sales of products from their meetings. In both cases there are national and international organisations which provide oversight.

In contrast to the above, there is no formal process in place within the Knitters' group for the selection of leaders, and there is no defined leadership structure to facilitate therapy. One of the key differences between the Knitters' group and the above-mentioned groups is that although the former functions as a self-help community, it is not explicitly help-intended and

does not have a formal leadership structure to facilitate that help. Though Sarah, due to her high social capital and embrace of the maven role, is observed to occupy a socially negotiated leadership position within the community, she did not elect to take on the responsibilities of leadership. In the case of Weight Watchers, gold members must apply for leadership positions.

Moisio and Beruchashvili emphasise the *"pivotal role"* (Moisio and Beruchashvili 2010, 866) played by Weight Watchers' leaders in *"facilitating the experience of redemption"* (Moisio and Beruchashvili 2010, 866), prompting members to *"report transgressions"* (Moisio and Beruchashvili 2010, 863) and generally being vital to the flow of the spiritual-therapeutic model. In contrast, at times when there has been disruption to the therapeutic flow within the Stitch 'n' Bitch group, Sarah rejects the mantle of leadership, leaving the group somewhat rudderless, and allowing these disruptions to fester. As one who seeks therapy from the group herself, she chafes under the responsibilities of her presumed role and questions why she should be the one to intervene in the 'war' between Alison and Jennifer. Although she clearly relishes her maven role and high status, describing the 'dogged determination' of her cognitive guidance, she is no 'trusted servant' but rather a peer who demands space to complete her own therapeutic consumption. The overall outcome is that the therapeutic consumption experience can be disrupted in a way that contrasts with the more stable experience of therapy one would hope to find in a more formal therapeutic environment.

5.2.5 Open-Ended

Although membership of AA or Weight Watchers may be open-ended and indeed lifelong, there is a goal in mind: dealing with pathological consumption. In the case of the Knitworld, membership is perhaps even more flexible and open-ended. Although members of the group share a common predicament, once companionship has been achieved and emotional support attained, members can choose to leave, secure in the knowledge that the group is there if they need it, as with Danielle, or continue to attend, as with Sarah, who has been an active

participant since the first meeting. When Cosima injured her wrist and was unable to knit, she still attended the group. It is difficult to imagine that if an alcoholic suddenly found himself or herself 'cured', the reason for their attendance at AA no longer applicable, they would persist in attendance. However, it is clear that in this group it is 'not about the knitting' but, rather, it is the therapy that drives continued attendance.

Having established that this group obtains therapy through consumption in a different way from those previously identified in the literature, the mechanisms by which the group accesses therapy in this female-led and -dominated consumption community are now explored.

5.3 Mechanisms of Therapy within the Knitworld

To construct a model for the mechanisms of therapy, several sources were considered. There is a distinct lack of conceptual work around therapy in the area of consumption communities or marketplace cultures. Despite Golpaldas' (2016) characterisation of therapy as a marketplace icon, only two major theories linking therapy and consumption have been presented. These are the ideas of compensatory consumption (Grunert 1993; Woodruffe 1997; Woodruffe-Burton 2001; Woodruffe-Burton and Elliot 2005) and the spiritual-therapeutic model suggested by Moisio and Beruchashvili (2010). However, since neither of these two concepts is sufficient to properly interpret the findings of this study, the literature on therapy and self-help groups was examined.

This body of work yielded several useful aspects which were then utilised to help construct a new framework of therapeutic consumption. Concepts from both literatures were then combined to develop a refined overall interpretation of the findings from this study (see Section 2.7) , and this interpretation was then used to construct a conceptual framework for therapeutic group consumption as follows.

5.3.1 Comparison of Characteristics of the Local Stitch 'n' Bitch Community with those of a Therapeutic Self-Help Group

The key characteristics of a therapeutic self-help group, a term which is often used interchangeably with a mutual support group or a peer psychotherapy group (Shaffer and Galinsky 1989), are outlined in Jacobs and Goodman (1989) and Shaffer and Galinsky (1989). Both attempt to define the nature of a self-help group. Each pair of authors, writing at the same time, draws attention to different aspects of the self-help group, without benefit of the other's conclusions. Combining these two descriptions results in the development of a typology of the self-help group and a list of key therapeutic attributes.

The combined typology of a self-help group is used to examine the characteristics of Stitch 'n' Bitch as presented in Table 5.1.

Self-help group	Stitch 'n' Bitch
Power residing in the membership	No external powers
Equal rights within its group process	Yes, but some carry more weight (social capital)
Leadership vested in selected indigenous and/or professional representatives who serve at the pleasure of the group	No formal leadership structure
Idealistic about de-emphasising rank and privilege	No formal leadership structure, all decisions by group discussion
Free expression of thought and feeling provided such expression does not unfairly pain others	No taboos
Can be fierce about its independence from external rule	Negative response to attempts to formalise the leadership structure.
Capable of shifting from early isolationism toward cautious co-operation with foreign powers	No example of external powers
A common predicament, problem, or concern	Liminality, isolation, alienation
Minimal fees	No fees
Reciprocal process of help-intended activity	Not initially help-intended
Shared belief in the power of the group	Extremely strongly supported
Avoid professional leadership	No formal leadership structure, all decisions by group discussion
Open-ended membership where the groups composition is rarely constant	Attendance is not required, group members come and go.
Provide an informal social network that often involves the participant in a large variety of informal member to member contacts, sometimes viewed as more therapeutic than the formal group meetings.	Many members acknowledge activities external to the regular meetings as their favourite part of the group.

Table 5-1 Integration of Jacobs and Goodman (1989) and Shaffer and Galinsky (1989)- Characteristics of a Self-Help Group

Having determined that many of the Local Stitch ‘n’ Bitch group’s characteristics closely resemble those of a therapeutic self-help group or support group, the mechanisms by which these groups deliver therapeutic benefit are next examined.

5.3.2 ‘Helping Behaviours’ and Social Support in the Local Stitch ‘n’ Bitch Group

We recall from Section 2.7 that the work of Finn (1999), Hirsch (1980) , Pearson (1982, 1983) and Mosio and Beruchashvili (2010) lead us to a model for the mechanisms of therapy. This is then applied to the findings from the female-led and -dominated consumption community of the Local Stitch ‘n’ Bitch group in Table 5.2.

Mechanism	Definition	Examples within Local Stitch 'n' Bitch
Emotional Support	Provision of expertise, information, advice, direction, explanation, a model of how to be, honest feedback, a sounding board	Danielle states that she uses the group to alleviate loneliness and for emotional support.
Satisfaction	Pleasure derived from being able to contribute to another	Sarah and Beth express some pride in being able to help others, but modesty prevents them 'admitting' to this pride.
Intimacy	Praise or criticism for specific actions, attention, interest, affirmation of one's competence, reinforcement	Close physical proximity, few taboos in conversation according to Delphine.
Tangible Assistance	Helping or declining to help	Support of Danielle particularly in terms of gifting yarn
Cognitive Guidance	Sharing of activities (external to the group), belonging, togetherness	Sarah being described variously as 'the knitting guru' or 'Buddha' and 'Knitler'
Social Reinforcement	Making someone feel better or worse, caring, emotional sharing, affection, warmth, respect, empathy, understanding, reassurance, forgiveness	Criticism of socially unacceptable modes of femininity displayed by Jennifer, praise and affirmation of competence of Katja
Socialising	Pleasure derived from being able to contribute to another, altruism	Beth's memories of Thanksgiving dinners, baby showers for Alison and Sarah
Story-telling, celebration and encouragement	A shared repertoire and folklore of the group, consumer testimonials, joy in each other's progress.	Stories of incidents in the group's history passed on, as well as lore of the Knitworld like the Curse of the Boyfriend Sweater, 'showing off' FOs.

Table 5-2: Mechanisms by which Therapy is Provided with Examples

5.3.3 Generation of a Framework for Therapeutic Consumption

Using theories of therapy provision from Sections 5.3.1 and 5.3.2, an overview is generated of what composes a therapy-orientated group and how that group serves to provide therapy to its members. Fig 5.8 shows how the various aspects of therapy identified in the data feed into the group and its therapeutic nature.

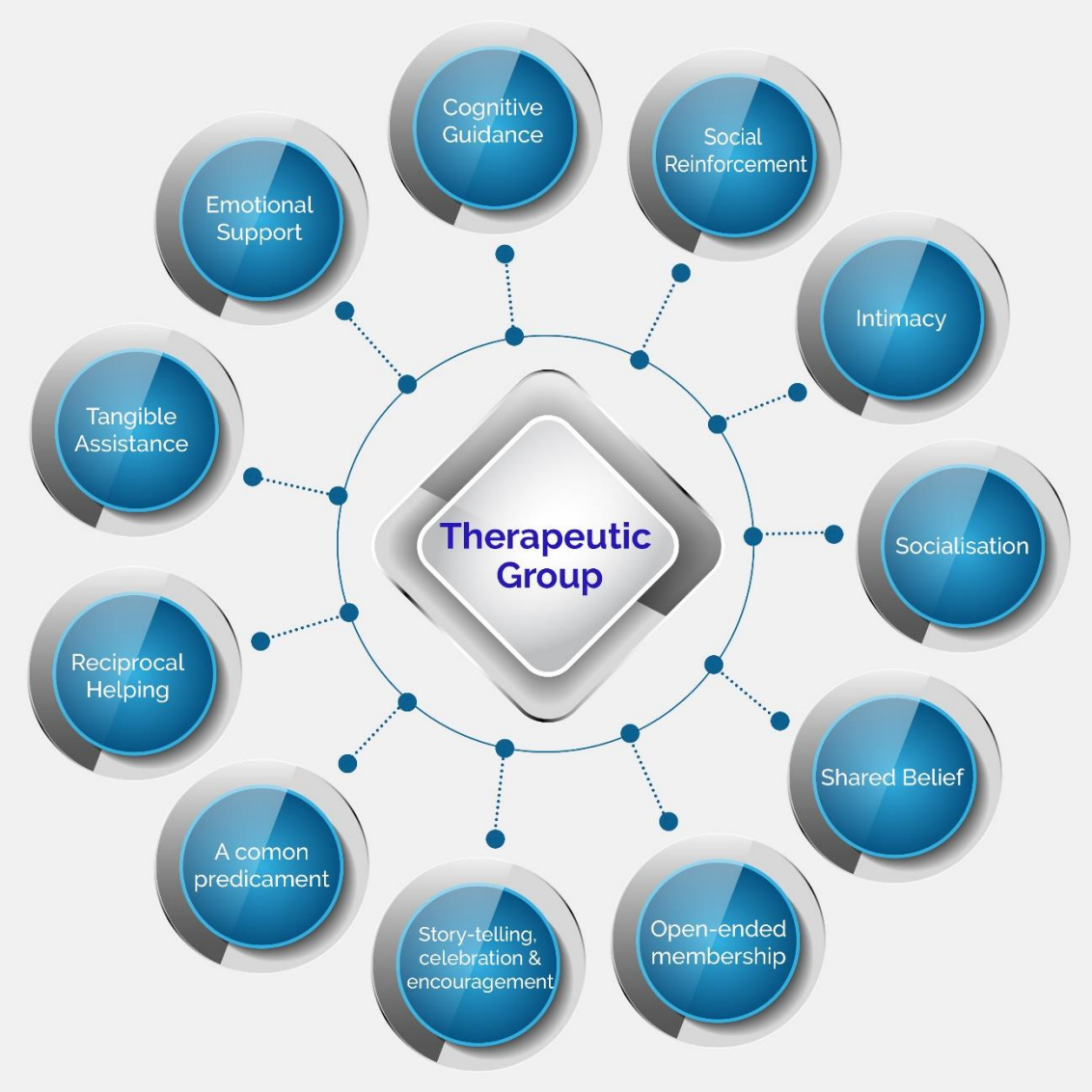

Figure 5-1: Potential Mechanisms for Therapy within a Therapy-Orientated Group

Having established the mechanisms by which therapy is enacted in this female-led and –dominated consumption community, we can now finally build a model of therapeutic consumption. An examination of the group characteristics which specifically relate to consumption will give us a model of therapeutic group consumption.

As shown in Section 4.2.4, reciprocal helping and tangible assistance are often provided via consumption. The data shows gifting behaviours and assistance in obtaining tools and yarns to expand or practice their craft (Siobhan claiming Sarah's prize in This is Knit; Katya giving Cosima spindles and roving to learn spinning). We also see support for businesses run by group members, Dyad Fibres and Prolethean Yarns. Charitable consumption is also a common form of tangible assistance practiced by the Knitters, and serves as a powerful restorative when therapy is disrupted (Section 4.4).

Emotional support is provided by the offline group, Local Stitch 'n' Bitch, and by the online Knitworld/Ravelry.com community (Section 4.2.5). This emotional support is accessed through the consumption of knitting items. In Amelia's case, she gained an immediate friendship group to supplement her distant 'kith and kin', simply by purchasing some yarn and needles though she only produced a few rows of knitting.

The group provides strong cognitive guidance (Section 4.2.6) with regard to which marketplace offerings are most desirable and they 'egg each other on' to purchase the best tools and materials. Consumer testimonials often comprise the story-telling (4.2.9) element of therapy in this group. Accounts of SAE (stash acquisition expeditions/experiences, see Appendix 1) are recounted and shared experiences form part of the repertoire of the group. The 'correct' choices are socially reinforced via praise and joint online ordering. Encouragement (Section 4.2.9) is given for skilful work and finished projects.

Group socialisation (4.2.8) often centred around consumption. The potluck Thanksgiving dinners, for example, which became an annual tradition, involved each member producing a dish of food to be shared by the group. This also represented a form of emotional support to

the Americans and Canadians in the group who found this time of year difficult. Later, knitting would be produced and on some memorable occasions, clothing swaps were held. More regularly, groups or subgroups might meet to shop for yarn. It was not uncommon for multiple members to travel, together or separately, to This is Knit in Dublin for their annual Yarn Tasting event. Socialising external to the group often involved patronising the Abbot Ale House, the bar where the group usually met, evidence of an ongoing loyalty to the business which facilitated the group and therefore the therapeutic process.

The data leads to the construction of the model of therapeutic group consumption seen in Fig 5.9.

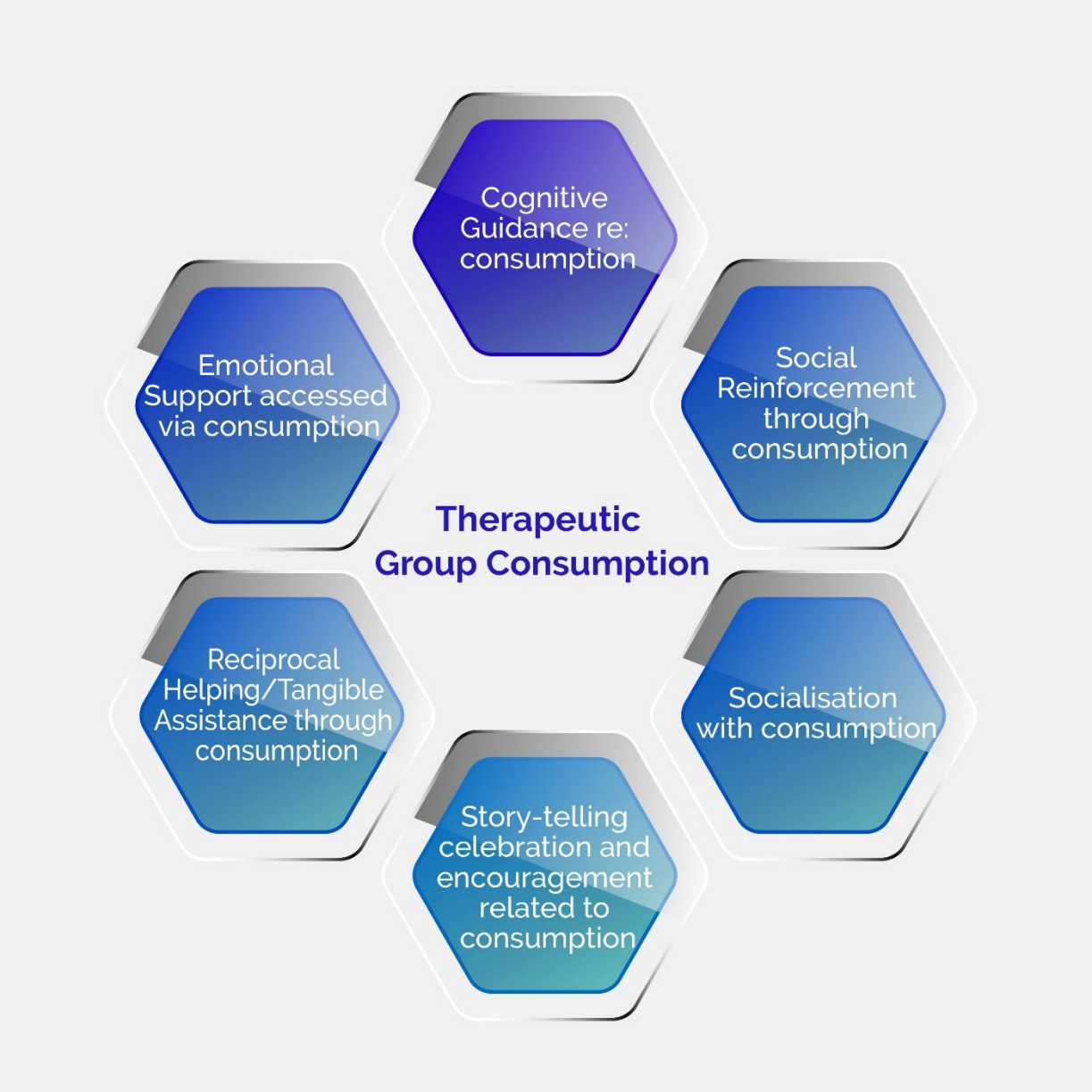

Figure 5-2: A Proposed Model for Therapeutic Group Consumption

5.4 Towards a Conceptual Model of the Therapeutic Consumption Community

Having established that the primary nature of consumption within the Knitting community is therapeutic and that there exists a therapeutic group consumption, the theoretical context in

which this community should be placed is now examined. Existing models for consumption communities have been discussed in Section 2.3. This female-led and –dominated consumption community is now considered in terms of the current framework to locate this group within the existing literature.

5.4.1 Existing Consumption Communities

Goulding et al. (2013) in their paper "Learning to be Tribal" develop a typology based on a meta-analysis of Consumption Community publications to differentiate between Subcultures of Consumption, Brand Communities, and Consumer Tribes. The work echoes Canniford's (2011) earlier work on disentangling the confused usages of these terms in the literature. These, together with Thomas et al. (2013), are among the only papers where not only are the *"characteristics, features, and practices of different kind*[s] *of collectives… delineated, but … compared with one another at a more comprehensive theoretical level where their similarities and differences … become clear"* (Närvänen 2013, 24). Goulding et al. (2013) also consider the Community of Practice which is more concerned with the transmission of knowledge and skill than consumption practices. Using their typology, the female-led and -dominated consumption community of Knitters is considered.

5.4.2 Comparison of Characteristics of the Local Stitch 'n' Bitch Community with those of a Subculture of Consumption

Subculture of consumption:	**Local Stitch 'n' Bitch**
Self-selecting microcommunities	Yes, the group is self-selecting and could be described as a microcommunity
Ritualised modes of expression	Not applicable, in particular there are no ritualised rites of passage or of membership etc.
Subvert dominant institutions (Goulding et al. 2002) but rarely display political resistance (Martin et al. 2006)	The group does not display political resistance or subvert dominant institutions, refuting any politicisation of their activities
Strong interpersonal bonds	Strong bonds and moral obligations are observed. Members attend each other's weddings, parties and christenings and provide therapy to each other.
Beliefs that preclude other social affiliations	Members of Stitch 'n' Bitch attend other Knitting groups and other craft groups (Sit 'n' Spin)
Not multiple (dominating)	No – members attend other groups/ partake in other crafts with no backlash – very dissimilar to HOG culture…

Table 5-3: **Characteristics of a Subculture of Consumption applied to Stitch 'n' Bitch**

A subculture of consumption (Schouten and McAlexander 1995) is described as a self-selecting micro community with strong interpersonal bonds. While this is an accurate description of the Knitting community being studied, the community fails to meet the rest of the criteria necessary to be thus defined. Some authors, (Myzelev 2009, Pentney 2008) and the founder of the movement (Stoller 2003), believe Stitch 'n' Bitch to be a third wave feminist movement and that, thus, the fabriculture movement 'subverts dominant institutions', the patriarchy or kyriarchy.

