THE KNITTED FLOWER PROJECT:
ARTS-BASED RESEARCH WITHIN KNITTING COMMUNITIES

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for
the Degree Master of Arts in the
Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By
Molly L. Uline-Olmstead, B.F.A.

*****

The Ohio State University
2009

Master’s Examination Committee
Dr. James H. Sanders, III
Dr. Candace J. Stout

Approved by
Advisor
Graduate Program in Arts Policy & Administration
Copyright

Molly Uline-Olmstead

2009
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to explore three threads of intertwining interest: knitting, artmaking, and qualitative inquiry. I explore the history of knitting as women’s work, a creative outlet, and community activity and from this historical basis I investigate the contemporary role of knitting in women’s culture: in art, leisure, and lifestyle. My contemporary analysis serves as the groundwork for creating a community knitted artwork. I approach this artmaking through mixed arts and feminist based qualitative methodology of A/r/tography and the corresponding methods of Autoethnography, and Knitalong. In order to evaluate this work, I encouraged knitters to read, reflect, and revise both the research findings and artmaking processes. I identified areas of resonance, transparency, communicability, and coherence throughout, highlighting ways in which this research can apply to other projects. My goal has been to perpetuate knitting, engage in and encourage communal artmaking, and provide a forum for discussion and dialogue about the role of knitting in the lives of the participants.
This thesis is dedicated to knitters and crocheters.

Especially those who participated in this project,

the needlewomen in my family,

and the West Side Columbus Knitters

who are so welcoming and so kind.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you, to my advisor, Dr. James Sanders, III for supporting my research, providing guidance, asking the tricky questions that added depth to this work, and all those helpful edits and suggestions.

Thank you, to Dr. Candace Stout for providing guidance and room for exploration in the classroom, helping me both expand and hone my writing abilities, and for her consideration and support.

Thank you, to Dr. Patti Lather who helped me develop my methodology and my *Foucauldian problematic*.

Thank you, to the Department of Art Education for pushing the boundaries of research in the arts, culture, education, and arts administration, and inviting me to join the conversation. Thank you, to the John Glenn School of Public Affairs for adding context to the world of public policy and underscoring the importance of civic responsibility.

I cannot say thank you enough to the wonderful knitters who shared their brilliant words and knitting talents with me: Amber Wagner, Andrea L. Stern, Audra, Betty

Thank you, to my dear friends and mentors who never tire of discussing research and writing, frameworks and paradigms, the arts and the world, especially Brea, Cath, Nancy, Laura, Zulal, the ladies of the Gender and Emancipation Project, and my classmates and colleagues.

Thank you, to my family. You are so loving and patient. You are so brilliant and giving. You are the source of this project and the support to see it through.

Thank you, always, to Dave.
VITA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 6, 1982</td>
<td>Born in Syracuse, New York, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>B.F.A. in Painting and Drawing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Ohio State University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Columbus, OH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003 – 2004</td>
<td>Administrative Intern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Ohio Art League</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Columbus, OH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004 – 2006</td>
<td>Teaching Assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Saint Andrew School, Latchkey Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Columbus, OH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004 – 2007</td>
<td>Arts Intern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Ohio Department of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Columbus, OH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007 – 2008</td>
<td>Gallery Management Intern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Delaware, OH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Research Assistant to Dr. Candace Stout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Art Education Department, The Ohio State University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Columbus, OH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008 – Present</td>
<td>Education Student Assistant, K-12 Touring and Partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>OSU Urban Arts Space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Columbus, OH</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIELD OF STUDY

Major Field: Arts Policy and Administration

Area of Emphasis: Museum Education
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Framework</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Story</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section Overviews</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review: Genealogy of Community Knitting</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epistemology, Methodology, and Methods</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A/r/tography</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autoethnography</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knitalong</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics and Assessment</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knitted Data and Contextualization &amp; Blog Data and Contextualization</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants as Authors</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revisiting Earlier Chapters</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audiencing</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silences</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Significance and Goals</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section Conclusion</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women and Fiberwork</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The art / craft split</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Extraordinary Nature of Fiberwork</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artistic Expression</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Outlet</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionalism</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY ........................................... 58
Epistemology: Feminist Critical Theory and Constructivism as a basis for Qualitative
Research ........................................................................ 58
  Feminist Critical Theory .................................................. 60
  Constructivism ............................................................... 61
Methodology: A/r/tography ................................................ 63
  A brief genealogy of A/r/tography ........................................ 64
  Defining A/r/tography ...................................................... 67
  A/r/tography, Foucault, and Knitting ................................. 71
  Benefits and Pitfalls ........................................................ 75
Methods ............................................................................. 81
  Autoethnography .............................................................. 82
  Knitalong ........................................................................ 86
  Ethical Concerns .............................................................. 89
Assessment .......................................................................... 90
Section Conclusion ............................................................ 92

CHAPTER 4 - KNITTED DATA AND CONTEXTUALIZATION .......... 95
Online and Offline Data ..................................................... 96
Flowers ............................................................................. 98
  Mary ................................................................................. 100
  Catherine Belmont-Rowe, Bean Counting Knitter ............. 100
  Stefanie Goodwin-Ritter, Stefanie ................................... 102
  Heather Brown, Dizzy Spinster ....................................... 103
  Eleanor C Sayre, LE ......................................................... 104
  Liela McLachlan, Liela ..................................................... 105
  Grace Yaskovic, Grace ..................................................... 107
  Joanne, Joanne ............................................................... 108
  Cyndi in BC .................................................................... 109
  Dianna .............................................................................. 110
  Stephanie .......................................................................... 112
Maria Frazier, Ria..............................................................................................................113
Michele Frankl, the book faerie ..................................................................................114
Lindsey Jensen, Lindsey ..............................................................................................115
Ingrid Murnane, Ingrid ...............................................................................................116
Linda Brown, Linda ......................................................................................................117
Susan Napoli, Susan ....................................................................................................118
Pam Sykes, Pam, Pretty Knitty ......................................................................................119
Debora Hampton, Debbi ............................................................................................120
Renee Bolduc, ReneeNicole .........................................................................................122
Robin F, Robin ............................................................................................................123
Andrea L. Stern, Andi ..................................................................................................124
Julia Sims-Haas, KnittyWitty ......................................................................................126
Section Conclusion......................................................................................................127

CHAPTER 5 - BLOG DATA AND CONTEXTUALIZATION ..............................................128
Blogging ........................................................................................................................128
Time ..............................................................................................................................129
Group Dynamic ...........................................................................................................131
Proximity ......................................................................................................................131
“Talk Back” ................................................................................................................132
Discussions ...................................................................................................................133
Discussion #1: Why do you knit? ................................................................................134
  Creativity ....................................................................................................................135
  Portability and Versatility .........................................................................................136
  Connection to the Body, Care for the Self and Care for Others ..........................137
  Heritage, Foremothers, and Womanhood ................................................................139
  Teaching and Learning ..............................................................................................141
  Social Connections ..................................................................................................142
Discussion #2: What is your favorite item to knit and why? ......................................144
Discussion #3: When and from whom did you learn to knit? Do you have a particular
story? ..........................................................................................................................147
Discussion #4: Have you participated in knitalongs? Charity knitting? Art knitting?
  Gift knitting? .............................................................................................................151
Discussion #5: Do you prefer to knit alone or in a group? Why? .................................155
Discussion #6: Do you feel knitting is a craft or an art form? Why? .........................158
Discussion #7: Do you see knitting as activism or as political? Why/not? .............161
Discussion #8: Do you equate knitting with feminism? Femininity? Both? Why/not? .................................................................166
Discussion #9: How do others respond to you when you knit in public? Do you have
 a particular story? ......................................................................................................172
Discussion #10: Have you ever taught someone to knit? Do you have a particular
 story? .........................................................................................................................175
Discussion #11: How do you feel about personal stories as forms of research? What
 about the use of a blog or artmaking? ......................................................................179

viii
Discussion #12: What do you think? Did you enjoy participating in this project? If so, why? If not, why not? What was you favorite part? Your least favorite?..... 182

Section Conclusion.................................................................................................................. 185

CHAPTER 6 - Conclusion........................................................................................................ 187
Authorship, Artmaking, and Writing with the Work of Others ........................... 188
Literature Review Revisited................................................................................................ 193
Women and Fiberwork Revisited ................................................................. 193
The Art / Craft Split Revisited .................................................................................. 194
The Extraordinary Nature of Knitting Revisited ........................................ 195
Charity Knitting and Community Art Knitting Revisited .......................... 197
Methodology Revisited ......................................................................................... 199
Knitting as artmaking, researching, and teaching – Self-care..................... 199
Knitting as Autoethnography – Self-writing and Writing for Others .......... 203
Knitalong ..................................................................................................................... 206
Applications and Avenues for Future Research .............................................. 207
Validity, Successes and Areas that Needed Improvement ......................... 212
Validity ....................................................................................................................... 213
Successes and Areas That Needed Improvement ........................................... 215
Conclusion ..................................................................................................................... 217

APPENDIX A - IRB APPLICATION MATERIALS ......................................................... 219
APPENDIX B - IRB APPROVAL LETTER ................................................................. 244
APPENDIX C - KNITTED FLOWER PROJECT KNITTING PATTERN .................. 246
APPENDIX D - CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS ............................................................. 248
APPENDIX E - SIGN-UP EMAIL ............................................................................ 250
APPENDIX F - INFORMATION PANEL EXHIBITED WITH ARTWORK AT WONDER KNIT ................................................................. 253
APPENDIX G - EXHIBITION INVITATION ............................................................... 255

LIST OF REFERENCES..................................................................................................... 258
LIST OF FIGURES

Photographs are by Molly Uline-Olmstead unless otherwise noted.

Figure 1.1: Early conceptual sketch for the Knitted Flower Project........................................3
Figure 1.2: Early conceptual sketch for the Knitted Flower Project........................................3
Figure 2.1: Kelly Jenkins, Knit Uncensored, 2003, machine knit wall hanging, photograph by Jenkins and used with permission received via email 4.12.2009............................................40
Figure 2.2: Lisa Anne Auerbach, 2005, machine knit sweater, photograph by Auerbach and used with permission received via email 4.13.2009.................................................................41
Figure 2.3: Lindsey Obermeyer, Stretched Thin, 1999, knitted mohair, photograph by Sara Peak Covery and used with permission received via email 5.2.09.................................42
Figure 2.4: Ming Yi Sung, detail from Androgenous, 2004, mixed media crochet installation, photograph by Sung and used with permission received via email 4.13.09.................................43
Figure 2.5: Cynthia Capriata, detail of I Bichos, 2007, crochet and mixed media installation at GALLERY 2001.................................................................44
Figure 2.6: Nina Rosenburg, Red Sweaters, 2005, Acrylic yarn, photograph by Rosenburg and used with permission received via email 4.12.09.................................................................48
Figure 2.7: Marianne Midelburg, Crochet coral and anemone garden, 2005, crochet and mixed media, photograph by Alyssa Gorelick, and used with permission received via email 4.16.09 ................................................................................................................50
Figure 2.8: Sample intarsia projects from microRevolt, photograph by microRevolt and used with permission received via email 4.11.09.................................................................52
Figure 2.9: Breast Cancer Awareness Themed Tit-Bit, photograph by Tit-Bits and used with permission received via email 4.14.09.................................................................54
Figure 2.10: Conference (detail), Larissa Brown (and 100 volunteer knitters), 2004, wool & cattle tags, photograph by Brown and used with permission received via email 4.13.09..............................................................................56
Figure 3.1: Cynthia Capriata, 2007, Walk Through Body (left) and Bichos Creature Series (right) installed at GALLERY 2001, image by Molly Uline-Olmstead..........................70
Figure 4.1: Flowers organized by color.......................................................................................96
Figure 4.2: Flower by Mary.........................................................................................................100
Figure 4.3: Flowers by Catherine Belmont-Rowe ..................................................................101
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

READING THE PATTERN AND CASTING ON:
AN INTRODUCTION TO THE KNITTED FLOWER PROJECT

Conceptual Framework

The purpose of my thesis is to explore three threads of intertwining interest: knitting, artmaking, and qualitative inquiry. I explore the history of knitting as women’s work, a creative outlet, and community activity. From this historical basis I address the contemporary role of knitting in women’s culture: in art, leisure, and lifestyle. This contemporary analysis serves as the groundwork for creating a community knitted artwork. I approach the artmaking through the mixed arts and feminist based qualitative methodology of A/r/tography and corresponding methods of Autoethnography, and Knitalong. In order to evaluate my work, I encourage knitters to read, reflect, and revise throughout the research and artmaking process. In addition I identify areas of resonance, transparency, communicability, and coherence throughout. Finally, I highlight ways in
which this research can apply to other projects. The goal is to perpetuate knitting, engage
in and encourage communal artmaking, and provide a forum for discussion and dialogue
about the role of knitting in the lives of the participants.

Personal Story

This project has evolved out of a mess of ideas that came together for me one
night. I sat straight up in bed, literally said “A-HA!” and went scrambling for a pen and
paper. I was trying to decide on a thesis topic. I wanted to find a way to explore knitting
as art, research, and scholarship. I was upset and tired of the social and political
landscape of our country. I was missing the time I used to have in the studio working
with other artists. I wanted to explore differences between online communities and in
person communities, especially as they related to craft culture and blogging. I was taking
a qualitative researching course where I was being encouraged to think deeply and with
purpose. I had just heard that the honeybees in North America were disappearing and no
one knew why. All of these thoughts and ideas came together at once on April 22nd as I
was reading before falling asleep. I am sure there was a popping noise in my brain, like a
champagne cork or maybe like hands clapping, and the ideas all shuffled and sprinkled
neatly into place. “Flowers,” I thought, “I have to knit flowers.”
I started knitting while I was in art school working toward a Bachelor of Fine Arts. I saw Debbie Stoller, editor of feminist magazine BUST on the Today Show talking about her new knitting book *Stitch n’ Bitch*. She talked about feminism and craft and how, as women, we should appreciate and honor our mothers and grandmothers handiwork and keep those traditions alive. I warmed instantly to the idea of knitting as a feminist act. I had been working with calico, thread, and muslin in my own artwork for
three years, trying to negotiate the very same ideas for myself. I was encouraged to hear that I was not silly, that making art on a sewing machine was just as legitimate as making art at an easel. I bought needles and yarn and I got down to business. From that point on I have become an avid knitter and consumer of knit culture.

It is not just the knitting I enjoy, it is the conversation, the community, the act of giving away something beautiful and functional that I have made. I cannot get enough of knitting and I cannot get enough of other knitters. I began reading knit blogs as a way to pass the time at work and pick up some pointers, but as I read the online journals of other knitters, I found them discussing more than stitches and fiber. They were discussing politics, feminism, current events, art, relationships, motherhood, and all the while knitting and creating. I entered Graduate school in the mind frame of the current, socially conscious, and committed knitter, knowing I wanted to do research on woman and knitting. I wanted to discover how this craft had become so rich, symbolic, and popular, and how I had become so completely seduced by it. Which brings me back to myself, sitting in bed on Sunday night mumbling about flowers and digging in the nightstand for a notepad.

Section Overviews

This thesis has six chapters including this Introduction; a Literature Review; the Methodology and Methods chapter; a presentation of the Data, the Discussion of the data and how it relates to the Literature Review, Methodology, and itself; and finally a Conclusion. The following describes the contents of these chapters.
When I tell people that I am researching knitting they always think it is a little funny and perhaps even frivolous. But then I ask them if researching art history makes sense. Admittedly, some of them say no, but many of them get it right away. Knitting has often been overlooked as an art form, a craft, a social phenomenon, perhaps because it is women’s work (Stoller, 2003). Similar to quilting, which has recently been given the credit its due, knitting was practiced in the home by women to be briefly admired and then worn on the body. It is not meant to be experienced on gallery walls, or sold at auction for large sums of money. Yet it is still artful and it is still valuable.

Quilts: The Great American Art by Patricia Mainardi (1978) explores the way women’s work has been overlooked and in many cases deliberately ignored. In her research she found that many quilts are displayed simply as examples of a style with the maker’s name omitted from the record. These quilts were, however, signed and recorded in women’s journals and their friends’ journals. Mainardi (1978) underscores this denial of authorship highlighting “…[t]he great pains taken by art historians to identify all work of male artists, even if only by conjecture (p. 7)…” There are many parallels between quilting and knitting. Both are considered women’s work, both are social activities, and both have been vehicles for social commentary, protest, and change. In fact, Susan B. Anthony gave her first speech about women’s suffrage at a quilting circle in Cleveland (Mainardi, 1978). However, these art forms have been overlooked while Rembrandt’s school has been explicitly documented, every meeting of the Dada movement is recorded,
and college classes are taught about the Cubists and Impressionists. Women’s work has been left out of this discourse, and I want to help give it a voice.

The Literature Review explores these gendered tensions in fiberwork. It then goes on to examine knitting specifically and the role it has played historically in the lives of women as well as contemporary examples of knitting being used as a catalyst for art, activism, and community. The chapter is designed as a genealogy in the Foucauldian sense of the word. It is different from a history in that it presents a variety of perspectives and is allowed to be “messy.” It is not strictly chronological and interweaves social issues with the timeline. I use a Foucauldian lens again in the methodology and methods chapter introduced in the next section.

Epistemology, Methodology, and Methods

Knitting is a craft with endless potential. Simple to learn, knitting presents limitless opportunities to build on the basics, hone the craft, and make clothing, housewares, and artworks. Beyond the physical characteristics of making loops with two needles and thus creating fabric, there is the potential to create social networks through knitting. These social networks and friendships initiate change, growth, learning, and teaching. I want to explore the transformative nature of this simple craft.

Knitting has recently experienced resurgence in popularity. Women, myself included, are returning to the craft, learning it for the first time, and re-evaluating its potential. As an avid knitter and scholar, I began to see these two aspects of my personality converge. As I began exploring the topic, I discovered that many knitters
were telling the same story. They spoke of feminism, anti-consumerism, activism, environmentalism, building friendships and communities, reconnecting to their foremothers, and making something with their hands. The goals of this research are in part, to unpack these issues and desires and then apply them through the act of knitting itself.

Knitting can be a feminist act. A tension exists between a feminism that seeks to transform the female role by moving away from feminine conventions, and a feminism that embraces these feminine roles as a part of our heritage as women. Knitting has often been viewed as subjugating, an activity meant to keep women in their place. Third wave feminist and avid knitter Debbie Stoller (2003) underscores this tension:

…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…well, what were they to make of that? …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 the only those things that men did were worthwhile…Why couldn’t we all – women and men alike – take pride in the work our mothers had always done as we did in the work of our fathers (p. 7).

These sentiments are reiterated when we consider that the White House suffrage demonstrators packed knitting to work on during their lunch break (Macdonald, 1988). In fact, knitting has been a part of women’s political activity for hundreds of years. In America, specifically, women knitted to support troops as well as protest wars and in the sacred space of the knitting circle, all topics of conversation can be fair game. In my own
knitting circle, the women and I discuss politics, religion, sex, friendship, school, and family, as well as yarn, fiber, needles, patterns, techniques, and fashions. Once the act of knitting brings us together, we are able to learn, share, and teach any topic.

*A/r*tography*

Knitting as an act of teaching is the other element of my research. Knitting can bring all the disparate strands of one’s life together in a repetitive, memorable way. Leitch (2006) refers to this as a “haptic space”, or the safe space of our chosen community where we can learn at our own pace, based on our own interest. I consider the “haptic space” to be a variation on the “Third Space” as it was applied to education by Seidel, Deasy & Stevenson in their 2005 publication of the same title. However, the “haptic space” focuses on somatic memory. In this space the touch of the yarn links with the rhythmic motion of knitting and the communication of ideas and transfer of skills. This somatic memory, the practice of learning by doing, is one of the tenants of A/r*tography (Springgay, 2008; Irwin, 2004). In this section of the methodology chapter I unpack A/r*tography using the later writings of Foucault, specifically his work dealing with Self-care. I suggest that A/r*tography and its concept that one is simultaneously an artist, researcher, and teacher, is linked to care for the self, and care for others. Through my research, I hope to place knitting and knitters in the realm of A/r*tographers as artists, researchers, and teachers by engaging them in creating an art project and through that art project, opening up a dialogue that inspires teaching and researching.
Autoethnography

Autoethnography is one of the two methods I use. Knitting is personal; it is a tactile, self-contained hobby. At the same time, when knitters come together or work on their project on the bus or in a waiting room, the act becomes public. This relationship between the personal experience and that experience’s translation across other individuals is the basis of autoethnography (Sparkes, 2002; Leggo, 2008; Goodall, 2008). The shared experience of knitting, and sharing of knowledge while knitting, constitutes autoethnography in practice. Autoethnography allows us, as researchers, to explore our history and personal experience in a deep and meaningful way, while relating it to the greater human experience. It is the essence of the feminist mantra, “the personal is political.”

Autoethnography has two roles in my research project. The first autoethnographic thread follows my own narrative as a knitter; exploring how knitting has affected my view of feminism, art, friendship, community, or education, and how that narrative relates to the narratives of other knitters. I further explore how the experiences of the participants are similar or divergent. The second thread follows the process of making the knitted artwork. The art making process will be journaled through a blog by the participants. The act of journaling is a critical element of autoethnography and it’s connection to women’s history. Given that biographers and historians rarely chronicled women’s lives, women have been their own historians, sharing their experiences orally with friends and through journaling. In fact, most of the historical records we have about knitting come from journal entries (Macdonald, 1988). Blogs, or “web logs,” are a
combination of this open form of oral history and more private form of journaling. This melding of conversation and personal reflection is ideal for autoethnographic narrative “…and fits with poststructuralist views that stress the interaction of the reader and the text as a co production…(Sparkes, 2002, p. 220)”

Blog entries contain two elements; prompted and free discussion. Prompted elements precipitate from a series of issues based on the core themes of the research. Examples include the question, “Is knitting an art or a craft? Why do you feel this way?” and “Do you think of knitting as feminist? Why or why not?” Free discussion elements are entries and comments that discuss the progress of the project, types of yarns and materials, and general topics of interest in participants’ lives. These blog entries constitute the data of my research so that, in the end, the research is a shared experience.

Through this shared experience, the writing and journaling in itself becomes a method of inquiry (Richardson, 2000). As we write, share, and dialogue, the information expands and extends. Richardson (2000) encourages this type of inquiry for the individual researcher stating that “Nurturing our own voice releases the censorious hold of ‘science writing’ on our consciousness as well as the arrogance it fosters in our psyche; writing is validated as a method of knowing” (p. 962). In this project, this type of writing – writing to better know ourselves in the world – is extended to research participants. The shared blog provides a forum for this type of writing.

In addition to the autoethnographic narratives, there is the text of the artwork. The piece is a "text-ile" composed of individual knitted flowers made by many different hands, each with its own signature way of working the yarn. Each of these individual
pieces, created collectively add to the narrative and the dialogue of knitting through the color, the shape of the stitches, the type of yarn, and the size of the flower. Each of these flowers comes with a story. Was it made at a knitting circle? Was it the left over yarn from a sweater for a loved one? Was it knit all at once or across a few sittings? When someone asked the knitter what she was working on, what was said? There is so much experience wound up in any fiber work and it is exciting to see what this piece holds in its stitches.

Knitalong

Knitalong is the second method and overlaps with the autoethnographic methods. While the term “knitalong” is new, the concept is ancient. The term was coined organically in 2000 on the Internet (Brown, 2008). However, people have been knitting collaboratively for hundreds of years. There are many types of knitalongs. I will list a few examples here and elaborate with additional examples and a plan for my own knitalong in my methodology section. Knitalongs can range from what one thinks of as the traditional knitting bee where women collect in one place to work on their respective projects, to charity knitting where groups collect or work from home on a single project, such as an afghan or preemie caps for donation, to an artwork knitalong where people participate by knitting a piece or section of a larger collaborative artwork. This project falls under the third category.

I want to underscore the power of knitting as an art form that is uniquely feminine, hence the flower form. I see the flowers as a way to make something both
beautiful and socially meaningful. The flower itself is a lovely and symbolic object that
refers directly to the environment. It has clear feminine associations in that women are
almost encouraged to behave like flowers, to dress up in bright colors and use make up,
to encourage masculine attention. Artist Beryl Weaver uses flower imagery in her
embroidery works, which Parker discusses in *The Subversive Stitch*:

[Weaver] attacks ‘the way we are always compared to flowers: women and flowers – personal and warm – pretty but stullified. One man even went so far as to say he liked women to be independent, so he could go ‘from one to the other, like a bee on spring flowers’ (Parker, p. 206).

In addition, young girls are often, unfortunately, referred to as blossoming flowers as they
go through puberty. Flowers are sexual. Orchids, for example, have evolved to resemble,
almost precisely, the reproductive organs of the insects that pollinate them. Flowers are
plant material and many yarns are plant based such as cotton, bamboo, flax, and linen.
Finally, the simple design of the actual flower pattern, shown in Appendix C offers a
clean slate for a variety of individual expressions.

*Ethics and Assessment*

Finally, the Methodology chapter addresses the ethical concerns of researching in
an online forum and the steps I have taken to address those issues. In addition the section
lays the groundwork for assessing the project and discusses how I will address validity,
reflexivity, and data resonance. This introduction to assessment will set the stage for the
full assessment in the Discussion section.
Knitted Data and Contextualization & Blog Data and Contextualization

There are two forms of data; the offline data composed of the flowers and the online data composed of blog posts and comments. These data sets inform, intersect, and interact with each other creating a discussion, a fabric, and an artwork. Because of the volume of data, I have split the presentation and discussion over two chapters. The first will discuss online and offline data and the challenges and benefits of using both. The chapter then presents the flowers and the knitters who created them, interweaving quotes and stories from the blog. The second chapter discusses some of the concerns and issues that arise when working with online and offline data and define key terms that will help in reading the blog data. I then present the blog data organizing it by discussion posts and the variety of comments those discussions generated. I identify trends and themes across the comments in anticipation of the Concluding chapter.

Conclusion

The final chapter binds off for the project. When one binds off a finished piece of knitting, the piece is seemingly complete. However, it is really just beginning its life as a sweater, hat, afghan, or mitten. Though the knitting is finished, the piece now will be used, worn, complimented or criticized. The knitter will apply the knowledge she learned from that project to future projects. For example, “that style of sweater looks really great so I may knit another similar pattern” or “that yarn is too scratchy to wear close to my
skin. Perhaps I won’t use it again.” Similarly, I have learned some valuable lessons about making art, doing research, and learning and teaching.

**Participants as Authors**

There is a degree of complexity to the question of authorship when dealing with collaborative artmaking. I see all the participants as co-authors of the artwork. Because of this, I wanted the participant’s voices to be apparent. Their comments and flowers are the main source of data and they share ownership in the process. In addition, as I collected data from the blog and worked on the final analysis, I wanted the participants to read and reflect on the comments and discussions. I wanted to be sure that their voices shone through and that the artwork was representative of their experience. This is a daunting task as is any collaborative project, however, I feel it is vital and a core goal of the project. This aspect of authorship is explored in the Conclusion chapter as it relates to validity, reflection, and resonance. I explore areas of agreement and disagreement, as well as shared and divergent experiences.

**Revisiting Earlier Chapters**

The Conclusion knits together my genealogy of knitting, the methodology and methods, and the data and explores how all of these elements interact. In addition it looks at issues of authorship and assessment including validity. Finally, this chapter identifies potential applications for this type of research across disciplines and avenues for future
research, as well as how this research has been integral to my Masters studies in Arts Policy and Administration and Museum Education.

Audiencing

These final two sections of this chapter address the issue of audiencing and the overarching goal of my thesis work. The importance of audiencing is highlighted in Yvonna Lincoln’s 2001 conference paper titled *Audiencing Research: Textual Experimentation and Targeting for Whose Reality?* and refers to the process of determining one’s audience and considering that audience throughout the researching and writing process.

Audiencing a piece of writing is extremely challenging. I come from a Fine Arts background and my experience is with audiencing works of art. Will the viewer get what I am trying to convey? Will they understand the thought process and artistic process I engaged in to produce this piece? I am not afraid that people will hate a work, but that they will have no reaction at all, that the dialogue will be terminated. In artmaking, the artist statement is a crucial part of the process. How can I expect my audience to understand my work if I cannot understand my own thoughts and intentions? These questions will be important when exhibiting the knitted artwork resulting from the research.

In addition, clear and honest writing goes a long way. In pattern writing the finished piece is presented at the beginning. If one follows these instructions, one will end up with this garment. Likewise a piece of writing needs to be direct in its intention. If
one reads these chapters he or she will learn about these subjects. However, one can never determine how an audience will interpret a piece of writing. Everyone brings their personal bank of experience and knowledge with them to everything they see and read. Post-structuralist theory accepts that constructing knowledge is a process. I am building knowledge as I write and communicate with the participants, but that process is not complete until someone reads what I have written and adds their own interpretation to the story (Lincoln, 2001). I want people to read my work, to comment on it, and share it with others.

The audiences for a project like this include academics, feminists, knitters, crafters, quilters, autoethnographers, artists, and A/r/tographers. I hope that by using the mixed methods of writing, researching, and artmaking, I can broaden my audience beyond the Ohio State University to the larger community of crafters and artists.

Silences

One of the issues one must contend with when performing web-based research is how to address the identity of one’s participants. In this project, participants had the option of anonymity. 22 knitters officially signed up by providing a name but there were other participants who chose to not to provide a name, chose to knit and not comment, or comment and not knit. I wanted to leave identity open for a few reasons. First, when communicating on the Internet there are often clues to identity such as one’s avatar. My own avatar is a photograph of me, however, there are a plethora of options. Some people use images of their pets, photographs of objects, cartoon characters, or images of a
celebrity. The same ambiguity applies in regards to one’s handle, which can be any combination of letters, numbers, or symbols, and many people, myself included, go by more than one handle depending on the website. Second, Internet profiles for knitting sites such as Ravelry and even social networking or blogging sites rarely request strict demographic information. Some, like Facebook, do ask questions about sexuality, relationship status, age, and religion, however, the questions can be limiting. For this project I did not request demographic information from my participants. Sometimes issues like spirituality, gender, and relationship status are brought up in the discussions and are addressed at that time. However, I did not preface the project with demographic questions. As a result, certain issues are not discussed in this project such as race or sexuality. Finally, I cannot be certain that every participant was female. The participants I know personally and have met face-to-face are female and the participants I do not know face-to-face seem to be female based on comments where they self-identify as female. Because of this, when I refer to participants I use the feminine pronoun. Ultimately, I learned through the course of the project to embrace the ambiguity of online communication. I discuss this issue of face-to-face versus online communication further in the Data and Contextualization Chapters 4 and 5.

Project Significance and Goals

One goal of this project is doing meaningful work using arts-based qualitative methods that may be useful to others. I want fellow artists, researchers, and teachers to explore this research and consider how it may apply to their own work, challenging them
to look at that work in new ways. By using a combination of popular craft, a Foucauldian lens, blog technology, and an arts-based analysis the final project has the potential to be useful and interesting across a variety of disciplines.

A second goal is to encourage new forms of research presentation. By using a blog, producing an artwork, and writing a thesis, there is a cross-pollination of themes, ideas, and representations. Participants are identified by their stories and comments on the blog, their hand knit flowers, and the way their comments and flowers are drawn together and presented in the thesis. Each of these modes of representation presents a different view that appeals to a different audience, and elicits a different reaction. This provides a variety of ways for people to engage with the research.

Finally, I hope to increase the number of people interested in and practicing needlecrafts. Movements, whether they are social, artistic, or political, are cyclical, however, and some can die out all together. Many of these crafts have fallen by the wayside due to modernization and globalization. It is no longer thrifty to knit your own sweater or sew your own quilt. It is cheaper to go out and buy one. As a result, these crafts have become niche pursuits and hobbies, where they used to be household necessities. This is not to say that we should all return to the home, raise our own sheep and make our own clothing. However, it would be a shame to let the work of our foremothers fade away in the wake of modernization. I hope by pursuing knitting as viable and meaningful site of research I can help keep it alive and encourage new knitters to take up the needles.
Section Conclusion

The goal of this introduction was to lay the groundwork for the following thesis. It serves to casting on the threads of discourse constituting the fabric of this thesis. In it I have introduced the topics I will cover and some of the issues and questions I aim to answer with my research. In addition I have outlined the chapters and what one can expect to find in each section. I have also discussed audiencing and whom I hope will take an interest in this project in the future. Finally, I outlined the major goals of this project. The following written work collaborates with the blog and the final artwork. Throughout I have included links and images that I hope help produce concepts of what it means to be a knitter and at the same time demonstrate that such meanings are different for each knitter.

---

1 Avatar is the symbol or image one uses to identify one’s self on the internet. It is also the term used to describe one’s character in a videogame or web-based environment such as World of Warcraft of Second Life

2 Handle refers to the name one uses to identify one’s self online.

3 Facebook does not, at the time of this thesis, recognize transgendered people.
Pottery shards preserve well, as do bones, spearheads, and metallic objects like jewelry and coins. Paintings are preserved because they hang on the walls of museums, homes, and places of worship. Manuscripts are likewise protected in libraries and personal collections. Much of the story of history is written through these objects, bits and pieces of the protected and non-perishable. Fabric, however, is perishable and except in rare cases is difficult to reconstruct, but nonetheless it is still crucial to our understanding daily life (Barber, 1995). Until the introduction of rayon, acrylic, and nylon, fabric was exclusively made of plant and animal material that came from the earth and swiftly returned to the earth. This earthy, ephemeral, homely realm of fabric was the
domain of women sewers, weavers, spinners, and knitters because it was compatible with the work of child rearing. It was dull and repetitive, easily interrupted, safe, and kept women close to home unlike hunting or gathering (Barber, 1995).

This gendered nature of fiberwork has been both beneficial and detrimental to women. The following attempts to unpack the gendered nature of fiberwork, specifically knitting, and how it has shaped the craft. At the same time, I wrestle with the art/craft dichotomy. While some, including the women who practiced it, have viewed fiberwork as stifling and limiting, fiberwork has also been a catalyst or an ingredient for social bonds, professional development, artistic expression, and subversive acts. I am focusing specifically on knitting, but unfortunately, research into the history of knitting has only yielded a few texts, all of them focused on European and American knitting, so I am also using some examples from weaving, quilting, crochet, and embroidery to help enhance the discussion. These texts also focus, predominantly, on American and European fiberwork. The final section of this chapter will explore contemporary community knitting projects that set a precedent for my own project, and, at the same time, draw on the history of women’s fiberwork.

Women and Fiberwork

Academic historians have been discouraged from writing about hand knitting for several reasons. Hand knitting has relatively little to show in museum collections; books about it are in the main either journalistic or amateur; the domesticity of the craft has reduced its attractiveness to historians; and there is no outline of the subject to which monographs studies can be related (Rutt, 2003, p.4).
Rutt seems to be saying, as politely as possible, that something as domestic, ephemeral, and popular as knitting doesn’t warrant true inquiry. However, this didn’t stop him from writing his *History of Hand Knitting*. In this quote, he does not directly address the issue of gender, the fact that women practiced much of hand knitting, and perhaps that is another reason it is not researched. Though he does allude to the issue in his book he never fully addresses it. This is not a criticism because, for Rutt, the main character in the story of knitting is knitting. He doesn’t care to be bogged down in gender politics but, instead, wants to look at knitting as an artifact, a fabric structure, and a commercial venture. He does tackle the sticky issue of “art or craft”:

> Knitting is best called a craft. It serves life and is relatively ephemeral. It gets worn and wears out. It can be expensive but is almost never precious. Its structure is more limiting than the structures of tapestry and embroidery. Therefore knitting is widely practiced by non-professionals and tends to be a peoples craft. There in lies much of its interest and the fascination of knitting history (Rutt, 2003, p. 25).

I agree with elements of this analysis of knitting as a craft but I find it limiting. I think knitting can straddle the (/) between art / craft, sometimes with both needles planted firmly on one side or the other. However, that is my contemporary assessment and it comes on the heels of a long history of knitting as a practical, social activity.

The tricky art / craft issue does exist and is wrapped up in who performs which activity. In addition, there is concept of fabric as women’s work. The art / craft split is fairly recent, however, women and fiberwork is an ancient relationship. They seem to feed each other – women working fiber, fiber eventually categorized as craft, and then even within the world of craft, categorized as women’s craft. As I’ve been sifting and
reading and trying to make sense of it, I’ve come full circle to my original feminist conclusion, that women are bodies, messy, leaky, childbearing bodies (Pillow, 2003).

As female nude, woman is body, is nature opposed to male culture, which, in turn, is represented by the very act of transforming nature, that is, the female model or motif, into the ordered forms and colors of a cultural artifact, a work of art (Parker, 1989, p. 119).

Women’s bodies have been defined by their ability to create new life and their connection to the natural world. Likewise fabric is bodily, made from raw materials like something from nothing, to be worn on the skin (Barber, 1995; Sanders, 2004).

The visual culture of fiberwork reiterates this inextricable connection to the female body and how that female body is a mysterious entity. Early women’s clothing, such as string skirts, was intended to sexually arouse and advertise fertility (Barber, 1995). Later, as fabric making technology developed into weaving, fabric was often decorated with images and symbols of fertility such as eggs, birds, and snakes, or characters from lore like the Protectress of Minoan and Russian Motifs, or the Willies¹, versions of which show up across European folklore (Barber, 1995). It isn’t surprising that fertility and fabric, so tightly woven together in the hands of women, came to be so mysterious and often feared by men. Women seem to make something out of nothing; a shirt out of plants or animal hair, a baby out of a sexual act.

Fiberwork became a metaphor for womanhood before art split from craft and the relationship became cemented. This metaphor ranged from pastoral and maternal to witchy and threatening. There are many examples from early renaissance painting of Madonna’s peacefully knitting shirts on several double pointed needles for a beatific
baby Jesus (Rutt, 2003). Another example is Penelope weaving her story cloth to ward off suitors only to ravel every thread each night and begin again in a gesture of commitment and love for her sea faring husband. A conniving or threatening example is Madame DeFarge knitting as she plots revolution and counts the severed heads as they fall, or Arachne, the too proud and too talented weaver who was doomed to live as a spider. These women were “crafty” in that they crafted objects with their hands and were also clever and even plotting. Their endeavors and plans were not considered “artistic.”

The art / craft split

Etymologically ‘art’ has a Latin root and ‘craft’ an Old English root. Both words men the same thing: skill. The distinction between ‘artist’ and ‘artesian’ is modern. It was not fixed till the end of the eighteenth century, during which the idea of ‘fine arts’ first emerged, and the cult of ‘artistic inspiration’ was developed (Rutt, 2003, p. 25).

As the cult of artistic inspiration was on the rise, forces of gender, class, ethnicity, and religion, were at work driving a wedge deeper between art and craft. Art consisted of painting, sculpture, and drawing; was the realm of white, European, upper class, educated, Christian men; and became the dominant researched subject. Craft consisted of weaving, sewing, woodworking, and ceramics; was the realm of lower class, uneducated women and men who may or may not be of color or of different religions; and was unworthy of rigorous research. Parker underscores this separation:

The art/craft hierarchy suggests that art made with thread and art made with paint are intrinsically unequal: That the former is artistically insignificant. But the real differences between the two are in terms of
where they are made and who made them (Parker, 1989, p. 5, emphasis is author’s).

