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## CRAFTING RESISTANCE: HANDMADE CULTURE AS A THIRD-WAVE FEMINIST RESPONSE TO CONSUMERISM

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CRAFTING RESISTANCE: HANDMADE CULTURE AS A THIRD-WAVE  
FEMINIST RESPONSE TO CONSUMERISM

(Spine title: Crafting Resistance)

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by

Sherilyn M. Williams

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Graduate Program in Media Studies

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## Abstract

This thesis explores a resurgence of the handmade movement as a specifically third-wave feminist response to corporate consumer culture. Websites such as *Etsy.com* and *Craftster.org* have recently emerged and provide a means for crafters and purveyors of handmade goods to engage in trade, community building, and commerce with one another and consumers. I am fundamentally concerned with how the resurgence of the handmade movement relates to the greater discourse of third-wave feminism in the context of production and consumption, the rejection of corporate profiteering, and the reclaiming of one's own labor through the handicrafts. *Etsy.com* and other craft websites have multiple ties to the third-wave feminist magazine, *BUST*, and this relationship is rigorously examined. My argument is built on a framework of feminist theory, consumption theory, and craft theory. Semiotic analyses of crafting texts and in-depth interviews with twenty-seven active crafters and *Etsy* members are employed in this research.

### *Key Words*

third-wave feminism; crafting; handmade; consumption; resistance; community, online, *BUST* magazine; *Etsy.com*

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## Introduction – Cutting the Cloth

### Purpose

Interest in handicrafts is presently on the rise, and the market value of grandma's needlepoint has little to do with it. The emergence of predominantly female craft groups across the globe<sup>1</sup> is an increasing trend, indicating the resurgence of a new arts and crafts movement in a climate of mass-production and corporate free-market economy. These craft groups meet both in person and online. Websites devoted to craft tutorials, craft blogs, craft marketplaces, and crafty chat in general are popping up at rapid rates and demonstrate the desire for people interested in crafts to share their interests online and find crafty friends abroad. Crafting communities, craft as a mode of resistance, and women and crafting are key themes that will be examined further in this thesis.

My own interest in craft peaked in the fall of 2006, when I stumbled across the online craft marketplace *Etsy.com*.<sup>2</sup> Thousands of individuals set up shop on *Etsy* to sell their handmade goods, and, even more create accounts to purchase goods. I fit into the latter category, being devoid of any artistic talent or skill. I was amazed by the sheer abundance of talent and creativity, in addition to the community dynamic that seemed to exist among craft makers and craft buyers. I also noticed that most buyers and sellers on *Etsy* were women, which fueled my thinking about the intersection between both femininity and feminism and the act of making goods by hand. Thus, my random

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<sup>1</sup> Stella Minahan and Julie Wolfram Cox, "Stitch'nBitch: Cyberfeminism, A Third Place and the New Materiality," *Journal of Material Culture* 12 no. 5 (2007): 6.

<sup>2</sup> There are a number of other craft and handmade-related online marketplaces right now, including <http://yessy.com>, <http://www.lov.li>, <http://www.mintd.com/shop>, and [www.dawanda.com](http://www.dawanda.com). However, *Etsy.com* is by far the most popular of craft commerce websites.

discovery of *Etsy* and the subsequent addiction to “buying handmade”<sup>3</sup> are the ultimate reasons this thesis exists. This thesis is fundamentally concerned with the revival of a handmade movement in a climate of corporate giants, mass-production, and mass-consumption, and its intersection with and relevance to third-wave feminism.

### Background

Websites such as *Craftster.org* (*Craftster*) and *Etsy.com* (*Etsy*) have recently begun providing online spaces for crafters and artisans to gather, discuss their crafts and surrounding issues, build communities, and in the case of *Etsy*, sell their handmade goods. The success of *Craftster* and *Etsy* (*Etsy* has over 150,000 registered sellers catering to nearly a million users<sup>4</sup> and *Craftster* has almost 145,000 members<sup>5</sup>) is indicative of the strong potential of a renewed interest in crafting.

*BUST* magazine, a bimonthly glossy publication aimed at young women and originating out of third-wave feminist discourse,<sup>6</sup> consistently features craft projects, recipes, and other DIY (“do it yourself”) ventures. Additionally, *BUST* frequently showcases items made by *Etsy* sellers in its editorial content and also features advertisements placed by them. *BUST*'s ties to primarily female entrepreneurs, who market their handmade goods through the publication's advertisements, positions the magazine within a feminist/crafting discourse.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.buyhandmade.org/>.

<sup>4</sup> Sydney Stoyan, “Bling Around the Collar,” *The National Post* (June 20, 2008): <http://www.nationalpost.com/news/story.html?id=602709>.

<sup>5</sup> <http://craftster.org>.