However, as seen in the depth interviews, most of the participants in this study did not identify with the stated ideology of the movement at all (see Section 4.6.1). There are no ritualised modes of expression as predicted by Goulding et al. (2013) in that there are no formal membership rites or rites of passage within the Knitworld. Finishing a complicated lace project or a first sweater may be celebrated by the group in an offhand congratulatory way, but it is not fundamentally identity changing. Further, there is no skill-test to attain the 'Knitter' identity. Being a 'Knitter' has specific meanings for each individual. Once you affirm your sense of caring about the activity to your own satisfaction, you are part of the group. This is also true of identification with the Stitch 'n' Bitch movement and the Local Stitch 'n' Bitch group. When the author, via the Local Stitch 'n' Bitch Facebook page, sought members to interview Aryanna was the first to respond, despite the fact that she attends Knit Up and has never come to a Local Stitch 'n' Bitch meeting. She immediately considers herself part of the 'ingroup' that is being sought.

Most tellingly, the group is not dominating and does not preclude other social affiliations – members often attend other knitting groups, either to try them out, to change to a more suitable time slot, or to increase their amount of knitting per week. The absence of these criteria determined that the Stitch 'n' Bitch community cannot be classed as a subculture of consumption.

5.4.3 Comparison of Characteristics of the Local Stitch ‘n’ Bitch Community with those of a Brand Community

Brand community	**Local Stitch 'n' Bitch**
Set of social relationships structured around the use of a focal brand	The group is structured around multiple brands (see table 4.1 for examples)
Shared use of product and services gives interpersonal connections	This is particularly true when, for example, Katja shared a spindle and spinning fibres with Cosima to help her learn to spin. There are multiple examples, including joint trips to Dublin to This is Knit or the Knitting and Stitching Show, or the groups close association with Dyad Fibres adding to their social capital within the Knitworld.
Generate shared rituals, ways of thinking, traditions, sense of moral responsibility to other members, religious zeal towards the focal brand (Muniz & O Guinn 2001, Muniz & Schau 2005)	While there is no one focal brand in this case, there is certainly a strong sense of moral responsibility. "Non-breeders", for example, felt compelled to produce baby-gifts for the mothers in the group, despite their complaints. Rituals such as the annual Thanksgiving dinner were a popular tradition of the group. Strong cognitive guidance led to similar ways of thinking when it came to superior brands and products chosen by the group.
Can lead to co-creation of value by consumers and firms	Co-creation of value occurs with the Stitch 'n' Bitch brand. As a movement, the brand relies on its membership to propagate it at a grassroots level.
Not multiple (dominating)	No, as per table 4.1, many brands are used by the Local Stitch 'n' Bitch group

Table 5-4 **Characteristics of a Brand Community applied to Stitch 'n' Bitch**

The Brand Community (Muniz and Schau 1997) again represents a partial fit to the Stitch 'n' Bitch group [if we consider the 'Stitch 'n' Bitch' movement (not to be confused with Debbie Stoller's yarn label) as the brand]. The social relationships of the participants in the Local group originated with the Stitch 'n' Bitch group; most of the women had no connection to each other prior to joining the group. We also see co-creation of value as the Stitch 'n' Bitch brand is a worldwide women's movement which is nothing without its members. Further, we see several examples of entrepreneurship throughout the study, including Katja's yarn company, Dyad, and Aryanna's yarn company, Prolethean.

While the group engaged in rituals, such as Thanksgiving dinners, birthday cakes and baking for the group and also displayed a sense of moral responsibility to each other, it would be disingenuous to suggest the commitment to the brand approached religious zeal. Most members were diligent but not devout in their attendance at the group and there was minimal effort to convince others to 'convert'. While the shared use of products and services like yarn brands such as Dyad Yarns, patterns such as Owls, or Whale Watch Hats for Knit-Alongs, and the diffusion of cathexis around tools strengthen the interpersonal connections, these products and services are not linked with the overarching Stitch 'n' Bitch brand. The brand is not dominating – multiple other brands are used to create and interact with the community, including Katja's yarn, tool brands like Knit Pro and Hiya Hiya and websites like Ravelry and KnitPicks. These brands are used but there is no deep loyalty; the group embraces, then discards the Knit Pro brand and adopts Hiya Hiya. As Siobhan tells us, Sarah has now moved on to something else and Hiya Hiya may, also, soon be left behind. Debbie Stoller's attempts to monetise the brand with Stitch 'n' Bitch yarn failed to appeal to the group, the yarn was described as '*cheap looking*' and '*nothing special*'.

Although brands are used extensively by the members of the group to facilitate therapeutic practices, as seen in Table 4.1, there is no single therapeutic brand embraced by the group. The meanings and importance of these brands can change over time, as in the case of the change in desirability of Knit Pro needles, and, thus, no therapeutic brand community has emerged

through this study. Although the level of consumer engagement with the brand may vary in intensity over time (Brodie et al. 2011), for a brand community to exist, there must be a brand central to the community. The absence here of a clear brand around which the group rallied, again determined that the Stitch ‘n’ Bitch community cannot be classed as a Brand Community. Since therapy resides in the community, and not in the brand, it is unlikely that a single brand could become the focus of therapeutic expectation.

5.4.4 Comparison of Characteristics of the Local Stitch ‘n’ Bitch Community with those of a Community of Practice

Community of Practice	**Local Stitch 'n' Bitch**
Exist primarily for information transfer	Members state that they can learn to knit from the internet and that the group is 'not about the knitting'.
Even spontaneous communities tend toward some form of internal leadership.	There is a socially negotiated, but informal, leadership structure based on commitment and skill.
Engagement, imagination, alignment	Deep engagement with the community – for example adding designs and pattern notes to Ravelry.com to aid other Knitters, bringing new knowledge to the group from classes on Craftsy and IRL. Although Knitters can push the boundaries of knitting and re-imagine and redevelop agreed competencies, and certainly buck formal rules, this group is less fluid and changeable than others. Alignment (the coordination of individual activities such that they can have an effect within and beyond the boundaries of the group and in so doing achieve some greater goal or aim) often involves a shared repertoire which can certainly be seen in Stitch 'n' Bitch as stories such as the author's 'rescue' of Jennifer or Sarah's issue with the smell of wool while pregnant are shared repeatedly. There is a common usage of words from the Knitworld and a knowledge of Knitting which must be spread to new members.

Table 5-5: Characteristics of a Community of Practice applied to Stitch 'n' Bitch

This potential definition is the most easily dismissed, as the Community of Practice 'exists primarily for information transfer.' Both Cosima and Sarah state that the group is not primarily about the knitting and that they could have, for example, used YouTube to learn to knit alone.

The community of practice is also described as tending towards some form of internal leadership. While informal leadership does exist based on social capital, the group is far more egalitarian than the type of guild structure described by Wenger (1998). Thus, the group cannot be described as a Community of Practice.

5.4.5 Comparison of Characteristics of the Local Stitch 'n' Bitch Community with those of a Consumer Tribe

Consumer tribes:	**Stitch 'n' Bitch**
A consumption community which does not locate their socialisation around a single brand	As seen in Table 4.1, members use multiple brands
Multiple (not dominating)	Not only are members free to join other tribes, they are even free to attend multiple 'rival' knitting groups.
Flow between different tribal identities	No, identity as a Knitter becomes internalised
Playful (can be devoid of long term moral responsibilities or zeal)	Members consider themselves to have responsibilities to each other, attend family events, and give gifts for life events.
Transient	People come and go, but the 'group' remains
Entrepreneurial	Yes, Katja and Aryanna started their own yarn companies, Alison, Aryanna, Cosima, Katja and the author have published patterns, Cosima tech-edits patterns, Siobhan and Sarah are 'test knitters' – trying out new projects for designers.
Not enduring subversion of dominant institutions	There is no strong political or subversive element to the group as described in section 4.6.1
Development of shared repertoire	As discussed previously, the group educates new members in the language (see Appendix 1), the legends (for example the Boyfriend sweater) and the ways of being of the Knitworld, as well as the repertoire personal to the Local Stitch 'n' Bitch group.

Table 5-6: Characteristics of a Consumer Tribe applied to Stitch 'n' Bitch

The final possible consumption community presented by Goulding et al. (2013) which could possibly fit the group is the consumer tribe, and, in this, we find a concept that more fully aligns with the Stitch 'n' Bitch group and the wider Knitting community. The group is multiple; a consumption community which does not locate their socialisation around a single brand (Goulding et al. 2012). This is apparent from the interactions with the Stitch 'n' Bitch and Ravelry brands, as well as with many designers, yarn brands, and tools. Many brands are consumed for their linking value. We have seen Katja, Aryanna, and Alison emerge as tribal entrepreneurs, to greater and lesser degrees. As discussed, despite Debbie Stoller's stated aims, the group fails to subvert dominant institutions in any politically meaningful way.

However, contrary to the transient or playful nature of the consumer tribe, members of the Local Stitch 'n' Bitch group appear to have a commitment to each other. The group internalises the identity of '*Knitter with a capital K'* and can later perform that identity without group support, for example, Knitting In Public (KIP). As discussed, the members display moral responsibility to each other and can feel quite betrayed by rejection, as when Alison left the group.

While the group is transient in the sense that members come and go, nonetheless, the 'group' remains as a safe space to be used if needed. Danielle feels that, though she has not attended in several years, she is still a member and can go back if she ever feels the loneliness and isolation that led her to initially seek out the group. In this way we observe once again the therapeutic aspect of the group. Therapy is a treatment for emotional distress that outlasts the treatment itself. In Danielle's case attending the group alleviated her loneliness and alienation. Despite the fact that she no longer attends the group, the benefits of the therapy have continued.

While the consumer tribe is the most obvious fit for the group, yet, it clearly has striking differences from the typology of the tribe put forward by Goulding et al. (2013).

5.4.6 Towards Synthesis

Aspects of the subculture of consumption, the brand community, and the consumer tribe are present in the female-driven consumption community. While the consumer tribe model offers the best fit, significant variances from that model which do not hold true for Local Stitch 'n' Bitch exist, especially around the 'playful' and 'transient' nature of the tribe.

Additionally, therapy and therapeutic behaviour have not previously been highlighted as characteristics of consumer tribes. Yet, it has been demonstrated in this study that these characteristics are prevalent in both Local Stitch 'n' Bitch and in the wider global Knitting community. While in a group established explicitly for self-help purposes, one would expect to see a 'reciprocal process of help-intended activity', this consumption community was not initially 'help-intended'. Despite this, we still see that a reciprocal process of 'socioemotional helping' is a strong characteristic of the group and manifests itself in the form of cognitive guidance, social reinforcement, tangible assistance, socialising, emotional support, satisfaction, and intimacy.

A new category of consumption community is therefore suggested: The Therapeutic Consumption Tribe.

5.5 The Therapeutic Consumption Tribe

As in a consumer tribe, this consumption community is a self-selecting micro-community which is multiple, i.e. engagement in it is not at the exclusion of other communities. It is not located around a single brand; rather, members draw on the shared use of many brands and services to develop strong interpersonal bonds. Some of those brands come from within the community as the members are entrepreneurial and engage with external brands to co-create meaning. The strong interpersonal bonds created result in a sense of moral responsibility to the other members.

Rank and structure are de-emphasised; there are no rules beyond social norms, although these are adjusted to account for the intimacy of the group environment and some taboos are acceptable. There is a clear shared belief in the group's ability to provide therapeutic benefit and that therapeutic benefit is derived primarily from socioemotional helping/social support.

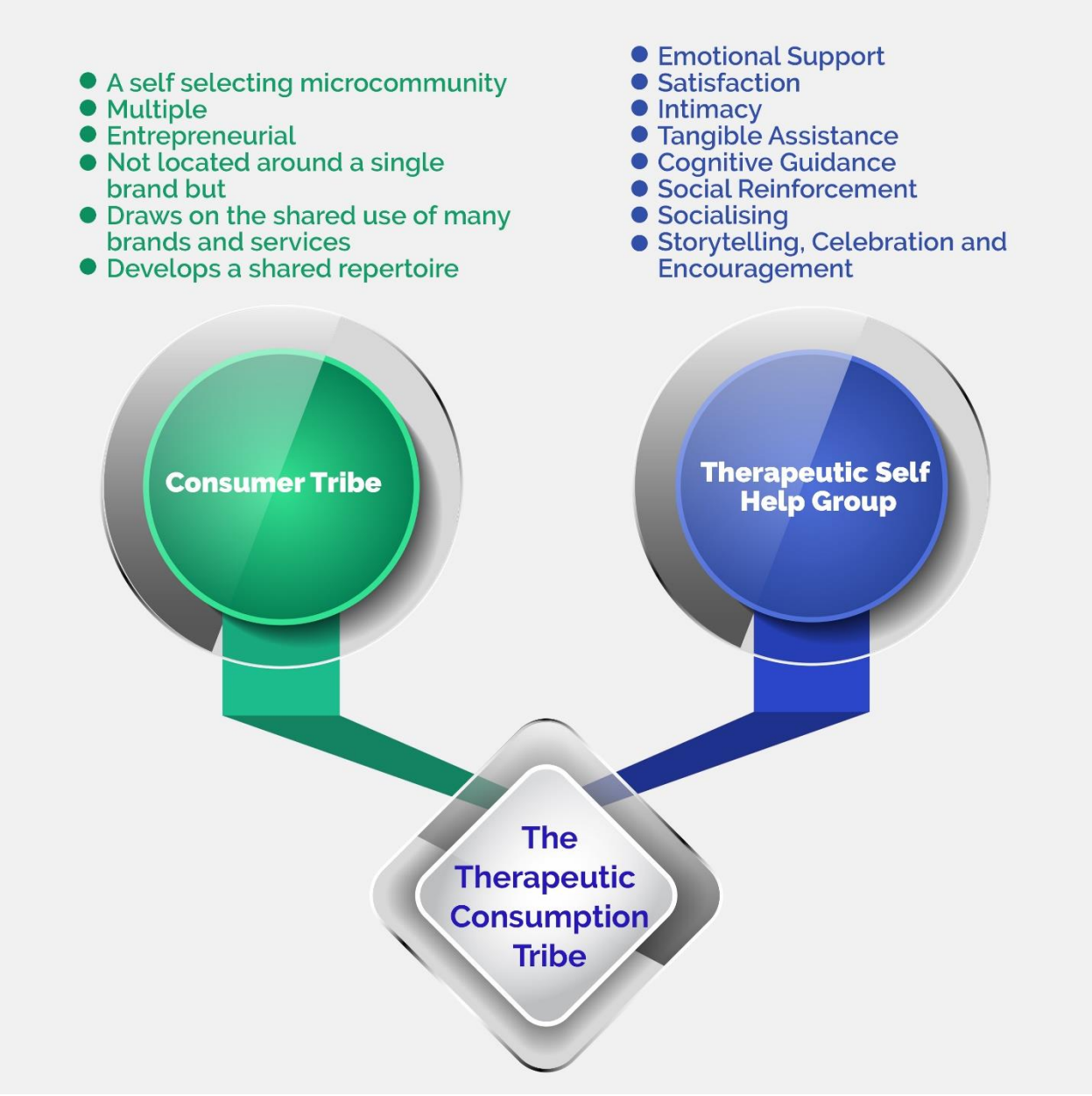

Figure 5-3: **The Characteristics of the Therapeutic Consumption Tribe**

This is a novel form of consumption community. Though it shares characteristics with the consumer tribe (Cova and Cova 2007), unlike the consumer tribe, however, the dominant characteristic is the provision of a group therapeutic environment facilitated by consumption and the marketplace.

The community utilises multiple brands and services such as Stitch 'n' Bitch, KnitPicks, Dyad yarns, Ravelry, This is Knit, Knit Pro, Hiya Hiya and others for their linking value and to reinforce the intergroup bonding. These strong interpersonal bonds lead to socioemotional helping and social support which the group itself identifies as therapy and which fit with the characteristics of a therapeutic self-help group.

As well as appearing to be 'tribal', the consumption group also matches many of the characteristics of a therapeutic self-help group as defined by Jacobs and Goodman (1989) and Shaffer and Galinsky (1989) and manifests key aspects of therapeutic consumption including storytelling, celebration, and encouragement (Moisio and Beruchashvili 2010). Thus, the synthesis of both these constructs makes the Therapeutic Consumption Tribe an appropriate description of this consumer phenomenon.

5.6 Further Findings from the Female-Led and –Dominated Consumption Community

As discussed in Chapter 2, much of the seminal work on consumption communities has focused on "hyper-masculine" (Martin et al. 2006) environments (Arnould and Price 1993; Belk and Costa 1998; Celsi 1993; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). The ongoing dearth of studies conducted within female-led and –dominated consumption communities has led to agreement that femininity is still decidedly under-theorised (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Maclaran 2015; Martin 1998; Pyke and Johnson 2003; Schippers 2007). Those studies that have examined female identity have largely done so within 'hyper-masculine' environments (Martin et al. 2006). This study considers the meanings that reside in a female-led and dominated

consumption community without the 'outgroup' minority status (Avery 2012) of a male-led and –dominated consumption community. Rather, the nature and meaning of consumption within a female-led and –dominated consumption community has been explored, contributing in a novel manner to the work in this field by scholars such as Carlson (2010), Harju and Huovinen (2015), Minihan and Cox (2006), Scaraboto and Fischer (2013), Schau and Thompson (2010), Shankar (2006), and Thompson and Üstüner (2015).

As previously addressed, Shankar's (2006) chapter on book groups as a female-led and -dominated culture offers an insight into the importance of these groups to the members, highlighting the possibility that belonging to the group may matter more than the hobby itself. Shankar (2006) mentions not only shared sentiments and a collective bond, but also the common witticism 'a drinking group with a book problem'. Schau and Thompson (2010) identify a need to actively negotiate liminality as a key meaning behind the Twilight brand community which is also exceptionally female. This points not only to the principle that the link is more important than the thing (Cova 1997), but that the link, in these and other cases, is, essentially, therapy.

It is therefore proposed that the therapeutic encouragement and support that women consumers give one another in all female-led, market-mediated communities or sub-communities, including roller derby (Thompson and Üstüner 2015), motorcycle-riding (Martin et al. 2006), or the fatshionista blogosphere (Harju and Huovinen 2015; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013), could usefully be regarded as constituting a form of therapy, given that therapy has emerged as key within the Knitting community. However, further research is required to explore this possibility, particularly given the contrast this presents to findings in other studies of female-dominated communities, where community priorities seem to be centred on the activity, rather than the provision of mutual support.

Carlson (2010), for instance, observes that within the roller derby group she studied, the focus was very much on the activity rather than on mutual support. Social capital was based on skill

and physicality, rather than commitment to the welfare of each member of the group. This reminds us that female-dominated consumption communities are not always the places of mutual support and affirmation that the stereotypical ideal implies.

It is fair to say that within Local Stitch 'n' Bitch, the atmosphere was not always one of mutual warmth and support. For instance, it is clear from the treatment of Jennifer as a transgressor of social norms that a competitive element existed, particularly around images of acceptable femininity. However, as one participant clearly stated, membership of Local Stitch 'n' Bitch is "*not about the knitting*". While social capital can be accrued through skilled crafting, it is also linked to commitment to the community. Charlotte, for example, who could never knit more than a simple square, was considered a leader of the group for many years. She has since founded two further Stitch 'n' Bitches in the U.S. but has made little progress in terms of skill. Hence, the priority for the community resides in mutual support.