As the world barreled headlong into the industrial revolution and modernity, the split became wider. At the same time, craft became devalued on another level. Modernity valued the homogenized, efficient product. Craftwork was individualized and slow. Modern cloth was produced in factories with quality standards. Homespun or knitted cloth was produced in the home by slow, non-standardized methods and was, therefore considered, inherently inferior. This devaluing of craftwork, specifically women’s work like fiberwork

…has been a way to sustain the dominance of male controlled visual art production. This differentiation has been a tool for asserting that sculpture and painting (media that claim to give form to concepts and ideas) are valued above work tied to the body or its function (vessels, utensils, garments, etc.) (Sanders, 2004, p. 94)

This ties back into the idea of bodies as mysterious. Women are bodies and bodies are bound to the earth through all their needs and weaknesses and bound to home production because of their children. Men are minds and have the option of transcending their body through art and spiritual contemplation. Men are not bound to the home and are allowed to build factories and participate in society on a grand scale. There is an unfortunate caveat to this modern division that placed women in the home and men in the realm of business. The cloth produced in modern factories was still produced by young, underpaid, and overworked women, still very much aware of the aches and pains of their bodies as they bent over a loom, or inhaled the lint and dust from the machines.
The art / craft division had an additional, insidious affect on women. As women are told that their supposed lack of artistic or historical achievement in the past justifies a real lack of opportunity in the present they tend to believe that it is true (Mainardi, 1978, p. xi). Women seem to become self-suppressing and are put in the difficult position of having to speak against their gender in order to justify their work (Parker, 1989). This begs the question; by what standards should women’s work be justified?

A strange thing happens when women craftspersons or artists are added to Art History texts. It subtly reinforces the doctrines and systems developed by men that sought to exclude women in the first place (Parker, 1989). Instead of trying to reify these systems, many have called for a whole new system that celebrates the work and achievements of women for what they are, instead of trying to cram them in as footnotes in the traditional text:

the truth is that ‘high’ art has always fed off the vigor of the ‘lower’, ‘folk’, and ‘primitive’ arts and not the other way around. The African sculptors needed Picasso as little as the Japanese Print makers needed the Impressionists or the American Quilt makers needed the minimalists (Mainardi, 1978, p. 53)

Essentially, the ordinary and everyday is extraordinary by a new set of standards.

The Extraordinary Nature of Fiberwork

Fiberwork consumed many women’s lives and some women hated it. It would be unfair to discuss the benefits of fiberwork without acknowledging that some women could not stand embroidery, knitting, sewing, spinning, or weaving. For example, more
than a few samplers have been signed with similar statements such as “Polly did it and she hated every stitch she did” (Parker, 1989, p. 66). However, fiberwork, and specifically knitting was a comfort to many women. It offered an opportunity for artistic expression, a social outlet, professional development, and even political involvement, each of which could be hard to come by for women.

Artistic Expression

Early textiles were richly and elaborately patterned and embellished. Time did not yet equate to money as it does now and was considered a limitless resource (Barber, 1995). In addition, while early clothing followed a prototype, patterns were self-designed. In knitting, there were very few early pattern books and even those lacked information that modern knitters consider essential such as needle size, gauge, and yarn weight (Rutt, 2003; Macdonald, 1990; Strawn, 2007). All of this information had yet to be standardized and women had to design most of their patterns as they went along, making subtle alterations or dramatically frogging an entire work. Even today patterns are rarely written to fit just right and it is common practice to lengthen a sleeve, add a stitch pattern, change necklines, or add bust darts.

A beautiful example of early sweater design is the famous Aran sweater, which is intricately cabled and patterned. Women designed the sweaters and cable patterns for their sea faring husbands. Each family had a unique sweater design with the panels of cabling attributed to a male member of the family. Collectively, these panels formed a family history as well as means of identifying which man belonged to which family.
(Hollingworth, 2006). The cables and patterns were modeled after everyday things in women’s lives, plants, waves, talismans, and symbols. The artistry of these sweaters belies their practical nature. They were predominantly designed to protect the men that wore them. The cables created a denser fabric that still allowed flexibility and movement. The density of the wool made the sweater waterproof. If a man were thrown overboard, his sweater would protect him from the ocean chill until he could be hauled out. If he could not be rescued, his sweater, with its family cable patterns, served to identify the body when it was found (Hollingworth, 2006).

Fashion became women’s means of expression. The style of their clothes, the patterns in their quilts, the look of their home, all became a creative outlet. County fairs also provided a way for women to exhibit their work (Mainardi, 1978; Macdonald, 1990; Strawn, 2007; Brown, 2008). The craft exhibits at county fairs were packed with knitting projects, quilts, and embroidery works. These were often the only exhibits rural people visited (Mainardi, 1978). Women presented their best and most creative works with the hopes of receiving a blue ribbon and the praise of friends and neighbors.

Social Outlet

Socialization was crucial at a time when one’s friends and neighbor could be miles away and the day-to-day work of maintaining a household and a farmstead consumed every waking moment. Fiberwork, because it was portable, allowed women to visit and still be productive. “…sewing allowed women to sit together without feeling they were neglecting their families, wasting time or betraying their husbands by
maintaining independent social bonds” (Parker, 1989, p. 14-15). In the earliest Neolithic and Bronze Age villages there is evidence of women coming together in the communal spaces to chat and work fiber crafts together (Barber, 1995). In areas where weaving was the primary means of fabric production there is evidence in surviving cloth that shows that women often worked together at a single loom (Barber, 1995).

These female friendships were key to women’s lives and provided a safe place to discuss everything including housework, childcare, relationships, politics, and the fiberwork itself. This community aspect has often been cited as a reason to dismiss fiberwork as the equivalent of art (Mainardi, 1978; Parker, 1989). However, these gatherings were not unlike the art academy’s critique in that women could share suggestions and help with a tricky technique like turning the heel of a sock or the monotonous process of backing a quilt (Mainardi 1978; Macdonald, 1990). One could also argue that the knitting bee or quilting frolic operated on a different level from the art academy as something more fluid and less contrived, imbuing the work with a sense of community and love that enhanced it and made it more relatable, artful, and meaningful than a painting or sculpture. These objects, after all, were intended to be experience at the most personal level, on the body as clothing or over it as bedding (Mainardi, 1978).

Knitting was the constant companion in a woman’s life, especially during the move westward in the United States. During this particularly trying time, many women were married and taken west by new husbands leaving their entire relations behind. Women wrote about focusing on knitting to ease sadness and build vital female friendships (Macdonald, 1990). It was a language that transcended class, homeland,
politics, or religion. Evenings were times when women were allowed to knit together, share stories, and discuss their anxiety about the wild landscape around them. Upon reaching remote destinations these evening knitting times were equally important and women traveled great distances to knit together (Macdonald, 1990).

Perhaps the most dramatic examples of social knitting happened as the result of war. At these times of deep strife women sought each other’s company as a way to ease the pain of a loved one in battle and to do something to contribute to that loved one’s comfort. Knitting seemed to be a natural solution. During the Revolutionary War, Civil War, World War I, and World War II women collected through their churches, community centers, in their homes, and local society groups such as the Temperance Movement and Women’s Seaman Friends Society to knit for the men at war (Macdonald, 1990; Strawn, 2007). Churches and bible societies combined knitting with sermons about charitable giving. These societies and groups provided social comfort and often the men who could not fight but still felt the need to contribute attended knitting circles, either learning how to knit or recalling their early training as boys (Macdonald, 1990; Strawn, 2007). An example of these comforting gatherings happened during WWII in Akron, Ohio. A group of twelve women moved in with their parents while their husbands were over seas and started a weekly knitting circle where they discussed politics, parenting, and war news. The group agreed to meet until each woman’s husband returned from the war. All but one did (Macdonald, 1990).

Knitting circles still provide a much-needed outlet for women to collect with friends and talk. Knitters usually don’t knit for thrift anymore but for therapy and care of
one another. Knitters are drawn to other knitters who share the language of knitting and a sense of belonging (Strawn, 2007). Now the knitting circle operates on two levels. For example, I attend a weekly stitch n’ bitch in my community. On average, six to eight of us attend a meeting. We talk about our day, our family, and our projects. Sometimes the conversation is heavy, sometimes it is light, and often it strays toward raunchy and hilarious. At the same time, I also write and read blogs about knitting and belong to a knitting website called Ravelry³. I communicate with all of my local knitting group friends via the web but I have also befriended knitters from other states and countries. The knitting circle remains small and local and at the same time has expanded to become international. However, the need to connect and share stories about our lives is still very much the same as it was one hundred years ago. It provides a respite from the day and an easy transition into conversations and shared experiences.

*Professionalism*

Fiberwork provided some women their first professional opportunities. The textile trade in the Middle East proved to be a valuable business opportunity and a source of financial independence for women. In Egypt, linen was a form of currency and was always listed among the assets of the household. Often, the matron of the household was the overseer of linen production and therefore controlled a certain portion of the wealth (Barber, 1995). Similarly, embroidery provided professional opportunities for women, especially in the Middle Ages. Once a woman developed a reputation for speedy and attractive stitching she was repeatedly commissioned for clothing and house wares.
Unfortunately, this modicum of respect was often overshadowed by low pay and the medical conditions that accompanied needlework such as strained and failing eyesight, back and neck pain, strained muscles and tendons in the hands and wrists (what we refer to today as carpel tunnel syndrome), and fatigue from long hours (Parker, 1989). However, during a time when poverty crouched around every corner, an opportunity to contribute to the household income was always welcome.

Other strong examples of women’s professionalism accompany the war efforts, specifically the Civil War, WWI and WWII. During the Civil War, especially in the northern states, women learned early that in order to get material to the soldiers they would need to band together and standardize the process. Women were encouraged to knit for charity rather than their husband or son. By pooling resources they would be able to send out more care packages, handknits, and first aid equipment than if each woman worked independently (Macdonald, 1990). These activities happened without government request. Machine knit items such as bandages and socks were available but considered sub-standard. As a result 750 organizations were founded in the first year of the war. These organizations became highly organized under the United States Sanitary Commission (later the Red Cross), which arranged donations and sent agents to hospitals and the battlefield and resolved rivalries between separate groups to create a unified effort toward supporting the troops (Macdonald, 1990). Large sums of money were needed to support the commission and so women organized fairs and bazaars to raise funds. “Largely staffed by women, these fairs proved to be not only the most important
source of income for the commission but also a training ground for women’s
organizational skills (Macdonald, 1990, p. 110).”

This same structure continued for WWI and WWII with women leading the effort
for knitted comforts and necessities for soldiers.

Modern women credited speed knitters contributions with being as
significant to the war as female railroad agents, ‘cow tester’ dairy agents
for the department of agriculture, workers in shipyards and engine shops,
and ‘strong able-bodied women’ who unloaded coal cars. ‘The weaker
sex’ article in the staunchly feminist The Woman Citizen hailed Mrs.
Albert Nicolay of Cincinnati for knitting twenty-five hundred pairs of
socks for the September quota of the Red Cross in addition to taking care

Women entering education professions also used war knitting as a way to build their
career and create connections between the school and the community. Especially at urban
and rural settlement schools, knitting became a crucial extra-curricular activity. During
the winter, when soldiers were especially in need of warm knits, children, boys and girls,
were encouraged to knit during class time to keep up with the need (Macdonald, 1990).
One example is Nancy McClure:

…with her new graduate degree in progressive education, soon combined
educational and community activities at a consolidated county school in
western North Carolina to which students either walked or traveled by bus
from remote mountain areas. Allowed by a lenient principle to teach her
eight grade girls knitting during her study periods, she obtained olive drab
yarn, needles and instruction for seventy-two inch mufflers from the tiny
Red Cross headquarters and soon had her girls knitting them. Their
mothers, eager to contribute to soldiers in that area, begged for knitting
too, and, with student couriers delivering yarn to and bringing finished
products from these isolated ‘mountain ladies’, Nancy McClure soon
realized her goal of integrating ‘home and school’ and helping the war
effort (Macdonald, 1990, p. 300).
Between the wars, during the Great Depression, women turned to knitting as a source of income. Many women who had held jobs during WWI suddenly found themselves out of work and desperate for income (Strawn, 2007). Newspapers featured advertisements for “piecework” and “fancy work.” Women could knit quickly while attending to household duties as a way to supplement the meager income brought in by their husbands (Macdonald, 1990). Some of this home knitting developed into small cottage industry, especially in situations where women had inexpensive access to materials. Unfortunately, women have never made an adequate wage for the hours and effort devoted to each piece. Knitter Virginia Perry sums up this dilemma in this painfully direct observation:

Still appalled at the ‘pittance’ sewers and knitters earned she summarized: ‘A woman may be defined as a creature that receives half price for all she does and pays full price for all she needs…she earns as a child – she pays as a man’ (Macdonald, 1990, p. 139).

Astute women like Virginia Perry are an example of where knitting began to intersect with subversion.

_Subversion_

When most people consider knitting, they imagine a peaceful, often elderly woman, her needles clicking rhythmically as she rocks back and forth in her antique rocker. According to Mrs. Clounda Nicholas, mid-century female activist and avid knitter, that is exactly what women wanted men to think. “Feminists hinted that [Clounda’s] traditional appearance – knitting – duped male legislators into
underestimating her crusade for more liberal property rights for women” (Macdonald, 1990, p. 143). Knitting managed to weave its way into the political lives of women. Something about knitting as a collective activity and a contemplative activity seemed to get women’s minds and voices working. However, knitter’s ability to affect change has often been overlooked and overshadowed.

For example, every American child learns about the Boston Tea Party as the catalyst that started the Revolutionary War. However, several years prior to that fateful night the British government placed restrictions and high taxes on imported fabric. In protest, women turned to their spinning wheels, looms, and needles creating yards and yards of homespun fabric. Colonists wore only homespun and many churches held spinning and knitting bees supported by the Daughters of Liberty (Macdonald, 1990). Some men were uncomfortable with the idea of a politically active wife, but something had to be done about the outrageous taxes imposed on the colonist’s necessities. The tea tax was, indeed, the last straw. It’s unfortunate, though, that history books never explain that American Indian costumes worn by the Sons of Liberty as they crept onto the Dartmouth, Beaver, and Eleanor in Boston Harbor, were made of fabric spun, knit, woven, and sewn at home. Yes, some revenue was lost as the tea casks were heaved over board, but the fabric industry in Great Britain was dealt a more lasting and painful blow. The boycott continued through the war and “[a]lthough women were not heroes in battle, they fought for independence by establishing spinning groups and spinning their own yarn to make sure Americans were ‘clothed with the work of our own hands’” (Strawn, 2007, p. 15).
During the Civil War knitting acted as a catalyst for women’s political involvement:

Along with Bible groups, antislavery societies appealed to large numbers in the North, and the women’s rights movement attracted the truly bold despite admonitions that should a woman ‘raise her gentle voice amid the storm of debate, or rush into the heat and strife of partisan politics she would jeopardize her femininity and risk the shame of becoming ‘madly unsexed’ (Macdonald, 1990, p. 45).

Women’s efforts were often viewed as stepping well outside their domestic roles and it was said they could not comprehend the intricacies of politics. However many were forced to take on all the male tasks of running plantations in addition to their own domestic work (Macdonald, 1990). Women were also deeply involved in the charity work mentioned earlier. There civic involvement began to spark their interest in women’s rights. They were allowed to manage every aspect of the charity bazaar except the money. This, understandably, rubbed some women the wrong way,

When the fair’s dynamic leader Mary Livermore was appraised of this [that she could not sign a contract w/out a spousal guarantee] and simultaneously discovered that she had control over neither her money she herself earned nor her children, she drew her self up and remarked that once the war was over she knew what cause would get her attention (Macdonald, 1990, p. 112).

It’s no wonder that knitting and Suffrage became so tightly woven together. American suffragettes took cues from their British counterparts who embroidered their protest banners and circulated patterns that would allow women to express their political views (Parker, 1989; Strawn, 2007). In 1918 the Brand Blue Book of Yarn Kraft published the suffrage sweater pattern designed to advertise one’s support for women’s
right to vote (Strawn, 2007). Suffragettes protesting outside the White House always packed knitting to work on during their lunch break (Macdonald, 1990).

It was war knitting, though, that served as a catalyst as in this example from New York during WWI.

Suffragists considered knitting for the war effort another kind of activism. Miss Helen Hill headed a knitting unit at the headquarters for the 27th Assembly District of the Suffrage Party in New York City… she and her entourage printed circulars which they handed out from table to table in restaurants and to neighbors sitting on city stoops… The ‘Knitting 27th’, turned out comfort hand knits for the Navy League, specifically 5 garments each for 712 sailors on the warship USS Missouri. Asked if the 3,560 handknits would be ready in time Hill replied; “Well, these are the same women who helped get signatures of more than 500,000 women of New York City who want to vote. Women who did not let the grass grow under their feet until they had performed that arduous task are not likely to stop at a little thing like knitting winter garments for 712 sailor boys” (Strawn, 2007, p. 98-99).

One can imagine women in knitting circles around the United States lifting their needles in a decided V for victory on August 18th, 1920 when the 19th Amendment was ratified.

Why this Craft Continues

Knitting has a long, rich history. The craft has survived the industrial revolution and the advent of cheap and accessible machine knit goods as well as women entering the workforce.

By the 1980s, more than half of all college students were women, and the salaried labor force was sixty percent female. Many women knit to relax after long days working in stressful occupations. As twentieth century wound to a close, Americans continued to knit, although they no longer needed the product, they did need the process of knitting (Strawn, 2007, p. 181, emphasis is author’s).
The craft continues thanks to knitters like Elizabeth Zimmerman, Nicky Epstein, and Barbara Walker and has recently experienced a dramatic resurgence with knitters like Debbie Stoller, Stephanie Pearl-McPhee, and the Mason-Dixon Knitters. The idea that working women would drop the craft in favor of inexpensive ready-made knits was utterly disproved.

Rather than spelling the demise of knitting, the increasingly pricey array of new yarns and designer pattern redefined knitting from utilitarian craft to designer fashion statement. Knitting was also redefined as a compassionate gesture that could make the world a better place. Knitting became a serious medium for fine artists and increasingly knitting became a source of solace and a way to connect with a world growing smaller each day (Strawn, 2007, p. 183).

Women, and an increasing number of men started knitting or reconnecting with the hobby for a variety of reasons including charity, expression, socialization, protest, and therapy. Knitting also offered a way to create something individual outside the consumerist and capitalist forces encountered on a daily basis. All of these themes began to appear in knitted artworks.

**Artists Knitting**

Knitting in art can be seen as an offshoot of women artists of the 1970s like Judy Chicago, Faith Ringgold, and Miriam Shapiro embracing women’s fiber work such as quilting, embroidery, crochet, knitting, and weaving in their own work. These women had the goal of reclaiming and celebrating the craft work of their mother’s and
grandmothers, demonstrating that the processes and products were beautiful, labor intensive, and deserved the same recognition as painting and sculpture. Contemporary artists working with knitting address a wide array of issues like feminism, consumerism, oral history, personal narrative, motherhood, sexuality, and environmentalism. At the same time, by using knitting in their art, these artists are constantly referencing the craft’s history as a gendered activity.

Kelly Jenkins is an artist who directly addresses the stereotypes that surround women and knitting. She uses digital technology to print sexy call girl advertisements and faux gentleman’s magazine covers on wall sized machine knitted panels as seen in Figure 2.1 (Hoggard, 2005). The text on the panels uses the double entendre common in knitting such as “chicks with sticks” and “knitting with balls” as a way to spoof clichéd attitudes about sexuality. Her work is also a way of celebrating knitting and making it desirable, “transforming [it] from a domestic hobby into a naughty but thrilling erotic must have” and subverting traditional views of knitting as old fashioned and grandmotherly (Hoggard, para 2). Jenkins is manipulating ideas about womanhood in her work in order to make a statement about how society views craft, femininity, and sexuality.
Lisa Anne Auerbach works political messages into her hand and machine knit garments and pieces exhibiting them as banners, billboards, and alternative fashion displays, as well as, in galleries and on her website, StealThisSweater.com (Auerbach, 2008). She claims part of her inspiration and interest in knitting stems from the fact that “…[t]he popularity of the sweater for women coincided with women's fashions becoming less restrictive and suffragettes leading the way towards women's rights. Knitting is radical” (Steal This Sweater, 2008)! Some of her patterns include “Body Count Mittens” that reference Madame DeFarge and address the lives lost in the Iraq War; the V-day Yurt created to celebrate the 10th anniversary of V-day; and her sweaters that bear phrases like “Keep abortion legal / pro-life is pro-living”, “Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition.” The sweater pictured in Figure 2.2 says “Did you hear what Bush said about Roe v.
Wade? ‘I don’t care how they get out of New Orleans’”(Steal This Sweater, 2008). Auerbach explains, “Some jokes aren't really very funny. This one takes as its starting point our president's [George W. Bush] cluelessness about contemporary issues and ends with his insensitivity.”

![Picture of a sweater with text: "I don't care how they get out of New Orleans"]

Figure 2.2: Lisa Anne Auerbach, 2005, machine knit sweater

Lindsay Obermeyer’s work is about family, motherhood, and connection. She has worked with the traditional sweater form creating garments connected by fifteen-foot sleeves as in the Attachment Project, or a knitted umbilical cord as in Brain Food. Another sweater called Stretched Thin (Figure 2.3) has long i-cord nipples extending from the chest and demonstrates the stress and anxiety that can come with being a new mother. She has also created a series of hats all connected by a red i-cord called the Red
Thread Project (Klose, 2006). These works demonstrate the connection between mother and child and individual and community.

Figure 2.3: Lindsey Obermeyer, Stretched Thin, 1999, knitted mohair

Ming Yi Sung is a crochet sculptor working and teaching elementary school in Virginia. Her work extends from a personal mythology about sex and sexuality as she explains in her artist statement:

[T]here once existed a creature, Androgyny, who took the form of both sexes. As time went by, it lost some of its own physical identities and split into two separated sexes, as we are now. Somehow the soul within us still holds the personality of both sexes. Through the presentation of my installations, I am continuing my investigation of my personal myth and creating a world of my own (Sung, 2006).
Her sculptures are composed of fanciful landscapes and characters that mix genders and sometimes even species. She anthropomorphizes trees, fruits, and animals creating a brightly colored crocheted environment. She has experimented with a variety of media including clay, painting and drawing, and papier-mâché before finally finding her voice through crochet (Sung, 2006). Her use of crochet makes her worlds soft and inviting, her choice of colors and imagery straddles the line between reality and fantasy.

Figure 2.4: Ming Yi Sung, detail from Androgenous [sic], 2004, mixed media crochet installation

Another artist that uses crochet in her work is Cynthia Capriata. I had the pleasure of working with Capriata in 2007 when I exhibited her work at GALLERY 2001 at Ohio Wesleyan University. She combines a variety of fiber and yarns to create large scale crochet forms reminiscent of women’s anatomy. Her choice of media is luxurious and she
often uses yarns and fibers reminiscent of velvet, fur, or satin. These fiber choices enhance the sensuality and sexuality of her pieces. In addition to these large artworks she creates smaller drawings with delicately crocheted doily patterns. These smaller doily pieces are knit with austere, simple cotton yarn in muted white and black shades. The juxtaposition of these two types of works, the bodacious and sexy large works and the small delicate drawings, seem to set up a dialogue between bodily sexuality and the dainty femininity. Her use of crochet, a craft used to create both large bright blankets and wall hangings and amazingly complex and delicate lace, underscore this dialogue.

Figure 2.5: Cynthia Capriata, detail of I Bichos, 2007, crochet and mixed media installation at GALLERY 2001

There are many artists using currently using knitting in their work. These are just a few that I have found particularly interesting in thinking about my own interest in knitting and the development of this project. The final section of this paper expands on
these individual artists and looks at a few artists and groups who are creating community knitted works. Again, I am focusing on a few projects out of many amazing creations.

Community Knitting Projects

When I started knitting I was delighted and fascinated by the craft’s ability to bring people together and encourage them to share their stories. In addition, there was the constant awareness knitters had of one another’s needs and the need of their communities. Historically, charity knitting accompanied every need, whether it was knitting for the poor or for soldiers at war. Presently, the need in the world is staggering and like their foremothers, knitters try to contribute in whatever way they can.

Charity Knitting

It seems that most knitters have applied their skills to charity knitting in some way. I knit afghans for Warm Up America! a charity dedicated to getting warm blankets to those in need. The organization encourages people to work together on afghans, each creating a couple squares toward the finished product (Warm Up America, 2008). They also encourage knitters to donate locally to charities in their community. I donate to the YWCA family center in Columbus, Ohio. The organization started small in 1991. Its founder Evie Rosen started the organization out of her knitting shop in Wausau Wisconsin (Christiansen, 2006). The afghans provided a tangible way for knitters to provide warmth and comfort to those who needed it most, and at the same time, gave them and opportunity to use up extra yarn. The Craft Yarn Council of America (CYCA)
took over Warm Up America! in 1994, reaching national status, yet still encouraging participants to act locally (Christiansen, 2006).

Rae French started Hugs for Homeless Animals in 1996. She was disheartened by the situation of animals at shelters kept in a cold cage with slim hope of adoption. She invited people over the web to knit Snuggles for animals (Christiansen, 2006). These mats in a variety of sizes from kitten to Great Dane are intended to give animals in shelters a little extra comfort and a soft place to sleep. French continues to operate the organization, which boasts the most comprehensive list of shelters, the Worldwide Shelter Directory (Christiansen, 2006).

There are several charity knitting organizations for children. Project Linus is an organization founded by Karen Loucks and developed “…to bring peace, comfort, and love to critically ill and traumatized children in the form of handmade security blankets” (Christiansen, 2006, p. 82). Hospitals are always in need of preemie caps and baby blankets knit in sterilizable acrylic or cotton yarn and shelters need child sized as well as adult-sized blankets. Many knitters become connected through family members or friends who are nurses or doctors to a specific hospital in their area, knitting small comforts for the children and babies who spend time there. Finally, the Mother Bear Project sends hand knit teddy bears to children in South Africa who have been orphaned by or are themselves suffering from HIV/AIDS (Christiansen, 2006).

The list of knitting projects and charities is too long to list and is always changing and adapting as needs change. For example, there are still knitters making socks for soldiers, but not nearly at the level they were during our nation’s earlier wars. There
is not much need for socks, but knitters with loved ones over seas still feel the need to contribute. There are fewer charities that send items over seas these days because the need at home is great. Local shelters are always desperate for blankets, hats, and mittens. Perhaps as great as the need for actual knitted objects is the need to raise awareness about those experiencing homelessness or illness, or those who cannot speak for themselves like animals in shelters. Community art projects fulfill this consciousness-raising role.

_Knitted Art: A Community Perspective_

When I learned to knit in my third year of art school, I was instantly aware of its potential as an artistic medium. That, coupled with its ability to bring people together made it the craft for me. The following are five community knitting projects that inspired me to take my own knitting to the next level, weaving it into my scholarship, artmaking, and research. Each of these projects shares a few characteristics. Each is, thus far, ongoing. Each has a web presence and, therefore, a community that participates both in person and over the Internet. Finally, each addresses, through the medium of knitting in the idiom of art, a critical issue affecting women today – Red Sweaters addresses war, Crochet Reef addresses the environment, KnitPro and Microrevolt is focused on sweatshop labor practices, Tit Bits deal with women’s health, specifically breast cancer, and the Meathead Hats address the overarching issues of community art and knitting.
Red Sweaters

The Red Sweaters project began Saturday, February 19, 2005 in San Francisco, California at 1:32am by Nina Rosenberg (Rosenburg, 2007). The project, drawing on the tradition of wartime knitting was "...inspired by the war in Iraq. Its purpose is to spread public awareness, encourage thought, and inspire discussions about war and current events without promoting a specific view" (Rosenburg, 2007). The original idea was to knit one little red sweater for every casualty of the Iraq war, however, this task was deemed too daunting and had to be scaled back to every American casualty in the war. The actual number has yet to be reached.

Figure 2.6: Nina Rosenberg, Red Sweaters, 2005, Acrylic yarn
Rosenburg’s inspiration came from a variety of places, including Red Cross war posters and literature like the aforementioned A Tale of Two Cities. She decided to use red because it is the color of blood. Blood has no class, race, or gender. She also chose the type of yarn, deciding on the cheapest acrylic yarn to make the project accessible to everyone. Though the sweaters are all from the same yarn and pattern (designed to fit a G.I. Joe action figure) each turns out differently because of varied knitting styles and stitches. The sweaters were originally exhibited in a tree, as shown in Figure 2.6, and later in a gallery. Rosenburg cites several reasons for using a tree including its symbolism of life, age, and solidity (Rosenburg, 2007). I also feel it references the tradition of tying a yellow ribbon around a tree.

The project itself references the wartime knitting of the Civil War, WWI and WWII. However, women used to knit to satisfy the need for warm clothes. Now there is no longer a distinct need yet knitters still feel the need to contribute in some way. This project allows them a way to participate in the dialogue, contribute to an artwork, and perpetuate the discussion about war. It keeps their loved ones foremost in their minds and hearts. This is reflected in the fact that many of the sweaters are knit in the name of a loved one in the military (Rosenburg, 2008).

_Crochet Reef_

The Crochet Reef was designed and curated by The Institute For Figuring co-directors Christine and Margaret Wertheim. Their intention was to raise awareness about the increasing damage happening to the Great Barrier Reef. They see the project as “…a
woolly celebration of the intersection of higher geometry and feminine handicraft, and a testimony to the disappearing wonders of the marine world” (The IFF, 2008). Dr. Diana Taimina developed the original hyperbolic crochet design and the Institute has since been creating a wide array of life forms including kelps, corals, and anemones. The reef is divided into sub-reefs including the Red Reef, Blue Reef, Bleached Reef, Branched Anemone Garden, the Ladies’ Silurian Atoll, which is composed of 1,000 individual crochet forms, and the Toxic Reef composed of crochet plastic trash and yarn (The IFF, 2008).

Figure 2.7: Marianne Middleburg, Crochet coral and anemone garden, 2005, crochet and mixed media

Unlike Red Sweaters, which were inspired by war knitting, there is not an historical precedent for knitting a project aimed at environmental consciousness raising. In fact, women were delighted when acrylic yarn was developed (Strawn, 2007). Acrylic yarn is spun from plastic fibers made from oil. The yarn is machine washable and was
introduced on the market around the same time as washing machines. It was considered a wave of the future with no concern for the damage all that oil based, non-biodegradable material would do to the environment. Fortunately the attitudes have changed and there has been a huge push toward using environmentally friendly yarns from organic, sustainable materials created by businesses that are socially conscious. In addition, knitting is a part of the Do It Yourself (DIY) mentality that values making items of lasting quality as opposed to purchasing one-off items that will be thrown away.

**KnitPro and Microrevolt**

KnitPro and Microrevolt ties in closely with the themes of Crochet Reef but instead of commenting on the exploitation of the environment it comments on the exploitation of female workers (Gschwandtner, 2007). The actual work of art is the computer program, KnitPro. The program will chart any image you upload so that you can knit it pictorially through a technique called intarsia. The community aspect is the subversive use of imagery that happens when knitters start appropriating the logos and imagery of companies notorious for using sweatshop labor like Nike, Barbie, and Disney, as in Figure 2.8. The act is considered a Microrevolt.

A similar type of activity happened during the 1930s when marketing and knitting begin to intersect. Because of the stock market crash women began to make a lot of their own clothing, but there was still the desire for high style items. Women used to be able to purchase kits at department stores to work up approximations of designer knit wear. It's not unlike how designers like Ralph Lauren have separate clothing lines for department
stores and outlet stores. Department stores were brilliant at marketing knitting as an affordable and stylish. In addition, they became a place for women to find work while jobs were scarce (Macdonald, 1990).

Figure 2.8: Sample intarsia projects from microRevolt

Many women, like my great grandmother, bypassed the department store all together and just copied styles right out of the magazines by simply studying the picture and drawing out an approximate pattern. The resulting garments were both within the idiom of capitalism and outside of it. Women were still marketed a look and a package of goods, but they were making the decision to produce it themselves. This may or may not be considered subversive, but there was a certain degree of pride in being able to replicate an expensive piece for a fraction of the cost, if not a fraction of the labor. Now the gesture is expressly subversive. Microrevolt uses the appropriation of logos to speak out against sweatshop labor and irresponsible business practices.
Beryl Tsang began the Tit-Bits project after she lost a breast to cancer. She turned to knitting as a way to cope throughout the process of shopping for a prosthetic (Gschwandtner, 2007). Finally, distraught by her options she turned to her needles again, this time for a new breast. In 2005, inspired by her solution to her prosthetics problem, Tsang started the tit bits website as way to sell her creations, as well as provide a forum and resources for women experiencing breast cancer (Gschwandtner, 2007). She also offers the pattern through the free pattern website Knitty (Tsang, 2008). While these breasts are practical, they are also works of art, knit in a delicate spiraling pattern in every practical flesh color of cotton you can imagine in addition to floosies and fancies, knit in luxurious yarns in a variety of colors for special occasions. They are weighted to hang like a natural breast and even have a knitted nipple that can be enhanced with novelty buttons or ribbon (Tsang, 2008). Tit bits are an alternative to the often cold and impersonal medical options.

The idea of a knitted alternative has rich history. War knitting included bandages, hospital blankets, and “stump socks” created by a woman who knitted regular socks during the Civil War, but due to failing eyesight and arthritis, needed something simpler to knit during WWI (Macdonald, 1990). Currently there are knitters creating leprosy bandages, prayer shawls for people coping with loss or tragedy, lap blankets for those in assisted living and nursing homes, and preemie caps for premature babies. Knitting for the medical care of others is strong tradition and offers a personal connection for those
who are ill as well as a way to demonstrate love and understanding for the people that care for them. Tit-bits follow in this tradition of creatively coping.

![Breast Cancer Awareness Themed Tit-Bit](image)

**Figure 2.9: Breast Cancer Awareness Themed Tit-Bit**

*Meathead Hats*

Artist, knitter, and writer Larissa Brown designed the Meathead hats for an exhibition. The project was designed to reference the concept of similarity and consisted of hats knit in the same pattern with the same yarn and then numbered with cattle tags. Brown recruited the talents of knitters from around the world, sending them kits with the yarn and the pattern and adding the cattle tags when the knitters sent them back. However, as Brown began receiving the finished hats, the project that started out as a project about sameness and conformity became about uniqueness:
[T]he biggest surprises were the hats themselves. Even though they were all made from the exact same materials and pattern, each one came alive with its own personality. They were entirely different from one another, in shape, form, size, tightness, twistiness, and character. Some were frighteningly long and strange, others tiny little balls of anxious knitting. A few were so freakishly shaped they became the sweet underdogs of the grid. Thanks to the knitters who volunteered, an art installation that was going to be about conforming and giving in to the world's pressures actually became about individuality. About the irrepressible personal spirit, and the power of each knitter's hand in her work. I became filled with wonder at the potential for variation within a sea of sameness, and my work as an artist and a crafter has not been the same since (Brown, 2006).

Brown was fascinated by the process and knitters’ willingness to knit with and for her. She organized another knitalong with the Meathead Hat pattern, this time encouraging knitters to embellish, play with color, and really individualize their hats. The finished products were exhibited online at the photo-sharing website Flickr⁶ and can also be viewed at Brown’s Knitalong website⁷.

The Meathead Hat experience led Brown to become increasingly interested in the phenomenon of knitting together. Her interest spawned the book Knitalong (2008), which is a series of essays that discuss knitting in prisons, orphanages, schools, for artworks, charity, fairs, and competitions, and knitting in stitch n’ bitches and knit cafés from a contemporary and historical perspective. The book also includes patterns that are especially popular for knitalongs. For example, one project called the Barn Raising Quilt is designed so that each knitter in the knitalong contributes a square. Similarly, for the Traveling Scarf each knitter knits a certain length of the scarf and sends it along to the next knitter and so on until the scarf is long enough to be gifted to a friend about to take journey.
In addition to essays and patterns the book provides tips for planning a knitalong including the types of patterns that work best, suggested time frame, and other administrative details. This particle information has become extremely valuable in designing and carrying out the Knitted Flower Project and therefore an integral part of my methodology. I explain this more in the following chapter.

Section Conclusion

This literature review presents some of the issues and themes that will be explored during the course of the project and introduces some of issues that will be discussed in the following methodology chapter such as teaching and learning through knitting, knitting as a form of self-care and care for others, and the link between knitting and
narrative. During the course of the blog discussions the participants and I will discuss women and fiberwork, the art / craft debate, and the extraordinary nature of knitting including knitting as a potential media for artistic expression, as a social outlet, as an opportunity for professionalism, and as subversive or activist activity. In addition, the blog discussions will address charity knitting and knitalongs. As I have attempted to convey in this chapter, I have chosen these themes because they resonate across time and seem to be as relevant now as they were to ancient weavers. My hope is that this resonance and these themes will continue to appear and create meaning across the remainder of this thesis.

1 The Willies are the spirits of girls who died before having children. They appear in folklore across Europe and range from benevolent and helpful to vengeful and bitter.

2 Frogging means to ravel stitches that have already been knit, often due to a mistake earlier in the piece. The term frogging is a play on words where “ripping back” or “rip it” sounds like “ribbit”, the sound a frog makes.

3 Ravelry is a social networking site for knitters and crocheters that allows them to catalogue their projects and yarn; communicate with each other; search for and research projects, patterns and yarns; join networking groups; and advertise and sell designs and handspun yarn. The web address is http://www.ravelry.com/.

4 For those interested in knitting for charity, this website is a good place to start: www.knittingforcharity.org/

5 Intarsia is a knitting technique that uses two or more colors of yarn to knit a charted picture in a garment.

6 Meathead Hat 2006 Knitalong: http://www.flickr.com/groups/meatheads06/

7 Knitalong website, Meathead Hats gallery: http://knitalong.net/?page_id=33
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

GAUGE, STYLE, NEEDLES, AND BLOCKING:
EPISTEMOLOGY, METHODOLOGY, METHODS, AND ANALYSIS

Epistemology: Feminist Critical Theory and Constructivism as a basis for Qualitative Research

Every researcher encounters the qualitative versus quantitative conundrum at some point in their career. Sometimes the decision is difficult and there are always questions about validity, generalizability, and appropriateness. However, in many if not most cases the issues and questions one wants to address resolve the dilemma. In my own situation, the key issues I wanted to address included personal narratives, artmaking, craftmaking, relationship building, feminism, and community. My decision to use qualitative methods was born out of the topic and spun from an epistemology rooted in feminism and art, artmaking, and personal narrative as a source from which to construct knowledge.
Fortunately, it has become increasingly acceptable to use qualitative research methods that allow for ambiguity rather than definitiveness; that seek to understand issues rather than solve problems. “We have come to realize that research predicated on a problem-solving model of practice is, at best, itself problematic. Researchers concerned with human relationships do not solve problems, they cope with situations” (Eisner, 2001; p. 138). These researchers, mostly from social sciences disciplines have paved the way for more interpretivist and constructivist forms of knowledge building rather than problem solving or information mining. Qualitative researchers understand that there are no hard and fast rules for anyone and that knowledge is changing and subjective. I am using qualitative methods in this project because the answers are not definite, nor do they need to be. According to Eisner (2001)

The past 30 years have seen a growing interest in, and acceptance of, pluralism in our social life. We are less certain about the virtues of homogeneity than we once were. Feminists have taught us about the multiple ways in which the world can be experienced and have uncovered assumptions and values in our so-called value neutral research practices that make them seem less neutral than we once believed they were. Put another way, the politics of method became visible (p. 138).