A further contrast to other studies of female-led and female-dominated communities emerges very clearly with respect to the possibility of a collective feminist and/ or activist orientation. Numerous media articles and academic papers explore the idea of craftivism and feminism in the crafting community. Authors such as Minahan and Cox (2006) suggest that resistance and cyberfeminist themes are important reasons for membership of a craft community. Nor is such an orientation confined to the craft community. Thompson and Üstüner (2015) suggest that members of the female-led and -dominated community of roller derby grrrls are strongly engaged in gender resignification and countercultural rebellion. However, this study finds that the women of Local Stitch 'n' Bitch have little interest in trying to either *'jam the cultural hegemony'* (Thompson and Üstüner 2015, 237) or engage with the third-wave feminist politics of Debbie Stoller, the founder of Stitch 'n' Bitch. While Thompson and Üstüner (2015) may have identified roller derby as a performance of feminist identity, the members of local Stitch 'n' Bitch are not engaging in a similar performance, despite Stitch 'n' Bitch globally having been positioned explicitly by its founder as third-wave feminist. Instead, the findings show that few of the Stitch 'n' Bitch members who participated in the study were aware of the ostensibly

feminist nature of the group with whom they identify, and quickly rejected the proposition when it was put to them.

The more overt feminist orientation of roller derby may arise because participants are engaged in a clearly thought-out resistance to heteronormative gendered identities (Thompson and Üstüner 2015), consciously adopting a competitive and violent identity more commonly associated with hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) in order to perform their gender resignification work. Thompson and Üstüner (2015) relate their findings to the findings of Martin et al. (2006), seeing commonalities between roller derby grrrls' embodied resistance and the gendered identity projects of the women Harley-Davidson riders engaging in ideological edgework. These studies take place in heterotopias, or *"counter-sites"* to the "*dominant ideological order"* (Thompson and Üstüner 2015, 259), while the Knitters, in contrast to these communities, are in fact embracing a traditionally gendered identity, without concern for others' perceptions. If a feminist project were to be identified here, it would be associated with the third-wave feminist ideals of reclaiming the feminine, as hoped by Debbie Stoller, rather than with the privileging of the masculine via the adoption of masculine practices by female bikers. However, this ideal of re-engagement with their foremothers is also dismissed by the participants in this study. Theirs is a contemporary orientation unencumbered by the agendas of others.

It is worth noting that this study is not the first to find a lack of clear feminist orientation within a female-led and female-dominated community. Carlson's (2010) emic study of roller derby (Carlson 2010) provides some corroboration that perhaps Thompson and Üstüner's findings may not resonate with the women they studied, or that they necessarily extend across all female-led and dominated communities. Similarly, in the fabriculture literature, Kelly (2014) discusses the ideas of feminism and craftivism with Knitters and finds they have little interest in such an interpretation.

This represents an interesting contrast to much of the current literature. Feminism and craftivism in fabriculture remain, for want of a better term, a "sexy" area of research. Alkenbrack (2010), Bratisch and Brusch (2011), Groeneveld (2010), Myzelev (2009), Pace (2007), Pentney (2008), Portwood-Stacer (2005), Pritash (2014), Robertson (2007), Wallace (2013), Winge and Stalp (2014) have all published in the areas of Feminism and Craftivism in Fabriculture. However, despite the fact that Debbie Stoller (2008) professes Stitch 'n' Bitch to be a feminist movement, this study found that progressive, political and craftivist meanings had little resonance for the members of Local Stitch 'n' Bitch. Echoing Kelly's findings, it seems that perhaps the feminist ideals of Stoller and others do not resonate as strongly in the wider craft consumption community as might be expected based on a review of 'fabriculture' literature. It may be, as in this study, that for those who are deeply immersed in feminist thinking (like Siobhan in Local Stitch 'n' Bitch or, indeed, Debbie Stoller, a Ph.D. in Women's Studies and editor of a successful Third Wave Feminist publication, Bust Magazine), their knitting naturally takes on feminist meaning as they ascribe feminist meaning to all their actions. After all, '*the personal is political*' (Hanisch 1969). However, in the current study, it is apparent that little consideration is given to such meanings in general and, specifically, in regard to the participants' crafting. Thus, the craftivists and feminist activists studied by Alkenbrack or Pentney, for example, may be outliers rather than mainstream representatives of the beliefs of the craft consumption community in general.

Two points thus arise; first, it becomes debatable as to what extent Stitch 'n' Bitch or the wider 'fabriculture' revival is, in fact, a political or feminist movement. If members' actions hold no political significance for them, can those actions be politically significant? If Alison declares herself not to be a feminist, how can her knitting be a feminist project? Second, it should not be assumed that female-led and female-dominated consumption communities are necessarily feminist in consciousness. Rather, each community merits exploration of this issue in its own right.

This leaves us with two conclusions with respect to the extant literature; first, that the orientation of the therapeutic consumption community as a particular form of female-led, female-dominated community is primarily towards therapy via activity, rather than towards the activity itself, and second, that the therapeutic consumption community also differs from other female-led and dominated consumption communities in the lack of importance attached to a feminist orientation.

5.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, the findings from this study have been situated in the wider literature around therapeutic consumption and in the literature on female-led and -dominated consumption communities.

Based on the data from this longitudinal, ethnographic study there exists a previously unexplored aspect of therapeutic consumption. This therapeutic consumption differs from those previously identified in the literature. Compensatory consumption (Grunert 1994; Moisio 2007; Woodruffe 1997; Woodruffe-Burton 2001) is too limited to encompass this phenomenon and there is no spiritual element (Moisio and Beruchashvili 2010). Thus a new model of therapeutic group consumption has been suggested.

Efforts to situate Local Stitch 'n' Bitch and, indeed, the Knitters' community, within the existing typology of consumption communities (Canniford 2011; Goulding et al. 2013; Thomas et al. 2013) failed. Although the community has much in common with the consumer tribe, members demonstrate a high degree of moral responsibility to one another in contrast with the playful nature of the 'neo-tribe'. Therapeutic group consumption gives rise to a deep interconnectedness between members. As a result of this, a new typology is suggested, the therapeutic consumption tribe.

Finally, the current study's findings are compared to findings from other studies of female-led and -dominated communities. In contrast to the findings of Thompson and Üstüner (2015) and Minahan and Cox (2006), this study finds that the members of Local Stitch 'n' Bitch, and potentially most Knitters, do not ascribe a political, progressive or feminist meaning to their craft. Instead, it is therapy which is the key meaning associated with the Knitter identity and with consumption in the Knitworld.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Summary

This final chapter outlines the contribution to theory and practice made by this thesis. The major theoretical contributions of the study, that there exists a previously unexplored therapeutic group consumption and a previously unconsidered typology for a new type of consumption community / marketplace culture, the therapeutic consumption tribe, are explicated. Other theoretical contributions to the area of female-led and -dominated consumption communities are identified. Suggestions are made as to the implications from these findings for the practice of marketing. The limitations of the study are examined and some final thoughts are presented.

6.2 Research Question

The question this thesis set out to answer was:

What is the nature and meaning of consumption in a female-led and –dominated consumption community?

It is apparent from the data that the Knitters studied for this work, Local Stitch 'n' Bitch, ascribe a therapeutic meaning to the consumption activities of the community. This finding is also reflected in the data from Ravelry.com. The theoretical contributions arising from this finding are now addressed in Section 6.3.

6.3 Theoretical Contribution

Having examined the extant literature on contemporary consumption communities, a deficiency was identified. Studies commonly dealt with male-led and -dominated communities, for example Bikers (Schouten and McAlexander 1995), Beerpong Players (O Sullivan 2013a, 2013b), Mountain Men re-enactors (Belk and Costa 1998) and ESPN Zone Patrons (Sherry et al. 2001). Often, those studies which were not explicitly 'hyper-masculine' (Martin et al. 2006) were located in the type of thrill seeking, adrenaline fuelled environment associated with hegemonic masculinity like skydiving (Celsi et al. 1993), motorcycling (Murray 2016), or white-water river rafting (Arnould and Price 1993). Many other studies addressed consumption communities that might not have been overtly masculine in character but nonetheless tended to be male-led, male-dominated, or both (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001; Leigh et al. 2006; Algesheimer et al. 2005; Cova et al. 2007). The overall outcome of this was that a body of literature emerged that addressed the phenomenon of consumption community essentially from the perspective of male-led and -dominated consumption experience.

This thesis thus focused instead on the decidedly under-theorised (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Maclaran 2015; Martin 1998; Pyke and Johnson 2003; Schippers 2007) area of female-led and -dominated consumption communities. Only a small number of studies have previously examined feminine and feminist consumption in this context (Minahan and Cox 2006; Shankar 2006; Thompson and Üstüner 2015).

Having undertaken a full longitudinal, ethnographic study of a female-led and –dominated consumption community, the major findings to emerge were the identification of therapeutic group consumption and of the therapeutic consumption tribe.

6.3.1 Theoretical Contribution 1: Therapeutic Group Consumption

The key meaning to emerge from the data behind consumption activities in this female-led and –dominated consumption community is that members are engaged in therapy via group consumption. The members of this consumption community seek therapy through consumer experience, turn to a consumption community to provide therapy, and clearly attribute legitimacy to that community as a therapeutic environment. The therapeutic experience is delivered through consumption of goods and through consumption activities. This differs from therapeutic consumption as previously explored in the literature in the forms of compensatory consumption (Grunert 1994; Moisio 2007; Woodruffe 1997; Woodruffe-Burton 2001; 2005) and spiritual-therapeutic consumption (Moisio and Beruchashvili 2010). Compensatory consumption has often been discussed in terms of impulse purchases to repair emotional states (Rook 1987; Woodruffe 1997; Woodruffe-Burton, Eccles and Elliott 2002), which then leads to regret. Compensatory consumption is considered to be far too limited a descriptor for the therapeutic aspect of this community. There is no spiritual component, as in spiritual-therapeutic consumption (Moisio and Beruchashvili 2010), possibly due to the lack of an underlying pathology. Membership of AA or Weight Watchers has a goal in dealing with pathological consumption, and draws on religious elements such as confession and penance to achieve this goal. The Local Stitch 'n' Bitch community is not originally help-intended, but, rather, has an explicitly pro-consumption orientation. However, it possesses many of the same characteristics as a self-help therapeutic group.

In examining the mechanisms by which a therapeutic support group functions from both the therapy literature (Barerra 1986, Hirsch 1980, Pearson 1982, 1983) and the consumption literature (Moisio and Beruchashvili 2010), it is apparent that many of these mechanisms are also utilised by Local Stitch 'n' Bitch. Fig 5.8 shows that the group members engage in reciprocal helping, tangible assistance, emotional support, cognitive guidance, social reinforcement, intimacy, socialisation, and story-telling, celebration, and encouragement, to deal with their

shared predicament of loneliness. The members express a shared belief in the therapeutic powers of their open-ended community.

To generate a model of therapeutic group consumption, these mechanisms are used as a lens to examine the consumption activities engaged in by the members of Local Stitch 'n' Bitch. In Fig 5.9 the mechanisms by which members engage in therapeutic group consumption are outlined. The members render tangible assistance and offer reciprocal helping through consumption. Emotional support is accessed through consumption. Members are offered cognitive guidance on their consumption. Consumption is socially reinforced and socialisation centres on consumption activities. Members experience and offer story-telling, celebration and encouragement around consumption. Hence consumption is integral to the group's therapeutic experience.

6.3.2 Theoretical Contribution 2: The Therapeutic Consumption Tribe

The Therapeutic Consumption Tribe recognises a new type of consumption community. This work, thus, builds on previous literature examining consumption communities, including for example Cova and Cova (2002) on consumer tribes, Schouten and McAlexander (1995) on sub-cultures of consumption, Muniz and O Guinn (2001) on brand community, and Goulding et al.'s (2013) typology of these. The Therapeutic Consumption Tribe, when compared to the consumption communities previously defined in the literature, most closely resembles a consumer tribe, yet it differs from the previously identified characteristics of a tribe in several fundamental ways.

The therapeutic consumption tribe is neither 'playful' nor 'transient' (Goulding et al. 2013) but rather seems to engender a longer-term commitment to socioemotional helping between members. The characteristics of this consumption community also closely resemble the characteristics of a therapeutic support group or self-help community. However, in this group,

though the members are aware of the therapeutic value of the group, its formation was not initially “help intended”.

The Therapeutic Consumption Tribe offers a means to aid transition through liminal zones such as motherhood or emigration, and, also, to assuage negative emotions such as loneliness. **T**his aid is consciously sought by members of this tribe; while members of other forms of tribe, subculture of consumption or brand community may certainly derive therapeutic benefit from their participation, the deriving of such benefit is not the main focus of those forms of community. This contrasts with the intentional, overt therapeutic focus of the therapeutic consumer tribe.

6.3.3 Theoretical Contribution 3: Further Findings from the Female-Led and –Dominated Consumption Community

This study aimed to contribute to an acknowledged gap in the literature (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Maclaran 2015; Martin 1998; Pyke and Johnson 2003; Schippers 2007) around consumption in a female-led and –dominated consumption community. As discussed in Chapter 2, where researchers have examined female consumption, they have largely done so by treating women as a demographic rather than by engaging in a meaningful way with gender-related issues in consumption (Carlson, Suter and Brown, 2008, Hur, Ahn and Kim 2011, Hudders et al. 2014, Jang et al. 2008; Munnukka, Karjaluoto and Tikkanen 2015; Stokburger-Sauer and Teichmann 2013; Tsarenko and Strizhakova 2015). While several of the relatively small number of studies which treat femininity and female identity as more than a target market have mentioned mutual support and bonding (Harju and Huovinen 2015; Minihan and Cox 2006; Schau and Thompson 2010; Shankar 2006; Thompson and Üstüner 2015), none has addressed the potentially therapeutic nature of such a community.

Female-led consumption communities are not always repositories of therapy. For example, in Carlson’s (2010) study of roller derby participants, she suggests that derby is not always the

place of mutual support and affirmation that Thompson and Üstüner (2015) imply. Indeed, within Local Stitch ‘n’ Bitch, therapy was disrupted by personal conflicts on occasion. However, in contrast to Carlson’s (2010) participants, the Stitch ’n’ Bitch community retain a focus on the accessing of therapy through group consumption, so that if necessary, work is undertaken to restore access to therapy, and the system of social capital prioritises commitment to the community over proficiency as a skilled crafter. Hence, the priority for the community resides in mutual support.

A further contrast to other studies of female-led and female-dominated communities emerges very clearly with respect to the notion of a collective feminist and/ or activist orientation within such communities. Numerous media articles and academic papers explore the idea of craftivism and feminism in the crafting community (Alkenbrack 2010; Bratisch and Brusch 2011; Groeneveld 2010; Myzelev 2009; Pace 2007; Pentney 2008; Portwood-Stacer 2005; Pritash 2014; Robertson 2007; Wallace 2013; Winge and Stalp 2014). Thompson and Üstüner (2015) similarly suggest that gender resignification and countercultural rebellion are key meanings for the roller derby community. This study, however, refutes the findings of Minahan and Cox (2006) who suggested that resistance and cyberfeminist themes would be important reasons for membership of a craft community. Instead it reflects the findings of Kelly (2014), as few of the Stitch ‘n’ Bitch members who participated in the study were aware of the ostensibly feminist nature of the group with whom they identify.

Thus the Craftivist and Feminist Activists studied by Alkenbrack or Pentney, for example, may be outliers more than mainstream representatives of the beliefs of the craft consumption community in general. While this in no way invalidates or lessens the importance of their work, it is interesting that the majority of work on the fabriculture environment is being carried out in what may be a niche within the larger community.

Certainly for the members of Local Stitch 'n' Bitch therapy is the most important meaning behind their collective consumption, but perhaps there is a therapeutic value in conscious feminism for these other participants.

6.4 Contributions to Practice

6.4.1 Contributions to Practice in Fabriculture

For marketers within this specific contemporary craft or fabriculture environment, therapeutic group consumption and the therapeutic consumption tribe identify an additional 'linking value" (Cova 1997) that a brand can embrace to promote itself. As Holt (2002, 83) says, brands can present themselves "as *cultural resources, as useful ingredients to produce the self one chooses."* In this case, we see consumers using various tools and yarns as cultural resources to demonstrate, not just their status as "*Knitters with a capital K*", but, also, to signal their depth of involvement in their community and their willingness to provide socioemotional helping. In Section 4.2.10, the many ways in which the consumer marketplace is used to facilitate this Therapeutic Consumption Tribe are discussed.

Sarah's promotion of 'appropriate' tools which others, eager to demonstrate their level of commitment to the group, then purchase, is one such example. Her initial choice of Knit Pro/Picks needles was later replaced by Hiya Hiyas. The Hiya Hiya needles are double the price and even more exclusive and elusive than the Knit Pros, and Jennifer crossed Arizona to obtain them. This mission to complete her set of needles, while possibly representing a bid for status in the group, also serves as a signifier of how much Jennifer needs and values the group. In upgrading to the Hiya Hiyas, the members not only demonstrate how committed they personally are to the group, but also clearly signal how much the group means to them.

As to the derivation of implications for marketing from these group marketplace practices, as identified in Vargo and Lusch (2008) and Vargo, Maglio and Akaka (2008), understanding the community will be key to co-creating. By engaging in behaviours matching those of the Therapeutic Consumption Tribe, a brand can position itself as part of the 'tightly knit' community. Some examples of how fabriculture brands were observed engaging in potentially therapeutically meaningful activities during the study are as follows:

Cognitive Guidance:	*Craftsy* is a brand built entirely around the provision of expertise, with pay for tutorials on multiple aspects of knitting and other crafts. *Dyad Fibres* and others used blog posts and youtube videos to educate the community on techniques.
Tangible Assistance:	*Dyad,* like many independent and larger yarn companies, engaged in patronage of up and coming designers, gifting yarn and promotional items to events for knitters and providing free patterns to promote their yarn and provide a 'gift' to the community. *Woolly Thoughts* was integral to efforts to secure payment for teachers at Knit Camp Dyers such as *Fyberspates* and *Skein Queen* donated prizes to Knit Camp tutors' funds Some designers operate a patronage system through the website *Patreon.com,* where fans pay a monthly amount to designers to have access to exclusive patterns etc.
Socialising:	*Ravelry* meet-ups have been held in several cities around the world (e.g. Edinburgh, Scotland, 2014) *Vibes and Scribes* (shop) held knitting evenings
Emotional Support:	Using the example of the Knit Camp scandal again, as well as tangible support, many dyers posted public statements of sympathy and support for those affected.

Table 6-1 Examples of Brands used to Facilitate Therapeutic Mechanisms

6.4.2 Contributions to Practice in Other Contexts

While the findings of this study have clear applicatory value to the current context and could potentially have strong applicatory value in other craft /fabriculture consumption communities, further research is needed to establish the degree to which the insights from this study could provide implications for practice elsewhere. As indicated in Section 2.4, a reading of Shankar (2006) suggests that book clubs may be another female-led and –dominated consumption environment which serve a similar therapeutic purpose for its members. If a book club was found to be a Therapeutic Consumption Tribe, book club brands (such as Oprah's Book Club or Richard and Judy's Book Club) might then benefit from engaging in, and being seen to engage in, the behaviours identified as therapeutic. This goes some way to suggesting that the potential exists for a wider application of the insights generated by the current study.

However, it is interesting that commercial offerings which attempt to provide therapy, through *"community advice and support"* (Campbell 2011, 503), but without a more thorough engagement in behaviours matching those of the community, for example on women's website iVillage.com, have largely been a failure. It seems that consumers seek out the more organic and authentic online communities of Ravelry.com or the Fatshionista blogsphere to fulfill their therapeutic needs rather than simply engaging with more generic alternatives that lack focus on a specific activity or shared issue. While Campbell (2011, 503) observes, *"numerous posts appearing on the message boards suggest many regular users view iVillage as a vibrant online community worthy of their emotional investment"*, the manufactured community has since disappeared. Analyses of its failure identify a fundamental mismatch between what advertisers wanted women to be interested in discussing, and what women actually were interested in discussing (Moses 2014). Ravelry.com offers huge opportunities for craft businesses, including craft micro businesses, precisely because it limits advertising to those products which are relevant to the conversation already established. Additionally, it does not seek to dictate the shape or form of women's conversation to be more commercially appealing. This mutually

respectful model is much more in keeping with the therapeutic ethos than that of iVillage, where some posters were guerilla marketers, or where content was dictated by advertisers and dominated by branding (Campbell 2011). For therapy to exist, there must be freedom of expression, and therapeutic support groups are likely to resist outside interference. In attempting to build or to commercialise a female-led and -dominated space, marketers would do well to consider the therapeutic model.

6.5 Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of an ethnographic study is the risk of attempting to draw larger conclusions than might be justified from the study of such a small group. It would be easy to dismiss the contributions to practice, for example, by saying that the experiences of a small group of women in Ireland may not have any implications for the wider crafting community and for marketers, generally. Hopefully, potential objections have been overcome by the production of a 'good' ethnographic study as defined by Stewart (1998) and by demonstrating clearly how the data evolved into theory.

The nature of ethnography requires a long term, fully immersive involvement with the community being studied. This also presents both ethical and methodological issues. Relationships formed with the informants over the course of many years led to the author having to balance a desire to protect these women's privacy with the academic responsibility to accuracy and openness. Even with anonymisation, in such a small group it would be immediately clear to group members who is represented by each pseudonym. The author felt a strong desire not to overexpose her participants and, not wanting to hurt people, a desire to ensure their privacy. Ultimately, only at one point in the thesis findings did the author feel it was best not to identify the speakers; this occurred during a conversation about sex which is recounted in Section 4.2.7. A reproduction of a sarcastic remark to Jennifer was removed after a fellow academic failed to note the sarcasm in the text. The author discussed the remark,

which was a rather crude allegation if read literally, with Jennifer and decided to remove it rather than risk causing offence, though Jennifer's main concern was for the 'structural integrity' of the thesis without the quote.

Relationships within the group inevitably changed over time and it is almost impossible not to view earlier happenings through the lens of later events. The author had one previously close friendship become distant during the course of the study and it was difficult not to let subsequent emotions colour past experiences. This difficulty was resolved by relying on contemporaneous notes and observations which made it possible to be more objective in this matter. Ethnography, unlike positivistic methodologies, however, acknowledges that it is impossible to fully sever the researcher from the research and, while in this study every effort was made to manufacture distance, this study is merely one perspective on the group.

In this study, the author additionally engaged in netnographic research for triangulation purposes and to ensure that the findings were reflective of the wider crafting community. This additional approach should serve to reassure those uncomfortable with qualitative methodologies of the real value of the study. However, the sheer volume of postings on Ravelry.com, the netnographic site studied, presented a problem of its own. The only easily identified and administered means to locate relevant confirming and disconfirming observations with which to search the Ravelry.com forums was the use of keywords established in the primary ethnographic site and in participant interviews. This necessary filtering of the data could potentially lead to accusations of picking and choosing only those data which suited the narrative or agenda of the thesis. However, it is important to reassert that disconfirming observations were sought.

Time and money are limitations in any study, and, perhaps, even more so in a Ph.D. This work started at a difficult time in Ireland, with deep recession, austerity, and public sector cuts. As such there was little funding available to pursue the work. Although officially a full-time student, the author also engaged in part-time work both inside and outside the University to

make ends meet. Ultimately, her position at Dyad Fibres began to take more and more of her time. While at the initial stages Dyad Fibres was composed of only Katja and the author, in Katja's kitchen, by the time the author left the company, in February 2016, it had over 20 employees and two premises. In some ways, this proved an invaluable experience, allowing the author to present 'practitioner side' academic papers (O Sullivan and Richardson 2012a) as well as those based on her thesis work (O Sullivan and Richardson 2011, 2012b, 2012c, 2013, 2014). The author was also invited to give the keynote address at the Traditional Lacemakers of Ireland Cork Annual General Meeting in 2014 and, in this role, met with many prominent members of the knitting community. Undoubtedly, these 'extracurricular involvements' impacted her ability to deliver a timely Ph.D. thesis. However, it did not impact on data gathering or analysis and has not affected the overall quality of the Ph.D. In truth, these experiences have all contributed to and enhanced the work.

6.6 Suggestions for Further Research

6.6.1 How do Knitters Relate to the Knitworld?

The author has repeatedly emphasised the importance of Ravelry.com to the Local Stitch 'n' Bitch group and its centrality as a hub of the Knitworld. Most yarn shops around the world have immediate Ravelry access on hand for those who need to check pattern details or stashes while purchasing. It is impossible to overstate the effect Ravelry.com has had on the Knitworld and how it has served to interconnect thousands of smaller sub-communities, like Local Stitch 'n' Bitch, around the globe.

It is, perhaps, inevitable when reflecting on a study after completion that additional possible interview topics will occur to the researcher. One such topic that stands out in the current case is the view that informants had of themselves as members of Ravelry. While it was clear from participant observation that Ravelry.com is integral to the formation of the Knitter identity, the

exact nature of the relationship between sub-community, larger community and global community is one that warrants further examination. This would quite possibly have generated further interesting insights. However, this possibility can be readily addressed in future research.

6.6.2 Examining the Therapeutic Consumption Tribe

The immediate and most obvious suggestion for future research is to examine other female-led and –dominated consumption communities to see if these also offer a therapeutic dimension. We see elements of the therapeutic beginning to be identified in Avi Shankar's work on female-dominated book clubs, as discussed previously. It is, therefore, possible that this therapeutic dimension is common across all female consumption communities, and, indeed, may be fundamental to them as in the case of Cork Stitch 'n' Bitch.

The model of the therapeutic consumption tribe may also be useful in examining male consumption communities. Some men's groups, for example Men's Sheds, have an explicitly (mental) health promotion goal (Ballinger, Talbot and Verrinder 2009; Moylan et al. 2013; Wilson and Cordier 2013). However, we have seen some evidence of therapy in male consumption communities which are not focused on provision of therapy (Belk and Costa 1998; Fischer and Gainer 1994; Sherry et al. 2004). It is unknown how widespread this phenomenon is. A re-examination of some of these consumption communities with an eye towards their therapeutic nature would seem to be indicated. In the future, researchers undertaking studies in male consumption communities where close emotional bonds are formed might wish to consider the Therapeutic Consumption Tribe as a potential alternative community type.

6.6.3 The Impact of Entrepreneurship on Therapy

Over the course of the study, Dyad Fibres became a full- or part-time job for many of the group members. By the end of the author's association with the brand, Katja had over 20 employees and felt an increasing weight on her shoulders due to her responsibility for all these livelihoods. The author also encountered many other craft practitioners for whom their hobby had become their main source of income, including Aryanna at the time of her interview. This is not unexpected due to the entrepreneurial nature of tribes. However, given Katja's increased stress, does the therapeutic nature of the group continue once it becomes a job? It is possible that the therapeutic aspect evolves rather than discontinues, and that Katja, for example, experienced flow while quietly knitting by herself. However, towards the end of the study the author observed that it sometimes seemed like Katja was 'performing' the role of 'knitting celebrity' at Stitch 'n' Bitch. Katja no longer seemed to be experiencing the more authentic enjoyment of earlier years. A suggestion for further research would thus be to examine the impact that entrepreneurship has on therapy, particularly when a hobby becomes one's main source of income.

6.6.4 Other Themes

Several other themes were identified over the course of the research which were not included in the final thesis. The issue of tensions around motherhood (O Sullivan and Richardson 2012c) within the group was a particularly interesting topic which merits further study. Laurie Lisle's (1996) personal, historical and sociological account of the stigma of childlessness would offer an interesting theoretical starting point for work in the use of consumption to negotiate the roles of the mothers, expectant mothers, want-to-be mothers and 'non-breeders' in a socially diverse female friendship group in their 20's, 30's and 40's. Ultimately, the depth and breadth of data produced by ethnographic research means that many themes, including female

entrepreneurship and craft branding, could not be fully explored in this thesis. The author would hope to revisit them at a later date.

6.6.5 Final Thoughts

While Illouz (2008) and Golpaldas (2016) discuss the ubiquity of therapy in popular culture, little consideration has been given to whether the term has become generally overused. A dilution or blurring of what therapy is has become apparent in current discourse. In searching for a definition of therapy (see Section 2.7), it became clear how poorly defined therapy actually is.

The definition of therapy used in this thesis (a treatment for emotional distress which outlasts the treatment itself) is fully consistent with its definition in the conceptual literature. This relatively broad definition reflects the somewhat imprecise nature of therapy's definition in the literature. As addressed in Section 2.7, despite a proliferation of therapeutic schools and formats (Golpaldas 2008), definitions of therapy itself in the academic literature are relatively rare and often arise in work on newer fields such as Art Therapy or Music Therapy, perhaps as a way of reassuring the reader that this is, in fact, therapy. The mechanisms by which therapy functioned offered far more value in the case of this work in determining the nature of therapeutic group consumption. Rather than simply assessing whether the benefits of group membership seemed to treat emotional distress in a way which outlasted group meetings, the author found that utilising the work of Jacobs and Goodman (1989) and Shaffer and Galinsky (1989) to build a schema of key mechanisms by which therapy functions was more robust, and led to the construction of the models for therapeutic group consumption and the therapeutic consumption tribe.

It is possible that a term such as 'quasi-therapeutic' might need to be introduced to identify those activities or 'treatments' which, while mood-lifting or having a positive effect on well-being, are not strictly therapeutic in nature. In the case of the current study, it has been clearly shown that the community under study has derived therapeutic benefit from communal

consumption processes in a manner fully consistent with the definition of therapy in the literature. The author thus remains fully confident that the concept of therapy has not been misapplied in the current context. However, notwithstanding the findings of this interpretive study, there remains a very strong case to be made for a re-examination of therapy as currently conceptualised in the professional and academic literature in order to clarify what exactly is meant by therapy post this degradation of the term in popular discourse. In the absence of such a re-examination of therapy, it remains the case that we are potentially in danger of classifying every activity which makes the 'doer' happy as therapeutic.

A rigorous refining of the conceptualisation of therapy could serve both to guard against this danger, and serve as a means to scrutinise other potential instances of therapeutic consumption and clarify their similarities to the bona fide form of therapeutic consumption documented in this thesis.

Finally, though it may seem trite to simply end the study with a warning of ‘don’t try this at home’, it is vital to acknowledge that there are limits to the effectiveness of therapy provided in this context. Using material goods to provide emotional comfort can lead to problematic and compulsive shopping behaviours (Faber, O Guinn and Krych, 1987; O Guinn and Faber, 1989), as may be evident in relation to Jennifer’s yarn buying. Also, the outcomes of membership of a therapeutic consumer tribe may not mirror the outcomes of clinical therapeutic practice, and while the group offered a relief from loneliness or from liminal confusion for many, it was not a panacea for all forms of distress.

What we have observed through this study, however, is consumers co-creating meaningful therapeutic experiences for each other through acts of everyday consumption. Ultimately, the women of Local Stitch ‘n’ Bitch form a close-knit support group by engaging in therapeutic group consumption and creating their own therapeutic consumption tribe.

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Appendix 1: A Glossary of Commonly used terms in the Knitting Community

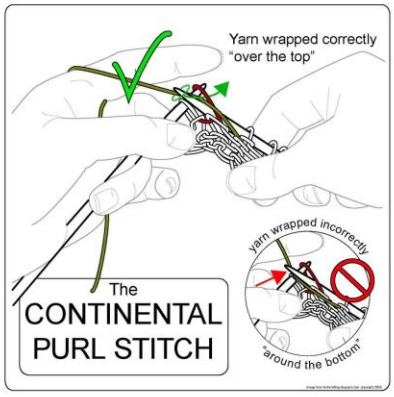
(Illustrations from TECHKnitting.blogspot.com used with permission)

Bicraftual: Able to both knit and crochet
Blocking: A finished piece is wet and stretched on wires to obtain final dimensions.
Circs: Short for circular needles, sized tips joined by a cable. May or may not be interchangeable**.**
Cold Sheep: From the term going cold turkey, going on a yarn diet.

I spent so much this month; I'm going cold sheep until January.

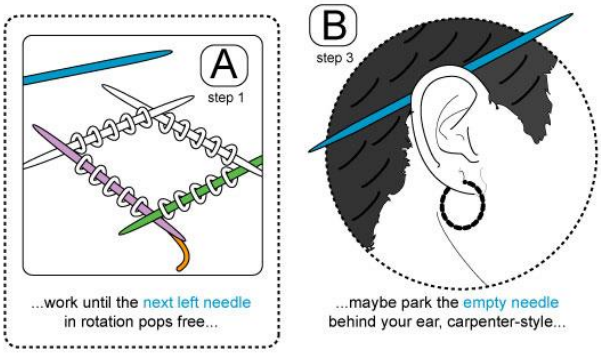
Continental Knitting or just **Continental**: One of the two main knitting techniques, where the yarn is tensioned on the left hand. Common across Europe and in European colonies, believed to be faster than English. (Opposite is English)

I'm a total convert to continental.



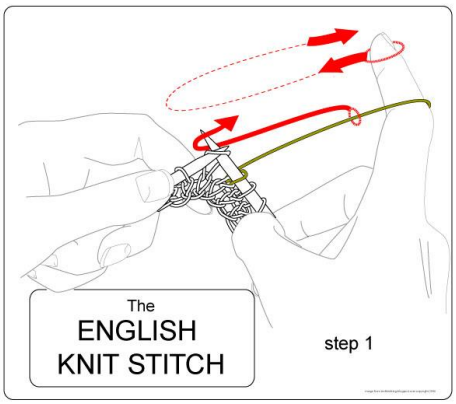
Destashing: Selling or gifting some of your yarn (usually to reduce stash or make space for new yarn)
DPN: Double pointed needle

Are you going to put that sock on circs or DPNs?



English Knitting or just **English**: One of the two main knitting techniques, where the yarn is tensioned on the right hand. Common in the UK and British colonies. (Opposite is Continental)

Are you English or Continental?



FO: Finished object (Opposite of **UFO**)

Frog (Frogging): Ripping out your knitting, a pun on Rip it, rip it sounding like a frog.

And then I saw a mistake on row 3, so I had to frog the whole damn thing.

I-cord: A tube knitted in the round using double-pointed needles, often used as a decorative edging.

Interchangeable(s): A circular needle with a cable that can be detached from the 'tips' (needle) to provide a variety of sizes of knitting needles.

ISO: In Search Of… A request for yarn on the forums.

If you need more of that yarn, have you tried an ISO?

Gauge: How many rows and stitches per inch square or 10 cm squared. How dense the fabric produced is, altered by needle size and chunkiness of the yarn.

KAL: Knit Along, a casual or organised group knitting the same project, sometimes organised by designers/dyers/LYS with prizes.

KIP: Knit In Public

Are you going to an event for Worldwide KIP day?

Knit Picks/Knit Pro: used interchangeably, the brand has a different name in the U.S. and Europe.

LYS: Local Yarn Store

Picking: Linked to the Continental style of knitting, yarn is picked from the left hand with the tip of the needle.

PHD: Project Half Done, however several of the women of Local Stitch 'n' Bitch are/were grad students pursuing Doctorates. In this document, PHD is not used in any knitting sense to avoid confusion!

Pooling: When a multicoloured yarn ends up with a splotch of one colour in a FO.

Ravatar: A Ravelry member's profile picture.

Raveler: A member of Ravelry.

Roving: Fleece that has been 'carded' or brushed in preparation for spinning.

SABLE: Stash Acquired Beyond Life Expectancy, more yarn than you could ever hope to knit.

SAE: Stash Acquisition Experience
Stash: A knitter's on hand supply of yarn (often hidden)
Swatch (or Swatching): Also called a **gauge** square, a piece of fabric knit before a garment to obtain correct **gauge**, sometimes washed and **blocked** to see how the fabric will behave.
Tech-editor: A person who edits a knitting pattern for both language and knitting mistakes.
Tink (or Tinking): Tink is knit spelled backwards, it involves undoing work stitch by stitch usually to fix a mistake. Less drastic than **frogging**.
Tips: The needle part of an **interchangeable** needle.
Does anyone have 4mm tips with them?
Throwing: Linked to the English style of knitting, yarn is thrown forward around the needle. (Opposite is picking)
UFO: Unfinished object, stalled project
I have a secret box of UFOs.
WIP: Work in Progress (sometimes called a **PHD**- Project Half Done.)
My current WIP is a baby gift.
Yarn Bombing: Decorate a public monument/place with yarn decorations

Appendix 2: Feminist Ontology

Three major ontological perspectives in feminist thought are examined by Bristor and Fischer (1993) in terms of their implications and importance in consumer research: Liberal feminism, Experience Feminism, and Poststructuralist feminism.

Liberal feminism stresses that all human beings are equal and are "*essentially rational self-interest-seeking agents*" (Bristor and Fischer 1993, 519). It further emphasises that all differences between males and females arise as a consequence of "*socially allocated roles*" (Bristor and Fischer 1993, 520). The solution to female oppression, then, is to legislate to eliminate all sex-related differences and to strive for androgyny. Caterall and Maclaran (2001, 406) for example state that "*gender differences are not the result of nature or biology but of culture, this means they are changeable*." Liberal feminists believe "*the remedy to inequity is equal opportunity*" (Martin et al. 2006, 172). However, this viewpoint tends in many ways to be accepting of the sociopolitical status quo; it fails to acknowledge that not all women are equal, and "*is most protective of the interests of white, middle-class, heterosexual feminists*" (Bristor and Fischer 1993, 520). As Penaloza (2000, 5) says "*No woman is only a woman... the experiences of black or working-class women may have little in common with those of white and middle-class women*." Aronson (2003, 907) adds, "*Many middle-class feminist issues, such as the 'glass ceiling' and alienation from the housewife role, are far from the daily struggle to make ends meet that is faced by working-class women*".

Women's Voice, or Experience Feminism, contradicts liberal feminism and rejects the idea that men and women are essentially the same. This perspective is further divided into those who support biological determinism believing that men and women are innately different and that biological sex is directly linked to psychological gender, and those who view gender as socially constructed but so deeply embedded as to lead to real differences. Experience feminists believe, however, that femaleness and femininity are not inferior and pursue equality through

equally valuing and empowering different sexes / genders (Bristor and Fischer 1993). It is "*a politics directed towards securing recognition that the feminine is as crucial an element of the human as the masculine*" (Mascia-Lees et al. 1989, 8). This interpretation of feminism makes some uncomfortable as the biological differences between men and women have long been used to oppress. Thus, Elshtain (1982, cited in Tong 2008, 41) claims that "*liberal feminists refuse to entertain the possibility that some sex differences are biologically determined, for fear that affirmative answers could be used to justify the repression, suppression and oppression of women*." This has clearly happened in the past; the Victorians believed that engaging in mathematics or higher reasoning would overheat a woman's reproductive organs and result in sterility, thus, by limiting a woman's options they were protecting her from her own frail physicality (Brumberg 1998).

Poststructuralist feminism believes that *"all experience is socially constructed and mediated by the dominant discourse"* (Martin et al. 2006, 172). If language is the medium through which our subjectivity is constructed, then, an individual's subjectivity is not coherent or fixed. In contrast to both liberal feminism and experience feminism, poststructural feminists question the "*idea that knowledge can be validated by experience*" (Bristor and Fischer 1993, 521). Poststructuralists attempt to deconstruct dominant discourses and "*reject masculine/feminine dualisms and the worldview that hierarchically orders these categories*" (Bristor and Fischer 1993, 522).