Qualitative methods encourage the exploration and complication of personal epistemologies allowing for various voices, often previously unheard, to enter the conversation. In addition, there is the opportunity to use personal and creative methods such as artmaking and story telling. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the methodology and methods I employ in this thesis. I begin by discussing my epistemology, which is a product of a feminist, artist, and crafter’s perspective. I then delve into A/r/tography (Springgay, 2008; Irwin, 2004), its theoretical basis, benefits, and
pitfalls, and how these apply to my research question. I define my methods of Autoethnography (Sparkes, 2002) and Knitalongs (Brown 2008), describe how they will be applied and speculate about the potential challenges that may arise throughout the research process. Finally I present the criteria by which I will address validity: resonance, transparency, communicability, and coherence (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003).

_Feminist Critical Theory_

Eisner’s reference to feminist research in the quote above is essential because my research is feminist in nature. This project and the resulting thesis are based on Feminist Critical Theory and Constructivist Theory. Critical Theories such as Feminist Critical Theory and Critical Race Theory emerge from a Marxist position that perceives reality as “shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values [that are] crystallized over time” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). As discussed in the Literature Review, craft is often viewed as a low or lesser art because of its affiliation with marginalized people and their socio-cultural conditions. Knitting, for example, is a labor traditionally performed by women to be worn on the body thus separating it from oil painting, which is a skill traditionally performed by men to be admired on a wall. This perception of craft is one that has been shaped by our society and crystallized over time. Michele Hardy (2004) highlights this in her discussion of feminism and craft:

> It was not until I became familiar with feminist theory and with feminist critiques of science and philosophy that I began to recognize my experience and name my frustrations. These are that, as a woman and a craftsperson, I have felt insignificant, devalued, and guilty of self-indulgence, both generally and specifically within the university (p. 177).
It is an issue I have been working with in my own artworks for several years. I use both the skills and materials of painting associated with the art world, and the labor and materials of sewing and knitting associated with craft. My work is pretty and feminine but it is also about taking control of my femininity and respecting and celebrating the methods of creating my mother and grandmothers used. I want to address these same issues in the Knitted Flower Project with fellow knitters and crafters. How do they understand the difference between art and craft? Do they see the separation as gendered?

Constructivism

Questions such as these have led me to a constructivist approach to research. I am constructing a community of participants that will, in turn, construct a dialogue and an artwork. As a community we will share stories and experiences, interact and build relationships, produce artwork and meanings, and negotiate understandings of that artwork. All of these activities exemplify Denzin & Lincoln’s (1994) definition of constructivist research by making meaning in the community through discussion and participation, rather than finding or discovering it.

As a community of knitters we are building knowledge in several ways, each of which invites questions and dialogue essential to the research process. These include the following:

1) The participants’ accounts of the process of knitting and creating the artwork - What types of yarn did they use? What parts of the pattern did they find challenging? Did
they share the pattern with friends? Did they help those friends or did their friend help them? What did they discuss while they were knitting? If they discussed this project how did they describe it?

2) The participants’ personal narratives and histories as they relate to the project –
When, where, and from who did they learn to knit? Have they taught others to knit? What role does knitting play in their lives? What other crafts do they enjoy? What was happening in their lives as they participated in the project? Does knitting help them connect to others or to their ancestors?

3) Interactions between participants and descriptions of those interactions – What do they wish to talk about? How do they discuss the questions that I present? Do they find my questions useful and meaningful? How do they build upon or deviate from my questions?

4) Participants’ perceptions of the theories and concepts with which they are working such as feminism, the history of knitting, personal history and narrative, the art and craft dichotomy, art as a knowledge building activity, and community – How are these issues relevant in their lives? Which issues are most important to them? What are their personal philosophies? How have they encountered, researched, negotiated these concepts? Do they see them as connected to knitting?

5) The final artwork as an object – How do we define this artwork and our relationship to it? How does this artwork behave as a product of research? What does it mean to the knitters who created it? Do they see themselves as co-authors? What is the relationship between the artwork and the written text of this thesis?
6) The artwork’s potential to change attitudes and convey messages both about knitting and the knitters – Do the participants feel differently about their own knitting having participated in this project? Are viewers inspired to learn or return to knitting, artmaking, or both? Do viewers have fresh perspectives and opinions about knitting and/or knitters that they know? Upon learning the theory behind the project does it change their opinions about research?

This process becomes an exercise in meaning making that unfolds through artmaking, story telling, community building, and art interpretation, which aligns with the methodology of A/r/tography, methods of Autoethnography and the Knitalong. The next section explores A/r/tography.

Methodology: A/r/tography

A/r/tography holds its definition in its unique spelling. To be engaged as A/r/tographers means to act as (a)rtists, (r)esearchers, and (t)eachers, and explore the connections and spaces between those identities, signified by the (/) symbol. The spelling opens up multiple opportunities for defining and interpreting the methodology of A/r/tography, the role of the A/r/tographer, and how the methodology applies to this specific project. In order to navigate these interpretations and applications, I first present a brief genealogy of A/r/tography and, more broadly, arts-based research. Then, in order to unpack my own application of A/r/tography I apply the later writings of Michel Foucault in which he considers the technologies of the self including self-care and self-writing. Next, I examine some problems, criticisms, and challenges in A/r/tography and
arts-based research and how I hope to address them. Finally I explain how my methods of Autoethnography and the Knitalong precipitate from the over-arching methodology or A/r/tography.

*A brief genealogy of A/r/tography*

The history of arts-based research is rich and highlighted by brilliant names in the arts, education, and arts education. Frayling (1993) offers the earliest examples of artist’s acting as researchers through their art and whose art was also considered a product of their research. He points specifically to two English Romantic Painters, George Stubbs (1724 – 1806) and John Constable (1776 – 1837). Stubbs worked prolifically painting animals and studying their physical structure, environment, and interaction with humans while Constable studied cloud formations and weather patterns. Both artists transferred their research directly into their paintings. In addition to these two examples, there are hundreds, if not thousands more. Leonardo da Vinci (1452 – 1519) is always the classic example using his skill as a draftsman to examine anatomy and mechanics. More recently, Kara Walker (born 1969) uses her art to examine and express the experience of black women in America through the intersection of history, racism, sex, and violence.

The examples are practically infinite, from the cave painters of Lascaux recording hunting techniques and the species of animals they encountered to the young student today using visual arts, dance, writing, music, or acting to engage with his or her world, art is a source, process, and product of knowledge. Artists and craftspersons use their work to explore certain issues and improve their skills, as well as make objects for
display and appreciation, demonstrating “…that artists have worked just as often in the
cognitive idiom as the expressive; that some art counts as research by anyone’s
definition; that some art doesn’t” (Frayling, 1993; p. 4). This connection between art,
artmaking, and knowledge traces a direct line to the field of education where the
malleable and sometimes tenuous connection becomes better defined as a methodology.

According to Cahanmann-Taylor (2008) arts-based research begins with the
Aesthetics Movement in the late 1800s through the turn of the century. During this period
art begins to systematically enter the public schools in Great Britain and America
bringing to fruition the theories introduced earlier that century by pedagogues such as
Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746 – 1827), Friedrich Fröbel (1782 – 1852), and Johann
Friedrich Herbart (1776 – 1841) who focused on the potential to teach meaning through
the natural playfulness and artistry of children by showing them and teaching them to
appreciate art objects.

Cahanmann-Taylor then points to Maria Montessori (1870 -1952) and her child-
centered and arts intensive pedagogy and John Dewey (1859-1952) who, finding the
Aesthetic Movement problematic, encouraged learning through experience. Both
Montessori and Dewey felt that, though the Aesthetics Movement was a positive step
towards more artful learning, instructors should teach by doing instead of by showing.
This carried over into Dewey’s research practice, which was focused as much on teaching
and artmaking as the research itself. This philosophy of hands-on interaction aligned with
the beliefs of the Arts and Crafts Movement started by John Ruskin (1819 – 1900) and
William Morris (1834 – 1896) in the latter half of the 19th century, which reached its
height from 1880-1910. The movement encouraged people to turn away from the mass production of the industrial revolution, which they felt had a detrimental effect on society, and to embrace the elegance of handmade goods through woodworking, metal-smithing, weaving, embroidery, and pottery.

These movements and their philosophical and pedagogical underpinnings inspired the Settlement Houses of the United States. These community centers, like Hull House in Chicago, used arts, crafts, and performance as teaching tools. Their teachers, usually young women, embraced the pedagogies of Dewey and Montessori, embedding and centering those philosophies in the communities they served, usually comprised of working-class immigrant families, to try and improve their conditions. Addams saw the work of the settlement house as a necessary uphill battle against the ravages of industrialization stating that “[t]he settlement soon discovers how difficult it is to put a fringe of art on the end of a day spent in a factory” (Addams, 1910, p. 175). I would argue that these are the first examples of A/r/tographic communities, creating art, researching themselves and their history, and teaching each other both artmaking skills and about their social backgrounds.

Arts-based research also takes cues from the social sciences, specifically anthropology. Anthropology introduced new research tools such as story telling, interview, observation, writing, and narrative inquiry and moved the research community toward a more open definition of truth (Cahanmann-Taylor, 2008). Yet, arts-based research still struggled to gain access to the academic research community. Then in 1997 Barone and Eisner publish *Complementary Methods for Research in Education*. In it they
blended and blurred methods combining more traditional research methods with artistic ones (Cahanmann-Taylor, 2008). Over the last ten years, arts-based research has become increasingly a part of the research dialogue, especially in education and the social sciences over all. This has lead to the development of A/r/tography.

**Defining A/r/tography**

A/r/tography is form of arts-based research that draws on myriad qualitative research methodologies. It was conceived of by a group of scholars in British Columbia at the University of British Columbia interested in intertwining living inquiry, arts-based research and pedagogy process, and language and then exploring how these elements operate in a community of artist/researcher/teachers (Irwin, 2005).

A/r/tography uses broad definitions allowing the field to be complex and changing. For example:

...art broadly conceived to mean sensory-oriented products understood, interpreted, or questioned through ongoing engagement and encounters with the world. Artists are therefore committed to acts of creation transformation, and resistance. Artists engaged in a/r/tography need not be earning a living through their art, but they need to be committed to artistic engagement through ongoing living inquiry (Irwin, Springgay, 2008; p. 112).

Teaching and researching have similarly broad definitions: “[r]esearch is the enhancement of meaning revealed through ongoing interpretations of complex relationships that are continually created, recreated, and transformed. Teaching is performative knowing in meaningful relationships with learners” (Irwin, 2004; p. 31).
Ultimately, “…educators who consider themselves a/r/tographers are those individuals who are committed to acts of learning, teaching, understanding, and interpreting within communities of learners" (Irwin, Springgay, 2008; p. 112). The overall concern is not with uncovering answers but creating new circumstances and structures for knowledge production through individual and community inquiry. There are multiple avenues and strategies for creating these circumstances where art, researching, and teaching come together to form new sites of inquiry.

Irwin and Springgay (2008) identify six areas or renderings where the elements art/research/teaching interact. The first is contiguity demonstrated in the way that artist, researcher, and teacher lie adjacent to one another. Identifying contiguity highlights the in between space where the interactions occur.

The second rendering is living inquiry. As an A/r/tographer one lives artfully, curiously, and with the desire to teach share, and learn through qualitative and artistic methods on a day-to-day basis. The work is personal and ongoing.

The third rendering is metaphor or metonym or the idea that we are using art and poetry to stand for ideas and issues. An example of this is Nina Rosenberg using the red sweaters to symbolize lost soldiers. The process of knitting one of the sweaters is like adopting a small piece of a soldier’s memory. As the knitter creates each stitch, handles the yarn and needles, and carries the project through the course of her/his day, she/he becomes engaged with the dialogue of the Iraq War. The red sweater stands for a life, the process of knitting inspires dialogue, and the actual chain of sweaters come to represent
war, grief, patriotism, protest, and the perpetuation of the dialogue in it’s own status as forever unfinished.

Irwin and Springgay call the fourth rendering *openings*, which refer to the cut and tears in understanding that lead to conversation and exploration. As a result knowledge is constructed together rather than imposed on others. An example of this is the *Roe v. Wade* sweater by Lisa Anne Auerbach. The sweater was inspired by a joke she heard at a dinner party. The joke was alarming to her in that it was painfully unfunny. Hearing that joke was like an opening or tear in her understanding. In order to better understand her reaction to the joke she designed and knit the sweater.

The fifth rendering is *reverberation* or the subtle and dynamic movements that allow shifting and deeper understanding. Reverberation is like the subtle and meditative act of knitting. As a knitter works the yarn and needles her mind wanders and is able to concentrate on other issues. The physical knitting as a repetitive comforting motion allows the mind to become dynamic and shifting, and open to deeper thought and knowing.

The final rendering is, perhaps, the most challenging. It is called *excess* and it refers to the yet indefinable and unknowable. It means exploring how one comes to know what one knows and complicating that knowledge in order to seek what one does not know. Cynthia Capriata works with the concept of excess and the opposing concept of austerity. Her larger than life crochet forms represent female anatomy with dramatic fibers and colors. They are excessive, outrageous, and at the same time lovely and womanly. Her other body of work is delicate, like a grandmotherly doily or the collar of a
little girl’s Easter dress. When the two bodies of work are juxtaposed, as in Figure 3.1, the contrast between excess and austerity leads the viewer to consider femininity in a new way.

![Image of Cynthia Capriata's art installation](image.png)

Figure 3.1: Cynthia Capriata, 2007, *Walk Through Body* (left) and *Bichos Creature Series* (right) installed at GALLERY 2001

Combined, these six renderings provide a way to enter the A/r/tographic structure and begin the inquiry process.

Irwin and Springgay (2008) refer to A/r/tography as a Rhizomatic structure, a concept borrowed from Deluze. The rhizome is a system of nodes connected by bonds. Each node could represent person or concept and the bonds between the nodes represent the space where the work of defining and negotiating those concepts occurs. A/r/tography in its simplest rhizomatic form puts *artist, researcher,* and *teacher* each at nodes and uses the (/) to represent the bond between them. In the context of this project, each knitter
is a node and a source of knowledge that is connected through the bonds or knitting works between them. As knitters are added and form connections, the rhizome expands, becomes complicated, and embodies a community of knowledge construction. Rhizomatically constructing knowledge and community, the participants relate back to each other communicating, negotiating, changing, inquiring, creating and breaking bonds and changing the nature and location of those bonds. The following traces this community knowledge building process through a Foucauldian exploration of technologies of the self, tying it into the A/r/tographic and Rhizomatic web of my project.

_A/r/tography, Foucault, and Knitting_

One of the goals of A/r/tography as an organic methodology is to grow and change and support practitioners in handling unanswered questions and valuing the process of seeking. I will ground this methodology in my own research by using Foucault’s _Technologies of the Self_ (1997), as explored in _Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth_ and Eric Paras’ (2006) _Foucault 2.0_, which provides a genealogy of Foucault’s writings and philosophical movements. This grounding aims to help crystallize how I will employ the A/r/tography methodology in this project.

Foucault’s later work is an examination of Greco-Roman and early Christian approaches to self-care and self-knowledge. In both eras, one needed to have self-knowledge in order to maintain a proper and respectful relationship with god(s). As a result, one could also maintain a respectful relationship with one’s fellow man. In this essay he explores the routes to self-knowledge as constituting the arts of living. Paras
(2006) breaks these down into three separate arts: *melete*, or meditation concerned with the relationship of the self to truth; *askesis*, or exercise concerned with the relationship of the self to the self; and *mathesis*, or learning concerned with the relationship of the self to others. These categories, examined by Foucault and crystallized by Paras serve as the starting point for my connection to A/r/tography.

*Melete* is described in *Technologies of the Self* as meditation. By meditation Foucault (1997b) means

...the work one undertakes in order to prepare a discourse or an improvisation by thinking over useful terms and arguments [or]
...memorizing responses and reactivating those memories by placing oneself in a situation where one can imagine how one would react (p. 239).

In other words, one is presented with a hypothetical, a situation, or a problem and must meditate and ruminate on the possible solutions. I relate this activity to artmaking and to knitting as a meditative act. As an artist I am presented with a social or personal issue and my process of addressing that issue is through the physical act of artmaking as a form of meditation. As a knitter I am presented with the literal problem of a pattern or, just as importantly, a more intangible problem such as grief or frustration. The act of knitting, the click of the needles, and feel of the yarn helps to calm me and ease me into a meditative state. In this state I call on my personal experiences and body of knowledge to negotiate the issue and that negotiation is the give and take action and pause that results in an artwork or knitted fabric. The artwork and the fabric are both the meditation and the
product of meditation, an exploration of my relationship to truth. Thus *melete* is the mental, meditative state of artmaking or knitting and represents the (A) in A/r/tography.

*Askesis* falls on a different point in the spectrum, in that it refers to “exercises in which the subject puts himself in a situation in which he can verify whether he can confront events and use discourses with which he is armed” (Foucault 1997b, p. 239). Instead of meditating on those issues, now one is actively engaged with them. This type of activity represents the research dimension, or the (R) of A/r/tography. As a researcher I am constantly aware of what I know and am more poignantly aware of what I do not know. As I am making an artwork, knitting a garment, preparing a paper, or engaging in a dialogue, I am struggling with my self-knowledge in order to make the artwork meaningful and accessible, the garment aesthetically pleasing and well fitted, the argument intelligible, or the dialogue interesting. It is my responsibility to engage in the research and expand my base of knowledge so that I can contribute to the over all dialogue of art, knitting, activism, art education, or Foucauldian philosophy, and expand that base of knowledge. This struggle between my body of knowledge and my knowledge deficit is my struggle between myself and my self.

Finally, *mathesis* is closely tied to pedagogy and the practice of sharing knowledge, self-knowledge, and ways to know oneself - or the relationship of the self to others. In my A/r/tographic equivalent it represents the (T) or teacher. In the Greco-Roman period on which Foucault focused, the pedagogical relationship is characterized in two ways. In the case of the Stoics, the “master-teacher” speaks “and the disciple student…does not answer but must listen and keep silent” (Foucault, 1997b, p. 235-36).
In the case of Plato, the opposite is true and “the themes of contemplation of self and care of self are related dialectically through dialogue” (Foucault, 1997b, p. 236). This begs the question, is one of these methods better or are there yet unnamed methods to convey my knowledge of my self, my art, my skills, and my research? Therefore, teaching falls somewhere between the Stoic and the Platonic notions of pedagogy and results in feedback from and a dialogue with the student. So in addition to negotiating my best pedagogy I also need to absorb the feedback I receive so that I may self-meditate, make art, and research further, thus continuing the cycle of self-knowing and knowledge production. This shared cycle through the A/r/tographic method forms community and hermeneutic exploration across rhizomatic bonds. So while each participant is inquiring into the self, she is always relating back to her community.

This use of Foucault does two things for me as a researcher. First, it gives the project a stronger footing, allowing me to approach it from a fresh perspective by tethering A/r/tography in a new context. It allows me to both complicate through questions and simplify through comparison the concepts of A/r/tography. Second it sets the stage to begin discussing the benefits and shortcomings of A/r/tography. There are great possibilities presented in the questions above but there are also gaps and raveling edges. The next section presents some of these benefits and shortcomings and how I plan to address them in my research.
Benefits and Pitfalls

A/r/tography is a fledgling methodology, which pulls together many existing concepts making it rich with positive elements as well as challenges. I will first present arguments for A/r/tography as a methodology and then identify some criticisms. Then I will explore ways to address those criticisms in my own research.

Frayling (1993) contends that all research is creative:

Sociologists such as Harry Collins, in his book Changing Order and philosophers such as Paul Freyerband, have stressed that in science – as in everything else – there may well be conjectures but many of them are unconscious and they tend to be changed or modified without any explicit discussion, and they tend to involve a significant measure of subjectivity. In other words, the Edward G. Robinson version of research doesn’t much resemble what science looks like in the laboratory, or what it feels like to those who are doing it. Changing Order, according to Harry Collins, involves irrationality, craftsman’s knowledge, negotiating reality rather than hypothesizing about it, above all tacit knowledge rather than propositional knowledge. In the history and philosophy of science, historians such as David Gooding – who studies the methods of Michael Faraday – are now stressing the links between experimental scientists and creative artists (through the joint uses of imagination, intuition, and craft practice)…(p. 3).

A/r/tography takes this a step further by contending that this type of research is a part of everyday life and has transformative capabilities that break down barriers between definitions. For example, instead of viewing life through categories like science/art, work/play, or art/craft, one should enfold those relationships, allowing them to co-exist and inform one another thus leading to richer inquiry (Irwin, Springgay, 2008).

Like other qualitative methodologies, A/r/tography seeks new voices and perspectives to enter the discussion. These voices speak and ask questions across
disciplines thus challenging potentially problematic concepts and theories. In this project I am inviting knitters who may, or may not be scholars, to examine and participate in a scholarly work. Their opinions and perspectives will comprise the bulk of the data through engaging in a dialogue about knitting, scholarship, feminism, community, and artmaking. Such research has transformative capabilities as it allows deep self-analysis through creative acts and encourages us to extend beyond labels, exploring the interstitial places, the exceptional, and the extraordinary.

Another feature of A/r/tography is that it seeks to be unhurried and sustained. This may not seem beneficial in our fast-paced society; but, as with other qualitative methodologies, there is an allowance for deep, prolonged inquiry. A/r/tography enjoys a ritualistic, life-long approach to inquiry that is slow, thoughtful, and repetitive (Bickel, 2008). Education and research are becoming increasingly hasty in the move away from the open-minded view and toward a narrow, private, corporatist view of schooling through a downsizing of the shared public aspects (Barone, 2008). Objects are increasingly machine-made and day-to-day life seems to be driven by the capitalist notion that time is money and that good research is efficient research defined by grants attached to deadlines. A/r/tographers take satisfaction in projects that are ongoing and never truly finished. Perhaps one is able to conclude a chapter but the total work is a life-long endeavor. Similarly, knitting is slow, meditative, and ritualistic. One can finish individual projects that could take anywhere from an evening to several years, to a lifetime, but all the while one never stops honing and crafting skills, exploring new techniques, and sharing progress with other knitters.
Finally, A/r/tography seeks to complicate. Instead of seeking the simplified and generalizable, A/r/tographers look for the deviant, troubling, exceptional, and challenging. A/r/tographers are as concerned with the (a)rtist, (r)esearcher, and (t)eacher, as with the grey (/) areas in between. Instead of attempting to put finite labels on people and concepts A/r/tography attempts to view all myriad labels, their interactions, deviations, and ruptures. In this way, A/r/tography draws on the rich work of other qualitative methodologies that push for deeper and richer understanding of social phenomena. In this research I am concerned with the individual and the group; the artwork and the artmaking; the learner and the teacher; the text and textile, and the transitional space between all of these. I am not looking for the answer to a question or the solution to a problem but am exploring a set of ideas, their (inter)connections and separations, and allowing for both support of my personal experience as well as disagreements and deviations.

Unfortunately, each of these benefits also has the potential to become a pitfall. Combined with additional tensions that, according to Eisner (2008), need to be addressed when undertaking arts-based research, or in this case, A/r/tography, they pose serious challenges. For example, I need to be certain my creative work is also communicative. Art can be ambiguous and A/r/tographic theory can be esoteric, however, I need to be sure that my audience can access and find ways to discuss my work. I anticipate that the social and familiar nature of knitting, the way it invites conversation will help to overcome some of the ambiguity. Often when I am knitting in public people approach me, very interested and wanting to talk about my project, their experience with knitting,
and family members or friends who knit. Everyone has had some experience with knitting, either the practice or the resulting fabric. I believe that some of this curiosity, familiarity, and accessibility will translate to the finished artwork, thus encouraging conversation and engagement.

There is also a tension in the word “teacher.” In my own experience the roles of teacher and learner are inseparable. One must constantly be learning in order to teach and the relationship between teacher and student is constantly fluctuating. However, A/r/tography privileges the word teacher without always addressing this dual role. While this may seem like an issue of semantics and a necessary sacrifice to achieve the A/r/t acronym, I feel it needs to be addressed. In this project, negotiating the relationship between teacher and learner, both internally in the way I view myself, and externally in the way I communicate with the participants, is a constant give and take and a reflexive process.

Another tension lies in the inclusion or exclusion of new voices and perspectives. Even when accepting new perspectives, there is the threat of privileging and excluding others. In this research project, the participants are self-selected, internet-using, knitters who are over the age of eighteen and predominantly female. A certain degree of privilege and exclusion is already a part of the project. However, this is the population I am targeting as the project is about female knitters who use the Internet for social interaction. According to Eisner (2008) I also need to be aware and open about the fact that I am researching a specific group with potentially limited perspectives. As a result, this research is not broadly generalizable. There are elements that have broader applications,
for example, the artwork has the potential to appeal to a broad audience because it is knitting and more familiar than other art forms. In addition, the use of narrative and personal history taps into the primal and universal use of storytelling as a way to transfer knowledge and share experiences. Finally, using a blog as the primary vehicle for discussion may have potential applications for other researchers wanting to explore new ways of interviewing and forming dialogic communities. However, the actual population has certain parameters that limit the scope of the project.

Eisner does not discuss the unhurried, ritualistic nature of A/r/tography but it is a potential pitfall. While it can allow for deep and prolonged inquiry, it can also run the risk of crossing over into tedious self-absorption. This project has a set timeline but that isn’t enough to prevent solipsism. Part of the goal of the project is relating my experience and the experience of each individual knitter and share those insights and conversations with the greater community of knitters. So while I am looking inward at my own experience, I am also always looking outward at the broader context. A goal of this project is to encourage this reflexivity in each participant. In addition, the final artwork will be shared with a broad audience outside the community of artmakers with the hope of expanding the project’s scope and inviting multiple interpretations.

Unfortunately, while the artwork invites a broader audience, it also presents its own tension. Artmaking and artworks are novel methods and products of research, however, "...arts-based research needs to pursue novelty without sacrificing utility" (Eisner, 2008; p. 24). I do want my research to be useful, however, utility, in itself, is an ambiguous concept. First, the project challenges craft objects a useful. Generally, knitting
is prized for its warmth, functionality, and utility. What does it mean to knit an object that is not useful? Art, on the other hand, is not useful in the sense that a sweater and a pair of socks are useful. It is, instead, useful to the soul and mind. Viewing, making, and experiencing the arts can exercise the imagination and improve the quality of life. At the same time it can be used to potentially negative ends such as in the case of war propaganda or the reinforcement of racial or gendered stereotypes through advertising. As I mentioned before, there are practical, utilitarian aspects to this project such as unpacking personal narratives and exploring new technologies. However, there are other, less tangible elements of art that are equally, yet differently useful.

Finally in arts-based research and A/r/tography there is a tension between the subjective and objective (Eisner, 2008). By allowing for myriad translations one runs the risk of relativism. How does one evaluate work that is so personal and specific? My hope is that the communitarian nature of the artwork and the issues discussed on the blog will keep the project open and accessible. Ultimately, throughout the research process, I will need to keep these tensions at the forefront of my mind, addressing them openly and honestly. This will extend and enrich the conversation and address the broader implications of the project and address the aforementioned tensions.

Challenges, complications, and the ability of researchers to cope with and include those challenges in one’s inquiry create deeper meaning. In addition, challenges hone and refine methods by highlighting which are affective and which are inappropriate. This leads me to a discussion of method. This project uses to methods of inquiry that interact
and inform each other: autoethnography and knitalong. The next section examines these two methods and how they will be used in this research project.

Methods

Pearse (2004) presents a definition of praxis that helps to negotiate the bond between the theoretical methodology and practical methods of the artmaking/researching/teaching relationship of A/r/tography:

...praxis means the dynamic dialectical relationship between theory and practice. It is theory into practice, practice out of theory. Theory informs the practice and vice versa. In praxis, there is always an element of action; that is, some kind of application to the lived-in-world, although it is not about mere practice, the routine repetition of an act. There is always a reflective component wherein one describes, contemplates, and considers what is being thought or felt or is happening. There is always an evaluative component, though not always explicit, as one takes heed of the worth of the thought and action. There is always an interpretive component as the question 'What does all this mean?' is inevitable posed. Praxis is what one does as an artist, teacher, or artist-teacher-researcher (p. 184).

In this definition making, reflecting, and evaluating are intertwined as they are in Autoethnography and Knitalongs. In this section I discuss Autoethnography and Knitalongs, again, applying the later work of Foucault and his discussion of self-care and self-writing as activities that reverberate between the personal and the public. At the end of this section I lay out the more practical aims of undertaking a community artmaking project.
Autoethnography

Carl Leggo (2008) states that

[w]riting about personal experience is not only egoism, solipsism, unseemly confession, boring prattling, and salacious revelation. We need to write personally because we live personally, and our personal living is always braided with or other ways of living - professional, academic, administrative, artistic, social, and political (p. 5).

These personal stories intertwine and overlap with the stories of others so that my personal story also has the power to do “good work for other people elsewhere in the world” (Goodall, 2008, p. 15). By using personal and autoethnographic narrative writing one can create a more approachable and memorable text.

An example of an autoethnographic text about knitting, is Arctic Lace: Knitting Projects and Stories Inspired by Alaska's Native Knitters by Donna Druchunas (2006). Druchunas interweaves her own research story with the personal stories of Alaskan knitters, the historical context of lace knitting in Alaska, and the current network of co-ops under the Oomingmak Musk Ox Producer’s Cooperative. She visited this co-op in order to better understand how traditional lace knitting aligned with Eskimo women’s current way of life. The resulting book is a combination of Druchunas’s experience with the co-op; traditional Eskimo folklore, poetry, and biography; an historical account of Alaska; a discussion of the co-op structure and the process of raising musk oxen; and knitting patterns. The women’s individual stories relate to the overall story of knitting in Alaska. The lace patterns are composed of traditional Eskimo motifs integrated into the current way of life. There is an overall reverberation between the past and present, the
personal and the community. The combination results in an autoethnographic and layered text about the role of knitting in the lives of a group of women.

My goal is to produce a similar autoethnographic text. In order to better understand the role of autoethnography I am applying Foucault’s later work in which he returned to the subject, addressing both the freedoms and creativities associated with subjectivity as well as the hindrances and responsibilities.

At this time in his scholarship, a few years before his death in 1984, Foucault became especially concerned with the importance of knowing oneself and the art of living. He approached these topics through sexuality, biopower, and governmentality by analyzing the way we, as individuals, self-monitor and police our actions. Foucault traces the roots of self-monitoring, self-care, and self-knowledge to ancient Greek and Roman and then Early Christian practices of soul care, journaling, correspondence, and penance. At this time in his work there is an inversion. Where before this self-monitoring was a function of the surveillance state with ultimately negative connotations, now this self-monitoring becomes self-care. We owe it to ourselves to know ourselves and this self-knowledge will cause us to be better, more artful people. So while the issue is still the subject and the subject’s self-awareness, the connotation becomes positive.

The primary means of self-knowledge, according to Foucault, is writing, more specifically, self-writing. Foucault’s essay, Self-Writing, appears posthumously (1994) in Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth, a collection of his later works addressing subjectivity edited by his colleague Paul Rabinow. The essay explores writing through the journals and letters of Greco-Roman philosophers. In the essay he separates the writing into two
categories, *Hupomnemata* or personal notebooks as memory aids and chronicles, and *Correspondence* or letter that share personal experience and advice with others. In my own project, I see these two forms of self-writing working in tandem to help define blogs as autoethnographic objects.

A blog, or an online digital journal composed of words and images, is simultaneously a personal journal and a shared correspondence. They are personal records and thoughts shared in a public forum with the opportunity for reciprocation through comment and email, which I discuss in more depth in the following section about Knitalong. Blogs serve a *hupomnemata* function in that they constitute “a material record of things, heard, or thought, thus offering them up as a kind of accumulated treasure for subsequent rereadings and meditation” (Foucault, 1997a, p. 209). In addition they can have the cathartic or therapeutic function like *hupomnemata* in helping the writer to cope with grief or frustration. At the same time, a blog is a form of *correspondence*. Blogs are public, accessible, and often shared thus allowing us to exist in a second space for the reader, or as Foucault would say, “[t]o write is to ‘show oneself’ to project oneself into view, to make one’s own face appear in the other’s presence” (Foucault, 1997a, p. 216).

For example, *Mason-Dixon Knitting* is a blog that is treated as correspondence in a very literal sense. The two authors were brought together across many miles by a common interest in knitting. The blog itself was born out of a series of emails instigated by a sickness in one of their families and the women’s need to comfort and be comforted (Gardiner & Shayne, 2006). What began as a private conversation about dealing with the illness of a child, grew into a blog about daily life, knitting, politics, and womanhood.
This flow between the private and the public, and relating one’s personal experience to the experience of others is autoethnography. It is born out of a desire to know oneself so that we might know others or even help others to know themselves. “It is a way of giving ourselves to that gaze about which we must tell ourselves that it is plunging into the depths of our heart at the moment we are thinking…” (Foucault, 1997a, p. 217) and to share those thoughts and that self-knowledge with those about whom we care most and those who most care to listen.

In addition to the aforementioned challenges and criticisms of A/r/tography there are challenges unique to autoethnography as a method that uses personal narrative as a source and product of research. For example, not all of us have the privilege of telling our stories and having them heard. The position of an autoethnographer is a position of privilege (Leggo, 2008). As a researcher I must constantly be reflexive and aware of my position of privilege and how it affects the project participants.

Another set of issues raised by Wall (2008) in a discussion of her own experience writing autoethnography deal with self-editing, censorship, and honesty. How can we be sure we are presenting our stories in the way they actually happened? More importantly, can we ever be sure there is an “actual” truth to a story? These narratives are, by their nature, subjective and if that subjectivity is not explicitly addressed personal stories can seem dangerously universal. Wall also questions what it means to represent someone else’s story in the context of your own. In her case it was the story of her adopted child in the context of her story about adoption. What are the ethical concerns of telling stories about people? In order to address these issues, participants can choose anonymity when
they agree to participate in the project. In addition, because a blog is written and preserved, participants are also able to revisit earlier comments and edit, clarify, or reference them through future comments. Finally, the purpose of the project is not to seek truth, but instead, to explore experience with the understanding that the individual experience may be shared but is never universal.

While Foucault focuses primarily on writing, I contend that artmaking can also be an act of self-care and shared-care. In this situation I am dealing specifically with knitting. The act of knitting for myself is therapeutic both in the rhythmic and meditative motion and in the final product of an object made to protect and warm the body. I could just as easily knit for a friend as a form of correspondence. A literal example of knitting as correspondence happened during the Civil War, WWI and WWII when women would slip notes and poems in the mittens and socks sent to soldiers as a way to transmit love and support from the home front (MacDonald, 1990). By knitting for someone else I am transmitting the warmth and protection to another. Knitalongs extend this concept even further as they include even more participants and often have an artistic or charitable goal. They are meditative, communal, narrative, and artful, encouraging communication and inquiry, and thus connecting to and reflecting back on A/r/tography.

**Knitalong**

So why are knitting groups such a powerful friendship machine? 'Crafting is something that's very conducive to people bonding,' says Sister Diane Gilleland, member of the Church of Craft in Portland, 'because when you're making things, you're very relaxed and you're very positive. It seems to take you outside the normal social anxieties.' Besides pole-
vaulting you past the awkwardness of getting to know new people and placing you in a more receptive zone, some say knitting together taps into the power of creation itself. (Brown, 2008; p. 26)

Imagine five women around a table talking and knitting. The conversation is fluid; one story leads to another, each topic reminding someone of a similar personal experience that they, in turn, share with the group. All the while their hands are working, turning yarn into fabric, knitting the story into the stitches so that when they pick up the work again the story is there in the rhythm and feel of the fiber. Making something together is a powerful activity. In the case of this project it pulls together the strands of history, theory, and present experience, literally knitting them together.

Knitalongs can be A/r/tographic communities. The knitters are able to assume the roles of artist as they make objects, add personal touches, and apply their own unique style of knitting to a given pattern. They become researchers as they seek out information about how other participants have approached a pattern, negotiate unfamiliar techniques, and as they listen to shared stories. They become teachers as they guide a less experienced knitter through a complex stitch, give advice about fibers, and share personal experiences and narratives. Each individual knitter is analogous with Irwin’s (2008) concept of the A/r/tographer in a community in that “…they understand the need to be engaged in their own personal pursuits while they also recognize their pursuits are contiguously positioned alongside the pursuits of others, and together are becoming a whole constellation of pursuits” (p. 74).

Knitalongs can also be communities of Autoethnographers, collecting personal stories and sharing them in the context of knitting together. Historically, these stories and
the personal accounts of knitting were kept in women’s diaries or stored in their minds to be passed along to younger generations. Using the modern concept of Autoethnography is a way to pay homage to this fluid form of story sharing and journaling, as well as, to encourage it in modern knitting circles. My hope is to preserve the voice of fellow knitters as a way to help create a stronger narrative. I am using a blog, as a way to preserve those voices and bring them together into one broad conversation:

Blogs make the whole world of knitterly companionship and expertise available twenty-four hours a day. It's a blessing and an addiction. Since most blogs contain a list - or blogroll - of links to other blogs, it's easy to get lost for hours. It's an overwhelmingly female world. As most knitters are females, so are most knit bloggers - currently more than 95%. It's an overwhelmingly supportive world. If you ask a thoughtful question, someone will almost always respond. (Brown, 2008; p. 77)

Blogs have been a driving force behind the modern knitalong, increasing access and making the knitalong local and global. Blogs, like knitting and craft, are also perceived as gendered in their content and contribution. According to Gregg (2006) women’s blogs are often viewed as “less noteworthy than men’s by virtue of their often domestic and personal sphere of reference, whereas men’s blogs are often seen to be more engaged in political debate, especially when the notion of what counts as political remains undefined (p. 1).”

In her piece *Posting With Passion: Blogs and the Politics of Gender* Gregg (2006) unpacks these issues of blogging and gender from a feminist perspective. Ultimately, she is questioning the definition of politics and the assumption that the domestic content of women’s blogs does not apply:
...the logic behind this position is that politics itself is static, that what counts as political does not need to be debated because it is self-evident. Not only is this truly worrying for the prospect of any kind of effective political change or agitation, as it assumes an unchanging list of priorities for political debate, it refuses any mention of second-wave feminist movements of the 60s and 70s which established personal issues as political (p. 4).