Intersectional feminism is not discussed by Bristor and Fischer, but since "*has been heralded as one of the most important contributions to feminist scholarship*" (Davis 2008, 67). Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), intersectionality refers to an attempt to respond to the critiques of liberal feminism as overly focused on the issues of the middle-class white woman by addressing the interaction between gender, race, class, orientation, and other categories of difference. Though the term arose in the late 1980's, as early as the 1850's Sojourner Truth's famous address, "*Ain't I a Woman*", discussed the vastly different experiences of white and black women (Brah and Phoenix 2013). Of course, Intersectionality also has its critics. As it has

become something of a '*buzzword*' (Davis 2008), some scholars worry that appropriate ontological and epistemological rigour have not been applied to the term (Carbin and Edenheim 2013; McKibbin et al. 2013) and that it may be that "*the lack of ontological discussions has led to its very popularity"* (Carbin and Edenheim 2013, 1). While intersectionality appears to offer something of a panacea to overcome all divisions in feminism, Carbin and Edenheim (2013, 1) argue these are "*fruitful and necessary conficts*".

While the author herself aspires to espouse an intersectional feminist standpoint, in this study the principal feminist aim was to avoid '*othering*' and '*essentialism*' (Borgerson 2001, 177). Martin et al.'s (2006) work among female bikers takes a multi-perspective approach, drawing on liberal feminism, women's voice/experience feminism and poststructuralist feminism. "*Rather than force findings into a single ideological mould, this multi-perspective approach provides a framework for interpretive analysis that allows the lived experiences of women to emerge*" (Martin et al. 2006, 172). A similar multi-perspective approach was followed in this thesis.

Appendix 3: Profile of Informants

Ainsley	Ainsley is in her thirties, from the U.K., married. Ainsley was a postdoctoral researcher at U.C.C. She and her husband left Cork to travel around the world. They returned to the U.K. to work but later separated. She became very involved in sailing.
Alison	Alison is an American, mid thirties, mother of one. She was a close friend of the author. As an ex-pat spouse, Alison did not have a work permit, and was a housewife and, then, a stay at home mom. Alison did some work on line for an American company and maintains multiple lifestyle blogs. She maintains her digital image obsessively. Alison was involved with the American ex-pats' group in the city and got Jennifer and Amelia, whom she met through this, involved in the knitting group. She had a major falling out with Jennifer and later began attending the Saturday group, Stitch Up, termed 'The Mommies Group' by some, in preference to Stitch 'n' Bitch. She began with a relatively low skill set, but a high commitment to the group, and did take on a leadership role. When Charlotte left Ireland it was Alison who was entrusted with the 'mailing list' of members' phone numbers. However, after the issues with Jennifer and the birth of her first son, she was instrumental in establishing the weekend knitting group and no longer attends Stitch 'n' Bitch.

Amelia	Amelia is American, late twenties. Amelia was an American expat wife whose husband came to work for an Irish food business while he finished his Ph.D. Initially introduced to the group by Alison, due to Alison's pregnancy she soon became firm friends with the author and Katja. Amelia was a painter, interior decorator, and party planner. Her husband was very unhappy in his job, and they returned home after six months. She attended every week while in Ireland but had little interest in the scarf she started to join the group. She and her husband were big fans of craft beer, so she would just chat and drink. Since returning to the US she has had two daughters.
Angie	Angie is Irish, late twenties-early thirties. When Angie joined the group she was a legal secretary, living with her long-term partner. That relationship broke down and Angie began to look for a new career, ultimately, studying accountancy by night. She tried Internet dating and met a man she later married. They recently had a baby. Angie started out as a crocheter, and learned to knit in the group. She moved to Cobh with her then fiancé and no longer attends.
Aryanna	Aryanna is an American, in her thirties, married to an Irish man.

	She is a tribal entrepreneur, founding Prolethean Yarns. She hand spins Irish-sourced fleeces and dyes them. For some time this was her full time job, however, the model does not really scale due to the limited supply of wool and the labour intensity of hand spinning. She now has a full time job for a multinational. She was a member of the weekend knitting group, Stitch Up and never attended Stitch 'n' Bitch, though she is a member of the Facebook group.
Beth	Beth is an American in her mid/late twenties. She was also beginning a Ph.D. (in Ecology) when she joined the group and has recently completed. She was engaged to and later married an Irish man. Beth is quiet and shy. She describes the group as being mainly about the knitting for her, but then later said that the Thanksgiving dinners (a non-knitting event) were her favourite times in the group. She was particularly friendly with Angie, but they drifted apart. Beth largely knits socks on double pointed needles with luxury sock yarn. Her Ph.D. fieldwork left her unable to attend the group for long stretches during the latter part of the study and she expressed distaste for the falling out between Jennifer and Alison. She invited only the author, Sarah, and Siobhan to her 'hen' or bachelorette party.
Charlotte	Charlotte is an American in her mid to late thirties who was married to an Irish man and was working full time.

	Charlotte founded the group by contacting U.C.C. students and setting up a Yahoo group. Though Charlotte was extremely committed to the group, texting members to say if the meeting was going ahead, hosting Thanksgiving etc., she never progressed beyond knitting squares in plain stitch, on straight needles, and expressed little interest in becoming a better knitter. When Charlotte's marriage broke down, she returned to the U.S. She is now a very involved member of her local Stitch 'n' Bitch, and has since set up a Stitch 'n' Bitch for Google employees.
Cosima	Cosima is Irish, from Dublin, late twenties. Cosima joined the group as a physics graduate student in the local university. She was later awarded her Ph.D. and moved to Scotland for her postdoctoral studies. She was in a long-term relationship with the man she later married. Alison travelled to their wedding. She and Alison, and she and the author were particularly close. She has many typical 'geek' pursuits, related to sci-fi etc. and loved dinosaurs and robots, often knitting items with those motifs. She is very witty and now performs as a stand-up comedian. Cosima was extremely skilled in the areas of crochet, lace making and spindling in particular. She had very high commitment to the group, even attending when she couldn't knit due to carpal tunnel.
Crystal	Crystal, an American married to an Irish man and mother of two, is in her early forties.

	In the early part of the study she lived close to Sarah and got rides with her to Stitch 'n' Bitch. Their eldest children are also the same age. Both women have had thyroid surgery in the last few years. Crystal's family is low income and she received community housing in Midleton. She has only occasionally attended since, but is now attending a group with Jennifer. She crocheted exclusively, often items for her children. When she had a lift to the group, she rarely missed a session.
Danielle	Danielle is a New Zealander in her early twenties, mother of two. Danielle came to Ireland to spend a 'year out' with her father and became pregnant by an Irish man. She joined Stitch 'n' Bitch at 21, a little over a year after becoming a mother. She later had a second child and recently married the children's father. Danielle has a low to medium skill level, and left the group for roller derby. Her family is low-income and was given social housing in Mallow, around 45 minutes to an hour from the city centre, so, it is no longer practical for her to attend.
Delphine	An American expat wife of Asian descent and married to an Irish man, mother of two young children. She returned to the U.S. when her husband, an academic working at U.C.C., got a job at a college in Virginia.

Janika	Janika is German, in her early thirties, in a long-term relationship with an Irish man. Janika is a newer member of the group and works for one of the largest multinationals in the area. She grew up in East Germany and spent some of her youth in communist Ethiopia where her father trained teachers.
Jennifer	Jennifer is the American expat wife of a post-doctoral researcher in U.CC. She is in her late twenties and has recently had her second child. Jennifer joined Stitch 'n' Bitch after Alison met her at the annual expat American Football game. Jennifer was initially unpopular with some members due to being 'brash', loud' and 'very American'. She baked cupcakes and sweet treats for almost every meeting. Jennifer and Alison had a major falling out due largely to their very different personalities. Jennifer is from the very Southern-most U.S. and Alison comes from New England. Despite both being Americans abroad, they ultimately had little in common. Jennifer displayed a high commitment to Stitch 'n' Bitch and was particularly friendly with Sarah. Despite initially having little to no knitting ability, Jennifer progressed at a startling rate. She admitted that she had little to do during the day but practice, and within months had completed lacework etc. Indeed, her phenomenal aptitude caused many of the group to jokingly express relief when she struggled with intarsia (a difficult colour work technique)!

	Jennifer eventually developed friendships outside the group. She moved to Midleton, 40 minutes from the city, and was not able to commute to the group. She and Crystal tried to establish a Midleton group.
Katja	Katja is a Slovakian in her late twenties. She was a close friend of the author and employed her in her yarn business, Dyad Fibres. Katja is a talented knitter, crocheter and designer, as well as a highly successful yarn dyer. Katja moved to Ireland initially at 18 with her Slovakian boyfriend, later fiancé. They later broke up, reasonably amicably, and she is now involved with an Irish man. Katja is greatly admired within the group for her exceptionally high skill level, but Katja's commitment to the group was relatively low. She rarely attended meetings. She had previously employed Rachel in her company, had employed the author for several years and currently employs Sarah. The members of the group sometimes refer to her by the author's pet name for her, 'Queen [Actual First Initial]'.
Kira	Kira was a Post-Doctoral Fellow (in English) in U.C.C. Though Irish by birth she has spent much of her life in the U.K. She has a long term partner. A very capable knitter, she usually wore sweaters she had knit herself. Though she took up a position in a U.K. university, she remains active on the Facebook group and often shops 'with' Sarah and Siobhan online.
Leda	Leda is an Indian ex-pat wife.

	Leda joined the group while pregnant with her daughter and largely made garments for her. Leda is Jain and vegan, and gave cooking lessons to Sarah and others. She was initially embarrassed to admit to the group that she had an arranged marriage. Leda's husband would walk her to and from the meetings. She stopped attending largely because she had established a social life for herself in Cork and the group was no longer her only socialisation.
Marian	Marian is Irish, in her twenties, from Dublin. Marian is a TV producer from Dublin who was working in Cork on a local news type show. She joined the group just a few months before leaving Cork. She immediately became very good friends with Sarah and Siobhan, and has visited them to have knitting and Harry Potter marathons. She was extremely witty and coined the term 'Knitler' for Sarah.
Rachel	Rachel is an American in her late twenties-early thirties, who was also an ex-pat wife. Rachel had previously attended design college and worked for several large designers in the U.S. While in Ireland she worked on various craft and design projects. Katja was able to obtain a work permit for Rachel based on her fashion experience. Rachel largely knit on knitting machines, as she had no gauge – meaning that in any yarn, on any needles her knitting came out the same size,

	which is completely abnormal. She also crocheted, including headbands to sell etc. Rachel attended Stitch 'n' Bitch intermittently, but later began to attend a roller derby league which trained at the same time. However, her friendship with Katja and her artistic skill increased her social capital within the group. Rachel's marriage broke down causing a strain on her relationship with Katja. Katja's partner was a good friend of Rachel's husband. Rachel moved into Katja's house for a time and became solely financially dependent on her income from part time work at Katja's company. She was also dependent on Katja for transport to and from the workplace. After a year of this, Rachel returned to the U.S., and resumed working for a major designer's company in New York. She and Katja have repaired their relationship somewhat.
Sarah	Sarah is Irish, from Cork, mid thirties, mother of two. Sarah was one of the founders of the group, having been approached online by Charlotte when she was a mature student at U.C.C. Sarah has since had 2 children and while in the past she was largely a stay at home mom, doing occasional clerical work for the county, she now works two days a week at Katja's yarn company. Sarah has displayed a consistently high commitment to the group, as well as an extremely high degree of skill, and is usually where knitting problems are taken. She also has a forceful personality and strong

	opinions on knitting, leading to the nicknames 'Mammy Sarah' and 'Knitler'. Sarah has consistently occupied a high skill, high commitment role within the group. This, in addition to being a founder member, has resulted in her becoming the de facto group leader.
Siobhan	Siobhan is Irish, in her thirties, single, working in the pharma industry. She has been knitting all her life and joined Stitch 'n' Bitch after a relationship breakup. She and Sarah are particularly close. She is an extremely accomplished knitter and displays high commitment to the group. She described herself as a 'senior' member. Through her skill, commitment, and through her close friendship with Sarah, she is now a group leader.
Susan	Susan is a member of Stitch 'n' Bitch group Facebook page though not an attendee. She attends Alison's Knit Up group. She is a professional knitting pattern designer who has had covers on Interweave Knits and Vogue Knits, the biggest knitting magazines. She attended and taught at Knit Camp.
Veera	Veera is a close friend of Susan's and like her, is a member of Stitch 'n' Bitch group Facebook page but attends Alison's Knit Up group. She is a Canadian married to an Irish man. She hosts an annual knitting and spinning event at her home. She often test-knits for Susan. She also attended Knit Camp for the final weekend.

Appendix 4: Group Timeline

(compiled with help from “Charlotte”)

- January 17th, 2007 - First official Stitch ‘n’ Bitch Cork meeting, Souths Cafe at the Imperial Hotel, 7p.m. (2 members, Charlotte and one other (Deirdre). It was organised via the Yahoo group StitchNBitchIE. Charlotte later recruited new members with posters in town, MySpace, etc.

- Feb 2007 - Sarah joins

- March 2007 - Crystal joins

- March 2007 - Meghan joins

- June 9th, 2007 - First World Wide Knit In Public Day @ Grand Parade Peace Park (Charlotte noted in a post event email that in attendance there were the "usual group of four plus one new member," which likely included Sarah and Crystal as the usuals.)

- October 2007 – Crystal gives birth to a daughter

- Dec 2007 – Sarah gives birth to a son

- January 2008 - Brief hiatus for group as noted in email: "Stitch ‘n’ Bitch Cork City has been on hiatus the last few months as a couple of our regulars just had babies and everyone was too busy in December".

- May 2008 – Katja joins

- June 14th, 2008 - 2nd annual World Wide Knit In Public Day at Fitzgerald’s Park

- July 2008 - Rachel joins

- August 2008 - Group launched Ravelry page (at Sarah's suggestion) and relocate to Chambers Bar on Washington St.

- September 2008 - Cosima joins

- October 2008 – The author joins
- Autumn 2008 – Danielle joins
- December 2008 - Alison joins
- January 2009 - Beth joins
- February 2009 - Grace joins
- June 2009 - 3rd annual World Wide Knit In Public Day at Fitzgerald's Park
- July 2009 - Kinsale Arts Week Event (Charlotte, Sarah, Alison, Rachel and Katja were there)
- September 2009 - Kira joins
- September 2009 –Crystal gives birth to a son
- Autumn 2009 – Ainsley joins
- September 2009 – Author enrols in Ph.D. programme
- November 2009 - Angie joined. This is also about the time where we switched to meeting at Abbot's Ale House on Coburg/Devonshire St at Sarah's suggestion.
- Early 2010 – Author discusses study of Stitch 'n' Bitch with group members
- Summer 2010 – Charlotte spent time in the U.S. and started Stitch 'n' Bitch Lynnwood
- Summer 2010 - Jennifer joins
- June 2010 – Delphine joins
- July 2010 – Cosima leaves Cork
- August 2010 – Kira leaves Cork
- August 2010- Knit Camp U.K. in Stirling
- September 2010 – Siobhan joins

- September 2010 – Dr. Cosima's Viva
- September 2010 - Stitch 'n' Bitch Cork on Facebook
- Autumn 2010 – Leda joins
- November 2010 - Charlotte left Cork for Seattle permanently
- November 2010 – Delphine gives birth to a son
- December 2010 – Ainsley leaves Cork
- 2011 - Marian joins
- April 2011 – Amelia joins
- May 2011- Leda gives birth to a daughter
- June 2011 - Charlotte handed off the text messaging to Alison
- June 2011 – Delphine leaves for the U.S.
- September 2011 – Sarah gives birth to a son
- September 2011 – Pilot interview conducted
- November 2011 – Alison gives birth to a son
- December 2011 – Amelia returns to the U.S.
- Between 2013 and 2014, depth interviewing was conducted
- Jan 2013 – Bonnie joins
- Sept 2013 – Jennifer moves to Midleton
- Jan 2014 - Janika joins
- July 2014 – Dr. Beth's Viva
- July 2014 – Jennifer gives birth to a daughter

- Jan 2015 – Sarah has a son
- April 2015 – Launch of Prolethean Yarns' book (Aryanna, Cosima and Alison)
- October 2015 – Beth leaves Cork
- December 2015 – Stephen West visits Dyad, most of Stitch 'n' Bitch attend classes
- Fieldwork phase of the study ends

Appendix 5: Outline for interview

- Can you tell me how you learned to knit? (or crochet etc.)
- How do people respond to you knitting?
- Thread on Ravelry – someone who knits to a Knitter (capital K) – is that you? When was that for you?
- There was an article in the Guardian (May 16th) comparing knitting and yoga – relaxing or meditative?
- When did you decide to join a group?
    - How did you go about it?
    - What did you hope to get out of it?
- Can you tell me a story of a positive experience with the group?
    - A negative one?
- Changes over time?
- Page from Stitch 'n' Bitch Handbook as a prompt….
- What are your thoughts on Craftivism?
    - Yarn Bombing?
- I've asked you to show me some Finished Objects to talk about….
- Some knitters have "stash", some only buy yarn for a project – can you describe your shopping style?
- Are there any yarns that are special to you?
- Are there any tools that are special to you?

comfortably, and I found myself making perfect little rows of stitches in time with the rhythm of the swaying train carriage. I looked through the window at the passing pastures outside and felt a sense of exhilaration. It had finally clicked! My hands and my body and my brain and my eyes had finally gotten into sync, and knitting felt comfortable, pleasurable—relaxing, even. I couldn't stop knitting. And each time I'd come to a difficult point in my work—when I'd have to increase or decrease stitches, for instance—I'd just walk up and down the length of the train until I saw another woman knitting in her cabin, and ask her to help me over the hump. By the time I arrived on the West Coast, my sweater was done.

After I returned home from the tour, I sought out my local knitting store and bought yarn and a pattern to make another sweater, which I completed on my next train trip a few weeks later. I couldn't get enough of my newfound love—I would borrow every book I could find on the craft from my local library, then lie awake in bed late at night reading them. I found my eyes opening up to details I had never noticed before: the way that sweaters are constructed, the way that different fibers produce different knit textures, and the huge variety of objects that could be made from simple knit and purl stitches. I was hooked.

When I'd tell people about my latest obsession, I'd invariably get one of two responses. The first, "Can you teach me, too?" was a common and very welcome reply. But other friends responded with "Really?" or "How interesting," both spoken with an air of disbelief, even a touch of disdain. After all, I had gotten a Ph.D. in the psychology of women and had started *BUST*, a feminist magazine—what was I doing knitting? Soon it occurred to me that if I had told these folks I'd been playing soccer, or learning karate, or taken up carpentry, they most likely would have said, "Cool," because a girl doing a traditionally male activity—now, that's feminist, right? But a girl doing a traditionally female activity—let alone one as frivolous and time-wasting as knitting—well, what were they to make of that?

It made me rethink my original feminist position. After all, it had been thirty years since the feminist revolution of the 1970s and housewives as we knew them had pretty much gone the way of the dinosaur, so why, dammit, wasn't knitting receiving as much respect as any other hobby? Why was it still so looked down on? It seemed to me that the main difference between knitting and, say, fishing or woodworking or basketball, was that knitting had traditionally been done by women. As far as I could tell, that was the only reason it had gotten such a bad rap. And that's when it dawned on me: All those people who looked down on knitting—and housework, and housewives—were not being feminist at all. In fact, they were being anti-feminist, since they seemed to think that only those things that men did, or had done, were worthwhile. Sure, feminism had changed the world, and young girls all across the country had formed soccer leagues, and were growing up to become doctors and astronauts and senators. But why weren't boys learning to knit and sew? Why couldn't we all—women and men alike—take the same kind of pride in the work our mothers had always done as we did in the work of our fathers?