These are the exact issues I plan to address with the participants in my project. It is not only an issue of defining politics but also speaks to the earlier question of whether narrative, personal stories, and artmaking can count as research. One of my goals is to show that they can and in this case, do count as research, demonstrated through mindful and meaningful analysis of my work and addressing the issue of authorship upfront.

Ethical Concerns

While all the participants will be co-authors of the artwork, ultimately the thesis is mine. This is the nature of academia. In addition, blogging raises some critical questions. Who can participate? Participants were limited to those who were willing and able to use the Internet. While this is an increasingly large subset of the population, the knitters involved are still limited to knitters who communicate via the Internet. Hopefully, through the course of the project, knitters who haven’t used blogs in the past may discover a new medium of expression. Finally, when using the Internet, anonymity is always a factor. The online environment allows people to take on another identity. One can use her/his real name or adopt another name; use her/his real picture or choose some
other representative avatar. How might participant anonymity or naming affect the
dialogue and issues of confidentiality and authorship?

In order to address ethical issues up front there will be protocols in place, similar
to those described by Brown (2008). My call for participants, shown in Appendix D, was
posted on Ravelry. Through this call for participants knitters were asked to email me via
the blog to sign-up for the knitalong. The return email, shown in Appendix E, outlined
the purpose of the project and the guidelines for participating, including a discussion of
photo rites, anonymity, protection of participant address data, the use of contributed
artworks, a list of discussion topics, authorship, and the time frame. Participants were
asked to respond “Accept” and were then added to the knitalong roster. Some participants
chose to participate anonymously and not officially sign-up. Ultimately, participants were
self-selected and could choose how to represent themselves; whether to knit flowers,
comment on the blog, or both; how often to participate; and how much of themselves to
reveal. These concerns lead me to the final section, which addresses validity and
assessment, and the challenges associated with assessing research that is fluid,
individualized, and personal and determining validity in research that does not seek
specific answers.

Assessment

Assessing qualitative research is perhaps not as clear as assessing quantitative
research. Quantitative assessment is concerned with replicability, generalizability,
objectivity, and universality. The goal is to control for subjectivity and interpretation so
that they do not problematize the results. Qualitative research champions the messiness of
testament and subjectivity, seeks to understand how context affects outcomes, and
tries to understand the personal and individual. Having said that, for qualitative research
to be meaningful and useful, it must still demonstrate validity and justifiability, however,
by different criteria. I am assessing validity through resonance, transparency,
communicability, and coherence (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003).

Resonance implies that the research is meaningful to people and that those people
can see applications of that research in their own lives. In the case of this research it may
mean that the stories told by the participants have parallels in the life of the reader.
Perhaps the artwork references another artwork in her or his experience and allows the
viewer to make a connection between those pieces or to a personal experience.

For research to be transparent other researchers must be able to determine and understand the steps and the processes (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). The researcher
must be constantly reflexive about her or his thought process and share that process with research participants and the reader. In addition to a transparent process, the purpose of
the research should also be transparent. This allows participants to make informed
decisions about whether or not to offer certain information and to feel like valued and meaningful part of the research process.

Research must also be communicable, which may tie back into audiencing (Lincoln, 2001). In order for the process and findings to be meaningful they must be
presented in a format that is understandable and readable to one’s target audience
(Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). This project pays special attention to mixed research
and presentation methods in order to make it accessible to a wider audience. In addition, I have focused on the clarity of my writing to ensure that I represent the project and frame the contributions of the participants in a clear and communicable way. Stout (2007) underscores the importance of communicability by explaining that writing is integral to research: “We do not find meaning, then, in the end, write it up for consumption, a showing, an ossified representation of what we have learned. Instead, within the dynamics of reflexivity, we conceive of writing as infused within the whole of the research endeavor” (p. 228, emphasis is author’s).

Finally, qualitative research should be coherent. Coherence implies a story that is understandable, organized, and easy to follow. At the same time the story should be supported by meaningful examples that are also told in a coherent way. The reader should be able to follow and understand the point of the research regardless of whether she or he agrees with it (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003).

The qualities, resonance, transparency, communicability, and coherence, combined demonstrate validity, justifiability, and ultimately meaningfulness. The final Conclusion chapter unpacks each of these as they apply to the Knitted Flower Project. I introduced them in this chapter because it is essential that I keep returning to them and reflexively addressing how I am applying them throughout the research process.

Section Conclusion

This chapter presented the epistemological foundation, methodology and methods, and assessment criteria of the Knitted Flower Project. Within those sections I
have attempted to grapple with the challenges and potential pitfalls of working with arts-based research methods, as well as their highlights and benefits. This project is rooted in active artmaking, community building, narrative, and deep inquiry with the goal of exploring knitting as art, research, and scholarship.

Qualitative methodologies, specifically arts-based methodologies like A/r/tography, are complex, open-ended, and loaded with opportunities to experiment. In addition they offer opportunities to use methods like Autoethnography and Knitalong, which place emphasis on the process of constructing knowledge through story telling and artmaking. These methods encourage ownership and involvement on the part of the research participants adding depth and rigor to the research process.

Expanding the definitions of research allows previously ignored subjects and their voices to become sources of scholarship. At the same time, having a responsibility to those voices I need to ensure that my work is valid and meaningful. Richardson (2000) introduces the concept of crystallization as an alternative to the more traditional research method of triangulation in addressing validity when qualitative research:

…we have moved from plane geometry to light theory, where light can be both waves and particles… Crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, and thoroughly partial understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know. Ingeniously, we know there is always more to know (p. 963).

I think of my work similarly, as a prism casting and scattering light across the subject of knitting and knitters themselves. I think of each knitter as her/his own prism, filtering information like white light, dissecting and translating its parts. Research has the great
potential to shed light on the mysteries in our world and, as researcher, I have the responsibility to make that light clear, focused, and illuminating.

1 Mason Dixon Knitting blog, http://www.masondixonknitting.com/
CHAPTER 4
KNITTED DATA AND CONTEXTUALIZATION

STITCHES AND STORIES:
INTRODUCING THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE KNITTED FLOWER PROJECT

I sit down to write this data chapter surrounded by knitted flowers waiting to be exhibited. I have them piled in loose categories by color on a table in my apartment as pictured in Figure 4.1 below. These flowers are data. In addition, there is the Knitted Flower Project blog. On the blog at http://knittedflowerprojectblog.blogspot.com/ I have authored 19 posts that have received a total of 194 comments. These interactions constitute another thread of data examined in Chapter 5. This chapter focuses on the knitted flowers as data sources. First, I discuss the challenges and nuances of working with online and offline data. Next, I examine the knitted flowers as objects and data. Throughout this chapter, I explore the participants’ knitted flowers and blog postings and how these have operated as interactive sources of data that inform each other.
Online and Offline Data

This project is composed of online and offline portions. The discussions and communications, for the most part, occurred online. The flowers were knit and sent to me offline. These categories are not, however, finite. They interact and blur, thoughts and stories shared online were lived offline, the pattern for the flower knit offline was posted online and the flower itself was photographed and shared online. “We cannot separate our being online from being offline, because online and offline are not discrete entities” (Gajjala, 2009, p. 61). This distinction and its blurred boundaries caused me to constantly negotiate how much of myself to reveal in the blogging process and how much to discuss the blog in face-to-face settings. Presented rhizomatically, as in the earlier discussion of A/r/tography, each participant and I acted as a node, but a node with layers. My online node was connected to everyone online, but also to an offline layer of that node and, correspondingly, an offline world.
This blurring was especially apparent when I would meet with a participant offline and face-to-face. Some of the participants were friends before the project started. Throughout the course of the project we would still meet to knit or talk and sometimes we would discuss the project. Unlike the blog discussions, these face-to-face casual discussions were not recorded and not considered data in the research. However, they still happened and may have affected the project, albeit in small ways. Similarly, when friends would comment, I could contextualize those comments in a different way from those participants I did not know personally. For example, when Bean Counting Knitter’s responds to the January 23, 2009, Discussion #3:

There was a particular Cabled Jacket both Granny and my Mom knitted over and over for them to wear. When it wore out they would make another. Last year I knit a Cabled Jacket using that same pattern for my Mom. She is no longer able to knit due to arthritis in her hands and fingers.

I am intimately familiar with that pattern, I know which yarn she used to knit it, what it looked like as she was in the process of working on it, and I can even picture her mom wearing the finished piece. However, when a participant I do not know personally makes a posting, I cannot read between their lines. For example, I have little to add in response to Lindy’s entry on January 13, 2009 in Discussion #2: “I was on a hat kick for a while, until I discovered that the hat pattern I was using was really unflattering and everyone I gave them to kept ‘losing’ theirs.” I do not have additional context, I cannot picture the hat, nor do I know the people who received and “lost” their hats.

Along with the interactive nature of the data (i.e. offline and online), the scope of the online data also requires some further explanation. The project is porous. I know that
participants blogged about the project on their personal blogs and may have mentioned it in other online forums. Still the project must have boundaries, especially given the infinite nature of the Internet and blogosphere. Christine Hine (2008) addresses this dilemma in discussing her own online research: “Decisions to stop entailed feelings of doubt and loss, stronger in some cases than others. These decisions were always made as trade-offs to enable me to work in more detail somewhere else more promising” (p. 17).

For this reason the online data portion of this project is limited to the posts and comments on the Knitted Flower Project blog.

These blurred boundaries and multi-layered identities add to the richness of qualitative research. While they do not appear often in the data, it is important to acknowledge that they exist. Throughout this chapter I will note when the offline and online realms blur. In addition, I will note the participants that I know offline as well as online. Hopefully this will help to contextualize the data and add depth to the descriptions and analyses.

Flowers

I have grappled with how best to present the knitted flowers in the context of this document. They are tactile, colorful, and they contain subtle information about the maker that is difficult, if not impossible to translate. There are no rules that suggest if you knit in this way and use these colors and this yarn then you are this kind of person with these personality traits and this outlook on life. My goal is certainly not to establish any such rule, but instead try to identify more subtle correlations, for example, how an artist’s
interest in environmentalism might show through in that artist’s choice of subject matter and materials.

In some sense, the flowers are the artifacts left over from the artmaking and researching experience, similar to how an Elizabeth Peyton portrait is the remnant of studying a person’s face and personality combined with her own interest in society’s fascination with image. Similarly, a Cindy Sherman photograph is the culmination of years living as a woman and studying women, both in pop culture and in her own life. Artworks do not appear and exist in a vacuum. They are the evidence of life lived, process or media explored, subjects researched, and the setting in which they were exhibited.

Likewise these flowers, in addition to the blog, are a remainder of the experience of discussing knitting, sharing stories and experiences, meditating on a subject, and participating in a project. They demonstrate, perhaps, a knitter’s interest in a particular aspect of knitting, a preference for a specific kind of yarn, or a desire to work in personal elements and embellishments. I have decided to organize this section by presenting an image or images of the flowers, quotes from the blog by the knitters, and some discussion about potential relationships. I have organized the flowers in the order I received them, which is how they are organized on the blog. It is important to note that some participants did not knit flowers and only commented and some only knit flowers and did not comment. In addition, I am identifying the participants by both the name they gave me as their credit name and the name that they used to comment on the blog whenever I have both names.
Mary

To my knowledge Mary did not comment on the blog and only knit a flower. She did not officially sign-up via email so I cannot link her to a username. Her flower deviates from the pattern in that she embellished it with bee buttons and a leaf. It is the first flower I received which makes it one of my favorites.

Figure 4.2: Flower by Mary

Catherine Belmont-Rowe, Bean Counting Knitter

Catherine is a very good friend of mine and I recognize much of the yarn she used in these flowers. I almost feel as if we are too close for me to talk about her in any type of research context, but that is one of the challenges of such personal research. Catherine and I meet almost weekly to knit and talk. We have similar backgrounds, though we are separated in age by about 15 years. I see knitting for Catherine as a form of self-care. She is staunchly protective of the hobby and refuses to let it become a chore or a source of 100
frustration. She notes having used knitting as a way to cope with moving from Buffalo, NY to Columbus, OH:

I was feeling pretty much like a shaken up snow globe. Life was turned upside down. I think I turned to knitting, casting on and finishing a sweater jacket, to not only keep the connection with my recently passed Grandmother but also keep busy while becoming acquainted with a new town/state. These days knitting is a central part of my life. It is my relaxation as well as a social outlet. I love sitting around with knitting friends talking about anything while building stitches (January 5, 2009).

At the same time she is a brave knitter constantly attempting new patterns and techniques. She has also been supportive and committed to my research, often suggesting books and sources that have been tremendously helpful to this project. I think I have piqued her inner researcher as well.

Figure 4.3: Flowers by Catherine Belmont-Rowe
Stefanie Goodwin-Ritter, Stefanie

Figure 4.4: Flower by Stefanie Goodwin-Ritter

Stefanie seems to be a fairly socially conscious knitter. She often expressed a preference for handmade goods and gifts over store bought items and hand spun yarn as opposed to yarn bought at a chain store. She is also an artist, musician, and a feminist. In the following quote she describes how she turned to knitting when she struggled to find satisfaction in other art forms.

In high school and college, I wrote, drew, painted - basically anything artistic - to have a creative outlet. But I was frustrated that there was no point to creating my art once I was done with it - it seemed so static hanging on the wall, and it never turned out the way I wanted it to, so it just became more and more frustrating and less satisfying. Then I discovered knitting. I could be creative, I could do my own thing, and I could manipulate a yarn or a pattern to look exactly how I wanted it to - and then when I was done, I could wear it or give it to someone else to enjoy. And so the addiction began... (February 16, 2009)
The yarn she used is stiff and holds its shape. While she suggested in a note with her flower that I could remove the pipe cleaner stamens, they make her flower distinct and seem to capture some of the personality from her comments.

*Heather Brown, Dizzy Spinster*

![Flowers by Heather Brown](image)

**Figure 4.5: Flowers by Heather Brown**

Heather is a spinner, meaning she spins her own yarn in addition to purchasing yarn, and she actually learned how to knit at her spinning guild. The flower on the right in this Figure 4.5 is knit from yarn she spun herself. I knew Heather before this project began as a member of my knitting group, the West Side Columbus Knitters (WSCK). Here she told me that when she joined the Peace Corp and was stationed in Bulgaria she packed her spinning wheel. On the blog she shared stories of her Peace Corp experience:

> In 1998, I joined a spinning guild and at one of their retreats, they taught me how to knit and I will be forever grateful for that! Of course, I learned...
how to knit and it wasn’t for another 6 months that I learned how to purl. Yep. True story! I loved it – even took a class on how to make socks at which I also learned intarsia and Fair Isle knitting as well as how to knit a cable. Good stuff all because I made gobs of socks throughout my time in the Peace Corps. Of course, one day during training, I had my drop spindle and fiber out and all of a sudden, a Bulgarian reporter started asking me questions such as: ‘Do all American women spin their own yarn?!’ Uh, no. But they should! It’s fun! (January 8, 2009).

I noticed in Heather’s comments that, because she did so much spinning, knitting and learning about knitting while she was in the Peace Corp, knitting seems to connect her to that time in her life. For example, on page 146 I use one of her quotes about learning to knit socks from her host mother and connecting sock knitting to this important woman in her life. These strong associations between the physical act of knitting and spinning and her time in Bulgaria appear to assist Heather in making meaning from these experiences and are illustrative of the somatic qualities of knitting.

_Eleanor C Sayre, LE_

Eleanor’s flowers, pictured in Figure 4.6, deviate from the pattern. Eleanor learned to knit specifically to co-teach a sweater design class, as she explains in her comments. She has a background in designing theatre costumes and sees knitting as an opportunity to explore elements of design. She is able to develop and execute amazing hand knit constructions, rarely follows a pattern, and explains why in relation to teaching knitting:

_I think most new knitters want more handholding than I’m willing to give. It’s just not my job to tell you what to make! And I’m certainly not going to teach you to slavishly follow patterns! Knitting is about seeing a_
garment in your head, then making the fabric to make the garment. My best students are already artists or crafters or scientists -- anyone that's already creative and experimental (March 10, 2009).

Eleanor is another participant that I know from WSCK. Her personality and beliefs come through loud and clear when she speaks from an omniscient position. This could result from her training and career as a physicist and hard scientist or merely reflect her particular way of communicating. It was interesting to watch the other participants react to her often-bold statements, and I even enjoyed sparring with her on the blog—much in same way we do at our knitting meet-ups. We often joke about how we are two different ends of the research spectrum, she the quintessential quantitative researcher, and I the qualitative researcher. It shows in this project.

Figure 4.6: Flower by Eleanor C Sayre

Liela McLachlan, Liela

Liela joined this project with a broken arm and was worried she might not be able to knit the flowers, however, she came through and sent this one in Figure 4.7 with leaves
and an embroidered center. She was also a prolific commenter and seemed to spend a lot of time crafting her answers. Liela’s sense of humor emerges in her comments, like this one, which is a response to a post about feminism:

I think knitting is symbolic of our culture's concept of femininity, so a person's feelings about knitting often reflect how they feel about both femininity and feminism. I think that embracing and valuing traditionally feminine activities is truly feminist; therefore I think knitting is a valuable activity, which is both feminine and feminist. I'm sure an old school feminist would disagree, but there you go. I think they're wildly misguided about such things. Wearing a power suit and working in a law firm is not a more valuable way to spend your time than raising children and knitting. It is a different choice, and isn't feminism about choice and equal value? (February 26, 2009)

Her flower pictured in Figure 4.7 is embroidered and embellished, demonstrating a similar care and thoughtfulness. Liela seems to be the type of knitter and thinker that takes time to consider her knitting projects, as well as her opinions.

Figure 4.7: Flower by Liela McLachlan
Grace’s comments were often brief, but she responded to every question. When I look at her flowers I see vibrancy and an outgoing personality. She designs knitwear and mentions that the act of designing has transformed her knitting into an art form. This is readily apparent in her selection of colors for the flowers in Figure 4.8. She learned to knit as a child but did not knit seriously until a few years ago when she moved to a new town. Now she knits “an average of 6 hours a day, minimum. I am hopelessly addicted (January 26, 2009).” She also finds great joy and comfort in her knitting group,

When I get together with my knitting group--a marvelous bunch of women who keep me entertained and laughing I bring easy projects, so I can sit and knit and talk and laugh and not have to look at a chart or book. We talk about everything, so far nothing has been taboo, and we encourage and care about each from the depths of our hearts (February 2, 2009).
Grace’s brief comments are usually rich with sentiment, using a few words for a large impact. Likewise, her flowers, though simple and without embellishment, stand out from a bold color choice.

Joanne

Figure 4.9: Flowers by Joanne with handwritten labels

Joanne knits almost exclusively for charity and is actually predominantly a crocheter. She is also a member of WSCK and often works on toys for the Columbus Children’s Hospital, lap blankets for people in rest homes, and other similar projects. Most of what she knits she gives away.

I am constantly knitting for gifts or charity. I've recently knit a cap for a friend's bald hubby who gets a very cold head (while sleeping) during the winter. A friend in North Carolina is in the middle of some emotional times so along with my last letter to her, I included a knitted pouch purse for her to put small items in, while carrying around her art tote. I am now knitting spa sets for my two stepdaughters. Maybe everyone is just being polite, but they appear to like the kind surprises. I am so enjoying doing the spa sets that I plan on including a set with each of my friends' birthday letter/package. My reason for doing charity knitting… I want to help while
I can. My turn will come when I will need something from someone, so I am doing my best before I can't (January 27, 2009).

Joanne’s flowers, in Figure 4.9, are pinned to small slips of paper listing the type of yarn she used and the project for which she had originally used the yarn. I mentioned on the blog that the presentation reminded me of biological samples, which I thought was an interesting way to present the flowers. I often ruminate on Joanne’s decision to present the flowers this way as I feel the presentation may represent yet another imbedded project or artwork.

_Cyndi in BC_

![Figure 4.10: Flowers by Cyndi in BC](image)

Cyndi in BC is an art knitter and her flowers, in Figure 4.10, reflect this. She is also one of two international knitters in the project, living in British Columbia, Canada. She only commented once during the duration of the project:
Why do I knit? I don't remember NOT being able to knit. I learned as a preschooler from my mum and gramma. For me, knitting is as natural as breathing. :) I like knitting cause it keeps my hands busy, gives me useful items for myself and my family, it's portable, allows me to be creative and be an artist and designer too. Knitting helps me earn a living. I love being able to create one-of-a-kind items, play with colors and create textures. It's a great job (January 5, 2009)!

The flowers seem to be her main mode of communication and are truly individual works of art. They are embellished with layers of lace, buttons, and rhinestones and are knit with stunning yarns. These knitted responses speak for themselves.

Dianna

![Figure 4.11: Flowers by Dianna](image)

Dianna commented a few times, and, when she did, her comments stood out. She has had some amazing knitting experiences, including learning to knit when President Kennedy was shot, teaching knitting at a youth correctional institute, and getting
chastised for knitting during a presentation at a conference. I appreciate the uniqueness of each of these flowers in Figure 4.11. Whether intended or not, the flowers seem to correspond with her written comments. For example, the blue flower could be a mourning flower for a fallen president and the dark one with the pink fluffy center reminds me of her sassy response about the women who told on her for knitting during a conference presentation:

My husband was a design engineer at the time, and worked for a small company in Pennsylvania. I accompanied him when he went to a convention because the company encouraged spouses to be there. I knew I was in some way [sic] acting as part of the "host" organization and managed that well (I thought), mingling during the events and staying well away from the meetings, as well as watching what I said and to whom I said it. We were finishing the weeklong convention and spouses were invited to watch the final sales presentation, which was held in a large room. The room was totally dark - and I was sitting in the back at the last table. I took my wooden needles because I know metal ones ‘click’ and knit a ‘no-brainer’ project. There was just enough light that I could knit but no one could see that I was doing it. The woman who sat beside me was the wife of the Manager of Sales. No one was on the other side of me. I clapped at appropriate times, and knitted during the other times. When I met up with my husband later, he told me that he was to inform me that I was not to knit during meetings that the clicking of the needles bothered those sitting around me and distracted them from the presentation. I know who complained and to whom she complained - what I also know is that my needles didn't click - she thought I wasn't paying attention. I also know she was paying more attention to me than to the presentation if she knew I was knitting (March 2, 2009)!

Having attended several conferences and presentations I usually do the same thing – sit in the back and knit while still paying attention. During World War II it was common for women to knit during lectures. Emily Post, knowing that speakers would not confront wartime knitters suggested the following rules etiquette, “Do not wave long or shiny needles about in the air; Do not flap your elbows as though you were a bird learning to
fly; Do not leave your wool in a bag at your feet and keep hauling it up every so often with a thrust higher than your head,” to which an editorial in the *New York Times* replied, “perhaps speakers, too often given to ‘fruitless oratory’ should not be permitted to interrupt the knitting (Macdonald, 1990)!” Dianna is simply participating in a public knitting tradition.

*Stephanie*

![Figure 4.12: Flowers by Stephanie](image)

Stephanie, like Mary, did not comment on the blog. I do not have an official credit name or a user name for her. The note she enclosed with her flowers does identify her as a member of the Athens Knitters Guild in Ohio. I think the flowers, shown in Figure 4.12, make a very strange pair. The black and violet one is so somber, juxtaposed with the bright rainbow blossom. She mentions that both are made with left over scraps from her
yarn stash. One is left contemplating the two distinctly different projects from which these yarn may have come.

Maria Frazier, Ria

Figure 4.13: Flowers by Maria Frazier

Maria was an avid participant, commenting almost weekly. Her flowers, shown in Figure 4.13, are all cotton and very precise. I get the sense she is an opinionated person, as she often butted heads with Eleanor. I describe this in more detail later in the section for Question #4. She also seems like a very busy mom, using knitting to help relieve stress:

I do most of my knitting by myself surrounded by people. What I mean is I knit at home while watching TV - especially sports, I need to do something that includes movement to burn of stress while watching sports (I put the fan in fanatic) - with my husband daughter and friends watching with me. I knit at almost all my daughter's meets (tennis, fencing and track) as well as at her dance competitions so I'm surrounded by a bunch
of other parents and friends watching the meets. I knit at lunch at work. I
knit while waiting to pick my daughter up from practice, dance class or
fencing lessons. (February 2, 2009).

Maria also uses sports metaphors to describe her knitting, as in this comment where she
discusses whether knitting is an art or craft:

I think what I do with knitting constitutes a craft. Crafting being
something everyone given time, inclination and practice can do. In the
hands of some people, like my friend Grace [Yaskovic] …it is pure art. I
will always be, and enjoy being, a fiber craftsman. I will never be, and I
am ok with this, a fiber artist. Much like [how] Tiger Woods [and I] both
play golf, [but] what I do will never be comparable to Tiger. (February 15,
2009)

Maria offers an interesting intersection between knitting and sport that I have not yet
explored. I know that there are records for speed knitting, and I read about a woman who
knit while running a marathon. Perhaps it is a topic to explore in the future.

Michele Frankl, the book faerie

Michele’s comments started out brief, and grew in length and depth across the
duration of the project. She’s a librarian and does a lot of knitting during down time at the
library where she works. In this quote she discusses charity knitting:

I do a lot of charity knitting, and it's my favorite of the three. If you look at
my Ravelry projects, most of those are charity projects. I love the oddball
blankets--each knitter adds 3-4 inches and passes it along to the next
knitter. I love seeing what yarn/stitch pattern is chosen and how the
blankets develop. I've also made some really good friends from working
together on projects. Last year, four of us got together to deliver the
afghans that the group made for Victory Junction Gang Camp and had a
total blast! The friendships are an added bonus. (January 26, 2009)
I chose this quote because I can envision the yarn for her flowers in Figure 4.14 coming from leftover scraps from a donated afghan. The package with the flowers also contained a skein of yarn as a gift for me. I was really touched by this gesture.

![Figure 4.14: Flowers by Michele Frankl](image)

*Lindsey Jensen, Lindsey*

Lindsey, another WSCK member, is an adventurous knitter and when asked what she liked to knit best she commented:

I'm still exploring. Although I really like socks and toys and pretty much things that require double point needles, which I didn't realize until I was around a bunch of people who were very anti-DPNs
\[^1\] 1. I can see why they suck but the things they make are so intense and delightful. My favorite things to knit are intense and delightful projects (January 12, 2009).

She never brings the same project to our knitting meet-ups twice and has knit or crocheted blankets, jellyfish, sweaters, bathtubs, vests, turtles, socks, strawberries, hats,
peapods, mittens, a cat sweater, washcloths, and a banana. This flower in Figure 4.15 is the only one I received that was felted\(^2\) and it seems especially appropriate that it came from Lindsey, because she is always experimenting with a new technique.

![Figure 4.15: Flower by Lindsey Jensen](image)

Ingrid Murnane, Ingrid

Ingrid is the other international knitter in the project and lives in London, England. She is a fiber artist and I feel that training shows in her quirky flowers shown in Figure 4.16. The one with the green center is the size of a dinner plate. She describes the intersection between her knitting and artmaking process as follows:

> As for art knitting, I did a degree in textile art, and although I didn't do much knitting at the time, I am making up for that now. Quite often I will just diverge from the pattern as it is written and what I make will become a much more fluid item, changed in some way. Often, if it is a garment, it will become ultimately un-wearable. But generally I don't mind as it is all about the process for me (February 18, 2009).
Knitting seems to be both a meditative and experimental act for her and she often mentioned that knitting is an outlet that allows her mind to wander and play, as demonstrated in her playful and individual flowers.

![Flowers by Ingrid Murnane](image)

**Figure 4.16: Flowers by Ingrid Murnane**

*Linda Brown, Linda*

Linda did not respond often and her responses were brief and to the point. She is a self-taught knitter and tells this story about teaching knitting to others:

> I helped teach my Girl Scout troop to knit when they were in high school. Every winter we would get a cabin at the camp for a weekend and just hang out. So we decided knitting would keep them busy for a while. We had them knit squares, which were sewn together for a project. They had fun and 2 of the 5 girls became knitters. My daughter is not one of them (March 10, 2009)!

I am most struck by the color palette of Linda’s flowers shown in Figure 4.17. The blues and grays are somber and relaxing and the yarns are simple and elegant. I wonder if the
same could be said of Linda. Perhaps she also has simple and elegant tastes. I imagine that she has a room or corner of her home that is spare, calm, and private where she knits or reads.

![Flowers by Linda Brown](image)

**Figure 4.17: Flowers by Linda Brown**

*Susan Napoli, Susan*

While Susan did officially sign-up via email, to my knowledge she did not comment on the blog. I do know from her initial email contact that she has done projects like this before:

I am very much interested in taking part in you knitted flower project. A few years ago I took part in a crocheted flower art project in NYC. I have been knitting mostly on for 29 years. I dabbled in knitting in the 60's, and crochet in the 70's. I mostly crochet and spin, but after some time off from knitting, I have the knitting bug again. I hope to make a few flowers.  

³
Her flowers, in Figure 4.18, have delicate little beaded and felted centers and are impeccably made. Each of them seems to have a lot of personality and like Cyndi in BC (Figure 4.10) or Julia Sims-Haas’s (see Figure 4.24 below) flowers, speak volumes in lieu of comments on the blog.

Figure 4.18: Flowers by Susan Napoli

*Pam Sykes, Pam, Pretty Knitty*

Pam entered the project at the halfway point. Her comments are well worded and she often focused on the give and take of knowledge that happens in knitting.

I love technology, and the way you can do everything faster, and I work in an environment that challenges me with new technology frequently. Heck, I learned a lot of my knitting skills online! But, I love the idea of making it all myself - one long piece of string becomes a fabric to embrace the wearer - whether in a sweater or a sock - with the gift of time, and thought. While I knit, I often pray for the eventual recipient of the piece, and I keep that person close to my heart, even if that person is me. My knitting says, ‘I care about you so much that I want to make something you will love. I could give you a gift certificate, or buy you a knick-knack, but I know (for
instance) that you like to wear hats. I will make you the hat-of-all-hats, to keep your body (and your heart) warm’ (January 29, 2009).

Her yellow flower, shown in Figure 4.19, is another favorite because the button on the edge is a fly. It was so unexpected and a little bit gross. When I mentioned it on the blog she admitted that she had found the button mixed in with a bunch of other crafting items and decided this was a good time to give it away.

![Figure 4.19: Flowers by Pam Sykes](image)

Debora Hampton, Debbi

Debbi’s most memorable comment was about learning to knit. She learned from a close friend of her father’s named Wilma in a hospital waiting room while her father was having surgery.

When my Dad had bypass surgery I spent many hours in waiting rooms with his very dear friend, Wilma, whom I barely knew. She was knitting cotton dishcloths one after the other. She said it was soothing to her. I didn't understand that, but I figured that teaching me to knit might give us
something to talk about since we'd just about run out of conversation. So off we went to a big box store and I got needles and ridiculously inexpensive cotton yarn. After a dozen dishcloths, I asked Wilma to show me how to knit something else. That's when she confessed that she didn't really knit anything EXCEPT dishcloths! My new hobby might have fizzled out right then, if it wasn't for the internet and especially knittinghelp.com. I bumped into knitty.com and magknits and various knitting blogs and I was so energized by those projects and designers. Each time I'd visit Dad & Wilma, I'd bring my current project or finished object. Wilma was always so encouraging and even asked me to show her some stitch patterns (she was just being nice, she never finished the hat). Wilma passed in 2007, but I still think of her when I finish a project. I look at my work and remember what a positive reaction I always got from this wonderful woman. And it soothes me. (January 20, 2009)

This story is especially appropriate to this project because it intertwines many of the aspects of knitting that give me so much joy, including friendship, self-care, care for others, and the exchange of knowledge. Debbi’s flowers pictured in Figure 4.20 seem to reveal a much more flamboyant personality. I love the variety of textures and colors in the yarns she chose. They even came packed in a plastic heart-shaped container filled with confetti.

Figure 4.20: Flowers by Debora Hampton
Renee’s mother and grandmother owned a yarn store when she was young. Renee spent many hours in the yarn store but never made anything other than i-cords on an i-cord loom. She attempted to knit several times but never took to it. She tells this story about finally taking the plunge:

When I was about 20, I was going to college in Boston and really sick. I didn't want to withdraw from classes, but I was too sick to go. My insurance wouldn't cover anything so my Dad was in the process of fighting to get me care. I decided I wanted to knit. I believe this came out of pure homesickness. My Mom sent me a good book she'd found and I ventured out to find needles and cheap yarn. I found some wool-ease and attempted to make a scarf. I ended up getting sicker, ignored the knitting and moved home. Once there, my Mom taught me to knit over New Year's Eve. We were stuck in my room while my Dad was putting hardwood floors down in our house (we're all crafty!). I finished a quite ugly purple and black garter ridge scarf and never stopped knitting. (January 17, 2009)

She now credits knitting with helping her find control and a creative outlet amid stress:

Figure 4.21: Flowers by Renee Bolduc
For me, I believe, it's calming because I am in control of the situation. I am in control of the correct stitches being made and the overall creation. This piece of knitting does not exist without me. So, when my life is out of control, I still obtain a little. And when my life isn't overly stressful, it's simply something that's fun because it allows me to create kick-ass art. (January 17, 2009)

Her flower, shown in Figure 4.21 is knit from soft yarn and embellished with small pearl stamens and a leaf. The delicacy and attention to detail seems to reiterate the sense of care and control.

Robin F, Robin

Figure 4.22: Flowers by Robin F.

Robin also joined the project at the halfway point and commented on every topic. She is an avid knitter, loves to teach others, and participates in a variety of knitalongs and charity projects. She tells this story about learning to knit:

My mom taught me to knit. She swears I asked to learn at age 5; she was busy getting ready to make dinner and took 5 minutes to show me how.
By the time dinner was ready I had knit quite a sample. She was amazed (February 26, 2009).

This little vignette offers a peak into the relationship Robin has with her mother and the way they share and tell stories. While this story might be completely true, there also may be some exaggeration and playfulness added. One gets the sense that this is a favorite story that the two women share.

Personal story and narrative are important to Robin (March 16, 2009), as she relates in her response to a question about narrative, artmaking, and blogging as forms of research:

Personal stories have a role in research. Many historical researchers rely on diaries, captains’ logs, etc. for information…As a quilter; I love to know what the quilters’ choices were informed by. How they chose their fabrics and shapes. Knitting is usually more restrained since garments have to fit, scarves need to be functional etc., but the knitters choice of yarn or pattern can be significant.

Robin’s own color choices for her flowers in Figure 4.22, range from vivid blues and pinks to more earthy browns and greens. They feel whimsical and playful, reflective of her similarly playful comments and stories.

Andrea L. Stern, Andi

Andi is another knitting artist. She beads and quilts, adding painted and printed elements to create her fiber works. She added her own twist to the pattern by adding a spiral of purl bumps to the body of the flowers. Her responses to the more theoretical questions demonstrate her training as an artist. For example, in her comments regarding
whether or not knitting can be political, she addresses a variety of issues, specifically settling on self-care and care for others as potentially political:

I always feel stupid when it comes to this kind of question. What's the definition of political? Is tagging items such as stop signs, public trees, etc, activist? I'm not trying to be a smart ass, I just am curious… when I crocheted as a child I was considered ‘old fashioned’ and the whole idea of reclaiming what was seen as ‘women's work’ with the new wave of knitting I guess is what is political about it. Truly it is freedom to choose. To choose whether to make a sweater or to buy one. To indulge in the luxury of taking the time to hand make something that could just as easily be bought, (I struggle with this in terms of being thought selfish; so I suppose that is also a political act, giving of time to oneself, self nurturing is too often the last on our list of priorities). Some artists choose the medium as part of their message; I think the contrast of something seen as warm and nurturing (such as a sweater or afghan) made with a political statement (I am thinking of the work of Lisa Anne Auerbach here) is part of the power of that kind of work, but it is not the only way in which to express a viewpoint through the art. (February 17, 2009)

Andi’s flowers, pictured in Figure 4.23 are bold and unique among the others and her selection of colors and yarns, which she explains are left over from other projects, offers a glimpse into what her studio at home might be like.

Figure 4.23: Flowers by Andi L. Stern
Julia was the last participant to join the group and signed up in the last weeks of the project. Her flowers, pictured in Figure 4.24 are truly artful and contain knitted embellishments, buttons, jewels, and beads. She must have knit like crazy to finish them in time. Because she joined late, I only have a few comments from her. I find this one interesting because it echoes my experience as a young knitter and captures the experience of joining a group of knitters:

It's interesting that a group of people who have different backgrounds, professions, families, etc. connected by only a few yards of wool will eventually end up sharing stories and personal problems. I always feel welcome even though I might not know anyone or be the youngest one there. Knitting seems to transcend many obstacles and connect all different kinds of people. (March 22, 2009)
I was also fascinated by the ease of knitting with others and the open and welcoming nature of knitting groups. I hope that these participants had a similar experience even if it was virtual and not face-to-face.

Section Conclusion

This comparison between the virtual and the physical leads to the next data source for this project. The flowers act as the physical, tactile data. They allowed me to feel connected to the participants beyond their comments and contributions on the blog. The blog, in turn, expanded on the experience of the flowers allowing me to glimpse the inner lives of the participants, read their stories, and understand the way knitting plays a part in their lives. The next chapter unpacks this blurry separation between the online world of the blog and the offline world of the flowers.

1 DPN stands for double-pointed needle

2 Felting is a technique used on wool yarn in which the fibers are stressed using heat, water, barbed needles, and/or agitation to form a dense, shrunken fabric that does not stretch or show stitch definition. In many cases the fabric become virtually waterproof.

3 Quoted from an email received February 2, 2009.

4 Knitty.com is a free web magazine that publishes articles and knitting patterns. Magknits is a similar web magazine that is now defunct. Ravelry has adopted the patterns.
The previous chapter focused on the knitted portion of this project and interwove some of the comments and quotes from the blog. This chapter focuses on the blog itself, the 19 posts and 194 comments. First, I define the terms I use in the blogging discussion. I also explore issues that make research through a blog different from face-to-face interviews and how these can be both challenging and rewarding. I then discuss how I chose which comments to use in the thesis documents. Finally, I present the blog data and discuss the themes and threads that appear in each discussion topic.

Blogging

The blog discussions had a mixed format. Overall, they look most like interview questions and responses. However, a blog has unique characteristics making it quite
different from a face-to-face interview. In order to clarify the discussion in this section I will be using the following terminology:

- **Post** – These are the discussion texts, including images and the discussion questions, authored by me. I opened these posts with a greeting, presented images of the flowers I had received that week, introduced the discussion question, wrote about my own opinions, and then opened the question to the rest of the group. I was always careful to note that my opinions were mine, and I did not expect everyone to share the same opinion.

- **Comment** – These are the participant responses to the discussion questions. Sometimes participants had technical difficulties publishing their comments. In these situations they emailed them to me, and I posted them on their behalf.

- **Published** – This refers to comments or post that exist on the blog. Once a comment or post is published it receives a time stamp, showing when in the course of the project it went live on the site.

The next sections titled Time, Group Dynamic, “Talk Back”, and Proximity discuss intertwined characteristics of blogging that affected this specific project.

**Time**

Blogs are not bound by time. Unlike an interview that happens face-to-face at a specific time, blog interactions happen across time. For this project, I established a schedule for posts, publishing a new post on Monday or Tuesday of each week for twelve weeks. Participants could then comment at anytime after the post was published. Each
comment is time stamped illustrating where in time it was published in relation to the other posts and comments. For example the original Discussion #1 post was published on Monday January 5, 2009 at 8:33 AM. The final comment for that discussion was posted on February 26, 2009. At this time, other posts and comments were already published, potentially changing the context of later comments.

In addition, the sense of time varies for participants according to when they leave and enter the group, as well as whether they choose to comment or not to comment. A participant who joined the group at the very beginning of the project in December and commented continuously and steadily will have a different understanding of context, as compared with someone who joined the group in the final weeks and commented on early posts at a later date. Participants could leave and enter the dialogue and choose when to participate in a discussion, when to read without commenting, and when to leave the project altogether. Each of these actions affects the overall discussion in ways that may be undetected and for which no counterfactual test exists. Traces do, however, occur in the published dialogue.

This temporal unhinging, demonstrated by time stamps and the frequency of comments, lead to unique group dynamics and a “talk back” phenomenon that may not have occurred had I talked to each participant individually or spoken to them together in one room. In addition, proximity affected and was affected by time. The next section addresses Group Dynamic.
**Group Dynamic**

Because comments were posted across time, a participant who published the fifth comment could do so after reading the four comments already published. Some participants noted this as Pam did (January 29, 2009, Discussion #1) when she wrote, “I scrolled quickly past the other comments to make sure my answer was mine own here…” In other cases this group dynamic occurred more tacitly through repeated phrases, words, and concepts. In some cases this reflected the group dynamic, capturing a shared interest, as when many of the participants discussed their grandmothers. This had more to do with many people learning to knit from their grandmother than one person mentioning the word grandmother and having it repeated. In other cases, this group dynamic was a product of the blog environment and the process of participants building on each other’s comments.

**Proximity**

The Internet is often praised for its ability to bring together people from faraway places. This project was no different, with participants joining the discussion from Idaho, North Carolina, California, British Columbia, and England. This spread across geographic distance directly affected commenting, due to time zone differences and personal frames of reference. At the same time, when one visited the Knitted Flower Project blog, they were, in a sense, visiting a common location. One could view this as compressing distance and bringing participants to the central “location” of the blog.
The issue of proximity also affects the conversational nature of the blog. In face-to-face conversations includes a variety of information lost in blogging, such as facial expressions and appearance, tone of voice, and immediate feedback. Participants were distilled into their words and images of the flower’s they created. So while the technology allows people to communicate across great distance and time, certain elements of communication are lost.

This could manifest in two ways. People, who would otherwise be too shy or reserved to express an opinion, feel more comfortable as they are not directly facing someone. In contrast, because the comments are typed and preserved and not merely spoken, one may be less likely want their thoughts committed to writing. I could see this play out in the number of responses I received to different types of questions posed. Questions that were more personal, opinion based, and asked for anecdotal information received much higher rates of response than questions that ventured into political or academic areas of concern. I explore this more in the discussion section.

“Talk Back”

The phrase “talk back” refers to the more direct conversations between participants. Rather than the more holistic trends that resulted from group dynamics, “talk back” occurred when one participant would directly converse with another participant or refer to an earlier comment and then offer a personal opinion. For example, LE often elicited “talk back” due, perhaps, to her bold opinions. She and Ria shared several exchanges regarding knitting and charity, which are described in Discussion #4. In
addition, LE received a “talk back” from me and a few other participants in Discussion #8, also described below. These mini discussions between comments added richness and depth to the overall conversation, providing links and related themes between the discussions.

While these issues of time, proximity, group dynamic, and “talk back” may not be explicit in the discussion and the data, there are moments when they affect the conversation and exchange. Sometimes, as with “talk back” the affect is dramatic. In the case of proximity, the affect is less noticeable. However, whether visible or hidden, these issues require acknowledgement and attention throughout the following sections.

Discussions

The blog posts and comments had a fairly standard format, as described in the definition. In this section, I present a brief description of each thread of discussion, some highlights from the comments and my overall interpretation and feeling for each discussion and the resulting comments. I have included ample quotes and comments in order to ensure that the participants’ voices are heard. I have chosen the quotes based on a few criteria. I wanted each thread to be represented by a voice. This means that both contradictory and common threads appear. I also chose comments based on how well they addressed or grappled with the discussion topic. Some participants struggled to define their own opinions and these struggles produced compelling pieces of writing and interactions between those pieces of writing. Finally, I tried to embrace the “messiness” of the comments and demonstrate that there were often divergent themes and
disagreements, sometimes within the same comment. The full text of these discussions and comments can be found on the blog site, http://knittedflowerprojectblog.blogspot.com/.

Discussion #1: Why do you knit?

This was the initial opening discussion question published on January 5th, 2009. It received 24 comments, the last of which was posted February 26, 2009. In the initial post I explained that I have multiple reasons for why I knit, some that are more casual and some that are deeply personal:

I've answered this multiple ways depending on the circumstances: ‘I like to knit because it relaxes me’, ‘I like making my own clothes’, ‘It gives me something to do while I'm watching television’. All of these are true but there is more to it for me. My grandmother and great-grand mother were knitters. Though I didn't learn from them when I knit I still feel closer to them. I am trained as an oil painter but did not really feel like an artist until I started working with crafts like knitting and sewing. Knitting has introduced me to so many wonderful people simply because they share the craft and discussing it never gets old (Knitted Flower Project², January 5, 2009).

Many of the participants had similar reasons, both to mine and each other’s. The primary themes included the desire to be creative or express one’s self and, at the same time, make something useful; the portability and versatility of knitting; a connection to the body and care for the self as well as care for others; a connection to one’s heritage especially one’s foremothers and how that translates into womanhood; and an opportunity to learn, teach, and make social connections. The following unpacks each of
these themes, presenting similar and divergent responses and demonstrating how they are interrelated.

Creativity

Participants wrote about creativity, describing knitting as a way to express one’s self through pattern and fiber choices, and the sense of accomplishment that comes from hand-making an object. In addition, many discussed the satisfaction in making something useful rather than purchasing it, as Liela (January 10, 2009) describes:

Then of course there is the transformative aspect of knitting. Making one thing into another is a form of everyday magic. I like being involved in the process of turning animal hair into human clothing. I would like to learn to spin some day too. Producing the things I use is much more satisfying than simply being a consumer. I think we as a culture would be better off if we understood where the items we consume come from. It sheds a whole different light on cost and value. The money we spend is only part of the cost of an item, and when we appreciate how much labor was put into something it has a great deal more value.

This idea of utility was often expressed when discussing unique, wearable clothing, creating items for family members, or the home. I can attest to the satisfaction in receiving a compliment for a sweater or scarf I have made myself. Many participants shared in this satisfaction. For others the creative aspects of knitting served as a way to escape everyday stress and take control of one’s life, which I linked to self-care:

This piece of knitting does not exist without me. So, when my life is out of control, I still obtain a little. And when my life isn't overly stressful, it's simply something that's fun because it allows me to create kick-ass art (ReneeNicole, January 17, 2009).
Many of the participants linked creativity to self-care, seeing the outlet as a way to relax, expand one’s knowledge, and experience accomplishment. In addition, participants connected creativity to care for others, expressing the desire to give unique gifts imbued with a personal touch rather than something purchased.

Some of the participants, like myself, have an arts background and found that knitting provided a more portable and less messy alternative to more elaborate crafts, “I love the repetitive motion, the choice of colors, the freedom of being able to sculpt a form without having to deal with clay under my nails or the clean up” (Andi, January 5, 2009). Creativity was also linked to portability in that it allows the participants to carry a creative project throughout a hectic day, working on it a little bit at a time.

*Portability and Versatility*

Trifarina (January 5, 2009) underscores the importance of portability and its link to creativity, “I knit because I can't live without making things and it is the most portable craft I have found. Sewing takes up a lot of space that I don't have, and you can't run a sewing machine while proctoring exams.” The same ease of transport that was so important to wartime knitters, making socks for soldiers on the train or the suffragettes packing their knitting with their lunch, is still lauded by knitters today. For example Ria (January 10, 2009) explains,

I taught myself to knit about 5 years ago. My daughter was involved in dance competitions that involved long weekends in poorly lit auditoriums. Reading was difficult even with book lights. In the back of my head knitting seemed interesting so I got a book and some yarn and needles and gave it a try… I knit to pass time at my daughter's sports events now that she is in high school.
Other’s described how knitting helped pass the time while waiting for an appointment or commuting to work, “I'm in a band, so when we play a show or the few times we've been on tour, there is a lot of time to fill. I also have commute time on the bus and train that is perfect for portable projects like socks” (Stefanie, January 27, 2009).

Knitters also appreciated versatility in addition to portability as a positive characteristic of knitting. Janelle (January 7, 2009) specifically mentions this quality:

…I knit because it makes me feel good about myself, like I have accomplished something. It fulfills my desire to be creative, and it is so versatile that I can knit a hat for instant gratification or an afghan for a long arduous project.

Versatility is explored further in Discussion #2.

Connection to the Body, Care for the Self and Care for Others

Janelle notes that knitting makes her “feel good about herself”, a sentiment repeated in almost every comment. Participants constantly referred to a connection to the body, care for the self, and care for others in their comments. Many described the satisfaction in feeling the fibers and engaging in a repetitive motion. Cyndi in BC even writes “for me, knitting is as natural as breathing.” Liela (January 10, 2009) takes the concept a step further in commenting about the most basic human instinct:

I have this theory that because people have not really evolved significantly since we were tribal nomads, we enjoy and benefit physically and psychologically from things that make sense in a hunter/gatherer lifestyle. Walking is my favorite example, but I think for women especially, repetitive handwork similar to mundane tasks like picking berries or weaving baskets is satisfying on a deep level. Not everybody likes it of course, but once a person finds the groove I think it is very soothing.
This connection to the self and care of the self seems to go beyond the physical comfort and meditative nature of knitting. Bean Counting Knitter (January 5, 2009) talks about knitting helping her cope with moving from New York to Ohio and “feeling pretty much like a shaken up snow globe.” Dianna (January 7, 2009) uses knitting to calm her mind “in times of stress or crisis like after brain surgery.” Dizzy Spinstere (January 8, 2009) knits to stay sane and ReneeNicole (January 17, 2009) learned to knit as a way to cope with illness. Stefanie (January 27, 2009) credits knitting with helping her cope with depression and Trish (February 3, 2009) turned to knitting when her mom died as a way to help herself grieve.

Many of the participants discussed the care of others and how it relates back to care of the self. Pam highlights this in her comment:

I love technology, and the way you can do everything faster, and I work in an environment that challenges me with new technology frequently. Heck, I learned a lot of my knitting skills online! But, I love the idea of making it all myself - one long piece of string becomes a fabric to embrace the wearer . . .whether in a sweater or a sock . . .with the gift of time, and thought. While I knit, I often pray for the eventual recipient of the piece, and I keep that person close to my heart, even if that person is me. My knitting says, ‘I care about you so much that I want to make something you will love. I could give you a gift certificate, or buy you a knick-knack, but I know (for instance) that you like to wear hats. I will make you the hat-of-all-hats, to keep your body (and your heart) warm’ (January 29, 2009).

Dianna (January 7, 2009) also describes this relationship of care in her comment, “[k]nitting is a comfort – [both] for me as I knit and for the person who receives some knitted gift from me.” However, not every participant shared the same desire to care for
others. Lindsey (January 12, 2009) expressed a very different opinion that is probably true for a lot of other knitters even if they may be too shy to admit it.

Sometimes I think people get the misconception that everyone knits to make things for other people. Like every knitter is selfless. Well, that's crap. I knit because it makes something. Which I will probably keep for myself.

Often gift knitting and knitting for other people can take the joy out of knitting. This topic is visited again in Discussion #4.

Heritage, Foremothers, and Womanhood

As I expressed in my own answer to the discussion question, participants often wrote about knitting connecting them to their grandmothers. For some the connection came from watching a grandmother knit like Bean Counting Knitter (January 5, 2009):

My maternal Grandmother was my knitting mentor as a child. I am mainly a self-taught knitter but I learned my early basic techniques watching her. I think this is where I learned to be a sort of Continental thrower – by watching her knit English and throwing3. I did the reverse of what she did. I can remember her telling me, Cathy, you are doing it wrong but your stitches are right. Grandma passed away in 2004 but I still remember her while knitting my projects. She would be amazed at all of the online resources for knitters out there now.

NextVanGogh remembers starting to crochet when she was young and that experience connecting her with friends of her grandmother, “I remember once when I was about 8 or 9, our church had a ladies shut in and we all sat around and crocheted all night. I was with all these fabulous old grannies and had the best time (January 9, 2009).” Others saw
the connection as a more generally historic one. For example, Dianna (January 7, 2009) wrote that she knits because

[I]t is a way to connect with history - knowing that I am doing something that people had to do to keep their family clothed and warm; that the movements of my hands are the same as those that people in many cultures have used to create clothing for their loved ones.

Lindy (January 10, 2009) describes the importance of preserving and appreciating the craftwork of her grandmothers and, at the same time, making it relevant to today.

I love to knit. It's so relaxing, and I feel connected to my grandmothers, who have moved on. In addition - I love the idea of preserving traditional crafts, like knitting, sewing, or weaving, and passing them on. I also love the idea of using traditional crafts in non-traditional ways. I love funky patterns, and embrace the challenge of using neat, non-animal based fibers. This is important to me as a vegan, although I'm kind of on my own with this one in knitting circles.

In Lindy’s comment she is linking knitting with other aspects of her lifestyle, using knitting to also express her choice to be vegan.

Finally, some of the participants saw knitting as a way to negotiate womanhood. Identifying as a woman can mean so many different things that are often conflicted and contradictory. Brea (February 3, 2009) expresses this dilemma in her comment:

I knit because of some internal conflicts over the role of being a professional woman. I have often been told that I will be very successful in my career, but that my personal life (i.e. a clean home, a husband and having kids that aren't serial killers) will suffer. I often struggle internally with trying to prove this comment wrong. I associate knitting with nurturing, 'being domestic,' and taking care of hearth and home. Providing homemade things for people is the ultimate form of care, akin to cooking.
Knitting can be a subversive way to explore womanhood, or as Brea describes, a way to fulfill the need to be less subversive and more traditional.

**Teaching and Learning**

Learning new techniques, teaching someone else to knit, and experimenting with new yarns and patterns are all reasons cited for knitting. Knitters are often asked where they learned to knit, so the story of learning is fundamental. Many participants mention their knitting teacher and what the learning experience was like. Discussion #3 delves more deeply into the subject of learning to knit. Some participants see the connection between knitting and edification as something more vast and layered:

I like knitting because it is like writing or art in that it is very simple to learn to do, but impossible to master. A person could never say, ‘There. Now I have learned everything there is to know about knitting.’ The skill set is endless as is the creative possibility. It is also easy to learn new skills and basically risk free (Liela, January 10, 2009).

Liela relates knitting to a more general interest in life-long learning. There is always the opportunity to try a new pattern or a new technique or to work toward perfecting existing skills. Trish (February 3, 2009) expresses the satisfaction in learning new knitting skills to the general satisfaction of learning:

…I was making the transition from work-and-school to just work, and I needed something that gave me the sense of accomplishment and satisfaction that school gave me. I discovered that knitting was just like writing a paper (which I always really enjoyed!) - initial inspiration, research, planning, execution, mistakes, rework and editing in order to define something. Frogging stopped bothering me when I made that connection. After all, I'd never turn in a paper knowing there were grammatical errors.
Dianna (January 7, 2009) links learning and knitting in another way. She sees knitting as an aid in learning other skills and writes that:

>[A]s a kinesthetic learner I use knitting as a way to keep my hands busy during trainings where I am familiar with the material but need to participate (and stay awake!) and remember the specifics of the training.

Dianna’s comment relates to Leitch’s (2006) “haptic space” described in the Introduction. Knitting as a haptic space forges connections between the physical act of knitting a project and whatever is happening around the knitter, so that the project itself is associated with the remembered environment. For example, I have a sweater with sleeves that I knit during a trip to Germany in August, 2008. Every time I put the sweater on, I am reminded of the unseasonably cold weather, the fine and constant drizzle, and the faces of the people traveling with me. I ended up knitting gifts for each of those travelers.

**Social Connections**

Knitting was repeatedly lauded as a social outlet and way to make friends, or, like knitting for my travel companions, maintain a social connection. Trifarina (January 5, 2009) writes, “I also knit to make connections with real life, flesh and blood, human beings. I am socially awkward and don't enjoy keggers anymore. It's nice to have an excuse to meet up with like-minded people and eat cheese.” The participants commented that knitting brings people together, allows people to connect and make friends, provides an opening for conversations, and a way to seek out like-minded people in a new city.

NextVanGogh (January 9, 2009) explains that making knitting friends also enhances her knitting skills and links the social aspect back to learning:
What I love about knitting is the sharing and togetherness of the people I knit with and the friendships that have developed as well as all the learning I've accomplished because of these people...I went to my first knitting group 'meeting' in 2008 and I can honestly say, had I not continued to meet with these awesome knitters, I know my knitting would not have advanced and I probably still wouldn't be taking it very seriously. In fact I probably wouldn't be knitting every day with the passion that I have for it. So in a nutshell, my knitting has been a progression, a learning experience, a connection, companionship, and an addiction and that is why I knit.

Participants like Debbi (January 6, 2009) also mentioned social connection on the internet as well as in person, “I enjoy knitting with friends at my LYS and poking all around Ravelry with my internet buddies,” reiterating the blur between online and offline experiences.

LE (January 7, 2009) writes that knitting helps to forge friendships in a new place, “I knit because it's an easy way to find friends in a new city. Stitch-n-bitch groups are pretty easy to find and a lot more stable than most groups that just sit around and talk.” Dizzy Spinster (January 8, 2009) found that knitting even helped her build connections in Bulgaria while she was in the Peace Corp. These social connections continue to shine through in the participants’ comments, especially in Discussion #5, which deals specifically with knitting in groups.

Discussion #1 received the most comments. The themes introduced by the participants continued to surface in the other eleven discussion topics. The Discussion section of this thesis explores potential reasons why these themes might be so popular and why this first question received so much attention..
Discussion #2: What is your favorite item to knit and why?

This discussion was posted on January 12, 2009. It received 24 comments between January 12 and February 18, 2009. I introduced this topic by explaining how much I enjoy knitting afghans and blankets and why I enjoy them:

I knit my first [afghan] three years ago as a gift to my mom and step dad. It was a very simple pattern with alternating squares of garter, reverse stockinette, stockinette, and seed stitch. I bought a bunch of wild, soft, textured and novelty yarns like Fun Fur, Patons Allure and Divine, Yarn Bee Luscious, and Bernat Bouclé. These are yarns I normally wouldn't knit with but because the afghan was so large, there was a lot of room to play with texture. Then I began really exploring my afghan options and discovered the beautiful Mason Dixon patterns like the log cabin and mitered square afghans. They reminded me of growing up in rural central Pennsylvania seeing all the quilts in Amish country and at the county fairs. In addition, they reminded me of the Gee's Bend quilters that I fell in love with while I was in art school. Over all, because afghans are so big, there is a lot of opportunity to play with pattern, color, and texture (Knitted Flower Project, January 12, 2009).

The question seemed to revel two camps of knitters: those knitters who prefer quick, instant gratification projects like hats or toys and those who prefer projects that were more complex and even experimental like sweaters or afghans.

Liela (January 12, 2009) is an example of someone who preferred quick projects stating that in addition to making socks, hats, and gloves,

I also like to make little dolls based on Jan Messent's book *Knit a Fantasy Story*. They are super fast and easy, it is impossible not to be creative and playful with them, and they are so cute I wish I could still play pretend so I could play with them myself. They tickle my imagination. They also satisfy the need for instant gratification. Daydreaming new characters and environments for them is hugely entertaining as well.
Many knitters asserted that small projects gave them a sense of gratification, allowed them to work with nicer yarns (because the project required less of it), and left room for experimentation. Andi (January 15, 2009) affirms, “I like hats, they are small, but with a lot of possibilities, and wearable so the art can go with you.” Other participants, like Trish (February 3, 2009) preferred larger or more complex projects, “I'm working my way through lace right now. I like the amount of focus required for lace knitting. When I have an easy (boring) day at work, I like being able to go home and challenge myself.”

Still many other knitters expressed their appreciation for both types of projects.

Another common response addressed projects that focused on a favorite technique. For example, NextVanGogh (January 14, 2009) explains that her favorite knitting experiences are a result of technique rather than object:

As far as ITEMS to knit, I don't really have a favorite. I just enjoy knitting…Probably my favorite technique would be stranded color work. I love color and making designs while stranding is very interesting and fun. I like watching the different shapes emerge as I go along, row by row.

Bean Counting Knitter (January 13, 2009) also mentioned an interest in techniques, however, she seemed most interested in the learning process; “Lace. Lace has become a passion for me. I haven't knit much lace yet but I feel the need to educate myself on the beginnings of lace knitting.” This insight ties back to the Discussion #1 topic of learning and teaching.

Participants often expressed the desire to expand their knitting skills and try new projects and techniques. Ingrid (February 18, 2009) underscores this in her Discussion #2
comment; "I don't have a specific favorite item to knit: I like to try something new each time. Maybe a new technique, kind of yarn or color."

Many participants in Discussion #1 affirmed the importance of knitting as a form of care for others. Many liked to knit projects for the comfort of others, like Grace (January 13, 2009) who wrote that “[s]hawls are my true love, and I love to give them as gifts to those in need of a lift or comfort” and Dianna (January 21, 2009) who lists preemie hats, booties, Project Linus Blankets, IV wrist covers, and afghan squares for Warm Up America! as her favorite charity items to knit.

Like knitting for the care of others, there were also knitters who liked projects that led to friendships or social connections. Dizzy Spinster (February 2, 2009) shares a unique example in her comment about knitting socks while serving as a Peace Corp volunteer.

My host mother in Bulgaria made me a pair of socks one time - attempting to show me how to do it by working it toe-up, but apparently it didn't stick…Another time, I tutored a couple of students and because they knew I liked hand knit things, one of their mom's made me a pair of socks as a thank you gift. There's nothing better than a hand knit gift to bridge the gap between cultures! (And they say math and music are the only international languages!) While serving in Bulgaria, I made several socks because they were easy to work on while sitting on buses for hours…It was fun and made for a great discussion with other Bulgarians who didn't know Americans still made handcrafted items…I truly think I would have missed out on meeting many great, wonderful and interesting women had I not had an interest in knitting.

In this example, the item is a favorite because it connects the knitter to friends and reminds Dizzy Spinster of her experience in Bulgaria.
Many knitters, like Liela (January 12, 2009), seemed to be content to just knit:

“My favorite thing to knit is whatever I'm currently starting.” They expressed satisfaction in just working with the yarn and the rhythm of making stitches:

I find great joy in watching an item move from being a ball of yarn into a piece of knitted fabric. That is very satisfying for me. Knitting is a source of meditation for me. I can be in a room full of people but with the needles in my hands I am centered (January 13, 2009, Bean Counting Knitter).

Comments like these reiterated the importance of knitting as a form of self-care. In some cases the project isn’t as important as the process. Princessofallthingscrafty (January 13, 2009) expresses the importance of knitting as a process of meditation and self-care in her comment:

I cannot tell you how many times I've knitted something out of stress and was completely relaxed at the end of it. Knitting a baby blanket helped me get through my last lay off from work. I ended up having to redo the blanket because it was a little misshaped but I was pleasantly willing to re-knit it.

In this example, the act of knitting was far more important than the resulting blanket, so much so, that having to re-knit the piece was not considered a burden. Lindsey’s (January 12, 2009) comment seems to sum up the importance of knitting for the sake of knitting “My favorite things to knit are intense and delightful projects.”

Discussion #3: When and from whom did you learn to knit?
Do you have a particular story?

This discussion topic, published on January 20, 2009 received 20 comments between that date and February 26, 2009. It elicited many stories about mothers and
grandmothers, frustration and appreciation, and the timelessness of knitting. I opened the discussion with my own story which I admit to the group is not very exciting:

I worked at a cafe in the main library at the Ohio State University for a year as an undergraduate. We were next to the computer lab and one of the computer lab assistants would knit to kill time. She made mainly scarves and she put the idea in my head. A portable activity with usable results to do during down time at a boring job. Then I saw Debbie Stoller on the Today Show promoting the first Stitch n' Bitch book. I was a budding feminist and I wanted to be her. I went to the Columbus Metropolitan Library and borrowed the book with the best pictures (they didn't have a copy of Stitch n' Bitch), bought some needles and a skein of Red Heart and spent a weekend cursing and fumbling. After many ugly hours, dropped stitches, and sticky needles it clicked! I was knitting! Everywhere! Class, work (by this time I was tending bar at a pool hall. Very Madame Defarge), outside, inside, I couldn't stop. The first project I finished was a wonky scarf for my gram. Of course she loved it. She was a defunked knitter herself who learned from her mother but never developed much love for the craft. She preferred to build dollhouse furniture. But my efforts reminded her of my great-gram and that made her proud (Knitted Flower Project, January 20, 2009).

Many of these stories share similar characteristics like a bond with a foremother, the challenges of trying to learn a new skill, and the humor that eases the process along. LE specifically underscores this humor and camaraderie in her story of learning to knit to help teach a knitting class, “[My flat mate] wanted me to co-teach it with her. ‘But I don't knit!’ I protested. ‘That's ok,’ she said, ‘I have a whole pitcher of margaritas.’ So she taught me to knit, and I co-taught her class (January 20, 2009).”

Some of the participants, like Dianna (January 21, 2009), associated learning to knit with a specific time or event:

My first introduction to ‘fiber arts’ was in 1963, when President Kennedy was assassinated; my mother taught my older sister, brother and me to crochet to pass the time we were off school but (due to showing respect) needed to be quiet and were not allowed to play outside.
Debbie (January 20, 2009) learned to knit when her father had bypass surgery as a way to pass the time and ease her nerves while sitting in the hospital waiting room. However, nearly everyone linked learning to knit with a teacher or another person close to the process.

For example, Dianna (January 21, 2009) noted that after she learned to knit, she used

…string that had been collected by my grandfather when he worked at a local grocery that received its boxes tied with cotton string. He had tied every piece together with strong knots and wound it into balls, which were stored in our attic after his death.

Likewise, Debbie (January 20, 2009) learned to knit from her father’s friend Wilma in the hospital waiting room from a family friend while her father was having bypass surgery. She explains in the quote on page 118 that the experience created a bond between herself and Wilma. The two women shared their knitting projects at every visit until Wilma passed away.

Though there were some participants, like me, who were self-taught and one who learned in grade school, most learned to knit from a grandmother or mother, and all of them learned from women.

Bean Counting Knitter’s (January 23, 2009) story offers an interesting twist on this trend. She learned by watching:

My maternal Grammy always had a knitting project in her lap. I can remember watching her fingers for hours it seems. She was a mass producer of knitted items from sweaters to scarves and mittens. She had eight kids and 15 grandchildren to knit Christmas and birthday gifts. Neither mom nor Grammy sat down and taught me how to knit. I learned by watching Grammy for hours. I always could go to either of them for
guidance when I was having a problem with my knitting. I didn't take my knitting skill seriously back then. It almost seems like it didn't become a serious passion of mine until the year Grammy died. Perhaps it was her passing the torch to me.

Elaine (January 24, 2009) recounts a similar experience.

I don't remember a lot about learning to knit. I learned from my mom when I was a young 'un of 8 or so. My main memories of it are that I made a swatch that grew every row until I figured out how to not yarn-over in the first stitch, and that I quickly got more into it than my mom was.

For these two women, knitting was ever-present and seemed to naturally become a part of their lives.

Some participants started knitting as adults and learned the basics from a friend or family member and then turned to the Internet to expand their skill set. For example, Pam (January 29, 2009) learned to knit from her husband’s grandmother but turned elsewhere for new patterns and challenges.

After a dozen or more fuzzy scarves, I decided I wanted to learn to knit socks. I launched my campaign via internet ‘how-to’ sites, and learned to knit socks. . .then hats. . .then sweaters... and the rest, as they say, is history. Now I am a knitting fool!

Finally, many knitters had strong material and tactile memories of learning to knit. Ingrid (February 18, 2009), for example, associated learning to knit with a place and objects in addition to the grandmother who taught her.

My Nan taught me to knit when I was perhaps 5 or 6 (I'm 32 now). She lived on the Isle of Wight off England's south coast and I would go on holidays to stay with her and my grandad. She was a prolific knitter and sewer all her life and could easily adapt patterns to fit anyone. She also crocheted and I think kept all this going to ease the pain in her hands from arthritis: the more she used her hands, the longer her joints would keep
going. She taught me garter stitch firstly and I knit an awful lot of scarves for teddy bears out of the gaudiest wool I could find, on short green metal needles!

The experiences of learning to knit, while different and special to each knitter, do have some similarities. There is a strong connection to the teacher, a sense of satisfaction in learning, and there is a story. This narrative quality, the fact that is often told, tweaked, and retold, demonstrates an autoethnographic thread between the participants. The narrative continues with each new knitting project, especially projects that are knit with others knitters or for other people. The next discussion explored these knitalongs and the projects they produce.

Discussion #4: Have you participated in knitalongs?
Charity knitting? Art knitting? Gift knitting?

Discussion #4 was published January 26, 2009 and between that date and February 26, 2009 received 20 comments. I introduced the question with my own explanation:

I love to charity knit. I make afghans for the YWCA family center where my sister works as a youth coordinator. Each one is given to a family who is setting up a new home after a period of homelessness. This is also my first art knitting adventure. I have added knitting elements to artworks but never made an artwork of knitting. As for gift knitting? LOVE IT! When I am working on a gift for someone I sort of meditate and think about our relationship and friendship. I try to imbue warm, happy feelings into each gift and I hope they can sense it when they put on the scarf, mittens, socks, hats, or sweaters. I am trying to do a similar thing with this knitalong - concentrating on my research, on the knitting stories I have read and heard, and what the final project could look like (Knitted Flower Project, January 26, 2009).
I was surprised to find that many participants did not like to knit for charity, gifts, or art, or participate in knitalongs. For example, Bean Counting Knitter (January 27, 2009) explains:

My knitting is very selfishly motivated because it is my escape. When I feel unmotivated to finish knitting something it can become stressful defeating my reason for knitting. The same can be said for my gift knitting. I have found when I knit an item it becomes clear to me whom to gift the item. I have a very hard time picking yarn and pattern with the specific purpose of gifting. There is a very fine line for me and if in my head I start to feel like I am chained to a project I find I start avoiding the project or start to feel like it is a job rather than a relaxing investment of my time.

Many other participants had a similar love/hate relationship with charity and gift knitting and felt like all the time and attention that went into the piece was often not fully appreciated by the recipient. Liela (February 16, 2009) expresses this in her comment

I have not done charity knitting. It seems kind of strange to do that when it takes so long and costs more to produce something handmade. If the recipient doesn’t value the time and effort you put in, then why not donate something else that doesn’t consume your time or cost as much?

However, some participants saw charity and gift knitting as an important part of their lives, like Joanne (January 27, 2009), who states: “[M]y reason for doing charity knitting.....I want to help while I can. My turn will come when I will need something from someone, so I am doing my best before I can't.” Stefanie (January 27, 2009) similarly finds gift knitting to be an important activity:

I really hate shopping, so I'd much rather find the perfect project for the person I have in mind and knit them up some socks or a warm hat or something I got really ambitious this past Xmas and made my parents sweaters…probably won't ever do that again though!
Other participants, like Pam (January 26, 2009) and Ingrid (February 18, 2009) discussed their appreciation for art knitting.

The most interesting exchange in this comment section, however, began with LE and actually carried into future posts. LE stirred the conversation by expressing distaste for charity knitting on the grounds that it is sexist and classist in this comment that I posted on her behalf due to technical difficulties:

Knitting is for fun, not for other people. Sometimes I give knitted goods away. Sometimes I even make them for other people on purpose, as long as I don't have to tell them first. But I won't (can't?) commit to knitting on a schedule (knitalongs), or for a specific purpose (charity), or even commission. It's just not flexible enough, and then some of the fun leaks out. Also, and here's my feminist ranty bit coming out: I hate charity knitting. I hate the premise of it, I hate the practice of it, I hate the sexism and the classism of it. (January 27, 2009)

To which Ria (January 29, 2009) replied, “I don't really understand how charity knitting is sexist, anti-feminist or classist?” I asked LE via email to elaborate on her comment, mainly because I was interested in why she felt this way. A few days later she replied with this comment, which is long but I feel bears repeating:

Thanks, Molly, for posting my earlier thoughts. Here's hoping the internet is behaving right now. I hate charity knitting for a whole bunch of reasons, and they're kind of intertwined, so bear with me here. I hate that I'm expected to donate my time to charity because I am a woman. The expectation is very gendered, and I notice it a lot because I have other, male-dominated or male-normed social activities where the expectation is completely absent. It's not just that I'm expected to donate, it's that I'm expected to a) want to donate and b) have nothing better than my time and/or handicrafts. As a non-knit example, consider the bake sale as fundraiser. If I want to give $20 instead of making brownies for sale, I'm insufficiently involved / selfish / not woman enough. From a purely monetary standpoint, donating money is a lot easier and more profitable than donating time and goods. A formal social group of women -- like a stitch-n-bitch, or a sorority, or a Women in Science and Engineering group
-- turns to charity, to bettering others, to "giving back" in an eye blink. We can't just hang out. We have to serve to justify our existence and organization. Male-normed groups don't have that expectation, even for comparable interests and comparable levels of social commitment. If, on a personal level, I don't want to do charity knitting, I am shamed (overtly or covertly), and I probably have to apologize too. This shaming is much worse than for comparable groups of primarily men. So, I have to *want* to knit for charity because I am a woman, or feel bad about myself if I don't. That's bad enough, but there are classist assumptions in charity knitting that piss me off too. I'll save them for another time (February 2, 2009).

This comment, while I do not totally agree with it, is provocative, made me question my own charity knitting and how I feel about it from a woman's perspective. While I had vaguely thought about charity knitting from this perspective, I have never heard it expressed so clearly.

ReneeNicole (February 2, 2009) builds on LE’s comment from the perspective of classism:

I agree with Ellie's observation on the sexism involved in charity work. However, my very biggest issue with charity knitting is the overall thought that you can cheap out because it's for someone in need. I can't even count the amount of threads I've read on Ravelry where people will act 'embarrassed' about owning acrylic/novelty/old/ugly yarns and inevitably someone will tell them "oh just donate it/make items for charity." They may as well just say 'well, beggars can't be choosers.' I find these comments beyond offensive. Why should we be donating items we wouldn't wear ourselves?? While I understand everyone has different tastes and the items specifically donated to charity typically need to be easy to care for, the whole attitude just reeks of classism to me. Charity knitting is admirable if done for the right reasons and the few I've helped with made me feel as though maybe I was helping make this world just a teeny bit better.”

This thread of responses put charity knitting into a new light for me and made me more mindful about my own charity knitting. I have used some acrylic, potentially ugly, yarn
for my donated afghans and have often paused while filling out charity contributions on
my taxes, wondering if there was a way to work the time spent knitting into the overall
value of the donated blanket. While I will continue to knit for charity, I have a lot more to
think about while counting my stitches and rows.

Discussion #5: Do you prefer to knit alone or in a group? Why?

Discussion #5 was published on February 2, 2009 and received the last of its 19
comments on March 22, 2009. I opened this discussion with this personal opinion of
knitting alone and in groups:

I find both have their merits. Knitting alone - and for me this usually
means with the TV on or while reading - is the bee's knees. I usually sort-
of zone-out. This is so important to me because I have a mile a minute
mind that can hold about four separate trains of thought at a time and none
of them productively…However, knitting seems to siphon away all those
other random thoughts, compartmentalize them, and allow me time to
work with each one and try to resolve it. There are so few other activities
that put me in this state - artmaking, running, hiking. Knitting is by far the
most portable and convenient. Knitting in a group? Laughter also allows
me to enter the mind clearing state. Knitting in a group ultimately leads to
the kind of laughter that feels like a good ab work out and a good cry.
Knitting is the group safe zone and constant from which all the pain and
hilarity of life come pouring out. ‘What do you talk about in knitting
group?’ ‘Work, babies, womanhood, sex, movies, books, relationships,
fears, goals, food, drugs, politics, religion, bodily functions, family...oh!
and knitting, you know, yarn and stuff...’ (Knitted Flower Project,
February 2, 2009).

Many of the participants had similar opinions and saw the merits of both knitting alone
and with others. Usually they preferred to knit alone when working on an especially
complex project or when in need of solitary time. For example, Princessofallthingscrafty
(February 9, 2009) explains that, “I like knitting alone especially if I have a lot on my
mind. I can knit and release tension. I can go to other places in my mind or I can just knit and watch TV.” KnittyWitty (March 22, 2009) had a similar opinion, stating that, “I usually prefer to knit alone because it allows me to clear my mind and I can stay focused (especially with a complicated project).”

However, both of these knitters also commented that they loved to knit in groups. Princessofallthingscrafty (February 9, 2009) loves the “sisterhood” of knitting and how other knitters share her passion. KnittyWitty (March 22, 2009) finishes her comment by saying that “knitting seems to transcend many obstacles and connect all different kinds of people.” Most of the other blog knitters’ comments shared this theme. Knitting together allows the participants to communicate, teach, learn, laugh and meet new people.

Learning seemed to be an especially important theme. For example, while Janelle (February 20, 2009) thinks it is difficult to concentrate in a large group, she finds that

[T]here is an advantage of knitting socially, in a group, because if you are stuck you can ask someone next to you for help. If you are confused about reading a pattern someone is right there. I find learning from others is much easier than learning from a book or searching online.

Likewise, NextVanGogh (February 2, 2009) finds that knitting in a group not only teaches her new techniques but allows her to share her own knowledge. Dizzy Spinster mentions that, in addition to sharing knowledge, it is also satisfying to share accomplishments: “show-n-tell is great because you have a sense of accomplishment when you walk in wearing your newly finished sweater.” Finally Liela (February 16, 2009) takes a more formal look at the idea of knitting in groups as a way to learn:

One of my friends teaches at a Waldorf school, and she says everyone knits. It's part of the curriculum for teacher training, and all the kids learn
in the first grade. She says it's common for teachers to be knitting or spinning in meetings even. I think that would be fabulous! I would love to live in a world where everyone knits.

Over all, the most important aspect of knitting in a group seemed to be the friendship that comes from working together at a shared hobby. Pam (February 11, 2009) explains that working on something together can often ease the anxiety of meeting new people:

Such understanding and camaraderie! …Something about the distraction of the handwork helps to forge relationships. Sharing honestly without having to look deeply into everybody's eyes is easier than baring your soul through it's windows.