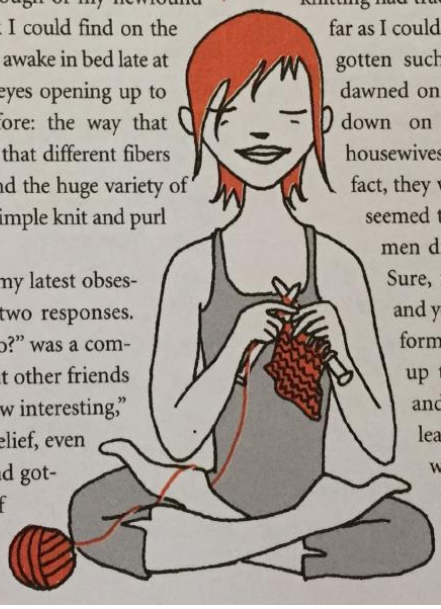


Figure A5-1: Prompt Page from Stitch 'n' Bitch Handbook

Appendix 6: Sample interview – Siobhan

[Siobhan]'s tape

I: What date is it?

S: It's the 11th July

…

I: You're [Siobhan], I had to anonymise it.

Can you tell me how you learned how to knit?

S: In primary school, my teacher, I think it was in First class and we all learned to knit, I think we made headbands for a doll or for ourselves maybe, but I loved it (oh really), wasn't always very good at it but Mum helped me but no I really liked it and did crochet as well, I don't know was that the following year or not. It was an all girls' primary school and we all did crafts

I: Did you stick with it the whole way up?

S: Em, I suppose the end of primary school I remember knitting a jumper in fifth or sixth class, when I was mid-teens I started knitting again, like I never fully stopped but I wasn't doing it continually and then even in college a little bit and when I was working and then when I joined Stitch 'n' Bitch that was when it – took over.

I: That's interesting because a lot of people in Stitch 'n' Bitch say that they didn't like it in school

S: Yea, I really did like it but then my Mum used to knit as well and she made jumpers for us and stuff

I: So you made your first jumper when you were about 12

S: yea, about that, yea. I'm not sure how wearable it was, it was bright pink, cerise pink (yea) I'd love if I still had it but it's long gone, it got lost in the mists of time. I think when I was a teenager I probably just went, awful, throw it out, yea, didn't know where my life was taking me, it'd be in a museum otherwise

I: There was a thread on Ravelry once that asked when did you go from someone who knits to being a knitter with a capital K?

S: Oh that was joining Stitch 'n' Bitch definitely

I: What was the difference between that and your previous knitting?

S: Well part of it was there was probably room in it, room in my life for it, before that, basically just before I joined Stitch 'n' Bitch, most of my friends left Cork so they were all in Dublin and I also had broke up with someone so I had a lot more free time and then I joined the group and really enjoyed it and made friends out of it and it became a bit more or I became a bit more obsessed with it. I just really enjoyed it, I suppose I've always had sort of pockets of it over the years but that's when I took off.

I: How did you decide to join the group?

S: I heard about Stitch 'n' Bitch years before, em, my Mum used always cut out things about knitting for me and about famous people who knit, I can't really tell the singer who I really liked-Catel Kinick who used to knit. She used to get all her patterns off of, I can't think of the name of it, got free online patterns, Knitty, (Knitty,), so I found out about Knitty years before and then Stitch 'n' Bitch and I got the book and I didn't know of any Cork group at the time and then I was actually out for a drink for two of my friends who were moving to Dublin in Abbott Ale on a Wednesday and I saw a group of knitters in the corner and I said right I need to find out more about this group, I think about a month later then I joined the group.

I: Did you approach that night?

S: I didn't actually, no, and I was sorry I didn't but I went home straight away that night and looked up Stitch 'n' Bitch Cork and that was the group that I found

I: And what did you hope to get out of it at that point?

S: I wanted to make something to wear like a cardigan or a jumper so I wanted a bit of help with that

I: Do you knit in public?

S: Yes

I: And how do people respond to you?

S: Em, you get some bemused looks, some people are just delighted to see you knitting and they want to come over and have a chat, a conversation. The first time I knit in public was on the train going to Dublin and there was a girl across from me and she was giving me kinda weird looks the whole time. But then after Mallow or one of the stations anyway, these two American women got on and they were sitting two seats up and one of them saw me and her eyes lit up and she got her knitting out of her bag and she was like waving it across at me and she came over and sat down and she was, we were talking about patterns and she was omg that's amazing, yea her friend wasn't a knitter and she was like rolling her eyes and I love the waving the knitting across a train like a flag of solidarity it really was and she gave me her email address and was asking for the pattern of what I was making and she sent me on a pattern as well

I: Did ye actually get in touch afterwards?

S: Eh yea, I mean it was just one email but yea

I: That's funny]

S: I kind of like it anyway I just kind of go em, what do you think of this. There's a bit of an attitude in knitting in public I think, (yea?) Well I want, because I was nervous of doing it I was

nervous of being embarrassed I did, I kinda went, em, screw you if you have a problem with it 'cause you do get odd looks (yea, It's true)

I: Can you tell me a story of a positive experience of the group?

S: Like within the group? At the?]

I: just within the group, like what's positive about it for you?

S: Em, well I've made great friends out of it, I don't know what to say, it's just such a big positive (ok), I love that I'm more creative now, a bit more crafty , more confident to do other craft things, I love the way the group is not a lesson so it's just going and chatting and there's help there if you need it, I've never had a problem that couldn't be solved within the group even if it's looking up stuff but just having people there to point you in the right direction (yea). I suppose the friendships have been the biggest thing for me (yea) em, I made a lot of good friends and then a couple of Really good friends that I think even if we weren't knitting that we'd still be friends. Yea, it's been a great asset, I don't know how to put it (no that's fine) it's been a great improvement in my life.

I: Ok what was it like before that needed to be improved?

S: I wouldn't have been confident in trying new things, craft wise or just doing anything creative, I suppose it's not like my life was bad before or anything]

I: Oh no Sorry I'm not trying to say that it saved your life if you're saying it's positive change, I'm just trying to get that sorted out in my head.

S: Well I'm not sure how I would have met really good friends without it because I wasn't at a stage where I'd be going out lots and meeting new people which I had been, I was always really social and meeting lots of new people , you know if I walked into a bar I'd always know people there, whereas that was kind of gone so I didn't really know, I'm not into sports, I'm not sure how easily I'd have made friends if it hadn't been for that kind of group (yea yea)

I: And do you have any negative experiences with the group?

Siobhan hestitates

I: Bearing in mind that this is confidential if you say anything. You can say that bitch Maire

S: (laughs) I suppose because it's a group of women that's linked by essentially one craft you're not necessarily going to get on with all of those people so one of the negatives has been getting on with or dealing with people you (like clashing personalities) exactly yea, In one way that's a good thing, just learning to deal with other people but it can be very frustrating. I think when I joined the group I thought it was just one big happy family and everyone got on and then the more you're in it, it's not really that, it's not the case (uh huh)

I: Did you see changes over time or do you think you were more naïve at the start to the internal politics or whatever?

S: I think it's just getting to know any group of people, when you get to know any group of people you see the top level and then when you get to know more the personality, more of the differences more of the similarities between ye

I: And who are the people in the group that you especially get on with?

S: Oh [Sarah], definitely, I mean in the group now I think I get on with everyone but [Sarah], would be the main one yea,

I: (that's good,I just wanted it for the tape, I know ye're best pals, I'm not an idiot)

S: I should call her … what's her pseudonym? [They had previously shared these]

I: Sarah, Sarah, you're her mother [in the context of the show Orphan Black, where the pseudonyms came from Siobhan is Sarah's mother]

S: Sarah's my best friend, yea it's I'd love if we had more people now, I think the group has gotten quite small but I do like it, I do still enjoy it but it's just in the early days if you didn't show up it wasn't a big deal, there was such a big group or if there were three or four people missing it didn't matter but if there's three or four people missing now that's everyone.

I: yea, it's a lot smaller now. And why do you think it's so much smaller, is it just that we've lost members and haven't attracted new members or is it

S: Yea , I really don't know, I suppose I wasn't involved in any kind of, I feel I'm a senior member now and I don't know what was happening before I joined, were they really actively looking for people to join, we're certainly not doing that, we're looking at the Facebook group a lot and if people contact us we're letting them know the details and stuff, I think some people don't like the fact that it's in a pub but there are other groups out there .

I: Have you encountered that people don't like that's in a pub?

S: Yea

I: that's interesting, it hadn't occurred to me, and what would their objection be?

S: I suppose maybe they think it's ah a real boozing night, which its not! or they don't like being in pubs, that seems to be the main reason. (interesting) but it's a kind of different pub any way not a rowdy one, well most nights (laughs)

I: Well, yeah last night it was pretty rowdy.

S: God yeah and they are in there a lot of Wednesdays

I: And then they switched to French and I'm I can still understand you, you're being even more inappropriate in French (oh really) I was like what you were saying in English was bad enough but like I can still understand you , you moron

S: I was able to tune it out when they spoke French

I: So, there was an article in The Guardian and there was a similar article in the Irish Times recently describing knitting as relaxing or meditative, and similarly the Guardian article was comparing knitting and yoga, do you have any thoughts on that?

S: It can be, it can also be one of the most frustrating things ever. I don't know about the knitting a jumper, the jumper thing is never relaxing until you get to a bit of the pattern where you're repeating it over and over, then yea, that's great, it's wonderful and relaxing but yea doing sleeves or different things where you have to make decisions or check that it fits that can be really frustrating.

I: Yes, you have to try on a jumper about a thousand times and there's needles in it and …

S: that's one of the projects I've brought, a cardigan that's on the needles for a good two years and I'm pretty much finished and all I have to do is border (sighs)

I: Yeah I had to bring some samples somewhere recently and I had to bring the body of a jumper

S: yea, I'd love to show you the finished thing. Yea though, it can definitely be really relaxing but that's not all it is.

I: So what else is it to you?

S: What is it? It's kind of empowering I suppose to be able to make yourself an item of clothing or something that's useful in the house. I've knit loads of things and some pieces are things that I use every single day and then there was another cardigan I was looking for I can't even find it so you know you win some you lose some but I was really proud of that cardigan because it was the first one I fully finished so there's that and I'll always wear it though probably not out as much, I think it's gone a bit out of shape

I: (that does happen too)

S: Yeah

I: Yeah I think someone was saying to me about the Lopi that I want to knit as well that, you know you'll get about two months out of wearing it and then it'll be the baggiest thing you own

S: Yea I saw a Lopi, there was a German student who stayed in our house one summer, she was working with my sister up in Galway and they were being worked very hard and they came down to Cork for a holiday, so she stayed for about two weeks and she had a massive Lopi jumper and I fell in love with it, so I've been wanting to knit a Lopi since I started knitting, I just haven't got around to it. It's going to happen and actually Riddari was the pattern I was thinking of doing (yea) there's two of them I have it down to, Riddari or I can't remember the name of the other one, yea it has to happen. I think I've always just loved knitwear but I only realised that recently. I remember buying an Aran cardigan when I was in college and I loved it (yea) and like that Lopi jumper it still stands out, there was, eh, I remember my brother's friend had this massive woolly jumper and I loved it as well, a big chunky thing, em, I didn't really like I suppose, wool scratchiness, although that's probably when I was a bit younger, yea, I've always loved knitwear.

I: That's interesting, some people would describe themselves as process knitters, they pick the pattern for the challenge and some people would describe themselves as product knitters like they want the sweater at the end

S: Yea, I'd say I'm definitely more of a product knitter (yea) I mean, I do enjoy picking things like that'll challenge me but I wouldn't do it if I didn't want the end product either

I: Ok, that's interesting, I've made a lot of hats just cause they look cool, but I don't need a lot of hats and I end up giving away a lot of hats

S: Yea, that's the thing actually 'cause I'm starting the more knitting now, well I kind of go, well I don't need ten hats, I already have a good five and I really don't need more but then it's hard if you picked a pattern you loved to give it away

I: When is your knitting time?

S: It can be any time really but in the summer I'm not knitting half as much but when I come home from work, yea, I probably do a few bits and pieces but we would knit 8 to 10 kinda, that timeframe, maybe not the whole two hours but if I'm sitting watching t.v. I'll just pick up the knitting (yea) I got tennis elbow over a year ago and that really played havoc with it (oh!) but I would have knit for hours in the evening (you had to slow down because of it?) yea (was it a tennis injury or was it an actual knitting injury?) No, it was actually a painting injury (oh wow!) yea, painting a wall and I overextended my arm or something, yea it was really awful (that sounds painful), it's mainly fine but it's just if I knit too long it starts to hurt so I just have to maybe knit for 20 minutes and then put it away and then pick it up again

I: Was it [Cosima] as well got Carpel Tunnel or something?

S: I don't know [Cosima], I never met her (oh, oh) yea, I know everyone thinks I met her, she was gone just before I started I'd say, because I started in the summer so I'd say that must have been maybe a month or two after she left

I: yea it must have been, oh that's strange, so I suppose I think of everybody being in the group at the one time, whereas there's actually been a lot of ebb and flow (yea) so did you know [Charlotte]?

S: No, I met her once though, she came back for a holiday and she asked me a knitting question, and I was so, oh what's happening (well it was [Charlotte], all she knows are squares, (oh but I didn't know that) you just knew she was the founder

S: Yea, I was omg, royalty asking me a question, it was funny

I: Can I give you a look at a page from the Stitch 'n' Bitch handbook, you mentioned that you do have it (yea) have a look at it and tell me if it makes you think of anything

S: The whole thing or just the highlighted

I: Whichever you prefer, the highlighted is probably the most important

S: I'd forgotten how I'd got into Bust magazine it was obviously from doing this.

I: Oh really, so it was knitting first and then Bust

S: I suppose they would have been around the same time, but I do remember checking it out because of this, Yea, And do you subscribe to Bust?

I: No, I just the emails too cheap to actually buy it (and Facebook as well) I actually don't have it on Facebook

[Reads page from Stitch 'n' Bitch Handbook]

S: I remember reading this actually, I'd forgotten it's in the book but now that I'm reading it, I'm like yea yea, I remember this

I: Well you're one of the few people who actually read it, so well done buddy

S: It'd say I read bits though, I don't know if I ever really read it right through, although yea, no bits stick out like the bit about she was knitting with her grandmother, her grandmother was dying, but I didn't have anyone to talk to about it

I: Yea, I think a lot of her family are still Dutch 'cos when I met her she was on her way to Holland

S: Yea, I really liked this, I do get very mixed reactions from people about knitting, some people just take the piss straight away and other people go really, and they want an explanation, actually one of the things I loved was we did a train the trainer course in work 'cause I have to give training on one of the software systems I work with, so we did this train the trainer session, this woman training us on how to train other people, so it was only a day long, normally it's a weeklong so it was kind of a shortened version of it. There was me and my boss and then people from other teams across the site and you had to tell her three things about you that no

one else knew and I kinda started off with the knitting and she said, oh you have to give me more than that, and I said in the pub every week and she said that's it and we all had to give a training session at the end of it and she had knitting needles and wool so she was, ok right you're giving a knitting lesson (wow) so I did that and I explained it to everyone and they were all like 'wow, ok ' and even my boss was like' yea, I get it now, yea you're really passionate about this and I'm like, I don't know why you're excited about it and he's, I'm going to take it up myself, but generally if you're talking to somebody and you're kind of talking enthusiastically they kind of go 'ok, fair enough' but you do get the, yea my granny used to knit, why are you doing that and then I'm sure you get it at Stitch 'n' Bitch as well, the 'can you make me a hat' constantly, no, I don't know you, it takes time

I: yes, or the, oh that's really good you could sell that

S: Oh that drives me crazy.

I: I could sell my €60 worth of yarn before I even get into my hourly rate, no I couldn't, no.

S: Are you willing to pay?

I: I don't think you're understanding the amazing alpaca cashmere here-

S: Yeah I'm not giving that to someone else unless I love them

I: Were you aware before you got into Stitch 'n' Bitch that, according to Debbie Stowler, it was a third wave feminist movement? (yea, probably know more about it now but I was aware) and was that something that resonated with you or appealed to you or was it just not a factor?

S: Definitely, (oh really , ok) I mean if it wasn't I don't think it would have stopped me but yea it was probably an important factor that I, I'm trying to think of the word, I hate using the word, but recontextualised knitting for me, that it wasn't a hobby that I had when I was a kid, that it was something that I could do now, that I could really enjoy, that made something for myself and because it's seen, well it's seen as old fashioned by so many people, taking it and using for

myself, clothes that I will wear all the time, kind of more modern bright and funky colours, where was I going with that sentence, I suppose just make it mine, that it's not some old craft, it's empowering

I: Would it surprise you to know that only one other person had given any thought to it and knew that it was a feminist movement (really, ah should I ask, can you say? Who was that?) [Danielle] was the only other person (ah) who was even aware that it was a feminist movement and she was very interested in that more in the way of valuing feminine work (yea) was where she was coming from with that, but nobody else was even aware of it or had given any thought to it

S: Well, I find that with feminism anyway, I suppose I've always been aware of it in some way 'cause my Mum was a feminist and was involved in a feminist movement when I was a kid, so it was always there for me but even now it still shocks me that women my age have never put any thought to feminism beyond its bra burning (and you don't shave your legs) oh yea yea – I went to a Feminista, do you know Cork Feminista (yea, yea,) I'm not going there anymore, it's kind of gone a bit off its, it's going in a different direction, I was at one of their meetings and one of the women was like sometimes I shave my legs sometimes I don't , it's really got nothing to do with anyone else 'cause like you don't have to leave your hair grow to be a feminist, it really doesn't matter, do what you want but just think about why you're doing things you know.

I: Which I think is one of the principles of feminism, make your own decisions, I mean yea, let's not judge anyone for their choices, I think for [Danielle] as a young stay at home Mum, that was one of the things for her that was, it's ok for me to be feminist who is a stay at home mom, I think that's way this really resonated with her and so she had put some thought into that but most people really in the group are like 'oh I didn't know that she was a feminist, I didn't know that she had a Ph.d., I didn't know that she wrote Bust magazine, you know all this

S: yea, yea, I'd actually forgotten the link between her and Bust and in my mind I got into them at the same time but obviously, I don't know, I think I found Bust through her but I could be wrong

I: yea, but I did remember that you were involved in Cork Feminista and things so, I thought that you might be the one who would

S: definitely yea, and I have a friend who is an amazing woman who, she was a body image activist when she was younger, she's from California, stay at home Mum, home schooled, big into craft, like makes the most amazing things like she's made kind of, like she's made basically cardboard furniture, but it looks Amazing and works in a solid, yea I don't know if there is anything she can't do really, you know she has a beautiful herb garden out the back, an amazing cook but that's all stuff she taught herself (kind of like [Katja]) yea those people yea, oh if I didn't like them

I: Yea I often say that, I often say that about [Katja], like if I didn't love this girl, I'd hate her

S: They can be so annoying but yea she's great and she crochets as well and yea there's four of us who meet for dinner every Tuesday in her house and I remember the other two girls, one of them in particular just said 'oh feminism uch' and she just said 'well do you believe in equality, well congratulations you're a feminist', and there's different explanations, even me, I've learned things there as well

I: Now did she come to the group a couple of times?