Knitting acts as an icebreaker for many of the participants and helps them to establish friendships. Bean Counting Knitter and Diana both express this in their comments. Bean Counting Knitter (February 4, 2009) states, “I was never part of a group growing up, ahhh the outcast, so for the first time I have finally found a group of people, well many of them anyway, where I am comfortable inside my skin.” Dianna (February 4, 2009) agrees with her and appreciates that knitting can, “…put all that ‘formal’ getting to know you stuff out of my mind.”

Laughter and humor were also common themes in the comments. Lindsey’s (February 2, 2009) comment especially captures the important of having a place to vent frustration and then laugh about that frustration.

I love knitting with people! We talk about everything, even stuff that pisses each other off. Whereas everywhere else you go you have to worry about saying stuff that will annoy or upset people. You can't talk about how you hate your coworkers at work. You can't talk about your letch professor at school. Everywhere you have to worry about stepping on toes.
Which doesn't mean all knitting groups are cool with you coming in and calling them bitches, setting the place on fire and leaving. Actually, no knitting group would be cool with that. But you get to go and vent when you find a good group. I knit alone all the time when I want to accomplish something….Although it's still not really knitting alone. Because when I finish stuff I want to share it with people so I'll take a picture of it, put it on my blog, bring it to knitting group to show off, take it into the yarn store to show them how the yarn knit up. I mean, knitting can definitely be something you do in private or you can make a social thing of it. Kind of like drinking.

I especially like how Lindsey’s comment demonstrates that even when one is knitting alone, she may not actually be alone. There is a show-and-tell thread to knitting that seems to carry through these comments. Whether one is sharing a piece in person or over the internet, sharing is often involved, thus underscoring why knitting in groups is so enjoyable.

Discussion #6: Do you feel knitting is a craft or an art form? Why?

This question was the first of a series I viewed as theoretical in nature. It was published on February 10, 2009 and received 12 comments, the last of which was posted on March 31, 2009. I introduced the question with quotes by Richard Rutt and Rozsika Parker from my Literature Review. I thought the question might be controversial, but the participants were very comfortable saying that it depends on the context or intention and often can be both. Some participants explored the question from a more theoretical point of view while other viewed it as an issue of practicality. For example, Brea (February 10, 2009) felt that function was the essential issue:

I think that this, as with most things included in the ‘is this art’ debate, is a matter of purpose. That is a grand way of saying, it depends. When I am
viewing the knitted projects for AIDS, soldiers, or the project we are all currently participating in: it is art. The reasons for these projects are beyond functionality and therefore more than a craft.

Princessofallthingscrafty (March 2, 2009) had a similar opinion and viewed it as an issue of purpose,

I think of knitting as both. Knitting is a craft for people that knit just to knit but don't see it as anything else. Knitting as an art is for people that see their knitting as a way to express themselves. My example of knitting as an art form is when you create your own patterns to fit your needs. You use colors and textures to express yourself.

These two comments begin to express how knitting can occupy both the realm of craft and art.

Some of the participants tried to answer the question by negotiating materials and process. Linda (February 11, 2009), for example states, “[t]he actual knitting seems like the craft part. But many kinds of art are ‘process heavy’ - metals, ceramics, printmaking, photography and those mediums are definitely art.” For Grace (February 14, 2009) the distinction was an issue of process: “[F]or me knitting started out as a craft, the day I decided to try my hand at designing and actually designed something that was well received it became an art…” The process of designing knitwear changed both her view of knitting and her relationship to knitting. NextVanGogh (March 31, 2009), however, feels that over all, knitting is an art that sometimes behaves as a craft:

On first instinct, I'm going with the ART answer here. To me the definition of art is CREATION and in knitting we are creating. We create fabric, we create garments, we create toys, or flowers. There can be a whole creative process from picking a pattern, to designing one…To me, it's no different than a painter choosing their medium from oils, watercolors, or gouache. Then they choose what they are painting on,
canvas, walls, stone and what they are painting with brushes, knives, etc. I put knitters in this same group - Artists. But then... I think about a carpenter. Is s/he a craftsperson or an artist...the answer of BOTH comes to mind. They create something out of wood, thereby my definition ART=CREATION and it is also craft. It takes skill and knowledge and can be sold.

Liela (February 16, 2009) grappled with this question both personally and from a theoretical perspective. I have quoted her at length:

I think the problem with this question is that first you have to decide what the definition of ‘art’ is. I don't think this is an easy question to answer. First of all, there are many different ways to use the word. If we are using ‘art’ to mean creative practice, then knitting qualifies. If it means decorative product, then it qualifies in a lot of cases. I think, though, that we are probably talking about the usage that delineates ‘high’ art from craft or the general practice. I think for an object to be art in that sense its primary purpose is not utilitarian. It has aesthetic value, but not necessarily "prettiness." It should be thoughtful/thought provoking and achieve some sort of commentary or exploration of some idea visually. Technical skill or virtuosity is not the main focus of the piece. In those terms, I don't think most knitting qualifies. It could, but it doesn't most of the time. I don't think that makes knitting less valuable. Craft is a wonderful thing in its own right. I think it is much more satisfying and in many ways more valuable. The problem is that we place a high value on the label ‘art’ and not on ‘craft.’ Why should something be less valuable because its primary function is to be beautiful and useful? I have more or less given up drawing because knitting is so much more satisfying. I like the physicality of drawing, but the product isn't all that satisfying, even when it is good. You just hang it up and look at it. Knitting doesn't have that same physical/mental/emotional euphoria as drawing, but it has its own blissful, soothing rhythm. I love the act of creating something useful with my hands. I don't do knitted art, I just practice the craft, and I like it that way.

After reading the ways in which each of the participants negotiated the question, I observe variation and nuance, absent a definitive response. This makes the question all
the more interesting and important. I feel that I could ask it over and over again and never achieve a definitive answer but, instead continue and enrich the ongoing dialogue.

I do feel that Pam’s (February 11, 2009) comment seems to sum up the dilemma eloquently, so I will finish the section with her remarks:

Knitting is both art and craft. The skills required to craft a garment or other object, are a perfect match for the artful eye that can arrange color and pattern, creating a finished object that is both beautiful and useful! It's a marriage made in yarn stashes everywhere, and neither art nor craft has the upper hand in the relationship. Rather, they work together, composing beautiful music in a very visual and tactile world!

*Discussion #7: Do you see knitting as activism or as political? Why/not?*

I published this post on February 15, 2009 and it received 14 comments, the last of which was posted on March 31, 2009. I presented this question with web links to some examples from my Literature Review chapter, Ming Yi Sung, Steal this Sweater, Red Sweaters, Hyperbolic crochet coral reef, and KnitPro, as examples to jumpstart the conversation. In the post I offered this opinion:

I do and I don't. Knitting has participated in some political actions - wartime knitting and charity knitting can both be seen as political. Suffragettes also packed their knitting on protests and embroidered their banners. But I think knitting may have just been along for the ride - a companion or medium through which protest occurred - but not inherently political. Currently, I think there are some artists and activists also using knitting, but is knitting political and activist or just the medium through which activism speaks? What do you think? Are there other artists using knitting in this way? Please share them with us.

I received a variety of responses, some of which agreed with the notion that that knitting was a medium but not inherently activist, others that described the act of knitting as
inherently activist. Still others disagreed with both opinions, while one or two responses linked knitting with other activist statements.

Ria’s (February 16, 2009) response encapsulates the opinion that knitting, while not inherently activist, can serve as a medium for activism:

I do not see knitting as inherently political or activistic (is that a word?)… People were wearing red to bring attention to heart disease being the no 1 killer of women. People wear pink to draw attention to breast cancer. Are red and pink activists. Hardly, they are just used that way. Rainbows are used for gay pride. But a rainbow after a spring rain is not political.

Ingrid (February 18, 2009) also agreed with this position, adding that, as a medium, knitting can be surprisingly effective:

I think that ultimately knitting is just another medium for political activism: I don't think that it is inherently political. I think that the reason why it makes such an impact is that it is that it has traditionally been seen as something somewhat domestic and as such stands out more when used out of context. Groups such as knitta 'bomb' lampposts and door handles with knitted cozies and post the fruits of their labor online.

In this context, knitting is unexpected. One would not normally associate the homey craft with the urban landscape. Juxtaposing these two environments, creates an interesting and effective tension.

Perhaps another way to think about knitting as a medium for activism is to examine the knitter’s intention. If one picks up their needles with the mindset that they are making an activist choice then the handknit becomes activist. LE (February 17, 2009) took this stance in her comment:

As to whether knitting is an inherently political act, I'm on the fence. There's two sides: whether the knitter intends to make a statement in the act of knitting or the use of hand knit goods, or whether observers read a
statement in the act or use. As a knitter, I don't intend to make political statements with my knitting…I make handknits because I like to knit, and I wear them because I like to wear what I have. Is that inherently political? Only if you take the stance that everything is politics.

Pam (March 5, 2009) extended this logic even further:

Knitting can be political, or an activism or anything. I occasionally see my knitting as a religious experience, even…not because I worship yarn, but because I can use my knitting to share with others the love I have experienced as a direct result of my faith experiences. It's just another way to give. What each knitter decides to give to is what makes knitting what it is. If you knit for a political campaign's advertisement, it is political. If you knit to protest something, the knitter becomes an activist. And if you knit to give gifts in the name of a deity, you are a religious knitter.

These responses are similar to the earlier responses about knitting as art or craft. In this sense it seems that one cannot arbitrarily assign labels to objects or actions without taking the time to examine intention.

Many of the participants commented that the act of knitting in itself could be seen as activist. Liela (February 18, 2009) finds that simply choosing something handmade over something mass-produced can be an activist decision:

I think knitting is also inherently activist, even if we are just knitting cute little scarves. We are programmed to expect perfect, mass-produced product and tend to dismiss imperfect, personal, hand-made creations in textiles, music, art, food. Even the act of knitting--choosing to do tedious manual labor when we could get a machine to do it for us--flies in the face of our cultural expectations. I think gardening, home cooking, sewing, and other luddite pursuits are similarly activist.

Andi (February 17, 2009) also felt that knitting could be inherently activist in the sense that knitting is a form of self-care:
…when I crocheted as a child I was considered ‘old fashioned’ and the whole idea of reclaiming what was seen as "women's work" with the new wave of knitting I guess is what is political about it. Truly it is freedom to choose. To choose whether to make a sweater or to buy one. To indulge in the luxury of taking the time to hand make something that could just as easily be bought, (I struggle with this in terms of being thought selfish; so I suppose that is also a political act, giving of time to oneself, self nurturing is too often the last on our list of priorities).

Stefanie (February 21, 2009) viewed knitting as a potentially inherently activist activity from a consumerist perspective. She would rather knit items and purchase yarn from small businesses and independent spinners and dyers then from chain stores:

I'm not so sure the simple act of me knitting is necessarily political - but the personal is political, so maybe it is...I don't set out to make any sort of political statement. I really admire people who find ways to make their craft draw attention to an issue that is important to them. Then again, if I didn't knit all the stuff that I do, I would have to go shopping a lot more and would probably end up giving a lot of money to big corporations and big box retailers...so in a way, knitting is my tiny way of supporting independent businesses and eschewing the mass-produced, overpriced crap of the chain stores.

Often, small decisions, like purchasing yarn from a local yarn store rather than Jo-Ann Fabrics or knitting a hat for winter rather then purchasing one, result in some significant impact or another. For example, when I purchase a skein of yarn for ten dollars from an independently owned yarn shop in my neighborhood that ten dollars stays in Columbus and contributes to the livelihood of the yarn store owner. That same ten dollars spent at Jo-Ann Fabrics constitutes little more than a drop in that corporation’s nationally accumulated ocean of assets. From this perspective, many individual actions and decisions become activist.
However, not everyone agreed. Debbie (February 21, 2009) did not find her knitting activist at all and commented, “ART? ACTIVISM? Obviously, I don't speak for anyone but myself when I say: Nothing I knit (not even flowers for Molly) is anywhere CLOSE to that serious. Sometimes a sweater is just a sweater.” I respect and sometimes agree with this opinion. If I sat down to knit everyday, focused on the activist nature of my knitting, the practice would become exhausting. This reiterates the importance of intention. Each knitter has her/his own reason for knitting, which needs to be respected.

Some of the participants linked their reason for knitting to other potentially activist causes such as charity, patriotism, and the environment. NextVanGogh (March 31, 2009) felt that the type of knitting determined the type of activism and uses charity knitting as an example:

My response would be it's more activist. I come to this conclusion because MANY out there at one time or on a continual basis do charity knitting. And making knits for a cause seems like an activist sort of ACTION. I think it is wonderful that so many care about the plight of others and give of their time and their volunteer activity knitting for a cause.

Grace (February 18, 2009) had a similar perspective but was cautious about the word political:

…I do think that charity knitting, and wartime knitting are patriotic and giving as opposed to political, maybe it’s just the way I define political. Politics to me mean doctrines, and -isms and laws, patriotism shows support, and giving back when others can't.

Finally, Robin (February 26, 2009) linked knitting with environmentalism and the decisions to use one type of yarn or fiber over another.
Some knitters use their knitting for a political statement, like…those who support environmental issues by using eco-friendly fibers only. Whether we realize it or not we all are participating in the politics of knitting by choosing where we buy our fibers.

Sustainability and environmentalism are important issues for a lot of knitters. There are vegan knitters who refuse to use animal fiber and knitters who will only use yarn made from organically raised plant or animal fibers. Personally, I choose not to use yarn spun from corn fiber, because I disagree with federal policies related to farm subsidies. These policies lead to an increasingly desperate scramble to unload corn, be it in fuel, food, or yarn. All of these small decisions overlap to produce a fabric of beliefs we wear daily. As a part of my life, knitting contributes threads to that fabric.

*Discussion #8: Do you equate knitting with feminism? Femininity? Both? Why/not?*

I published this post on February 23, 2009 and it received 16 comments. The last comment was posted on March 30, 2009. This was the only question that I introduced with a strong opinion. It is also the only question where I lost patience with a participant. I introduced the question with this post:

I do equate knitting with both feminism and femininity. I equate it with feminism because when I am knitting I feel incredibly capable, talented, intelligent, like a yarn rock star. I love to teach knitting, I love to read about other knitters, spend time with other knitters. In my experience, all of those things have brought me closer to women - really strong, talented, gifted women. That celebration of women's talent and ability is incredibly feminist. I equate knitting with femininity because knitting is a traditional women's craft. Yes, some men knit and we love them for it. But historically knitting, like sewing, like child rearing, has been for the women. I think that is wonderful! Why shouldn't we have a craft / art all our own that makes us feel capable and brings us together? Of course, I am able to say this because my fore mothers fought like hell for my right
to vote, buy property, live independently, and knit for fun and pleasure. So every few stitches is a little shout out to them. This is MY opinion and I'll admit, I get a little riled up about it. You may not feel this way at all and I think that is awesome too (Knitted Flower Project, February 23, 2009).

The very first comment from LE (February 24, 2009) upset me:

Sweet Zombie Jesus and the Skydaddy! My inner scientist is twitching. No. Emphatically not. I do not equate knitting with either feminism or femininity. To say A=B is to also say that B=A. There's no inherent order to the equals sign. Is feminism the same thing as knitting? What a silly question! If we draw a Venn diagram, do knitting and feminism have an intersection? (yes) Is it equal to their union? (hell no) Is one wholly within the other? (no, obviously) Ok, me and my soapbox will go back to the corner again.

It did not upset me because she disagreed with me, but because it was glib and a conversation stopper. It avoided actually answering the question through sarcasm and I feared it would prevent other participants from responding because it was so definitive and snarky. I struggled with how to address the issue. I know LE personally and I have watched her do this to other knitters at our West Side Columbus Knitters meet-ups. I know she is trying to be funny, but it can come across as judgmental and hurtful. In this instance I did feel a little hurt. The following day on February 24, 2009 I finally decided to address it in a comment in an attempt to open the conversation back up and clarify my own question further, “Eli, have you ever had an experience at that point of intersection...or at least near it? What was it like? What were you knitting? Who were you with? My inner qualitative researcher is twitching, eager to know.”

My fear, however, was unjustified. The participants were not afraid to respond, even to address LE’s remark. For example, Brea (February 25, 2009) opened her comment with, “I didn't really see the question as a math problem.” Liela (February 26,
2009) also addressed LE’s remark, “I agree--it's not a math problem; it's language, which is ambiguous and contextual.” In the end, LE (March 3, 2009) ended up leaving a second comment that addressed the question more directly:

…there's a big distinction between knitting because you need clothing (not feminist) and knitting as artistic expression (could be feminist). I knit. I am a feminist. I spent the last week thinking of times when those two spheres interact. Is it feminist to own my house? Yes, in a first wave sense. But even first-wavers wouldn't care that I own my own yarn stash, and some might even reject the consumerist nature of it. What about knitting for profit? for charity? for others? These are all anti-feminist acts, inasmuch as they are political at all. I don't do charity knitting partly on feminist grounds, but it's hard to claim that avoiding that quagmire makes the rest of my knitting somehow feminist. If the act of knitting, therefore, isn't feminist (at least, as I perform it), then what about projects? Which of my projects are feminist and either art or useful? I have a knitted uterus in menstrual red. I'm not sure if that's feminist or merely amusing. The other half of your question was about femininity. Being feminine, to me, is being practical, thrifty, and innovative with found materials. (I take the early Edwardian middle class view of being feminine. Blame the BBC.) *Obviously* knitting is feminine, and knitting in public is more feminine, for being a thrifty and industrious use of time. Noodling on the internet, however, is not feminine nor feminist nor knitting. So no more details on this subject now.”

I was so glad to see that she had taken the time to think about the question and answer it from her experience.

The other participants also took a lot of care in negotiating this question. Some agreed and some did not, some viewed it as a personal question while some addressed it from a broader perspective. There was also a lot of talk back in these comments, participants building on each other’s answers, agreeing and disagreeing. LE’s second response, for example, referenced this response by Stefanie (March 1, 2009) who in turn had referenced LE’s first response:
I guess inasmuch as I consider myself a feminist who knits, then yes. I don't know if it's specifically feminist, or making some sort of social, feminist statement, but it seems like a lot of crafty, feministy ladies are into the knitting, and I myself would definitely fall into that intersecting part of the Venn diagram. Seems like third-wave feminists especially are into it - as previously noted, first and possibly second wave feminists would probably not approve of something that smacks so much as traditional women's work (men originally owning hand-knitting way back when notwithstanding), but I like to think that now we are at the stage of reclaiming what was once seen as the "gentle" home arts and making them into our own artistic expression - instead of being unpaid work that you have to do so that you and the people in your family have clothing to wear.

This response also references Ria’s (February 25, 2009) comment, “Technically speaking - all the knitting guilds hundreds of years ago were male only - so the art form was male - the craft form at home was female.”

The participants were not hesitant to question one another. For example, in this exchange between Brea and Grace, Brea challenges Grace’s definition of femininity.

Grace (February, 24, 2009) begins by addressing LE’s first comment:

I have to agree with LE it has been my own personal experience that knitting and designing has definitely boosted my ego, but not done a thing for my stances on femininity or feminism. I think of knitting as a wonderful time filling creative outlet that allows me to express myself and sometimes make some money doing so.

Brea (February 25, 2009) both ties in the last question regarding activism and Grace’s comment:

To tie into the last post, this is also a way for women to demonstrate their concern over political issues in a way that has historically been "less threatening" to the men. While I am all for busting into congress and kicking ass and taking names for the war, it is also completely valid to do a knitted project of sweaters or socks for soldiers. I'll probably get more visibility doing the latter. I consider women taking action to have some foundation in feminism, regardless of the action. I think the bulk of this
question changes depending on how you take it and what your definitions are. For instance, Grace said: ‘it has definitely boosted my ego’ but doesn't connect that to femininity. I personally would.

These discussions added dimension as well as conversational elements, giving the comments a greater degree of dynamism.

There were also participants who presented their opinions without referencing other comments. Robin and Bean Counting Knitter addressed the question from their own experience growing up and how the popular opinion of knitting in regards to feminism and femininity has changed over time. Robin (February 26, 2009) explains,

Having come of age as an adult during the birth of the feminist movement, I remember when needle arts were frowned upon. The hippie in me back then loved my needle arts and defended my right to engage in them. As a senior citizen now, I see my knitting and my quilting as a link to the youth in my life- thru teaching, gifting and by my example. I am a complete person and they can be too engaging in a variety of activities regardless of gender.

Bean Counting Knitter (February 27, 2009) finds that, while she has always viewed knitting as a female activity, she observes subtle differences between how she views it now and how she viewed it when she was younger:

I was brought up to believe knitting was one of those things women do. My uncles and grandpa were/are hunters. Knitting was just one of many "things" that were only women's work. I think if asked while growing up I would have been more inclined to answer yes to both. In my adult life I have learned and have grown very comfortable with less of a line drawn in the sand. At this stage of my life I do not equate knitting as a female activity/art/craft. That said, all of my knitting friends are female. When I look for a project or even yarn selection I am inclined to pick something that is pretty, soft, sexy, or feminine. I would say that is tied to femininity.
These more personal interpretations are interesting because in some cases they are shared experiences. My own experience and perception of knitting as feminine is similar to Bean Counting Knitter’s experience. I had a father and male family friends who were hunters and carpenters. My mom, grandmothers, and aunts sewed, knit, crocheted, and quilted. As a child, such a division seemed like the natural state of things. Now I also have different opinions and see the distinctions as more blurred.

Finally, Liela and Andi saw the question, similar to the issue of art and activism, as one of intention as well as popular opinion. Andi, (March 30, 2009) for example, discusses both the knitter’s intention and the symbolism that is associated with knitting:

> When I was a kid knitting/crochet was not feminist at all, in fact the opposite. Now thanks to articles in Bust and scholarly entertainment books like KnitKnit. I perceive knitting to be thought of as more feminist. I think it is again the intention of the knitter. I was at Knitter's Mercantile yesterday and I'm fairly certain none of the women there would think that they were being feminist by knitting. On the feminine question, my husband and both sons knit, but there aren't many men in the knitting shops when I visit them. Some of it could be because of the mistaken idea that certain activities should only be done by one sex or the other. And I don't know how a knitting guy would go over in a sports bar. I don't think of knitting as only belonging to women (a.k.a. feminine) just as I don't think of most activities as being only feminine or masculine. But that doesn't mean that cultural symbols, characters in books, etc don't have an effect on what activities we expect to see a man or a woman engaging in.

Liela (February 26, 2009) also refers to symbolism and intention in her comment on page 106. She discusses how she thinks knitting is symbolic of our culture’s concept of femininity. At the same time she feels that valuing traditionally feminine activities can, in fact, feminist. In her discussion she references the importance of choice. I can knit as a hobby or knit with feminist and activist undertones because first and second wave
feminists paved the way for that choice and the revaluing crafts like knitting, quilting, cooking, and sewing.

This Discussion elicited some fascinating and thoughtful responses. In addition, it challenged my role as a facilitator of the conversation, drawing me into the duel role of participant and researcher and underscoring the potential messiness of qualitative inquiry.

Discussion #9: How do others respond to you when you knit in public?
Do you have a particular story?

Discussion #9 was posted on March 1, 2009. It received 15 comments and the last comment was posted on March 31, 2009. I introduced my own knitting in public experience with the following explanation:

When I first started knitting while I was in college I was working as a bartender at a pool hall called Suzi Cue. Incidentally, this is where I met my dear, sweet, patient boyfriend. On slow nights I would knit behind the bar. This was before the smoking ban...and when I was still a smoker...and so my sad little knitting projects smelled like ash and booze, but aside from that, they made for great conversation starters. I heard many stories about grandmothers, mothers, and even a grandfather whose wife taught him to knit after he had a stroke to help him regain dexterity in his hands. Now that I'm writing about it, I guess that is where the early seeds for this project were planted. In addition to the bar I knit in other bars, all over the Ohio State University campus, in coffee shops, the doctor's office, at work (when I worked at an elementary school I ended up teaching a couple students), at the beach, on the bus, on the subway (when I was in Germany this summer), at lectures, in the airport, on the airplane, in the movie theatre, at parks...I've pretty much been known to plop down anywhere and whip out my knitting and just about every time, without fail, people want to know what I'm making, where I learned, is it difficult, how long does it take? And then they tell me their own stories about people they know that knit, how they used to knit, how they would like to learn.

(Hand Knitted Flower Project, March 1, 2009)
All participants were public knitters too, though some had more interesting experiences than others. For example, my perception of knitting in public has been forever changed by the story Dianna told and that I quoted along with her flower on page 109.

Princessofallthingscrafty (March 2, 2009) actually found herself educating a coworker about the popularity of knitting:

I told a co-worker that I was going to a knitting camp two weekends ago. She went off the deep end. She said I was too young to be knitting, that was something that Grandma's did, how was I ever going to meet a man knitting and that I needed to go out with younger and single friends. So, you know I had to educate her a little. I told her obviously she hadn't kept up with the trend of knitting because there were a lot of younger people out there knitting now and some men knit also. I didn't go into the eligible bachelor thing because I don't know many men knitters and I don't know their background to say their eligibility but I was just flabbergasted by her response.

Many knitters find themselves in the role of educator in this situation. Non-knitters often have misconceptions about knitting, want to know about the process and project, and some even want to learn the hobby or start again. Grace (March 2, 2009) had this experience recently, “…a former knitter asked me to bring her some of my patterns so she could get started again! I knit everywhere and if more then 3 hours go by without knitting in it I start to get antsy.” The book faerie (March 2, 2009) is another participant who encourages interested people to learn, as does Pam (March 5, 2009):

I love to encourage people who say, ‘I could never do that. It looks hard.’ to try it sometime, and I have been accused of being a knitting evangelist. To date, I don't think I have totally converted anyone, but I have piqued a little interest here and there.
NextVanGogh (March 31, 2009) also seems to fall in the “knitting evangelist” category, especially during her experience in a hotel lobby and a busy restaurant:

This couple came down and sat at an adjoining couch, each had a book to read. And after a few pages and my clicking away, the lady looked up and started chatting. I proudly showed her my progress and the pattern and she was quite impressed. And she had that look in her eye, like a spark and I strongly felt whenever she got back to home she MIGHT just look into becoming a knitter. From what she said it didn't sound like she had knit before, but she definitely seemed interested in taking it up. I hope she did. More recently, like a few weeks ago I was at a busy restaurant waiting for our table and pulled a project out of my purse. Several of the restaurant staff walked by and gawked at me, one of the gals finally said, ‘Now that's something I need to do!’ My response was, ‘Yes you SHOULD!’

In my own experience, knitters are not overly protective of their craft. Everyone who wants to learn is invited to do so. In fact, certain knitters may even be willing to teach the basics as soon as they are asked.

Another increasingly common experience is the challenge of airport knitting. Since 9/11, airport security and procedures have changed dramatically. While knitting at my flight gate, I have had a few people approach me to ask how I got my needles past security. I explain that knitting needles and crochet hooks are approved on planes at the discretion of security checkpoint officials. In fact, one of the knitters in WSCK carries the FFA approved items list with her when she travels. Stefanie (March 2, 2009) relates her own experience, “…about a half-year after 9/11, I was knitting on a plane with some metal needles (long straight ones - couldn't believe I got it past security!) My seatmate looked pretty disturbed.”

Often, the knitting in public experience simply results in a story as with Bean Counting Knitter:
I knit everywhere I can get away with it. Often times people won't say anything but occasionally one will ask what I am making. I have a regular weekly meeting with a friend to knit at a local coffee shop. Recently on a morning following one of these meetings I popped into the same coffee shop and one of the workers, an older gentleman, said were you here knitting last night? I of course said yes. He went on to tell me a friend of his tried to teach him to knit but he just couldn't get the hang of it. I thought that was pretty cool. (March 7, 2009)

People seem to be drawn to knitters knitting in public. Perhaps it is because knitting seems unexpected, because it reminds people of a loved one, or because people are just intrigued by the color and texture of the yarn or project. Knitting seems to engage people and draw out their personal experiences and stories. It seems fitting that knitting in public planted the early seeds of this thesis.

Discussion #10: Have you ever taught someone to knit? Do you have a particular story?

I discussed in Discussion #3 the importance of learning to knit, how the participants often associate the experience with a loved one, a place, or a particular time in their lives. Teaching someone to knit can have similar associations. Discussion #10 was published March 9, 2009 and received 15 comments. The final comment was published March 29, 2009. I introduced the discussion with this story about teaching one of my former students to knit:

I have taught a few people to knit. I think my favorite story comes from teaching one of my former third grade students. I was working at an elementary school as an after school program teaching assistant. On relaxed days I would knit while the kids played. A few of the students wanted to learn so I told their parents what they needed to buy - some simple acrylic yarn and shorter size 7 or 8 needles. This particular third
grader really took to it. She was kind of a wild child but super creative - she wanted to be a fashion designer and was taking drawing classes at one of the local art schools. Knitting seemed to really mellow her out and help her focus. One day, a group of us were knitting and chatting. I happened to be watching this future fashion designer just as she reached the end of her row. Instead of flipping her needles and working back the other way, she started knitting backward along the same needle! Amazed, I asked her who taught her to knit backwards because it certainly wasn't me, I don't have those kinds of skills! She shrugged and said she had been experimenting at home and just figured it out. I was blown away. Future in fashion, working with textiles? Not a doubt in my mind (Knitted Flower Project, March 9, 2009)

I have similar memories of all the people I have taught and really enjoy the process of teaching people to knit. Teaching forces me to identify each of the steps that seem so natural and fluid for me, and to simplify them. In addition it is so satisfying to share something I love with someone else. Some of the participants really enjoy the process of teaching knitting. The most common response was mothers teaching daughters. Susan (March 9, 2009) tells this story about teaching her daughter:

Several years ago, I taught my youngest daughter to knit. Last year, pregnant with her first baby (my first grandchild), she had to be on bed rest for several months. So we made a quick trip to the LYS to pick out yarn and needles for a baby blanket. She ended up going with her own design, and the blanket came out so nice. It's a little big for my grandson, but by this summer he will be able to enjoy it. I think with knitting, crocheting, and even spinning there is some kind of fiber gene that gets passed on. I’m very proud of my daughter's knitting ability.

Given that many of the participants learned from a mother or grandmother, it seems natural that they would then teach their own daughters. Robin (March 9, 2009) also taught her daughters and explains that they passed the craft on as well, “I've taught many people to knit, my 3 daughters… one of my daughters taught her friends at school to knit
and they did a service project knitting caps for premature babies.” Perhaps the simplicity and portability of the craft makes it easy to teach and so the skills are passed along, person-to-person, generation-to-generation.

Dianna (March 10, 2009) has a somewhat different story about teaching that identifies another knitting trend:

While a Family and Consumer Science teacher with the Ohio Department of Youth Services (a.k.a. Maximum-security prison for 12-21 year old felons), I started an after school knitting group for the young men in the institution. During the several years I sponsored the group, I taught the guys to knit, then to follow the patterns for the service projects. They knit hats and booties for preemies, Linus blankets, and slippers. I figure I probably taught 75-100 young men to knit during that time. One of the guys loved knitting so much he wanted to be allowed to knit on the dorm. Because knitting needles can be used as a weapon (you wouldn't believe all the things that can be used as a weapon!) he wasn't allowed to have his project on dorm. During the hours he spent in his room he unraveled his thermal blanket, and using 2 pencils, he knit a scarf. Very touching - totally against the "rules" so he got in big trouble for destroying state property (the blanket). Before the Corrections Officer who found it threw it away he allowed the young man to show me his accomplishment. Funny thing - growing up neither of my daughters wanted to learn to knit or crochet. They have both taught themselves - one to crochet and the other to knit.

Increasing, both male and female prisoners knit. Many women’s prisons, orphanages, and halfway houses in 17th and 18th century America and England required knitting as a way to keep the residents productive and out of mischief, to give them a marketable skill, and to improve society’s impression of them (Rutt, 1987; Brown & Brown, 2008). Recently knitting and crochet programs have experienced resurgence in prisons. Christiansen (2003), a writer for Interweave Knits Magazine, visited Jackson Correctional Institution, a medium-security male prison in Black River Falls, Wisconsin where the crochet and
knitting classes create hats and blankets for charity. The goals of the program are not unlike the 17th and 18th century counterparts.

While some knitters were comfortable teaching others the basics, Lindsey (March 11, 2009) enjoys teaching people who already have some of the basics:

I've taught several people how to knit and I'm always amazed at how fast they pick it up or how they take it and make it their own. People's creativity is limitless when they let it be. Usually people learn the knit and purl and then stop but my favorites are people who already know the basics and want help learning more. I recently taught my friend how to knit in the round and within a week she had made seven hats. It's always incredible when you teach someone a craft because then in everything they make you get to take a fraction of a credit.

Lindsey identifies the satisfaction that comes from watching a student apply his/her own creativity, reaching out beyond the basic skills. This constitutes one of the true joys of teaching.

However, there were some knitters who do not teach. For Bean Counting Knitter (March 9, 2009) and Andi (March 29, 2009) the issue is technique. Both have non-traditional knitting styles that are difficult for them to teach and a student to model. For LE (March 10, 2009) it is an issue of patience and philosophy. In her quote on page 102 she explains that she feels new knitters often need more “hand holding” and guidance then she wants to give them. She is an experimental knitter and does not like to follow patterns or teach others to follow them. I find this interesting because I have watched LE work with new knitters and she is surprisingly patient, funny, and understanding. It is true that she prefers her students to start with projects that are slightly more complex and creative.
The act of teaching knitting seems to be just as special as the experience of learning. Passing down one’s craft to a friend, loved one, or someone who is simply eager to learn is a uniquely enjoyable experience. The skills live on and the student, in turn, develops their own special memory of learning to knit.

Discussion #11: How do you feel about personal stories as forms of research? What about the use of a blog or artmaking?

After eleven weeks of sharing stories and thoughts about knitting and producing a knitted artwork, I introduced this discussion topic on March 16, 2009. It received 5 comments, the last of which was posted on March 29, 2009. I prefaced the question with my own concerns about the legitimacy of such research:

One of the goals of this project is to interweave your stories and words with my ‘formal’ historical research. I put formal in quotes because I feel that your blog quotes and the flowers you have knit are just as formal and valid as the theory and history books and articles I read for the other chapters of my thesis. All of it consists of the stories and narratives of people - both the academic writing and this blog. Traditionally, research has not looked like this - anecdotal, personal, narrative, or in artwork form. Narrative research and arts-based research attempts to challenge the idea that research must take place in a laboratory or a library. Instead, research can involve individual stories, the process of artmaking, and can happen in an online forum. It can be a hard sell (Knitted Flower Project, March 16, 2009).

I was curious to see the types of responses I received and, in the end, was disappointed that I did not receive any contrary responses. However, the participants did not agree blindly and had some insightful comments about why they thought this type of research is valid.
Grace (March 16, 2009) addressed the issue from the learner’s perspective stating that “…we all learn in different ways, and diversity as to the ways of learning about something make the willingness to learn that much more viable.” Robin (March 16, 2009) approached the question from a historical perspective using examples like quilting, plays, and poetry:

Personal stories have a role in research. Many historical researchers rely on diaries, captains’ logs, etc. for information. These accounts provide a glimpse into the lives of everyday people who lived in the culture being studied rather than the official information and interpretation provided by governmental sources. Artists’ words about their work provide insight that you might miss otherwise. I always found that the interpretation by scholars of what a "poet or playwright" meant is colored by their own experiences. As a quilter, I love to know what the quilters’ choices were informed by. How they chose their fabrics and shapes. Knitting is usually more restrained since garments have to fit, scarves need to be functional etc., but the knitters’ choice of yarn or pattern can be significant.

Pretty Knitty (March 23, 2009) more specifically addressed the use of blogs:

I think personal stories are a great form of research. Additionally, especially in this digital age, a blog is a great way to reach your target audience, in this case, knitters. And if you are an artist, then it is only natural that you would use art as a part of your project. Part of learning, and growing up, is figuring out who you are and embracing that in your choices of hobby, friends and even career. If you are doing what you were made to do, you will find greater joy and fulfillment, even if life takes you down bumpy roads.

I find it interesting that she relates one’s type of work, in my case art, to the type of research I would choose to pursue. It does seem natural that writers would research through writing, scientists would research through science, and even chefs would research through cooking.
Princessofallthingscrafty went a step further and identified the blog itself as an art form, “I like how you are using the blog to bring us all together to tell our stories. I think that is art right there! It all ties into each other (March 24, 2009).” Though I had not thought about it until I read her comment, I agree with her. In the same way that the flowers are artifacts of the project, the blog exists as a similar artifact. It is made up of photographs and words, has an aesthetic quality, and an audience.

Finally, Andi (March 29, 2009) identifies novels, oral stories, and blogs as forms of valid research in her comment:

History is more than just the actions of people written about in the history books, it is also the result of those actions on the rest of people who were not famous or ‘important’ enough to be considered worthy of documenting. Personal stories are how the rest of history is fleshed out. I'm sure many women my age remember reading the Laura Ingalls Wilder books, and those stories made that time period much more alive for many of us than anything we learned in our history classes. Same thing with asking my grandfather about his experiences during WW II or my uncle about his time in Vietnam. Blogs provide another way of showing what we as a culture are thinking about and doing, yesterday I noticed three separate people who had named their newborns Tallulah, which I'm sure anyone researching for those ‘most popular baby names’ lists would find interesting.

This comment, especially, seems to identify the essence of narrative research and the parallel histories that exist for times and events. Laura Ingalls Wilder’s account, though in the form of a novel, is based in experience, intersects with other “non-fiction” accounts of that time period, and acts as an accessible, popular, historical document. Likewise, some of the most memorable accounts of war are those told by soldiers. Their stories, which in some cases challenge the accepted account, place the dates and events in a context of feeling and experience. Andi also mentions blogs as a current method of
sharing information and recording history. It could be argued that this is the most recorded time ever in our history, a record with the greatest variety of perspectives, opinions, and personal histories. I struggle to understand how future researchers might sift and translate the wealth of digital and analog information that exists around us.

Discussion #12: What do you think? Did you enjoy participating in this project? If so, why? If not, why not? What was your favorite part? Your least favorite?

This final question was published on March 23, 2009, received 9 comments, and the final comment was published on March 29, 2009. This question is a prime example of how online data can be incomplete. If any of the participants disliked the project they did not comment to that effect. Perhaps if I had communicated with each participant individually or used an additional web-based survey technique, I might have received some negative feedback. The participants that did comments had similar responses; they enjoyed reading each other’s comments, crafting their own responses, the simplicity and speed of knitting the flowers, and opportunity to use up left over yarn for those flowers. Many of the comments mention enjoying the act of participation, in and of itself. Many of them also mention looking forward to reading the finished thesis.

For example, Robin (March 23, 2009) said:

I was thrilled to participate in this project. I loved hearing how others view their knitting. The flowers were easy to make. The hardest part for me was getting them ready to mail to you. I’m looking forward to reading your thesis and seeing the exhibition.
Grace (March 23, 2009), had similar though brief comments, “I really enjoyed every aspect of the project and I am so glad I got to take part, I wish you lots of luck with your thesis!” as did Ria (March 23, 2009), “I had fun! Used up some scrap yarn. Liked leaving comments about the questions, really loved reading everyone else's comments.”

Pretty Knitty (March 23, 2009) highlighted the fact that this topic is meaningful to her, adding personal value and a sense of responsibility to the experience:

I had fun! I like to write, and your topic is something I love, so it was great for me! I think my favorite part was seeing my flowers on the blog. I know I am not famous, but my flowers are! Yippee! Seriously, I only hope that you had fun with this. I can't wait to see photos of the finished project! I was a little bummed that I didn’t seem to keep up with the discussions in a timely manner…but I think I did answer almost every question! I hope you score well.

In a similar way, Bean Counting Knitter (March 24, 2009) now relates the project to an event in her life, “I enjoyed working on this project. One thing I will always remember is being on the couch sick, watching the Inauguration of our new President, and the only thing I had enough energy to knit where little flowers.” I feel honored that my project will be linked with her memory of the presidential inauguration.

KnittyWitty (March 29, 2009) identifies the educational aspect of the project as important and memorable and sees the project as a potential inspiration for others:

I loved participating in the project! I wish I had discovered the project earlier! (I've only had a couple weeks) Of course I enjoyed knitting the flowers, but also looking at knitting in a different way. The blog questions really made me think about the history of knitting and how as women we continue the tradition, but in a modern way. I like how knitting has become a creative art as well as a traditional craft. I also liked being a part of a community of knitters whose individual work will together inspire others and different thinking about knitting.
This give and take between the personal and historical, individual and group, was an important theme across the project. KnittyWitty encapsulates the concept in this comment.

Finally, Andi (March 29, 2009) discusses the way in which the blog format allowed her to comment and form opinions more freely and without the fear of immediate negative feedback:

I enjoyed knitting the flowers, it was fun to find use for the scrap ends of yarn I save because they are too pretty to throw out (especially loved the ones I made with the Noro ends). I was sorry to not keep up with the discussions as much as I’d hoped, but I know life gets in the way. I always freeze up when trying to define things as ‘why do you do this’ because I’m so conditioned by my family and even some friends to expect to be told that I am ‘wrong’, so answering some of the questions was more difficult than it had to be. But I learned I could answer the questions, and if anyone here told me I was ‘wrong’ I didn't see the comments that came after mine (yet).

The anonymity of the blog format allows freedom. In addition, because the comments are written and not spoken, it allows the participants to read back over their words and feel confident about their responses before they post them. Finally, because earlier comments are preserved, participants can go back and review what has been said and use these thoughts in their own responses.

It would have been interesting to receive some negative feedback and criticism. I imagine some of the participants expressed their criticism through their rates of participation or in their absence during the critique. I discuss this in the next chapter and hypothesize why some questions may have received more responses than others. In addition, it may be that the nature of the project is difficult to criticize. While some
potentially controversial topics were explored, the overall tone of the posts and comments remained courteous and conversational. In the end, I do acknowledge the limitations of my own project. In the following Discussion chapter I elaborate on the elements of the project that I feel could have been stronger and how I might approach things differently in future projects.

Section Conclusion

This chapter presents the wealth of online data produced by the Knitted Flower Project blog, highlighting the participants’ comments and stories, as well as the common threads and themes. The following Discussion chapter analyzes the data as it relates to the Literature Review, Methodology, and itself. Specifically it identifies parallels between the genealogy of social and community knitting and this project. In addition, it explores the results of this project under the lens of A/r/tography and the corresponding methods of Autoethnography and Knitalong. Finally, I will discuss issues of validity and potential applications of the key elements of this project.

1 The quotes from the comments come from the discussion section (all quotes in Discussion #1 are comments to the Discussion #1 post, etc.) unless otherwise noted. Quotes are cited by participant author and date stamp.

2 “Knitted Flower Project” is my identity as the administrator of the blog. All of my posts and comments have this identity stamp.

3 Continental, throwing, and English are all styles of knitting. One’s style is determined by how one holds the needles and yarn and makes and transfers new stitches from one needle to the other. Many contemporary knitters are combination knitters meaning they use a hybrid of one or more traditional styles.
Garter, stockinette, reverse stockinette, and seed stitch are all basic stitch patterns. Garter means to knit every stitch every row. Stockinette means to knit on the right side or odd rows, and purl on the wrong side or even rows. Reverse stockinette means to purl on the right side or odd rows, and knit on the wrong side or even rows. Seed stitch means to alternate between knit and purl stitches on every other stitch and every other row. It is called seed stitch because the resulting fabric is bumpy like seed spread out on a flat surface.


Yarn-over (yo) increases the number of stitches on the needles by adding a stitch. It also creates a hole in the fabric and therefore is used mostly in lace knitting.

Noro is a brand of yarn.
FINISHING, BINDING-OFF AND WEAVING IN THE ENDS

I have sub-titled this final chapter *Finishing, Binding-Off and Weaving in the Ends* for a few reasons. Finishing is the term used for the final details of a knitted project including binding-off, weaving in the ends and other details like sewing on buttons, and seaming. Binding-off is the method of securing the live stitches so the finished piece will not ravel. It is usually done by passing each stitch over the next one until there is only one stitch left and then securing that stitch with the tail of the yarn. Weaving in the ends is the process of sewing all the loose yarn ends from changing a ball of yarn, seaming, or casting-on and binding-off into the body of the piece so they do not show on the right side of the garment. These processes are similar to what I plan to do in this chapter. I want to bind-off the live stitches and tie the ends back into the earlier chapters.
The term finishing may be a little misleading. The piece is finished, in that the knitting is finished but the piece is also just beginning. Lindsey (Discussion #5, February 2, 2009) describes this in the following comment:

…when I finish stuff I want to share it with people so I'll take a picture of it, put it on my blog, bring it to knitting group to show off, take into the yarn store to show them how the yarn knit up.

In a sense, this thesis, like the knitted piece is also just beginning. Like Lindsey says, now that the knitting is finished, the wearing and showing-off can begin. While I may be finished writing this thesis, it is in sharing the thesis that other researchers can reference it, participants can read and comment upon it, and I can revisit it. The purpose of this concluding chapter is both to finish the piece and begin a new discussion.

In this chapter I discuss the process of producing the artwork and the written thesis from the knitted flowers and words of the participants. I will also knit together the themes explored in the Literature Review and Methodology as they relate to the flowers and comments in the Data chapters. I explore some potential applications of this project to future projects and how the project applies to my Arts Policy and Administration and Museum Education studies. Finally, I will discuss issues of validity, the project’s successes, and areas that may need improvement.

Authorship, Artmaking, and Writing with the Work of Others

This process was a constant give and take both in making the artwork and administrating the blog. I was always hyper-aware of my role as researcher and trying to
negotiate when it was appropriate to step beyond that role and remain within it. I felt this
tension most when I was working on the final artwork and when I was writing the Data
chapters. I wanted to best represent the knitting and the voices of the participants, but at
the same time, I had a limited scope of their personalities, as they too were negotiating
how much to reveal and reserve both on the blog and in the flowers.

Figure 6.1: Building the supports for the panels

Figure 6.2: Painting and staining the birch panels
The artwork is composed of the knitted flowers and handwritten comments from the blog on painted and stained birch panels backed with poplar stretchers. The flowers are organized on the panels by size and color, but there is no precise pattern or formula. I put the artwork together without input from the participants. I posted process pictures (Figures 6.1 – 6.3) with the opportunity for comments, but the participants that did comment on those process pictures did not offer suggestions and only mentioned that the progress looked good. Similarly, the participants did not comment on the process of writing this thesis. I did send the Introduction to those who wanted to read it. However, no one returned it with comments or suggestions, though I encouraged them to. Perhaps they did not have time or they did not have the desire.

I do not see this as problematic but as a nuance of authorship in this type of project. While the participants are co-authors, ultimately, I am the author of the thesis and the artwork. This is the case for several reasons. First, the project occurred across distance and an extended period of time. Logistically it would have been nearly
impossible to bring all the participants together to write the thesis and compose the artwork. Second, much of the research both for the literature review and the methodology had to be done prior to actually recruiting participants in order to build a protocol to carry out the project. Finally, the project is my passion and has required many hours of reading, researching, writing, discussing, and thinking, multiple small failures and successes, and multiple consultations with mentors and colleagues. It has been a part-time job for two years and has required a kind of commitment that, as a graduate student I am in a unique and privileged position to offer. So while the participants and I built an online community and a dialogue that continued with the hand knit flowers, the communal nature of the entire piece, including the artwork and thesis had its limits.

![Figure 6.4: Knitted Flower Project artwork exhibited at Wonder Knit](image)

I tried to develop ways to work with these limitations. In the artwork I decided to include comments and quotes from the blog, as in Chapters 4 and 5, as a way to highlight the voices of the participants. In the artwork I tried to keep the background simple and
earthly and organize the flowers in a way that demonstrated their individuality. In addition, I added comments from the blog to the panels. I tried to place comments on the panels in such a way that contradictory opinions and experiences could show through, again to underscore the individuality of the participants. Finally, I chose to exhibit the work in a local yarn shop as opposed to an art gallery, as shown in Figure 6.4, in order to make the work more accessible to the participants that created it and other knitters in the Columbus area. It is exhibited with an information panel that briefly describes the project and lists all the participants who wished to be credited. It also invites viewers to visit the blog and read more of the discussions and comments Appendix F.

Authorship is a complex issue in this type of arts-based, community research. By making certain choices about method, I had to make other sacrifices in scope. For example, by using the blog and inviting participants to contribute across a distance, I sacrificed the opportunity to knit and speak with them face-to-face. In addition, by working with in a twelve-week time frame, I sacrificed the opportunity for extended participation on the artwork and thesis paper. At the same time, communicating across the blog and with in a certain time frame was important to the viability of the project. I see this issue of authorship in community artwork and writing as a rich area of inquiry with great potential for future projects. As researchers and members of the community increasingly collaborate on a variety of projects, authorship and the roles of researcher and community member will become increasingly blurred.
Literature Review Revisited

In the Literature Review chapter I covered several issues and themes that I then explored through the discussion questions. They included the link between women and fiberwork, specifically knitting; the art / craft separation and its implications for knitting; and the extraordinary nature of knitting, which including knitting as artistic expression, a social outlet, an opportunity for professionalism, and a potential means of subversion. In addition, the chapter explores why the craft continues today and how it is applied in everyday life including artistic expression and community knitting such as charity knitting and community knitted art projects. Overall, the participant’s comments and stories supported these themes with some interesting exceptions.

Women and Fiberwork Revisited

The connection between knitting and femininity and knitting and feminism was a strongly debated topic. The participants seemed comfortable connecting knitting to womanhood and their female heritage as described in the Discussion #1 subheading Heritage, Foremothers, and Womanhood. In this context, knitting is seen as a connection to one’s foremothers and that connection added to the appeal of knitting. However, when a question was posed that linked knitting to femininity or feminism as in Discussion #8 the conversation became more divided and intertwined. Perhaps this is due to the words feminism and femininity. These words can be very loaded with meaning and there are a
variety of ways, both positive and negative to define them. A more common reason cited by participants such as Grace (February 24, 2009), the book faerie (March 2, 2009), and Pam (March 5, 2009) is that they simply do not see a connection in their day-to-day lives. At the same time, there were participants who did experience the connection personally and more broadly including, Liela (February 26, 2009), Bean Counting Knitter (February 27, 2009), and Stefanie (March 1, 2009). The most common response landed somewhere in the middle where participants saw a link, but perhaps not a strong or personal link, or considered the connection an issue of intention, as in, if one knits with feminist or feminine intentions then one’s knitting is feminist or feminine.

One issue that is important to address is the gender of the participants. As I mentioned in the Introduction, some of the participants were anonymous and no one was asked to reveal their gender at anytime, yet it seems that all of the participants were women. This, in itself, seems to underscore a connection between knitting and women. In addition, when the participants discussed their knitting groups and social knitting experiences these groups were predominantly women. There are a few exceptions, for example, Andi’s (March 30, 2009) husband and sons knit. In this particular group, though, knitting seems to be a female activity.

The Art / Craft Split Revisited

Discussion #6, which asked whether knitting is an art or craft, had similar results. Overwhelmingly the response was that knitting had the potential to be both and that it usually depends on the intention of the knitter. One thread that was particularly
interesting actually subverted the traditional hierarchy that has existed between art and craft. Stefanie (February 16, 2009) and Liela (February 16, 2009) both commented that the pragmatic and utilitarian nature of knitting that usually defines it as a craft and makes it less desirable, in their opinion actually elevates it above art. Rather than existing solely for aesthetic value and its ability to provoke thought, it can do both of those things and be used as clothing or for the home.

The Extraordinary Nature of Knitting Revisited

The themes addressed in The Extraordinary Nature of Knitting section appeared across each of the twelve discussion topics. Knitting as a form of artistic expression was mentioned in Discussion #1 as one of the reasons many of the participants knit and was unpacked further in Discussion #6. They cited selecting yarn types and colors, designing patterns, altering existing patterns, and exploring freeform knitting as activities associated with their own artistic expression. Knitters like Ingrid, Stefanie, Susan, Cyndi in B.C., and Andi, have a background in or are actively pursuing the arts and see knitting as an extension of those artistic pursuits. Overall, there was a strong link between knitting and artistic expression.

Similarly, the participants identified knitting as a social outlet. In Discussion #1 there was a strong thread between knitting and friendship and knitting as a conversation starter. In addition the acts of learning and teaching knitting explored in Discussion’s #3 and #10 brought out the social aspects of knitting. To some extent, the subject of knitalongs in Discussion #4 also addressed social knitting. Discussion #5, however,
directly addressed the difference between knitting alone and knitting in groups and the comments highlighted the importance of knitting with other people and how enriching that experience can be. Like the connection to artistic expression, the social aspect of knitting, including making friends, teaching, learning, and sharing stories, is of great importance to the participants.

In the experience of the participants, there is no longer a strong correlation between knitting and professionalism. Only two participants had experience with yarn and knitting as a direct source of income. Cyndi in B.C. (January 5, 2009, Discussion #1) states, “Knitting helps me earn a living. I love being able to create one-of-a-kind items, play with colours and create textures. It's a great job!” and ReneeNicole’s (January 17, 2009, Discussion #1) family used to own a yarn shop.

However, if professionalism is defined more broadly than a few other experiences may apply. For example, Dianna’s (March 10, 2009) response to Discussion #10 describes how she taught knitting to her male students in the Ohio Department of Youth Services. Dianna applied knitting to create a successful and popular program at the correctional institution. While this does not directly align with the historical examples such as women doing piecework or working for department stores as knitting teachers and consultants, it is still an application of knitting in a professional setting. This is not to say that in general, knitting, yarn production, yarn sales, and knitwear design are not still professional opportunities, but this particular group did not have strong connections between professionalism and knitting.
Discussion #7 highlighted knitting as subversive or activist and like the connection between feminism and femininity, or the role of knitting as an art or a craft, the overarching opinion was that it is an issue of intention. If one knits with activist intentions then his or her knitting is activist and knitting can be a good medium for activism because it is unexpected. However, Liela (February 18, 2009) and Stefanie (February 21, 2009) saw knitting as inherently activist in that the choice to knit a hat rather than purchase it can undermine consumerist tendencies. Andi (February 17, 2009) saw the choice to knit and invest time and attention into making something for one’s self or engage in an activity of self-care as activist. Andi’s view of self-care as activist provides a connection to the Methodology chapter, which looks at knitting as a form of self-care and care for others through the lens of A/r/tography. This is addressed below in Methodology Revisited. In the next section I revisit the community aspects of knitting and how they relate to artmaking.

Charity Knitting and Community Art Knitting Revisited

In the knitting as a creative outlet discussion, a few of the participants had backgrounds in the arts and some had participated in arts-based knitalongs before. Likewise, most participants affirmed the social qualities of knitting and the importance of knitting groups and gatherings. In this section, to avoid repetition, I am going to focus on charity knitting which seemed to be the most popular form of community knitting in the group.
Though there was some debate, sparked by LE, about whether charity knitting was sexist, the participants’ general opinion was in favor of charity knitting. Charity knitting often connected the participants to communities beyond their local knitting group. For example, when Joanne (January 27, 2009, Discussion #4) knits for charity organizations she is connected to the community of other charity knitters and the community of the charity for which she is knitting. While these communities might be local, they can also be national and international. For example, the book faerie (January 26, 2009, Discussion #4) and Ria (January 29, 2009, Discussion #4) both participated in Victory Junction Gang Camp Afghan knitting. This project sends an afghan around to the participating knitters who each work a section of it and then send it on to the next knitter. The book faerie and Ria knit on different Victory Junction Gang Camp Afghans in different areas of the country but still share the experience of creating that project.

Though most of the knitters had not participated in a community knitted artwork before, they were participating in this project. Some of the knitters like Liela (February 16, 2009, Discussion #4), Linda (January 29, 2009, Discussion #4) had not participated in knitalongs and some even mentioned that they shy away from knitalong projects because they do not like to knit on a time frame, yet they were still interested in this project. KnittyWitty (March 29, 2009, Discussion #12) mentions the combination of knitting and sharing stories as adding value and interest to the project:

Of course I enjoyed knitting the flowers, but also looking at knitting in a different way. The blog questions really made me think about the history of knitting and how as women we continue the tradition, but in a modern way. I like how knitting has become a creative art as well as a traditional craft. I also liked being a part of a community of knitters whose individual work will together inspire others and different thinking about knitting.
It seems that the engaging element of the Knitted Flower Project was the added element of community. Because we were sharing stories and experiences in addition to knitting, it kept the participants engaged and involved over time and distance. Both in charity knitting and art knitting this added element of community enhances the project and makes it more meaningful.

Methodology Revisited

Community is an essential element of this arts-based research and A/r/tography project. As discussed in the Methodology chapter A/r/tography represents community connections using the rhizome. Each of the participants became a node on the rhizome, sharing their stories, experiences, and knitting along the inter-nodal connections and through the six renderings of contiguity, living inquiry, metaphor, openings, reverberation, and excess. These processes of sharing are artmaking, researching, teaching, and knitting through the methods of Autoethnography and Knitalong. The following weaves the blog discussions and flowers back into this methodology and methods.

Knitting as artmaking, researching, and teaching – Self-care

In the methodology I discuss A/r/tography through a Foucauldian lens, specifically exploring it through his work on the technologies of the self. The living inquiry of A/r/tography can be seen as relating to self-care through Foucault’s discussion
of melete, or meditation concerned with the relationship of the self to truth; asksis, or exercise concerned with the relationship of the self to the self; and mathesis, or learning concerned with the relationship of the self to others. The blog discussions and the knitted flowers demonstrate these three arts through A/r/tography’s six renderings. In order to demonstrate these interactions, I have three examples of quotes from the blog that intertwine these three arts and six renderings.

While many participants cited the meditative nature of knitting, ReneeNicole (January 17, 2009, Discussion #1) uses that meditative or melete time as a way to feel in control of her life as she describes in this quote:

The compulsion to create has always been there and I can't turn it off. Sometimes, when there are major life stresses, it either fades away (as with a friend's death a few months ago) or it goes into hyper drive (when major physical illness comes over). For me, I believe, it's calming because I am in control of the situation. I am in control of the correct stitches being made and the overall creation. This piece of knitting does not exist without me. So, when my life is out of control, I still obtain a little. And when my life isn't overly stressful, it's simply something that's fun because it allows me to create kick-ass art.

Using knitting as a way to gain control or cope with illness or stress references two renderings; openings and reverberation. The stressful situation is like an opening or a tear in one’s understanding. ReneeNicole knits as a way to meditate on that tear so it can be understood more clearly.
The subtle click of the needles and the dynamic action of her mind working to understand her stress reverberates, allowing her to move deeper in her understanding. ReneeNicole’s, ponders through her knitting, a situation such as death or illness. This contemplative sensitivity is also demonstrated in the delicacy and care she took in knitting her flower pictured in Figure 6.5. In this example, ReneeNicole's contemplation of death or illness through knitting is like exploring a similar concept through artmaking.

Brea (February 3, 2009, Discussion #1) provides an example of knitting operating as *askesis* as she uses knitting to explore her relationship to herself, specifically her identity as a woman:

I knit because of some internal conflicts over the role of being a professional woman. I have often been told that I will be very successful in my career, but that my personal life (i.e. a clean home, a husband and having kids that aren't serial killers) will suffer. I often struggle internally with trying to prove this comment wrong. I associate knitting with nurturing, "being domestic," and taking care of hearth and home. Providing homemade things for people is the ultimate form of care, akin to cooking.
In this example Brea performs the renderings living inquiry and metaphor. Knitting becomes another facet to her day-to-day negotiation between “being domestic” and “being professional” and how she values each experience. She is aware and reflexive about her womanhood and identifies certain activities like building her career and cooking as performances of the two facets of her experience. At the same time, she uses these activities as metaphors for aspects of her personality. Knitting and producing handmade objects for loved ones becomes a metaphor for domesticity. In this example, Brea’s living inquiry into her experience as a woman and how she negotiates that experience is similar to ongoing research.

This third example of knitting as a form of *mathesis*, the relationship of the self to others and relates to teaching. In this example, Lindsey (March 11, 2009, Discussion #10) describes her satisfaction in teaching someone how to knit:

I've taught several people how to knit and I'm always amazed at how fast they pick it up or how they take it and make it their own. Peoples’ creativity is limitless when they let it be. Usually people learn the knit and purl and then stop but my favorites are people who already know the basics and want help learning more. I recently taught my friend how to knit in the round and within a week she had made seven hats. It's always incredible when you teach someone a craft because then in everything they make you get to take a fraction of a credit.

Lindsey is discussing knitting through the rendering of excess. By passing a known skill to a new person she is opening up an opportunity to expand the body of knowledge around that skill. She is inviting the new knitter to explore what is indefinable and unknowable, to add their personal talent and perspective to the dialogue. The results are exciting and unexpected.
All three of these examples demonstrate how knitting is a form of self-care. Whether it is ReneeNicole meditatively knitting through a stressful situation, Brea negotiating her identity or Lindsey taking satisfaction and a little credit in the accomplishments of her knitting protégés, each is using knitting as a way to better understand their personal experience. At the same time, each of these experiences is also a way for them to care for others. ReneeNicole is finding a way to cope with stress, which makes her more mindful of how her stress affects those around her. Brea is negotiating her identity as a woman with the express purpose of being a good professional, mother, and wife. Lindsey is giving of her time and experience with the goal of educating others. The interaction of self-care and care for others could therefore be seen as integral to using Autoethnography as an A/r/tographic method.

Knitting as Autoethnography – Self-writing and Writing for Others

In the Methodology chapter I explored the method of Autoethnography through the Foucauldian lens of self-writing. Foucault identifies two types of self-writing, hupomnemata as a therapeutic and personal form of journaling, and correspondence as a way to share the findings of personal writing with others. These two forms of writing are inextricably intertwined in that each informs the other in the form of dialogue. In this project each of the posts and comments behaved as hupomnemata and correspondence. They were personal stories presented in a journaling format and then transmitted to the rest of the participants via the blog. The flowers behaved much in the same way. Personal choices were made about the pattern, yarn, embellishments, and colors. The flowers were
knit as a form of personal meditation. Then the flowers were corresponded through the mail and shared with the rest of the participants on the blog, with the public as a part of the artwork, and re-presented and interpreted in the thesis.

In some cases the flowers directly referenced the experience of the participants and tied into the comments those participants left on the blog. These flowers seem to be the strongest Autoethnographic examples. Dizzy Spinster used handspun yarn to create one of her flowers as shown in Figure 6.6. She explained in one of her comments that she learned to spin first and then learned to knit from women at a spinning guild. Another example is Joanne who knits mostly charity projects such as lap blankets or preemie caps. Her flowers were all knit using yarn left over from those projects, which she noted by labeling each flower with a slip of paper as shown in Figure 6.7.

Figure 6.6: Flowers by Dizzy Spinster made with hand spun yarn
The comments also had other autoethnographic traits. Participants were deft at moving between the personal and political when they responded to the discussion topics. In this example responding to knitting as feminist or feminine, Stefanie (March 1, 2009, Discussion #8) discusses her own experience, references the historical position of knitting, relates that historical position to contemporary knitting, and then finishes by mentioning an example of knitting as sexist:

I guess inasmuch as I consider myself a feminist who knits, then yes. I don't know if it's specifically feminist, or making some sort of social, feminist statement, but it seems like a lot of crafty, feminismy ladies are into the knitting, and I myself would definitely fall into that intersecting part of the venn diagram. Seems like third-wave feminists especially are into it - as previously noted, first and possibly second wave feminists would probably not approve of something that smacks so much as traditional women's work (men originally owning hand-knitting way back when notwithstanding), but I like to think that now we are at the stage of reclaiming what was once seen as the "gentle" home arts and making them into our own artistic expression - instead of being unpaid work that you have to do so that you and the people in your family have clothing to wear.
This comment bounces back and forth between personal response and political observation so that Stefanie’s personal experience becomes grounded in the broader political experience and the broader political experience becomes more relatable through personal examples.

Both the flowers and the blog writings fluctuate between personal hupomnemata writing and artmaking and as a public correspondence in both writing and artmaking. Each of these stories is embedded in the personal experience of the participants. Likewise, each flower was created in the hands of each knitter in a personal and meditative way. By sharing both the stories and the flowers, the participants corresponded and opened their personal opinions and experiences to the public forum. This is the nature of Autoethnography, personal stories that are shared in a way that they deepen the understanding of the self and others.

Knitalong

Just before I first started the knitalong portion of this project I gave a class presentation of my thesis work up until the point of the knitalong. I explained to the class that this portion, the data portion, was a step into the unknown. I had research several very successful knitalongs that produced amazing work. I was aware of the outlets I could use to recruit knitters. I even had a group of knitters through the West Side Columbus Knitters (WSCK) who might be willing to help knit some flowers or leave a few comments. However, I was terrified that I would put my project out there and no one would respond. I stood in front of my classmates and fellow qualitative researches and
admitted that my knitalong had no guarantees, that there was the potential for abject failure, and if that failure happened, I would have a very different thesis project to contend with. Shortly after this presentation I posted the first call for participants and waited to see what would happen.

When the final participant signed up in March 2009 I had 22 official participants and several anonymous participants. The knitters hailed from across the country and two of them were international. Some of the participants were people I knew from WSCK but the majority were people I had never met. Despite the fact that I had researched knitalongs, was aware of the dynamics, and how knitters were so willing and excited to participate, I was still amazed and delighted each week at their willingness to share. The participants wrote long and involved responses and knit so many, often complex and decorated flowers.

This project is composed of many elements including historical analysis, qualitative methodologies, personal stories, a blog, a written thesis, knitted flowers, and an exhibited artwork. In the end, the knitalong, the action of sharing stories and knitting objects together, stitched all these elements together to create the final fabric of the project.

Applications and Avenues for Future Research

This section examines potential applications for both the thesis subject matter and the methodology. While knitting may seem like a niche subject matter and A/r/tography may seem very personal and individual, this project has demonstrated that both have
applications and intersections across a range of topics and experiences with potential for building communities of inquiry. In addition, my research has been an integral part of my Arts Policy and Administration and Museum Education studies. I present some applications to these fields.

Even as I write this section I still have reservations about the applications of research about knitting, art, and personal stories as it may be considered too narrow. At the same time, having performed the project, analyzed and shared the data, held the flowers, and seen the reaction to the project, I know that it resonates across a broad audience and is rich with meaning. These personal stories and artmaking experiences have produced a body of knowledge that is deeply meaningful to the participants. In addition, the stories they have shared demonstrate how their knitting has touched the lives of their family members, friends, and even strangers who receive items knit for charity or ask them about their knitting in public. Knitting is an essential aspect of these women’s lives and the stories and opinions they have about the intersection between knitting and art, activism, gender, relationships, teaching, and learning ripple outward. This type of project adds value to such experiences and provides a forum for them to be shared.

Similarly, the methodology and methods I have used also extend across a broad range of research topics. A/r/tography has potential applications to a variety of subjects and research designs. Inviting people to engage in artmaking allows both the research participants and researcher to see the topic from multiple perspectives. In this case the project examined the historic art / craft division, feminism, activism, socialization, and personal narrative through knitting. Through this process the participants mined and
researched their own experiences, shared them and taught the group about their perspective.

Blog based Autoethnography holds potential for other research applications as well. By using a blog I was able to reach participants in other countries. The blog also maintained a digital record of each exchange and allowed the participants to read and respond to each other’s comments, build upon each other’s knowledge and challenge each other’s opinions. Inviting the participants to share personal stories allowed them to speak from a position of expertise and knowledge and to feel comfortable sharing when they otherwise might not, as described by Andi (March 29, 2009, Discussion #12):

I always freeze up when trying to define things as "why do you do this" because I'm so conditioned by my family and even some friends to expect to be told that I am "wrong", so answering some of the questions was more difficult than it had to be. But I learned I could answer the questions, and if anyone here told me I was "wrong" I didn't see the comments that came after mine (yet).

Blogs are a useful and dynamic research tool to add to the qualitative arsenal especially in the context of Autoethnography.

The actual data produced in this research acts as a record of the experience. Like many artmaking or writing experiences, the experience of creating the artifact can be more important than the artifact itself. This project is a model of that experience and the type of personal value and legitimization that can be gained from participating in a reflexive, community art project.

The Knitted Flower Project has also been a constant companion during my class work and studies in Arts Policy and Administration and Museum Education and has
implications for both fields. From an arts policy and funding perspective, this type of research lends credibility to community art projects as transformative experiences. In addition, foregrounding the value of women’s contributions to the arts and traditional women’s art forms has important implications within the context of arts funding policies.

As a museum educator both the subject and methods of this research provide insights and applications. The subject matter, which focuses on women’s fiberwork, invites one to look at art museums from a feminist perspective. As a museum educator I am constantly aware of how collections are arranged, which artworks are displayed, and negotiating how best to explain those choices to visitors. Curatorial decisions, like artworks, do not occur in a vacuum and have social and political implications. This project has explored ways to identify and discuss those issues and practices through blogging and artmaking.

In the same theme of valuing women’s artwork, one must consider how professional work is valued. LE’s discussion of charity knitting as not feminist raises critical questions about how society values different types of labor. Arts workers, such as docents and community arts organizers often work on a volunteer basis and many arts administration positions are part-time. Artworks, when donated by an artist are only valued by materials and not fair market value. LE’s observation about the gendered and devalued nature of women’s charity work provides an avenue into the issue of how our American society values arts workers, charity workers, and artists and whether or not those decisions are affected by gender or socio-economic status.

From a practical perspective, the research methods have correlations in the museum setting. Museums and other researchers such as Melissa Bontempo (2006) are
beginning to explore the educational potential of social networking technologies like blogs. After experimenting with this blog for this project, I see the technology having wonderful museum education applications. I can envision museums posting works with discussion text from the collection and inviting visitors to comment and reflect on those artworks. This type of activity would tie in with the current constructivist trends in museum education and art interpretation and allow visitors to dialogue in a way they might not be able to in the actual museum. In addition, it could encourage dialogue about the importance of both face-to-face experiences with artworks and the importance of making artworks accessible through online outlets. The autoethnographic characteristics of blogs can encourage visitors to personalize the museum and artworks, linking it to their everyday experiences at work, school, and home.

Finally, knitting itself may have a role in research far beyond this thesis. I have only touched on some issues that would benefit from further exploration. For example, Dianna’s (March 10, 2009) discussion of knitting with young men in a correctional institution raises many questions about the history of that practice and how it is viewed by society. It is often seen as a tremendous benefit to the incarcerated, however, that claim makes assumptions about incarceration and the nature of rehabilitating men and women in prison. Whether those assumptions are fair and if activities such as knitting can be beneficial would be an interesting source of inquiry.

Likewise, one could research whether there is a role for knitting in museums or in arts management settings. Knitting has been used in schools and is still practiced in Waldorf schools as a practical skill. However, it’s haptic qualities and use as a meditative
activity or activity of self-care may have applications in other learning or work environments. I often lament that as an arts worker, I have so little time to actually make the art that first sparked my passion for the field. I am not alone in this frustration. Artmaking is used in museum education, but what about artmaking for museum and arts professionals? How might making artwork or engaging in a hobby or craft while at work enhance their performance? It has been proven that the arts enhance student performance, might the same also be true for professionals.

This project has provided ruptures and openings for future qualitative and arts-based inquiry. The essential goal of this work has been a constant cycle of learning and sharing knowledge with the hope of inspiring the same inquisitiveness and passion in others. The arts and collaborative arts-based projects provide an open forum for this type of deep, creative, and collaborative learning and discovery in the community.

Validity, Successes and Areas that Needed Improvement

In the methodology chapter I introduced the criteria for addressing validity in this thesis project. For qualitative research to be meaningful and useful, it must demonstrate validity and justifiability. In order to demonstrate this I am using the criteria of resonance, transparency, communicability, and coherence (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). This section revisits those criteria and relates them to the outcomes of this project. In addition, I identify elements of this project that were successful and those less successful areas, and theorize how I might do things differently if I were to pursue a similar project in the future.
Validity

I have struggled with how to measure this project and address the issue of validity. The goal of this work was not to produce something valid in the way that quantitative research is valid. It is not meant to be replicable, generalizable, or objective. I was not seeking to prove a hypothesis. Instead, my goal was to bring knitters together to discuss the intersection between knitting and a variety of other inter-related topics, to create an artwork, and create a forum for the knitters to share their experiences and stories. In addition, I wanted the participants to think of artmaking, research, and teaching in a new way. I feel I have achieved those goals hope to demonstrate in this section that those goals and my process for pursuing them are valid, justifiable, and meaningful.

Resonance implies that the research is meaningful to people and that those people can see applications correlations of that research in their own lives. I see this work as resonant in that many of the participants shared similar opinions and experiences in their comments. At the same time there were divergent experiences and contrary opinions. Rather than undermine this resonance, these divergent experience enhance the diversity of the project and underscore it’s individual and personal nature. An example of resonance in action occurred on the blog when participants talked back to one another, supporting and challenging each other’s opinions. These examples of discussion demonstrate that the topics were meaningful and the participants were invested in each other’s words.

I was extremely mindful of the transparency of this research. The participants were constantly aware of my own feelings and experiences through the blog posts. When
the participants were recruited the purpose and structure of the project was explained both through email and on the blog. In addition, many of them requested and had the opportunity to read the Introduction chapter of the thesis. On several occasions I would ask participants to clarify their thoughts so I could be sure I understood them correctly. In this thesis I have tried to thoroughly describe the history and contemporary environment in which this work is grounded. In addition, I have tried to be clear and transparent in describing the methodology and methods, my reasons for choosing them, and the way they played out over the course of the project. To do this I have focused on the clarity of my writing throughout, as well as articulating my purpose and goals.

I have approached communicability through presentation. This project has three products that are interrelated and inform one another: the blog, the artwork, and this written thesis. These multiple formats give the project the potential to be communicable to a variety of audiences. In addition, these formats each help to crystallize and clarify each other (Richardson, 2000). For example, the project produced two types of data, online and offline data. Instead of these two data sources competing they supported and enhanced each other. Orgad (2009) describes how researchers can often take a limited view of the relationship between online and offline data:

Normatively, regarding online communication as a constrained version of face-to-face communication implies that online communication is ‘less’ than face-to-face communication: less authentic, less real, less close, and less truthful. Methodologically, treating online as a strained version of the offline limits the tools and practices that researchers use to those they can apply to the offline. It does not allow researchers to develop methods that are sensitive and specific to what happens online (p. 48).
Rather than relying on one type of data over the other I have tried to present them as equally valuable and mutually supportive. As a result, each product of the project provides another avenue to enter the dialogue and an additional means of communicating the experience and outcome.

Even though the research is presented in more than one format, each of those formats share elements. For example, the flowers make up the artwork, are pictured on the blog, and analyzed in the thesis. One can follow the thread of the flowers between the three formats. Similarly, the participant comments exist in all three formats. These consistent threads provide coherence and organization to the overall project. In addition, within each format there are clear organizing elements and threads such as the discussion of womanhood or creativity. The blog follows a series of discussion topics that are then explored by the participants. The artwork is organized by arranging the comments and flowers aesthetically according to shape and color. Finally, the thesis is organized with both a literary and theoretical arc designed to lead the reader through the story of the project. This arc is explained and described throughout each chapter to keep the reader engaged and positioned within the document.

By analyzing the project through these criteria both during and at the end, I have tried to present justifiable, meaningful, and valid research. The final two sections look specifically at logistical issues. While I believe the overall project was successful, there were more and less successful elements in its undertaking.

Successes and Areas That Needed Improvement
On the whole, I consider the Knitted Flower Project a success. I had a group of knitters that shared their opinions, stories, and knitting talents. They were thoughtful and consummate writers often giving me well-crafted paragraphs when I expected a few sentences. In addition they knitted a stunning collection of flowers that displayed a variety of yarns, knitting styles, and added design elements. The blog created an excellent forum to share both the stories and the objects. My decision to structure the blog around discussion topics ensured that there would be a new topic to discuss and explore each week. Another successful decision was to make the flower pattern simple and modifiable. Because the pattern was quick and easy to knit, the participants were willing to knit more than one flower and in some cases to add embellishments. These smaller, more logistical, decisions aided the overall success of the project.

At the same time, if I were to do this project again I would make some changes. First, I found myself constantly battling my time frame. I had established a structure that presented one discussion a week for twelve weeks. In hindsight, I would combine some of those discussion questions so that the discussion portion could cover nine or ten weeks. I would then reserve the final two or three weeks for more free form discussions. I ended up balancing between allowing enough time for participants to finish comments and send in flowers and keeping the time frame short enough so participants would not loose interest and drop out. The other change I would try to make is seeking more feedback from the participants regarding the artwork and thesis writing process. I did try to seek feedback and when participants were not immediately forthcoming, I shied away, not wanting to ask too much of them, and even perhaps being nervous about the feedback
I might receive. In retrospect I should have been more assertive and less hesitant in asking for their opinions.

Overall I am very pleased with the experience and unfolding of the Knitted Flower Project. The participants were engaged and invested in the research, vocal about their opinions, and giving of their time and talents. While I would make some adjustments to the project, the process and products were relatable, enjoyable, and resulted in meaningful experiences.

Conclusion

I introduced the goals of this research project in the Introduction. The first goal was to do meaningful work using arts-based qualitative methods that may be useful to others. I want fellow artists, researchers, and teachers to, perhaps, explore a section of my own research and find that it applies to their own work, maybe even allows them to look at that work in a new way. In order to achieve this I have used a combination of popular craft, a Foucauldian lens, blog technology, and an arts-based analysis. The project has been a meaningful to the participants, and hopefully, because of the mixed presentation methods, to a broader audience. The artwork exhibited at Wonder Knit is already reaching a broader audience, as is the blog.