S: Yea, she's come once or twice, yea but she has a young kid still so she can't always leave on a Wednesday and she used to teach on a Wed. also, yea but she'll probably come again

I: Yea, I think I remember sitting next to her one night, she's a very interesting woman, and I was interested in your little activist group before

S: Yea it's still going (still going?) Actually I was out with them yesterday, we went down to Gobnait's well in Ballyvourny, I'd never been and it's one of her favourite places, it's really nice, have you been down there? (no), it's just outside Ballyvourny, she was made a saint but they reckon she was a, She was telling me about her, a chieftess, (Yea, I feel there's a real pagan thing about it, yea a lot of pagan ritual around the well and stuff) yea, but the Catholic church made it into a (right, like they do with everything, yea 'cause this is totally us guys) 'cause basically people wouldn't stop doing what they were doing so they were yea, sure we'll just bring it in 'cause in the church there's a green man you know in the church, there's this pagan green man and outside there's like a little hole in the wall you put your hand through and there's this stone ball and it actually feels like marble it's so smooth now but she was known for healing animals, people, even now, they'll rub a rag on the ball and rub it on the sick animals and it heals them but there's all sort of pagan rituals, but it's a gorgeous place

I: Is that the place as well where you have to walk three times around the well or is that another abbey where there's a pagan ritual of walking three or four times around this fairy fort or something and then they sort of stuck an abbey there so that everyone would have to walk around the abbey

S: I don't think that's there, that's like withershins isn't it?Because I got an album called Withershins and she was like that's a pagan thing. but it's lovely down there and I recommend it if you want a drive out

I: I have bad memories of Ballyvourney, I got stranded on a bus there once, the bus broke down it was bad (oh) I'll tell you the story later it was very funny but since

S: we don't have to record that seeing as we've gone completely off topic

I: no all my bad but interesting stuff, I was interested that you said there was some change in Cork Feminista as well, what was that?

S: I'm probably not … maybe on a tape

I: oh yea, yeah, [Sarah] mentioned a couple of times 'cause you go up and down to Dublin quite a bit, (yeah) she mentioned sending you to Stitch 'n' Bitch for things for her (oh yeah) and I wondered if you might want to talk about that, particularly, that she picked colours and you were like, no, better colours

S: Oh yea, I think she won yarn and she got to choose the colours and I didn't like the colours she chose but like, I wasn't being mean, I thought they wouldn't go together, does [Sarah] (oh no she totally admits you're right) oh really she wouldn't admit to me! oh yea, I was like, is there going to be a [Siobhan's] right party every year because that one time she was right?

S: Yea, we can be both pretty strong minded about stuff and I, when I didn't know her that well, I used get a bit scared 'cause she just keeps going on and on and on, I mean I thought we had an argument once like we were driving up to Dublin and we had this big conversation about my credit card bill and I was getting like, ok we really need to leave this now, I was getting really stressed and the next day I was like, oh sorry about last night I was just really tired on the way to Dublin, and she was, what are you talking about, so I realised that's just the way she is, so I don't mind now when we argue, it's grand, just get it out but I don't think, you know, well argue is probably the wrong word, we do tend to just keep saying our point over and over again (used you call it a circular argument) a circular argument, yea that's it exactly, we just keep saying the thing over and over again until one person just says oh shut up. Were you asking about the going to Dublin thing or?

I: Oh just about shopping for yarn generally

S: Em I've had to take a step back

I: Did you have, I suppose some people have a stash and some people buy per project

S: Oh no, definitely a stash, but although I took a photo of my stash and I sent it to [Sarah] and then her and [Katja], looked at it and thought phew 'that's not a stash'

I: Can I get a copy of that photo?

S: Yea but it's not a good, it's not a good photo, it's just loads of bags in a wardrobe (that's ok) so there's nothing, yea I'll find it, it's in my file from last year

I: So do you have a wardrobe of yarn?

S: Yea, I do yes and I need to clear that wardrobe out because I have a friend moving in next month, I don't know where I'm going to put it, yea,em I love my stash but I have to start using it, yea, so I'm still buying stuff for projects but I'm trying to keep it to a minimum

I: And what when you're talking about a stash, are we talking about sweater quantities, random balls that you pick up?

S: most of it is probably sock yarn and individual skeins and stuff but I do have, I have the makings of about three or four jumpers and cardigans I'd say. And then I have kind of random things I bought in desperation which I'm better at now, as in, I couldn't find the colour I wanted and I ended up buying an acrylic and I hated acrylic, I'm never going to use it so why did I buy acrylic, 'cause I was never going to use acrylic, so why did I buy it, so I have some of those things like I bought yarn to make em, I can't think of the name of it, it's Vera Valamaki stripped (stripped study) no stripped study is the triangular one (I know which one you mean) I know it doesn't matter, [Sarah] made it in the brown

I: Some people have said that it's very awful to knit

S: I found it fine, basically I bought yarn to make it, and hated it and never used it and still have those three big balls of sock yarn. It was proper sock yarn, I don't know what I was thinking, so I just need to get rid of all that stuff (oh, where did you get it?) oh sorry, Knit in Midleton but it was just trying to find three colours that went together. I ended up making it in [Dyad Fibres], I think two different sock clubs and then on common thread and I made it for a knit along and I never liked it and I'm never going to wear it, so I've cast off and everything so I'm just going to

rip it back and use the yarn for something else 'cause I love the yarn, and it is lovely it's just not my colour, I'll use the yarn for something else

I: And with that it was a knit along, was it that you were under time pressure to use the right colours or

S: Yea, and I was also trying to use up sock yarn that was some stash, that was my Harry Potter shawl I started, myself and do you remember [Marian], (yes) yea, we watched all the Harry Potter movies in a weekend and I cast on at the start of the first movie for that and just kept knitting, we did Lord of the Rings trilogy again another weekend (wow) it's hard going, the Harry Potter was a marathon

I: It's hard going, somebody I know had a viewing party but I'm just I got distracted by the wine

I: Shopping for yarn, you go to Knit and This is Knit, would you go on line or are they your main ones

S: I don't really go to This is Knit anymore, I just find that when I go in, it's such a lovely shop and they're all pretty but I never really choose anything, 'cos there's so much in there and everything is so pretty, I'll generally walk away having bought nothing or if there's something in the sale bin or something, so I just stopped going in there but I will go in again I just haven't been in, in say, the last six months maybe even a year. Love [Dyad Fibres]'s so much, it's probably good that they don't have a shop although (you can just come down any time)

S: But because I work those hours, yea, I love [Dyad Fibres]'s and then the other shop we used to go to is the Constant Knitter. They have Dyad, that's in Dublin as well, I haven't been there in ages either and then Winny's Wool Wagon but that's a bit outside the city but they do drops as well, so that's handy (very good)

I: In your stash, are there, have you any yarns that are special to you, I don't know that have memories or stories associated with them?

S: Em, I have a couple of balls of wool from my Mum's stash, a couple of years ago she gave me all her bits and pieces, knitting bits and pieces. I have a cabled woollen jumper that she made for her, a small boy, I'm assuming my brother but I really don't know. That was like the back and front and the arms were knit but it was never sewn together and I was going to sew it together but no boy nowadays will ever wear a jumper like that, it's just heavy, I'm thinking of unravelling that, I love that yarn but the knitting is so lovely I really don't know what to do, unless maybe I could make it into a cushion or something.

I: Is your Mum retired from knitting?

S: Yea, she hasn't knit in years and I'd actually like to get her into it again 'cause she mentions it every so often, I think she'd really enjoy it but she gave away all her stuff, she gave me like pattern books and stuff. I have a pattern book that belonged to my aunt that's falling to pieces that I love, yea, I suppose all the yarn, all the beautiful sock club colours I have, I love them all but they're not, I would be really upset if I lost them or if, I have thought oh God if there was a fire

I: You'd just be throwing bags of yarn out the window?

S: I don't even want to think about it, yea pretty much yea, yea, but I don't think any of them mean anything over the rest and then there's yarn I love but I don't think there's any strong memory associated with any of them yea, the ones that were my mum's (have the strongest association - understandable) yea, yea, it's just trying to decide, it's actually even hard to knit with them 'cause I don't know, you know I'll want it to be something that I'll keep forever (get something that's worthy of the yarn) yea, but then I don't have a huge amount of so, It'll probably be something for the house rather than something I'd wear out and about (yea) in case I lost it

I: And what about tools, what are your most used tools?

S: My hiya hiyas , I love them, (you're a hiya hiya convert as well) she always gets her way, em yea she, I started off in the group with like fixed circulars, she rolled her eyes at and then I got the Knit picks 'cause that's the thing to do and then I resisted hiya hiyas for about a year and a half and then I got them and she's going onto something else now (oh really) no, I'm actually putting my foot down and I stopped her buying a set of crochet hooks at the Stitch 'n' Bitch show in Dublin, I can't remember what the other name, what the other brand is, (I must ask) but I just said, no you're not getting me on it

I: Now I know she ordered the handmade wool ones that have a two year waiting list (that might be the one) because myself and [Katja] both ordered that

S: I don't know , it's very tempting but I said no, I'm going to be sensible, but yea, so the knitting needles, stitch markers, I don't know what I'd do without them, em, darning needle, I love my little, I got an embroidery scissors you know, the one that looks like a (a stork) yea, a stork yea, I have one of those and I think it's really pretty, I think that's the main things I use, the main tools

I: Where did you get the hiya hiyas?

S: On line, I think ebay, I can't remember what company they came from

I: How long did it take her to 'break you down', you said

S: yea, over a year but you'd be broke from her, I bought three pairs of knit pros, the plastics that I bought first that I really shouldn't have bothered with, the metal ones, the nickel (the nicke,l yea) and then I got the limited edition the rosewood (ah, the rosewood) well I don't think they're actually rosewood, I think it's a rosewood effect (tint yea, I've heard that too), so I have a presentation box and everything (oh very good) and the different coloured cables (all very nice) so yea, I've got five sets of interchangeable needles (and now it's hiya hiyas all the time), I'll go for them first and then if I don't have the size or, I'll go for my knit pro, so all my chunky needles are knit pro

I: Have you heard any of her nicknames? (no, nick names?) no, you haven't heard Nitler?

S: Oh sorry, I thought you meant [Sarah's] nicknames for other knitters (no) I think [Marian] came up with that actually, it's, it's, I think she's ok with it but then other times she's just 'oh stop' I'm sure it's meant in a very loving way, (it is of course, ah no, it really is yea)

I: or Mammy [Sarah], 'cause she's looking after everybody and fixing their mistakes

S: I do remember, yea, being there at the start and she was so helpful and then I remember her turning around to [Jennifer] one night and saying 'no, do it you're fecking self' and I was thinking what the hell is going on here, but no, she was just saying she was well able to do it and she was like 'once you're able to do it, I'm not doing these anymore (yea) and she still helps me out, yea, I had a major panic with a veil that had to be finished two months ago and I made a mess of the border and I called out in a panic one midweek night and her husband is really lovely and he's like 'Hi [Siobhan] , how are you' and like a panic meeting in the sitting room, And I'm like omg what am I going to do and I ended up having to crochet a single crochet all around and picking, don't know that I would have found a solution on line for that so I'm kind of learning that as well, passed on other people, like I wouldn't have considered that as an option, so she's still helping where it's needed, if it's something she knows I could do, it's not happening .

I: So do you want to have a look at your finished objects or your work in progress if they are?

S: Yea, well I didn't have time to go through things last night 'cause I was out all day but I have this which I love (let's get it in the picture) it's a bit bobbly at the moment, do you want me to hold it up fully?

I: Ah no it's perfect, I'll never get all the detail so I'll just em, it's gorgeous!

S: I have made this blanket three times

I: I love the pattern, it's gorgeous

S: It's Stephen West (ok), I fell in love with it and then I got asked by a friend if I would, if she could commission a knitted item, her brother was getting married and she wanted a blanket and I was like 'ya, ya ok', I loved this pattern so I just sort of suggested it, so I made this and then I can't remember what happened, oh, she decided that it wasn't going to be for her brother 'cause she didn't know his wedding got postponed or something and she decided on doing one for her sister for her 30thso I knit it again in a different colour and that went out very well, I put in an extra colour in the border and then I did another one in the same colours as this for my sister for her 30th (it's gorgeous) and I love it (What yarn is this?) It's drops eskimo so if this goes in the washing machine you can say goodbye, so it's not everyone's cup of tea 'cause I did show it to another sister, I'm making her a blanket for her wedding as a wedding present, which, they got married two years ago but they've been living in Abu Dhabi and moving to Sweden now, so we said we might as well just wait until you go to Sweden and do it now, (there's not much call for a thick blanket in Abu Dhabi, I suppose) no, so I showed her this and she's like 'no, no, scratchy, ah,' so I'm going to make her a cotton blanket even though it's going to be really heavy (yeah it's going to weigh a tonne) but I can't think of any other options really, unless I do it in an acrylic blend but… (but shudder?) ugh, yeah, they're not all that bad I suppose . But yea, I was really proud of this, I think it is something for the home, I have a blanket obsession

I: it's beautiful, and how long would it take you to make something like this?

S: Oh I can't remember, I can find it on Ravelry, (ah no, that's grand) but I think it was a few weeks (and did you knit it on) I think it was very wide (circulars) yea, circulars (but on a long cable?) yea, (it's gorgeous) so I made this size and the one for the friend had an extra repeat in it (so an extra row) yea going that way, but that even though it looks kind of small, it's actually quite a big blanket, like if you were sitting on the couch (for a lap blanket it's perfect, yea I love the colours, gorgeous and it's a Stephen West pattern?) Yea, fell in love with it, (did you get it on Ravelry or?) yea pretty much everything on Ravelry, I mean before Stitch 'n' Bitch it would have been Knitty but it's not, I don't find Knitty easy to search (no) I actually have found way

more stuff on Knitty now that I'm on Ravelry. I actually go on Ravelry because when I first googled Cork Stitch 'n' Bitch, it said I had to join Ravelry to see the details and I was saying 'uh I hate signing up for websites', I don't know but I haven't regretted it. I have spent days of my life on it, if you add up all the time

I: Like are you involved in the Forums or is it on browsing or…

S: not a huge amount, the main thing if I log into Ravelry, the first thing I do is check what patterns have been recommended, do you ever use that

I: Em I have used it when with like yarn, what is recommended for the yarn

S: Oh no this is, Do you use favourites?

I: Yeah

S: yea, yea so basically what it does every day is suggests patterns that you might like, so they 'll be based on what's in your favourites, so either designers that you've favourited or patterns that are really similar to stuff you have in your favourites (that's clever) em, so it's quite good, I've picked up a few things from it that I'd never have spotted or like mightn't have spotted for a long time—it's done, it's updated every day but there might be nothing on a particular day, and then I do check-up the friends 'cause like, you can see what everyone's posted and just see what everyone's up to and I'm not stalking. And I look up projects and might just have an update sometimes but I do look up patterns, but the main thing I'd be really looking at are patterns and I do look up groups but they're not really on forums that much

I: I love this, I'm thinking I'm going to be making a lap blanket now (oh excellent, I can pass you on the pattern) not that I don't have enough things on my queue.

S: I'll give you 10% of the pattern (yeah, exactly) ah, that 10% you'll have the chart, I can't really imagine the rest) it's not really, it's not a really difficult pattern at all

I: And finding that, were you looking for, Oh there's a moth

S: I can't really believe that I've never had any holes or anything, I'm really not careful with it

I: (I did have a moth eat pants, but not yarn it's just, I do have a closed in box for them yea

I: I was going to ask you, but it's gone now, oh about the acrylic, were you always anti acrylic or is that something you picked up along the way or

S: I think [Sarah] was a big influence there but it wasn't like I needed much persuading, as I felt all the natural fibres and I thought oh this is so much better, I think when I started, when I was knitting in college and slightly afterwards, I probably was using acrylics and then I was never really happy with them and they always looked a little bit cheap or, but as far as I know when I was in primary school it would have been acrylics, I definitely knit a cotton top, I started to knit a cotton top, a sun top when I was in secondary school, I got the front and back done and never sewed it together, I'd never have worn it I know, that but I liked knitting it

I: Do you have a lot of like, the finishing is obviously a big thing for a lot of knitters, I mean that's the second time you've mentioned something that isn't sewn together

S: Yea I know that happens, I definitely think I'm getting better, but like this whole knitting on circulars and seamless knitting is just, I'll try and do that anytime I can, I love the idea and that has really changed, I don't think I 'd have finished any cardigans if it hadn't been for seamless knitting, like the one I did finish was a Vera pattern as well, it's the Celery cardigan (it rings a bell but I really don't know it) yea.it's a raglan cardigan with no seams and then you pick up stitches and then you do basically garter all the way round but then there's short rows so then you kind of get wider and it goes back in so it's like, oh this is amazing I'm finishing it and no sewing (that's fantastic) and I really like that 'cause when I have it finished (you want to move on and it's another Vera pattern) yea, I really like her stuff although not her new stuff, so basically the cardigan is knit it's done (oh wow, it is) but what needs to be done and what I really want to do is I-cord the entirety of the cardigan, start there, go all the way round the

back and all the way up and down (omg, I hate Icording so much) yea, I think once you start it'll be fine but it's the starting that's the problem (wow, I would not be enthusiastic about that) yea, I'm really, really determined to get this done for this winter, I've missed out on two winters with it already

I: so this is the one that's been going for two years

I have to say that with I-cord, well honestly, I would just not start it if I had to I-cord the whole thing. I didn't know, I went in obliviously, I didn't know what I-cord was really (and you've done the sleeves have you?)

S: and I even did Russian joins so I didn't have to sew in any ends, yea, I am pretty much determined to find a way of dealing with ends as I go on 'cause if I have to do it at the end, it's not going to happen, (yea), I even bought the buttons for this in This is Knit I think, before I'd even started knitting it and I don't even know where they are now, yea (it is a beautiful cardigan) I really like it and it's really wearable, I just need to finish, I think once I start it I'll get into the swing of it and it'll be fine and then because [Sarah] recommended a different i-cord to the one that's in the pattern so now I have a decision to make

I: Well let's admit [Sarah]'s one is probably better

S: But now I can't remember what she suggested 'cause that was over a year ago, I'll probably need to bring it in some Wednesday (like that is a lot of I-cord, that's tough) I really, really, really hope I have enough yarn (this is all you have?) I think I should have another one, I'm not sure, I'd say it'll take up a lot of yarn though (well, you have only four stitches) yea, so yea there's a lot of, I have another cardigan that all I have to do is knit that much on the sleeve, that's all I have to do

I: Do you lose interest or get bored or

S: That one I was knitting for Knitalong, an uncommon thread Knitalong, and I was knitting and I was like racing against time to get it done and I was knitting until like 3 o' clock in the morning and it had to be entered at 4 or 5 a.m. because it was something to do with time zones and the day was gone from the U.K./ Ireland point of view and when I was trying to finish it and I'd got just to the end of the sleeve, I realised I had made a mistake and it wouldn't match up with the other sleeve and I was just like 'oh the horror' and so, I had to make a decision 'cause I still had to finish knitting it and sew on buttons and I just kind of went naw, not worth it

I: Was there a prize for the Knitalong or

S: Yea, yea, I think it was yarn, so I decided not to post it up as finished, I said, yea, I'll come back to that and I never did (does it just have a bad association with it?) yea, and I also think it might be a bit small (oh no) so when you have to finish it,--- my new year's resolution for this year was to have less WIPs But that hasn't worked, I now have more than I had when I started the year but yea, I'd really like to just finish a couple of these, it is frustrating, I mean I've had a few WIPs that I wanted, I mean that cardigan I wanted to make when I joined Stitch 'n' Bitch, I made it, I think all I had to do was cast off at the bottom, the sleeves were done and all, it was seamless and it was just a tiniest bit too small and I never liked the colour, I bought like demi bliss Rialto Aran, or something, I spent a fortune on it, I never liked the colour, but I was like, I'm going to Stitch 'n' Bitch this week, I'll back out if I don't go so I ended up buying this yarn that I never liked, knit this cardigan that was too small and I think I waited about two years and then ripped it back (yea) and now it's all in a ball so I'm going to dye it and make something else out of it, yea, but you have to call time on something (I think your pressure decisions on yarn are not the best) yea, yea, oh totally, but I'm like that with anything, with shopping for anything, so I am a bit better now with, no you don't need (yea) It'll still be there tomorrow if you do decide that you want to get it, yea I'm not good with (yea)

I: And what's this?