A second goal is to encourage new forms of research presentation. I have used a blog, produced an artwork, and written a traditional thesis, allowing a cross-pollination of themes, ideas, and representations. Participants are identified by their stories and comments on the blog, their hand knit flowers, and the way their comments and flowers
are drawn together and presented in the thesis. Each of these modes of representation presents a different view that appeals to a new audience, and elicits fresh reactions thus providing a variety of ways for people to engage with the research.

Finally, I hope to have increased the number of people interested in and practicing needlecrafts. I don’t know how to measure this but my hope is that by using knitting in my research I am underscoring the value of handcraft and demonstrating that knitting is both inherently valuable and meaningful in the way it informs other areas of life.

Upon completing my first major research endeavor I feel overwhelmingly thankful to the participants. “Knitter’s affinity for each other defies description; only their own gestures and words convey that special relationship” (Macdonald, 1990, p. xvii). Through their gestures and words the participants have invited me into a corner of their lives and shared with me their knitting talents, thoughts, and stories.
APPENDIX A

IRB APPLICATION MATERIALS
IRB Application Table of Contents:

• Title page

• Screening questions

• Description of the proposed research, questions 1-9

• Extended Research Proposal – Attachment #1

• Copies of surveys interview questions - Attachment #2 – “Interview Questions”

• Data collection sheets - Attachment #3 – “Data Collection Sheet / Bibliography”

• Recruitment letter – Attachment #4 – “Participation Agreement Email”

• Consent form – Attachment #5 – “Documentation of Participation”
Application for Exemption
From Review by the Institutional Review Board

Molly Uline-Olmstead
Graduate Student
Arts Policy and Administration
The Ohio State University

10.22.08
### Principal Investigator

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Phone</th>
<th>E-mail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. James Sanders III</td>
<td>614.292.0266</td>
<td><a href="mailto:sanders-iii.1@osu.edu">sanders-iii.1@osu.edu</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University Title:</th>
<th>Department or College:</th>
<th>Campus Address (room, building, street address):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>College of the Arts, Art Education</td>
<td>258 Hopkins Hall, 128 North Oval Mall The Ohio State University Columbus, OH 43210</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
<th>Fax:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>614.688.4483</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Co-Investigator

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Phone</th>
<th>E-mail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Molly Uline-Olmstead</td>
<td>614.570.8905</td>
<td><a href="mailto:uline-olmstead.1@osu.edu">uline-olmstead.1@osu.edu</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University Status:</th>
<th>Campus Address (room, building, street address) or Mailing Address:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>1314 West 3'rd Ave. Apt. B Columbus, Ohio 43212</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
<th>Fax:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Protocol Title

The knitted flower project: Exploring knitting as a social, scholarly, community building activity through communal artmaking

### Source of Funding

Funded personally by student.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(a) For Office Use Only</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ Approved. ➤ Research has been determined to be exempt under these categories: ___________________. Research may begin as of the date of determination listed below.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Disapproved. ➤ The proposed research does not fall within the categories of exemption. Submit an application to the appropriate Institutional Review Board for review.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of determination:</th>
<th>Signature:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>_____________________</td>
<td>___________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Office of Responsible Research Practices
The purpose of the Application for Exemption is two-fold: (a) to determine whether the proposed research qualifies for exemption from review and continuing oversight by an Institutional Review Board; and, if so, (b) to ensure that the informed consent process protects the rights and welfare of human subjects in research. Please respond to the following questions and provide the requested documentation.

Have all investigators completed the required web-based course in the protection of human research subjects? ☒ Yes ☐ No

If No, see http://orrp.osu.edu/irb/training/citi.cfm for more information. EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS MUST BE SATISFIED PRIOR TO SUBMITTING THE APPLICATION FOR IRB REVIEW.

Please check the categories of exemption for which you are applying. The list of categories is located at the end of this application. You may check more than one box.

EXEMPT CATEGORY: 1 ☐ 2 ☒ 3 ☐ 4 ☒ 5 ☐ 6 ☐

SCREENING QUESTIONS: If you check YES to any of the questions below, your research is not exempt. Do not complete the exempt application. Submit an application to the appropriate Institutional Review Board for review.

Does any part of the research require that subjects be deceived? ☐ Yes ☒ No

Will research expose human subjects to discomfort or harassment beyond levels encountered in daily life? ☐ Yes ☒ No

Could disclosure of the subjects’ responses outside the research reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects’ financial standing, employability, or reputation? ☐ Yes ☒ No

Will fetuses, pregnant women, human in vitro fertilization, or individuals involuntarily confined or detained in penal institutions be subjects of the study? ☐ Yes ☒ No

For research proposed under category 2, will research involve surveys, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior with individuals under the age of 18? ☐ Yes ☒ No

For research proposed under category 4, will any of the data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens be collected or come into existence after the date you apply for exemption? ☐ Yes ☒ No

For research proposed under category 4, will any of the information obtained from data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or
diagnostic specimens that come from private sources be recorded by the investigator in such a manner that subjects can be identified directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects?

IF YOU CHECKED **YES** TO ANY OF THE QUESTIONS ABOVE, YOUR RESEARCH IS NOT EXEMPT.

IF YOU HAVE CHECKED **NO** TO **ALL** OF THE QUESTIONS ABOVE, YOUR RESEARCH MAY BE EXEMPT. PLEASE CONTINUE WITH THE EXEMPT APPLICATION.

If you have questions about the application or review process, please contact Office of Responsible Research Practices / Phone: 688-8457 / Fax: 688-0366 / E-mail: exemptinfo@osu.edu
For purposes of this application, “research” includes the recruitment of human subjects as well as data collection and analysis. None of these research activities may begin until the investigator has received a protocol number AND has received written concurrence that the proposed research is exempt. The “date of determination” on page one of this application is assigned by the Office of Responsible Research Practices; it indicates the date when research may begin.

Please describe your study clearly and completely, using a style of language that can easily be understood by someone who is not familiar with your research.

GENERAL QUESTIONS REGARDING THE PROPOSED RESEARCH

1. Describe the purpose of the research activity to be undertaken. Describe how it involves human subjects. Respond in the space provided here, or attach a research proposal and/or grant proposal containing the requested information.

Description:

The purpose of my thesis is to explore three threads of intertwining interest – knitting, art making, and qualitative inquiry. I will explore the history of knitting as women’s work, a creative outlet, and a community activity. I will do this by reading authors who have researched and analyzed the history of knitting and analogous textile work such as sewing, quilting, and embroidery. From this historical basis I will address the contemporary role of knitting in women’s culture - in art, leisure, and lifestyle. This includes artists who use knitting, the resurgence of knitting as a popular hobby, and the use of knitting in protest and activism. This contemporary analysis will serve as the groundwork for creating an actual community knitted artwork. I will approach the artmaking through the mixed arts and feminist based qualitative methodologies of A/r/tography, Autoethnography, and Knitalongs. In order to evaluate my work, I will use participant checks – encouraging fellow knitters to read, reflect, and revise throughout the research and artmaking process. In addition I will analyze my research through Laurel Richardson’s (2005) CAP ethnography criteria. Finally, I will also analyze the artwork using art criticism techniques including hermeneutic discussions with viewers while the work is exhibited (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994). The goal of this research is to perpetuate knitting, engage in and encourage communal artmaking, and provide a forum for discussion and dialogue about the role of knitting in the lives of the participants and women in general.
2. **Provide a brief description of the subjects you plan to recruit and the criteria used in the selection process. Indicate whether subjects are 18 years of age or older.**

**Description:**

The research participants will be knitters over the age of eighteen. They will self-select based on an open call to participate in a group knitting project, or knitalong. The call for participants will occur online through the knitting site Ravelry\(^1\). This site is similar to a message board or chat room, however, it is dedicated specifically to knitting. In addition, I will ask people from two local knitting groups – OSU Stitch n’ Snitch\(^2\) and West Side Columbus Knitters\(^3\) – to participate in the project. People may choose to remain anonymous or they may choose to be an author on the final artwork. Anyone who wants to participate will be allowed to participate. In addition, anyone who wishes to terminate their participation may do so at anytime. I have attached a copy of the Participation Agreement Email. This will be sent to those inquiring about participation in the project via email. Once they have read the terms of the project they will respond “Accept” and be added to the list of participants.

1. Ravelry – [www.ravelry.com](http://www.ravelry.com)
2. OSU Stitch n’ Snitch – [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/osustitchnsnitch/?yguid=281514183](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/osustitchnsnitch/?yguid=281514183)
3. West Side Columbus Knitters - [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/WestSideColumbusKnitting/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/WestSideColumbusKnitting/)

3. **Describe how the proposed research meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review and oversight. (Refer to the criteria on the last page of this application that correspond to the category or categories you checked on the screening sheet.)**

**Description:**

I am applying for exemption under category #2 and #4. I have chosen category #2 because I am using “interview procedures and observation of public behavior” and the information
collected in these interviews and observations will not put the research participants “at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects’ financial standing, employability, or reputation.” Participants will be self-selected and may choose to remain anonymous and may choose not to answer any of the interview questions, or participate in any of the blog discussions. I have also chosen category #4 because a portion of my research involves the collection of historical information from existing, published documents. I will be using published texts – books, online and printed articles, and blog posts – to collect information on the history of the social role of knitting and analogous textile arts including sewing, quilting, and embroidery, in order to contextualize and set a precedent for this research and the resulting collaborative knitted artwork.

4. Will your subjects be recruited through schools, employers, and/or community agencies or organizations, and/or are you required to obtain permission to access data that is not publicly available? If the answer is yes, provide a letter of support from the person authorized to give you access to the subjects or to the data in question. More than one letter may be required.

☑ Does not apply.
☐ Letter(s) attached.
☐ Comments:

5. Describe the means you will use to obtain data. Check all boxes that apply.

☐ Surveys or questionnaires distributed by mail or in person. I am attaching a copy of the instrument(s).
☐ Surveys distributed through the Internet, through listservs, or through E-mail.

☐ Interviews. I am attaching a copy of the interview questions.
☐ Focus groups. I am attaching a copy of the questions that will shape the discussion.
☐ Observation of public behavior.
☐ Observation of activities in school classrooms.
☐ Audiotapes. I will obtain consent from the subjects to tape their responses.
☐ Videotapes. I will obtain consent from the subjects to tape their activities or responses.
Review of existing records, including databases, medical records, school records, etc. I am attaching a copy of the data collection sheet. I am recording information in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. All of the information in the records to be reviewed exists as of the date of submission of this application.

Tissue specimens. All of the specimens have already been collected and are “on the shelf.” I am recording information in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

6. Indicate the date when you plan to begin research, and the date when you anticipate that data analysis will be complete.

Begin date: November 1, 2008          End date: October 15, 2009

CONFIDENTIALITY

- Investigators are required to protect the confidentiality of the information obtained during research, unless the subjects (a) explicitly agree to be identified or quoted, and/or (b) explicitly agree to the release of material captured on audiotapes or videotapes for use in presentations or conferences.

7. Provide a brief description of the measures you will take to protect confidentiality. Please describe how you will protect the identity of the subjects, their responses, and any data that you obtain from private records or capture on audiotape or videotape. Describe the disposition of the data and/or the tapes once the study has been completed.

Description:
Participants may choose to remain anonymous or to have their names credited in the research. Those who wish to remain anonymous will respond to questions via the blog without attaching their name. Email addresses and return addresses will be kept confidential and the email account, knittedflowerproject@gmail.com, will be dismantled when the research is completed. Participants may choose to have their email address erased from the email account earlier. Finally, those who choose to use their names will note be quoted by that name without their consent. They will be asked before
a quote is used if the quote is accurate. Quotes will only be used after they are checked in this way.

INFORMED CONSENT

• In most cases, investigators are required to obtain informed consent from their subjects before collecting data. Respond to questions #8 and #9 to indicate how you will inform your subjects about the research and how you will obtain and document their consent.
• Subjects must be told what they will be asked to do if they agree to participate in research, how long it will take, and how you will protect the confidentiality of the information they provide.
• Subjects must be told that their participation is voluntary, they can refuse to answer questions that they do not wish to answer, and they can refuse to participate or they can withdraw at any time without penalty or repercussion.
• With few exceptions, written consent of the child’s parent(s) or guardian(s) is required if subjects are under the age of 18. In addition, children 14 years of age or older should be asked to give written assent (agreement) to participate. Children younger than 13 years of age should be asked to give verbal assent (agreement) to participate.
• Provide a means for subjects to contact the investigator(s) if they have questions or concerns about the research. Make it clear to the subjects that you are affiliated with The Ohio State University.

8. What information do you plan to give to your subjects before you ask for their consent? Use a style of language that simply and clearly explains the research to your subjects. Respond in the space provided here, or attach a copy of the information you plan to provide to your subjects and/or their parents or guardians. (Note: if you use more than one method of recruitment, you may check more than one box)

☐ Letter(s) attached. I will give each of the subjects a copy of this letter.

Letters will be distributed via email.

☐ I will be contacting subjects by phone or in person. I am attaching a script that contains the information I will give them.

☐ Does not apply. My data analysis is limited to existing records or tissue specimens.

☐ Response:

9. How do you plan to document informed consent? Read all of the options before checking the appropriate boxes.
The subjects are 18 years of age or older. Before collecting data, I will ask them to sign a written consent form. I am attaching a copy of the consent form.

The consent will be in the form of a return email that will be considered an electronic signature.

☐ The subjects are 18 years of age or older. Before collecting data, I will ask them to give verbal consent to participate in this research study.
☐ The subjects are 18 years of age or older. I am distributing a survey or questionnaire to the subjects. They can choose whether or not they want to respond. I am requesting a waiver of written consent.
☐ The subjects are under the age of 18. I am attaching a copy of the consent form that I will use to obtain consent from their parents or guardians and assent (agreement) from subjects who are 14 years of age or older.
☐ Some of the subjects are 18 years of age or older, and some are younger than 18. I have checked more than one box above to reflect the methods I will use to document informed consent.
☐ Does not apply. My data analysis is limited to existing records or tissue specimens.
☐ Other. Please explain and provide justification for your request.

☐ Comments:
Attachment #1: Extended Research Proposal

The purpose of my thesis is to explore three threads of intertwining interest – knitting, art making, and qualitative inquiry. I will explore the history of knitting as women’s work, a creative outlet, and a community activity. I will do this by reading authors who have researched and analyzed the history of knitting and analogous textile work such as sewing, quilting, and embroidery. From this historical basis I will address the contemporary role of knitting in women’s culture - in art, leisure, and lifestyle. This includes artists who use knitting, the resurgence of knitting as a popular hobby, and the use of knitting in protest and activism. This contemporary analysis will serve as the groundwork for creating an actual community knitted artwork. I will approach the artmaking through the mixed arts and feminist based qualitative methodologies of A/r/tography, Autoethnography, and Knitalongs. In order to evaluate my work, I will use participant checks – encouraging fellow knitters to read, reflect, and revise throughout the research and artmaking process. In addition I will analyze my research through Laurel Richardson’s (2005) CAP ethnography criteria. Finally, I will also analyze the artwork using art criticism techniques including hermeneutic discussions with viewers while the work is exhibited (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994). The goal of this research is to perpetuate knitting, engage in and encourage communal artmaking, and provide a forum for discussion and dialogue about the role of knitting in the lives of the participants and women in general.

Methodology and Method

First, the participants and I will collaborate on a knitted artwork. Each will contribute knitted flowers to an over all garden that will be exhibited as a group art installation. Second, I will invite knitters to engage in a conversation about various knitting topics via a blog, or interactive online journal. Blog entries will take two forms – prompted and free discussion. Prompted entries will precipitate from a series of issues I would like to address with the participants that pertain to the core themes of the research. For example, the classic question, “Is knitting an art or a craft? Why do you feel this way?” and “Do you think of knitting as feminist? Why or why not?” Free discussion entries are entries and comments that discuss the progress of the project, types of yarns and materials, and general topics of interest in participants’ lives. These blog entries will
become the data of my research so that, in the end, the research is a shared experience. These activities represent the qualitative methodology of A/r/tography and the methods of Autoethnography and Knitalongs.

**A/r/tography**

Knitting as an act of teaching is the other element of my research. The act of knitting can bring all the disparate strands of one’s life together in a repetitive, memorable way. Leitch (2006) refers to this as a “haptic space”, or the safe space of our chosen community where we can learn at our own pace, based on our own interest. In this space the touch of the yarn links with the rhythmic motion of knitting and the communication of ideas and transfer of skills. This somatic memory, the practice of learning by doing, is one of the tenants of A/r/tography (Springgay, 2008; Irwin, 2004). Through my research, I intend to place knitting and knitters in the realm of A/r/tographers as artists, researchers, and teachers by engaging them in creating an art project and through that art project, opening up a dialogue that inspires teaching and researching.

**Autoethnography**

Knitting is personal, it is a tactile, self-contained hobby. At the same time, when knitters come together or work on their project on the bus or in a waiting room, the act becomes public. This relationship between the personal experience and that experience’s translation across other individuals is the basis of autoethnography. The shared experience of knitting, and sharing of knowledge while knitting, constitutes autoethnography in practice. Autoethnography allows us, as researchers, to explore our history and personal experience in a deep and meaningful way, relating it to the greater human experience. It is the essence of the feminist mantra, “the personal is political.”

Autoethnography has two roles in my research project. The first autoethnographic thread follows my own narrative as a knitter. How has knitting affected my view of feminism? art? friendship? community? education? and how does that narrative relate to the narratives of other knitters? Where are their experiences similar and divergent? The second thread follows the process of making the knitted artwork. The art making process will be journaled through a blog by all the participants. The act of journaling is a critical element of autoethnography and it’s connection to women’s history. Biographers
and historians rarely chronicled women's lives. Women were their own historians, sharing their experiences orally with friends and through journaling. In fact, most of the historical records we have about knitting come from journal entries (Macdonald, 1988). Blogs, or "web logs", are a combination of this open form of oral history and more private form of journaling. This combination of conversation and personal reflection is ideal for autoethnographic narrative "...and fits with poststructuralist views that stress the interaction of the reader and the text as a co production...(Sparkes, 2002, p. 220)

Through this shared experience, the writing and journaling in itself becomes a method of inquiry (Richardson, 2000). As we write, share and dialogue, the information expands and extends. Richardson (2000) encourages this type of inquiry for the individual researcher stating that "Nurturing our own voice releases the censorious hold of 'science writing' on our consciousness as well as the arrogance it fosters in our psyche; writing is validated as a method of knowing (p. 962)." I feel that this type of writing – writing to better know ourselves in the world – should be extended to research participants. The shared blog provides an ideal forum for this type of writing.

In addition to the autoethnographic narratives, there is the text of the artwork. The piece is a "text-ile" composed of individual knitted flowers, made by many different hands, each with its own signature way of working the yarn. Each of these individual pieces, created collectively add to the narrative and the dialogue of knitting through the color, the shape of the stitches, the type of yarn, and the size of the flower. Each of these flowers comes with it’s own story. Was it made at a knitting circle? Was it the left over yarn from a sweater for a loved one? Was it knit all at once or across a few sittings? When someone asked the knitter what she/he was working on, what was said? There is so much experience wound up in any fiber work. I am so excited to see what this piece holds in its stitches.

Knitalong

While the term "knitalong" is new, the concept is ancient. The term was coined organically in 2000 on the internet (Brown, 2008). However, people have been knitting collaboratively for thousands of years. There are many types of knitalongs. I will list a few examples here and elaborate with additional examples and a plan for my own
knitalong in my methodology section. Knitalongs can range from what we think of as the traditional knitting bee where women collect in one place to work on their respective projects, to charity knitting where groups collect or work from home on a single project such as an afghan or preemie caps for donation, to an artwork knitalong where people participate by knitting a piece or section of a larger collaborative artwork. This project falls under the third category.

I want to underscore the power of knitting as an art form that is uniquely feminine, hence the flower form. I see the flowers as a way to make something both beautiful and socially meaningful. The flower itself is a lovely and symbolic object that refers directly to the environment. It has clear feminine associations in that women are almost encouraged to behave like flowers, to dress up in bright colors and use make up, to encourage masculine attention. In addition, young girls are often, unfortunately, referred to as blossoming flowers as they go through puberty. Flowers are sexual. Orchids, for example, have evolved to resemble, almost precisely, the reproductive organs of the insects that pollinate them. Flowers are plant material and many yarns are plant based such as cotton, bamboo, flax, and linen. Finally, the simple design of the actual flower pattern offers a clean slate for a variety of individual expressions. I am so eager to see how the participants elaborate on the simple form.

**Assessment**

In order to analyze and assess the artwork and research I will use member checks, CAP ethnography, and hermeneutic discussion. The following describes these methods and their applications.

*Member Checks*

I see all the participants as co-authors of the artwork. Because of this, I want each participant to constantly comment, contribute, and advise on the artmaking process. In addition, as I am collecting my data from the blog and working on the final analysis, I want the participants to read and reflect on the collective experience of the artmaking. I want to be sure that they are comfortable with the representation - that their voices shine through, and that the artwork is representative of their experience. This is a daunting
task as is any collaborative project, however, I feel it is vital and a core goal of the project.

**CAP Ethnography**

In analyzing my own writing and thought process I plan to use Laurel Richardson's (2000) method of CAP (creative, analytical process) Ethnography and her criteria for evaluating alternative methods of research writing:

“I believe in holding CAP ethnography to high and difficult standards: mere novelty does not suffice. Here are four criteria I use when reviewing papers or monographs submitted for social scientific publication: 1. **Substantive contribution.** Does this piece contribute to our understanding of social life? …2. **Aesthetic merit...** Does this piece succeed artistically? Does the use of creative analytical practices open up the text and invite interpretive responses? Is the text artistically shaped, satisfying, complex, and not boring? 3. **Reflexivity.** How has the author’s subjectivity been both a producer and product of this text? Is there adequate self-awareness and self-exposure for the reader to make judgments about the point of view? Does the author hold himself or herself accountable to the standards of knowing and telling of the people he or she has studied? 4. **Impact.** Does this piece affect me emotionally or intellectually? Does it generate new question or move me to write? Does it move me to action? These are my four criteria. Science is one lens, and creative-arts is another. We see more deeply using two lenses (p. 964 emphasis is author’s).”

This passage expertly describes the goals of experimental writing and research and touches on many of the aforementioned issues involved with member checks. In addition, each of these criteria can be applied beyond the written thesis to the finished artwork.
Hermeneutic Discussion

The final portion of analysis is pulled from Hooper-Greenhill’s (1994) discussion of art interpretation. Once the piece is exhibited it will be accessible to the public and open to myriad interpretations. As a museum educator I facilitate conversations with viewers and visitors, leading them in a purposeful discussion, negotiating an understanding with an artwork. The same will be true of this artwork. Hooper-Greenhill (1994) has adapted the hermeneutic circle to this process of negotiation in the museum setting. The hermeneutic circle in this context is a cyclical process of viewing, describing, discussing, making meaning, and then repeating the process. It is ongoing – interpretations are developed, discussed, and revised within the community of viewer and redeveloped constantly with the discovery of new information. While the artwork is on display I hope to engage an audience in this process of interpretation so that I can better learn and teach about the artwork with a community of viewers.

Conclusion

I hope to increase the number of people interested in and practicing needlecrafts. Movements, whether they are social, artistic, or political, are cyclical, however, some can die out all together. Many of these crafts have fallen by the wayside due to modernization and globalization. It is no longer thrifty to knit your own sweater or sew your own quilt. It’s cheaper to go out and buy one. As a result, these crafts have become niche pursuits and hobbies where they used to be household necessities. This is not to say that we should all return to the home, raise our own sheep and make our own clothing. However, it would be a shame to let the work of our foremothers fade away in the wake of industrialization. I hope by pursuing knitting as viable and meaningful research I can help to keep it alive and encourage new knitters to take up the needles.

References


Attachment #2: Interview Questions

Each post will begin with a recap of recent activity on the blog and in the project. Then I will ask the question for the week – one question for each of the twelve weeks of the project. After the question is posed, participants will respond in the comments section of the blog. Participants will be free to respond to each other’s comments as well.

• Why do you knit?
• What is your favorite item to knit and why?
• When and from whom did you learn to knit? Do you have a particular story?
• Have you participated in knitalongs? Charity knitting? Art knitting? Gift knitting?
• Do you prefer to knit alone or in a group? Why?
• Do you feel knitting is a craft or an art form? Why?
• Do you see knitting as activism or as political? Why/not?
• Do you equate knitting with feminism? Femininity? Both? Why/not?
• How do others respond to you when you knit in public? Do you have a particular story?
• Have you ever taught someone to knit? Do you have a particular story?
• Do you see value in this type of project broadly and/or personally? If so, where? If not, why not? Has your opinion changed since the beginning of this project?
• Do you feel that personal stories are important forms of research? Why/not? Has your opinion changed since the beginning of this project?
Attachment #3: Data Collection Sheet / Bibliography

The following is a list of the resources from which I will collect historical data, including historical facts anecdotes, and quotes about knitting and other analogous crafts such as quilting, sewing, and embroidery. I will use annotated note taking format by hand as well as the note organizing software Mindola SuperNotecard™ 2.7.30.


Attachment #4: Participation Agreement Email

"[A Fine Art Knitalong] is a way to make an artistic impression with an impact unlike any single artist's work." – Larissa Brown, 2008, Knitalong, Fine Art Knitalongs

Thank you so much for your interest in the Knitted Flower Project. The goals of this project are to perpetuate knitting, engage in and encourage communal artmaking, and provide a forum for discussion and dialogue about the role of knitting in the lives of the participants and women in general. There will be two products of this project. The first is aknitted artwork, a garden of individual flowers knit by each participant. The second is my written thesis for a Masters of Arts Policy and Administration based on our conversations and my own historical research, which I plan to share with you throughout the course of this project.

Knitting has experienced resurgence in popularity. Women, myself included, are returning to the craft, learning it for the first time, and re-evaluating it's potential. As an avid knitter and scholar, I began to see these two aspects of my personality converge. As I began to explore, I discovered that many knitters were telling the same story. They spoke of feminism, anti-consumerism, activism, environmentalism, building friendships and communities, reconnecting to their foremothers, and making something with their hands. The goals of my research are to unpack these issues and desires and then apply them through the act of knitting itself. In order to do this I need creative knitters like you to share your talents and opinions as participants. **You must be 18 or older to participate.** Participants will:

- knit flowers in the attached pattern
- participate in a group blog at [http://knittedflowerprojectblog.blogspot.com/](http://knittedflowerprojectblog.blogspot.com/) discussing the history of knitting, and the role of knitting in our lives – remember there are no right or wrong answers and these discussions will become the body of my thesis so participants may choose to participate anonymously
- choose which issues to respond to, how long to participate *(you may withdraw at any time without penalty)*, and whether or not to participate anonymously
- read, reflect, and revise throughout the artmaking and thesis writing process – I will ask before using any comments or quotes with names attached to be sure I have a full understanding of the meaning. I want everyone to be represented accurately.
- respect each others opinions and maintain a safe and collaborative atmosphere

This project will extend from January 1, 2009 – March 31, 2009. If you have any questions about this research project feel free to contact:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dr. James Sanders III, Professor and Principle Investigator</th>
<th>Molly Uline-Olmstead, Graduate Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Department of Art Education</td>
<td>Department of Art Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>351 Hopkins Hall</td>
<td>258 Hopkins Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>128 North Oval Mall</td>
<td>128 North Oval Mall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbus, OH 43210</td>
<td>The Ohio State University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:sanders-iii.1@osu.edu">sanders-iii.1@osu.edu</a></td>
<td>Columbus, OH 43210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><a href="mailto:knittedflowerproject@gmail.com">knittedflowerproject@gmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following outlines how to sign-up to participate.

**Attachment #5: Documentation of Participation**

If you wish to participate and are **18 years of age or older** please reply to this email with the subject line "Accept". By agreeing to participate you agree to the following:

- knit flowers in the attached pattern
- participate in a group blog at [http://knittedflowerproject.blogspot.com/](http://knittedflowerproject.blogspot.com/) discussing the history of knitting, and the role of knitting in our lives – remember there are no right or wrong answers and these discussions will become the body of my thesis so participants may choose to participate anonymously
- choose which issues to respond to, how long to participate (**you may withdraw at any time without penalty**), and whether or not to participate anonymously
- read, reflect, and revise throughout the artmaking and thesis writing process – I will ask before using any comments or quotes with names attached to be sure I have a full understanding of the meaning. I want everyone to be represented accurately.
- respect each others opinions and maintain a safe and collaborative atmosphere

In that email provide the following information:

- I wish to remain anonymous: yes / no (If you answer yes you should respond to blog posts anonymously and you should not put a return address on the flowers you contribute. You may choose to reveal your identity at your own discretion.)
- If I answered "no" above the name I wish to use to be credited as on the final artwork, in photos of my flowers, and in the written thesis is:
- I want to read more of the thesis, please send me the introduction: yes / no
- I wish to be added to the mailing list so that I can receive notification when a new post is up (all emails will have email addresses hidden):
- I have additional questions: (Feel free to ask anything through this email address at any time during the project. Your questions will remain confidential.)

**I will not share email addresses or return address with anyone.**

Molly Uline-Olmstead
knittedflowerproject@gmail.com
[http://knittedflowerproject.blogspot.com/](http://knittedflowerproject.blogspot.com/)
APPENDIX B

IRB APPROVAL LETTER
November 5, 2008

Protocol Number: 2008E0733
Protocol Title: THE KNITTED FLOWER PROJECT: EXPLORING KNITTING AS A SOCIAL, SCHOLARLY, COMMUNITY BUILDING ACTIVITY THROUGH COMMUNAL ARTMAKING, James Sanders III, Molly Ulrich-Olmstead, Art Education
Type of Review: Request for Exempt Determination
ORRP Staff Contact: Cheri M. Petey
Phone: 614-688-0389
Email: peteyp.6@osu.edu

Dear Dr. Sanders,

The Office of Responsible Research Practices has determined the above referenced protocol exempt from IRB review.

Date of Exempt Determination: 11/3/2008
Qualifying Exemption Category: 2

Please note the following:

- Only OSU employees and students who have completed CITI training and are named on the signature page of the application are approved as OSU Investigators in conducting this study.
- No procedural changes may be made in exempt research (e.g., recruitment procedures, advertisements, instruments, enrollment numbers, etc.).
- Per university requirements, all research-related records (including signed consent forms) must be retained and available for audit for a period of at least three years after the research has ended.
- It is the responsibility of the Investigator to promptly report events that may represent unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

This determination is issued under The Ohio State University’s OHRP Federalwide Assurance #00006378.

All forms and procedures can be found on the ORRP website — www.orrp.osu.edu. Please feel free to contact the ORRP staff contact listed above with any questions or concerns.

Cheri Petey, MA, Certified IRB Professional
Senior Protocol Analyst—Exempt Research

Exempt Determination
Version 1.0
APPENDIX C

KNITTED FLOWER PROJECT KNITTING PATTERN
Knitted Flower Project

Yarn: About fifteen yards (this will vary with yarn, needles, and knitting style) of any gauge or fiber leftover yarn, feel free to mix yarns.

Needles: Correspond needle size to yarn gauge using a needle size that is on the smaller end of the spectrum - i.e. for worsted weight use a US 5 or 6. The finished piece should be able to hold its shape though some floppiness is expected.

Notions: Stitch markers or scrap yarn, yarn needle

Standard abbreviations apply and can be found here: http://www.yarnstandards.com/knit.html

Instructions:

Cast on 80 sts

Row 1 & 2: Knit
Row 3: K2tog to end
Row 4 (WS): *P8, pm, repeat from * 3 times, p8.
* Row 5 (RS): K2tog, [knit to 2 sts before marker, ssk, sm, k2tog] 4 times, knit to last two sts, ssk.
Row 6: Purl
Row 7: Knit
Row 8: Purl

Repeat from * twice

Last Row: K2tog to end - 5 sts remain

Finishing:

Break yarn leaving tail long enough to sew edge. Using the yarn needle to thread the tail through the sts on the needle, pull tight. Sew the edges of the flower together with RS together (purl bumps on the outside). Decorate if you like and send to:

Molly Uline-Olmstead, Graduate Student
Department of Art Education
258 Hopkins Hall
128 North Oval Mall
The Ohio State University
Columbus, OH 43210
APPENDIX D

CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS
This call for participants was posted on several Ravelry message boards after receiving permission from those message board administrators during the last week of December 2008 and the first week of January 2009:

Hello fellow knitters. I am seeking participants, ages 18 and older, for a fine art knitalong that is a component of my Master’s Thesis. The goal of this project are to perpetuate knitting, engage in and encourage communal artmaking, and provide a forum for discussion and dialogue about the role of knitting in the lives of the participants and women in general. There will be two products of this project. The first is a knitted artwork, a garden of individual flowers knit by each participant. The second is my written thesis for a Masters of Arts Policy and Administration based on our conversations and my own historical research, which I plan to share with you throughout the course of this project.

Participation in this knitalong, The Little Flower Project is totally voluntary, and any participant may withdraw from the project/study at anytime without penalty. Questions about the research may be posed to Dr. James H. Sanders III, my advisor, and the individual listed as the Principal Investigator. Dr. Sanders may be reached at sanders-iii.1@osu.edu or by mail at the Department of Art Education at 351 Hopkins Hall, 128 North Oval Mall, Columbus Ohio.

For more information about participating please email me, Molly Uline-Olmstead at knittedflowerproject@gmail.com.
"[A Fine Art Knitalong] is a way to make an artistic impression with an impact unlike any single artist's work." – Larissa Brown, 2008, Knitalong, Fine Art Knitalongs

Thank you so much for your interest in the Knitted Flower Project. The goals of this project are to perpetuate knitting, engage in and encourage communal artmaking, and provide a forum for discussion and dialogue about the role of knitting in the lives of the participants and women in general. There will be two products of this project. The first is a knitted artwork, a garden of individual flowers knit by each participant. The second is my written thesis for a Masters of Arts Policy and Administration based on our conversations and my own historical research, which I plan to share with you throughout the course of this project.

Knitting has experienced resurgence in popularity. Women, myself included, are returning to the craft, learning it for the first time, and re-evaluating it's potential. As an avid knitter and scholar, I began to see these two aspects of my personality converge. As I began to explore, I discovered that many knitters were telling the same story. They spoke of feminism, anti-consumerism, activism, environmentalism, building friendships and communities, reconnecting to their foremothers, and making something with their hands. The goals of my research are to unpack these issues and desires and then apply them through the act of knitting itself. In order to do this I need creative knitters like you to share your talents and opinions as participants. You must be 18 or older to participate.

The following outlines how to sign-up to participate.

If you wish to participate and are 18 years of age or older please reply to this email with the subject line "Accept". By agreeing to participate you agree to the following:

• knit flowers in the attached pattern

• participate in a group blog at http://knittedflowerprojectblog.blogspot.com/ discussing the history of knitting, and the role of knitting in our lives – remember there are no right or wrong answers and these discussions will become the body of my thesis so participants may choose to participate anonymously

• choose which issues to respond to, how long to participate (you may withdraw at any time without penalty), and whether or not to participate anonymously

• read, reflect, and revise throughout the artmaking and thesis writing process – I will ask before using any comments or quotes with names attached to be sure I have a full understanding of the meaning. I want everyone to be represented accurately.

• respect each others opinions and maintain a safe and collaborative atmosphere

In that email provide the following information:
• I wish to remain anonymous: yes / no (If you answer yes you should respond to blog posts anonymously and you should not put a return address on the flowers you contribute. You may choose to reveal your identity at your own discretion.)

• If I answered "no" above the name I wish to use to be credited as on the final artwork, in photos of my flowers, and in the written thesis is:

• I want to read more of the thesis, please send me the introduction: yes / no

• I wish to be added to the mailing list so that I can receive notification when a new post is up (all emails will have email addresses hidden):

I wish to be added to the blogroll on the Knitted Flower blog:

• I have additional questions: (Feel free to ask anything through this email address at any time during the project. Your questions will remain confidential.)

I will not share email addresses or return address with anyone.

Molly Uline-Olmstead
knittedflowerproject@gmail.com
http://knittedflowerprojectblog.blogspot.com/
APPENDIX F

INFORMATION PANEL EXHIBITED WITH ARTWORK AT WONDER KNIT
**THE KNITTED FLOWER PROJECT**
2009, Handknit Flowers, paint, stain, and graphite on birch panel.

Molly Uline-Olmstead

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amber Wagner</th>
<th>Eleanor C Sayre</th>
<th>Lindsey Jensen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andrea L. Stern</td>
<td>Grace Yaskovic</td>
<td>Lindy Russell-Heymann</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audra</td>
<td>Heather Brown</td>
<td>Maria Frazier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty Blankenship</td>
<td>Ingrid Murnane</td>
<td>Michele Frankl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brea Heidelberg</td>
<td>Janelle Hallett</td>
<td>Robin F.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine Belmont-Rowe</td>
<td>Julia Sims-Haas</td>
<td>Sarah Michet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyndi in BC</td>
<td>Joanne</td>
<td>Stefanie Goodwin-Ritter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debora Hampton</td>
<td>Kristie Tuthill</td>
<td>Susan Napoli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elaine Fleschner</td>
<td>Liela McLachlan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"[A Fine Art Knitalong] is a way to make an artistic impression with an impact unlike any single artist's work." – Larissa Brown, 2008, Knitalong, Fine Art Knitalongs

The goals of this project are to perpetuate knitting, engage in and encourage communal artmaking, and provide a forum for discussion and dialogue about the role of knitting in the lives of the participants and women in general. There will be two products of this project. The first is this knitted artwork, a garden of individual flowers knit by each participant. The second is my written thesis for a Masters of Arts Policy and Administration based on our conversations and my own historical research.

Knitting has experienced resurgence in popularity. Women, myself included, are returning to the craft, learning it for the first time, and re-evaluating it’s potential. As an avid knitter and scholar, I began to see these two aspects of my personality converge. As I began to explore, I discovered that many knitters were telling the same story. They spoke of feminism, anti-consumerism, activism, environmentalism, building friendships and communities, reconnecting to their foremothers, and making something with their hands. The goals of my research are to unpack these issues and desires and then apply them through the act of knitting itself. I want to thank the creative knitters who shared their talents and opinions and made this project so engaging and enjoyable.

For more information visit [http://knittedflowerprojectblog.blogspot.com/](http://knittedflowerprojectblog.blogspot.com/) or email me at knittedflowerproject@gmail.com.
APPENDIX G

EXHIBITION INVITATION
The Knitted Flower Project

Knitting • art • research • community

A Master of Arts Policy & Administration Thesis Exhibition

April 5, 2009 – May 6, 2009
Reception: April 24, 2009 6–9 pm

at

WONDER KNIT

3165 North High Street
Columbus, Ohio 43202

Store Hours: Monday, Wednesday–Sunday 11am–7pm
Tuesday Closed

knittedflowerprojectblog.blogspot.com
wonderknit.com
LIST OF REFERENCES


Mainardi, P. (1978). *Quilts, the great American art*. San Pedro, [Calif.: Miles & Weir