S: Yea, I can't remember the name of it, some sort of Scandinavian wool

I: These are both quite chunky, so you find yourself knitting more Chunky or is that just coincidence

S: I think that's just coincidence, most of my stuff is in sock yarn I'd say, I went out to Knit in Midleton, I was buying yarn or something and they were, why do you keep knitting stuff in sock? They were like, why wouldn't you knit a cardigan in DK or Aran? I was like, 'cause it's nicer I just think it looks better in the finer yarns (yea it's true) and it doesn't bother me 'cause once you're knitting a cardigan and it's not too detailed it's just rows and rows of stocking knit and if it's in the round it's all the better, yea, they just couldn't understand why I would start a cardigan in anything smaller than DK

I: I have half a sweater knit in lace weight (omg) now it's open obviously, but yea, that's the one that's going to be on the needles forever, nothing's ever going to happen

S: Omg but I kind of like taking on mad projects as well, they might never get done but some of them do

I: I would, actually, I would change the shape completely if I was, so I think I just might rip it out (oh really) like, I don't like it's a little bit too narrow or something, it's just going to be kind of square but actually it's not big enough to be squared down (oh, I know the type you mean yea) almost it's not very different from what I'm wearing but the big jumper has to be bigger (has to be bigger to do that) yea. I think I would almost go back and copy what I'm wearing right now

S: And is there any point in trying to block it and see will it get bigger?

I: It's silk merino, there's not a lot of stretch in silk (yea) It's just one of those things, it's just round and round and round and so it's grand for say if you had a glass of wine.

S: I don't mind once I've made the decision but it's just making the decision to rip it back, like I nearly have to put something away for months before I look at it again and then I kind of remove myself from all the work that went into it and rip it back but, generally, anytime I

haven't ripped back I've regretted it (yea, that's true, good point you may have convinced me) Sorry (that's ok)

I: Now you have some braids of fibre on the wall are you spinning as well?

S: No I'm not, that is felted, I'm making a rug (oh, ok) and [Sarah] plaited it up and I just hung it up there for a laugh but everyone who comes in is like, oh that's really nice, I'm taking it down, oh no you should leave it up, they're all felted braids. I would like to do spinning at some point, I can't see myself getting into it as a full time hobby but I would like to at some time at least have one thing made out of something I've spun so I've gotten it from fibre, from fibre to yarn to product, I would, what I really want to do is weaving, I'd love to try that.

I: I mean [Ayranna] from [Prolethean] has built her own small loom, now she bought a larger loom but she built a triangular loom initially, (oh really) and her stuff looks very, very professional

S: I've seen some amazing stuff on Ravelry, (yea I think once you get it right, plus it comes out well obviously compared to knitting it's so fast) and it's a great way of using all of those sock clubs (yea somebody sent [Katja] a really beautiful scarf that they made with a sock club and just a plain grey wool or something

S: I've seen some amazing stuff with hand dyed sock yarn, so that's where I need to go

I: So the next time I come over, there'll be a big loom in this room taken up with it

S: Do you know Sandi Toksvig? She's an English presenter, she's actually Danish originally, she's been on QI a good bit but she has her own radio show on radio 4 the News Quiz, it's on as a podcast every Friday, it's actually really funny, it's all just what's in the news and she's the presenter and I'm trying to think of the other Lesbian, God what's her name, Scottish, Sue Calman, she's s a regular on it as well but she was, Sandi Toksvig, was talking about her sitting

room has a big loom in it and her kids call it a loom with a view, she's mad into weaving and I love her, love her, she's amazing, she's very funny as well

I: Ok cool, I guess, Thank you very much for all of your time

I: IS there anything that you think I should have asked that I didn't ask?

S: I don't know, I didn't really know what you wanted to know so I hadn't really

I: this is it, chat about Stitch 'n' Bitch

S: I love knitting, I love talking about knitting

I: Ok that's perfect thank you

Appendix 7: Sample Participant Observation Notes - Regular Stitch 'n' Bitch meeting 17th Feb 2010

I'm in great form as we celebrated pancake day a day late, and I fucking love pancakes. Slight nausea in the car so in retrospect 9 might have been too many! Ages to park again. Went to popes quay, but there was mass on – ash Wednesday. Got parking in that big one, begins with a c...

I came in and saw MK, EG and BJ sitting in the far corner l to r. BJ was bent over EG's knitting so I moved in beside MK. There was stuff on the seat, so I said oh, someone else is here? And looked around, MK said no, thats B, but slide in here – there was lots of space between B's stuff and MK. I was happy out with this as I really enjoy Bs company –she is very quiet and I feel like we are really only getting to know each other lately. I unpacked my spirogyra gloves again. I looked over at MK and EG – I must have looked at their projects too long because MK said oh I learned how to knit! Usually MK crochets and E knits – they seemed to have each switched but actually EG was doing a provisional crochet cast on. BK came back around the table. She gave me a wicked grin and said how are you? I said good, sober! Because I knew she was putting in a dig about L's party Saturday. She said, oh please, I was drunk too. I said oh my god, I woke up with a sore throat the next morning and I was like what s up with that, oh god I talked all night! EG said, you were fabulous – the clothes swop was brilliant. MK said I'm so sorry I missed it. I said oh I was like performing all night. MK said I saw on face bk. EG said you were in great form. I just started laughing – then I said, h look at my t-shirt. EG said it's the one with the Chinese girl on the back! I said yeah, I lve it! Next time I have to actually bring clothes, not just come away with them!

{further explanation- laura's party on Saturday night. She makes strong mojitos. I hadn't eaten much. I started looking through the clothes for the swap, and talking at the group abt them. I did get embarrassed at one stage and Laura took over, but se got booed "off stage" for being

boring, and I was given another mojito and told to “get back up there”. I came away with a Harijuku Lovers tshirt of Laura’s and a bunch of stuff in wine because every time I held up something wine EB shouted “Maire’s”)

I said, B I thought you’d be gone? Are you going to Slovakia or Fashion week? She said no I’m going home, Miki is going to Lndn tomorrow.MK said how cold is it there. BJ said i dn’t want to think abt it, well not so cold in Bratslava bt... MK said it’s so unusual that we got snow this year. Did you parents have much (to EG) E said – oh yeah 30 inches, it was crazy. They made a great snow man. Irish snowmen must be so small! I said usually whatever you scrpe of the car. K said there were some huge ones in the green area of my park this year. I said well yeah this year. MK said all the kids were out. I said what i loved was in the quarry there were all these families out, parents with their kids lsiding down the hill. I guess the parents thought it might be the kids only chance to see snow! MK said oh we went sledging on a ???? what dii she say??? EG said we used to use cafeteria trays when I was in college. I said oh yeah they were using fertiliser bags, trays anything. Although lots had those proper little shovl things that you see... BJ said yes with the handle.

BJ said, did COL say she was coming to anyone. EG said, oh she never misses! MK said it’s really hard to get parking. I said there’s a funeral across the way and I went down to pope’s quay and there was mass on for ash wed. EG said oh, i nearly told someone that they had something on their head today. MK said when we were little my brother used to pretend to be a priest. he would cut out peices of bread with a bottle top (makes a motion) and we would all line up (close eyes and joins hands) adn he would do the (vague crss wave). I suppose we wnet to mass every Sunday... I said now that you mention it I’m pretty sure I remember getting smarties put on my tongue by my babysitters son. I think he was also marrying me at the time. I think it was one wedding, one war if i remember the deal.

B said i hope COL isn’t too late i brought some wool she wanted. A girl came over and showed a note book to E. E said right a knitting group. Scribble scribble. Oh sure every Wednesday.

Scribble scribble. Can you knit? Scribble Scribble. MK could read the notebook and joined in is it for lent? Scribble scribble. Myself and BJ were sort of raising our eyebrows and staring at each other is disbelief now. I suddenly became contious that our little nudges and giggles were a bit obvious so I said, who is taking lola for the week? She said, oh miki's brother. She didn't sound too happy about this. I said, he has a dog too right? She made a face and said Buster. Boisterous Buster. Then she said he has scabies now, so lola has to get a special shampoo too. I was totally grossed out and honestly thought this was a major overshare and said ewwww, miki's brother has scabies? She stared a beat and then said NO Buster has scabies! The two of us fell around laughing.

The silent girl left. I said E, what was that about?!? She saidshe's a singer and she has some damage at the moment so she's resting her voice. She can talk again in three weeks. Anyway, she wants to join, she can knit. But she had to head back over as she's on a date. I said with the notebook. EG said yeah. I think my thought of is she mental was quite clear on my face. Eg said I've heard of her before, I knw someone who knows her. Her name is polly. B went back to and she's on a date. MK maybe it's like date night though, like he already knows her. I said right maybe it's quicker to write date than longterm life partner.

MK said you said E was at V and S last week. I said yeah, so was S. (the person). EG said I've never been there what is it like? BJ said is it still the same and wrinkled her nose. I said, well it's very different (meaning to snb) I do like it. There's two much older ladies, Patsy and Mary that I get such kick out of. They're knitting for their grandkids like. BJ said the time i went I got stuck next to this girl who just going Really! And Oh My god! To everything. It was driving me crazy. And I remember I had some really really special yarn I was showing to carole and she asked me how much it cost and it was very expensive and she said how could you pay that for yarn, no yarn is worth that. (B's yarn is around €30 per 100g) She put me off – was she there? I said I don't think so, there were too Chinese girls that were just learning, so Mary was helping them. And two Americans – EG said oh no not more Americans- I sort of hesitated and said one is horendously anorexic. B said mmm, like my sister. MK said ah, no, the art student –I said

maybe- MK she was knitting out of tape – yes! MK said ah B this girl, you can see her skull. I said it's really awful. And her wrists when she knits, I can't even look. Said my sisters legs are the same as my arm. B held out her own very petite arm. I said is she actually sick, B, because of the lighthearted way she said it. She shrugged, she eats but very little. She was here in the summer and we went to a barbeque and my friend's mother said is she sick, because she is so thin.

She looked at her watch again. I said will i take the yarn for COL? B said she just said to bring whatever I have lying around, so I have a whole bag. This had such an effect it was funny- all three of us leaned in. Eg said can we look in like a hushed tone!

BJ took out a fabric shopping bag of her own yarns and put it between MK and EG. EG and MK started going through the bag and pulling skeins out with me leaning over MK to look.

Mk pulled out a dark skein and said oh, that's pretty, what's it called? I said that's hurricane right? And looked at B. She nodded and I said back to MK that's like B's signature yarn! B said mmm, with a sort of sheepish grin. Then she said it's very dark. I said the hurricane? She said

ues, it's a very dark lot – i may just keep it for a jumper. I said it's beautiful though. I took another dark skein and said is that hurricane? She said no, you see that's graphite. Once it was compared to another colour I could see what she was talking about. There were also 2 glaciers, two opalites, 2 spells, 2 new medusa dark blue and green blend, two hunters. MK said any rusty nail, but b didn't hear her. Eg said is this one sock yarn? Holding up the medusa. B said yes that's my new superwash sock yarn. I felt the other skein and said it is lovely. MK pulled out spell and said isn't this beautiful. I took it and said, i asked b for this ages ago, but then I didn't make it to the meeting! Mk said yeah I was looking for the rusty nail. B said abt the sock yarn I'm very happy with it now, it's 15% nylon but you really can't feel it. Emily ask how much are these, B? Holding up the medusa and a hunter. B said 10 for SnB. I was holding a skein of silk/merino in spell, and gave into temptation. I said and how much for silk blend. She said oh, 15? Emily handed over a 10 and two 5s and said, that's my birthday present to me. She put them carefully into her bag. I started counting out coins. BJ said to EG I started a sock yarn club yesterday. I said yeah- with only 15 memberships! B said well I wanted to work out the logistics first so I thought 15 was manageable. I said to EG and MK, it was getting nasty on ravelry last night! There were people offering to buy others memberships. B sort of laughed and said we'll see how it works. I had 13 euros counted out in 2s, 1s and 50cs. B said, enough, enough. That's fine. I said I'll owe you two! B said no, no, no. We are fine. I said actually what happened me was the park adn ride was full this morning and I had to park in the pay parking. So I have loads of change from the machine.

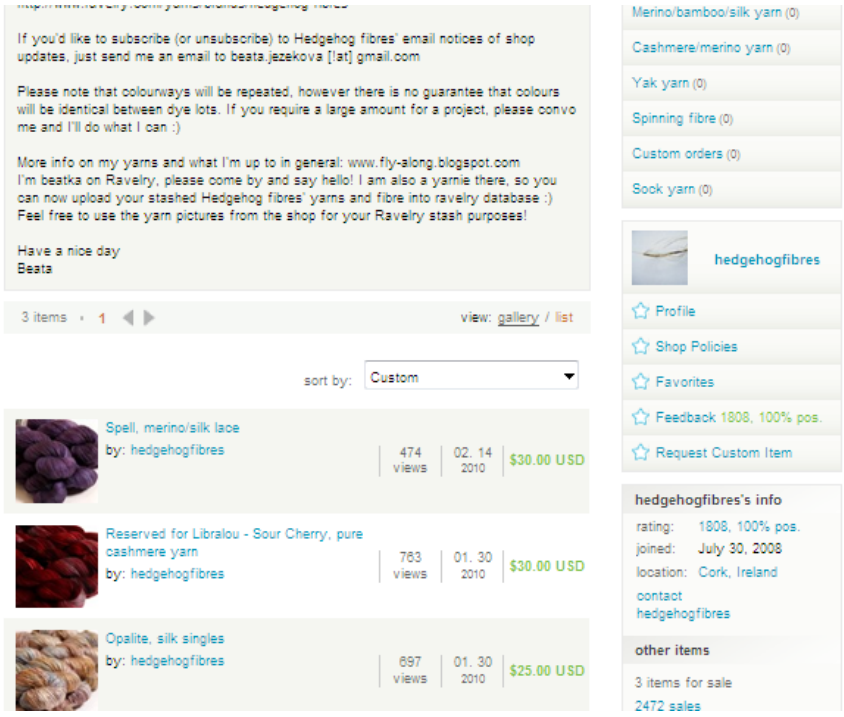
MK said to B- where do you get your wool? B said asia, china, india mostly. MK said I would love to have my own business, but I just don't know what to do. At the same time EG said cupcakes and I said what about the cupcakes? MK does sell cupcakes and she made COL's son's birthday cake. She said yes, I'm still trying to perfect the recipe though. I have my perfect carrot cake but i tried to make caramel last night and I ended up throwing them out. She said I want o try a (red something cupcake) its an American thing. EG said oh, those are good. BJ said are they actually red? Mk said well you can put as mch or as little red colouring as you want, but the coconut will make it slightly pink anyway. B sort of nodded looking a bit confused. I think cooking is not anymore her topic than it is mine and I did change the subject! I said B do you sell more tops or yarn? She made a thinking face. I can't describe it any better than that. She said - Yarn i think? Yarn now. Mk said what are tops. I said unspun yarn and EG said fibre for spinning. I said I noticed it seems to be about 50/50 in your store right now. She said that's because i was out of yarn! But now I have run out of tops. We laughed at that.

I opened my note taking at this point and couldn't get the full qwerty keyboard up so i was sort of frowning at my phone and flicking it back and forth. B saw me and started laughing and said you look crazy. I started laughing and said well after Saturday, I've embarrassed myself so thoroughly in front of ye, there's really no shame left. MK said and I wasn't there Saturday and didn't see what you were doing. I said so my cool facade is still up for M! During this exchange I thought, Brendan is going to read this and think self-deprecating humour again. That was a little odd as while I took pictures and notes through the whole evening, that was the one moment were I felt the effect of the study. Like I thought about how someone who knows me would read my own behaviour.

COL arrived in the door and she was obviously quite stressed. She said sorry I'm late i had to change I got peed on. She said B I missed the sock club, only 15 memberships! B said again i just want to try it out first. COL said she how much was it? BJ said 120 for the year. COL said yeah but it's two skeins each time. BJ said right, I mean i thought about sending one but two seemed better. COL said definitely. I said again- it was crazy on ravelry, people trying to buy each others' memberships. She said oh I know, people were freaking that a newbie got one of the slots! B passed over the bag of yarn again. COL started looking through. She said she wanted to make an ishbel scarf. She said to B that she was looking for a lighter colour, maybe a pink. B said she thought that she can do some pink for her if COL wants, but that she thinks it will look too washed out and not show the lace work. COL then took out the opalite silk/merino blend. She said it's so beautiful, you really don't see the colours in your photos. B said yeah I can't really pick up the variation. C sad its like a sea shell – what's that. I said mother of pearl. Carol said yeah, I love this but it's too heavy (it was worsted). Do you have any in lace weight? Will it still have that shine? B said I can make it up for you in silk. MK said I was looking for some rusty nail too. B said oh that was you! I couldn't remember who wanted that! In sock yarn? MK said yeah if you have it. B said I'll do it up for you when you I get back.

I said to MK there's some rusty nail on etsy right now isn't there? BK said yeah, but I haven't done rusty nail sock yarn, thats silk. Mk said oh right in your shop? Bj said yes. MK said what did

you say though etsy? I said yeah, etsy, you know etsy right? MK said no I've never heard of it until just now. B said but you've been to my shop? M said E sent me the link. COL said oh you are in trouble now!



B's shop on etsy

B decided to head off, to pack. I took out my iphone and looked up etsy. COL said it's a store for handmade things and crafting stuff. I showed her the home page and she said looked at some of the items. I said Oh my god, have you never seen regretsy either. She said whats that as I pulled it up. COL said its horrendous, it's the worst stuff on etsy. I showed here that days posting – the Robert Patterson Manllow (or whatever that abomination was called)

She started laughing and said oh that's brilliant. I read (name of blog) and (name of blogger) hates him, I have to send that to him. He's the guy who said a weed-whacker is not a suitable substitute for a haircut.

E has started working with MK, for another solicitor in the office. She has started teaching MK to knit. E said she didn't have much to do as the solicitor she is working for went off sick so she has just been filing.

I have no idea how we jumped on the Iron Man competition, I think MK said their boss does it. I said that a friend of mine's dad has done triple ironman – it takes like 48 hours. I said Tom is doing marathon training and COK said that Keiran, her husband is too. E said that her boyfriend is doing the bay run, I said oh tom is doing that too. E said that her boyfriend has a lot of books on running and theory. I said T can't really... I pause and M said read? I started laughing and said no! It's just that English isn't his first language so, it's just, not difficult – I mean he has

almost perfect English but it's not very relaxing for him. He tends to read French before bed. Then I started laughing again and said although, that's mostly bande dessinee, um comics.

[Section removed for privacy]

M took out her addi interchangeables starter kit, so that distracted us. They are 4mm, 5mm, 6mm and two cables. She opened up the cables and pulled out the little tightening key. C said really loudly, oh you found that did you! Myself and E started laughing, and explained to MK that that was a dig at me as I hadn't realised that the key was for tightening the needles on the cables and it kept loosening. C showed us a green leather journal she had purchased on etsy which she was using for writing patterns in. She said smell it, it's so lovely. We all smelled it, then we started laughing at the three of us smelling a book! It did have a lovely smell of leather.

I unfolded and re-crossed my legs and mk saw my shoes, which are sparkly cons. Mk said what size are those. I said 5s. She said oh, i really like cons but when I try them on I feel like I'm wearing clown shoes. They don't look too big on you. I said I thought the same until I got a got a fake pair and people said how cute they were. She said, yeah I have a couple of lookalikes too, but they're really uncomfortable, I agreed and said mine are penny's the soles are so thin it's like paper. I said I had to get use to the cons too though as they are so flat, and all my runners have arches.

COL and I were debating heading off, when EG's bf and his friend showed up so we made our excuses and headed off, leaving MK and EG with the bf and friend.