<sup>6</sup> Lettie Conrad, *Third Wave Feminism: A Case Study of BUST Magazine* (California State University, Northridge, Thesis, Master of Arts in Mass Communication, 2001), 13.

Handicrafts are longstanding cultural objects and artisanship is an extended cultural process. The act of making things by hand serves to enhance the monotony of life with objects of practicality, beauty, and meaning, and also offers the sheer pleasure of creating. The word "craft" has come to mean different things over the years, and as metalsmith and crafts writer Bruce Metcalf notes, it can be tricky terrain, describing everything from skilled work, the decorative arts, trades and folkways, to a mode of resistance against mass-production.<sup>7</sup> In this study, the terms "craft" and "crafting" will be used to describe handmade goods or the act of making goods by hand, and "crafter" will be used to describe those engaged in the production of these goods.<sup>8</sup> Crafters are not typically thought of as political dissidents, and the act of crafting is not generally considered one of rebellion or protest, but historically and at present the act of making goods by hand is indeed one of opposition. Moreover, because certain crafts have historically been confined to the sphere of women's production, the act of crafting as a means of protest is emblematic of new approaches in feminist thinking.

The notion of crafting as a mechanism of resistance has brought handicrafts into the public consciousness several times in recent history. The British and American Arts and Crafts movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century marked a protest against the dire factory conditions created by capitalism, the detachment from one's labor, and it advocated a return to creativity and concern for aesthetic.<sup>9</sup> A more contemporary resurgence in the interest of craft occurred once again in the 1960s and

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<sup>7</sup> Bruce Metcalf, "Contemporary Craft: A Brief Overview," *Exploring Contemporary Craft* (Canada: Coach House Books, 2002), 13-15.

<sup>8</sup> Participants in this study were asked how they self-identify as producers of handmade goods (i.e. artist, crafter, artisan, DIYer) and most prefer the terms "crafter," "artist," and "designer."

<sup>9</sup> Gillian Naylor, *The Arts and Crafts Movement: A Study of its Sources, Ideals, and Influence on Design Theory* (London: Studio Vista, 1971), 7.

1970s as anti-Vietnam discourse became closely aligned with the desire to return to nature and handmade goods. According to Stella Minahan and Julie Wolfram Cox,

The era was fraught with fears that natural resources such as oil would be depleted and that a nuclear holocaust was inevitable so alternative energy sources must be found. Women in the western world took up their needles and threads during this era. Spinning wheels were in full flight producing yarns for hand knits and looms threaded to produce textiles for wear and domestic use.<sup>10</sup>

Fears about declining natural resources, environmental degradation, and the negatives of capitalism, mass production and consumption are again set off by and located within the discourse of various media outlets, awareness advocacy groups, and public opinion at large. Consequently, craft is once again emerging as a means of protest and resistance.<sup>11</sup>

This thesis will use *Etsy*, *Craftster*, and *BUST* magazine, as well as a few additional craft-related sites to explore the intersection of craft, third-wave feminism, and consumption, and the way in which this intersection facilitates consumer resistance.

### Literature Review

Because of the multi-faceted nature of this thesis, the theoretical framework will be drawn from relevant thinkers in the areas of craft theory, feminist theory, and consumption theory. No one set of theorists can adequately explain the cultural phenomenon of craft resurgence as a feminist resistance tactic against consumerism and mass-production, and as such, relevant research in these separate areas will be examined and engaged to synthesize my exploration of the topic. The following literature review is divided into sections, with the aim of clearly engaging various fields interwoven by third-wave feminism,

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<sup>10</sup> Minahan and Wolfram Cox, 13.

<sup>11</sup> Amy Spencer, *The Crafter Culture Handbook* (New York: Marion Boyars, 2007), 9.

craft as a feminist resistance tactic, and consumption. Little research has been done on the current crafting movement specifically as it relates to third-wave feminism and resistance to corporate consumer culture. Thus, relevant literature comes from various directions including third-wave feminism and *BUST* magazine, DIY culture as a mode of resistance, online communities, and theories of consumption.

### *The Third-Wave and BUST Magazine*

There is an ongoing debate about using the terms “post-feminism” and “third-wave feminism” and what these terms signify and mean. Gillis and Munford argue that,

In so far as any notion of a ‘third wave’ implies that second wave feminism is over, it has too often been conflated with ‘post-feminism’. Post-feminism is itself an ambiguous and contested term that has been seized upon by a media all too eager to declare the demise – and failure – of feminism.<sup>12</sup>

For the purpose of this thesis, I will consistently use the term “third-wave feminism,” because I refute the notion that we are either beyond feminism, or that it no longer exists.<sup>13</sup>

In her Master’s thesis on *BUST* magazine, Lettie Conrad describes third-wave feminism as a “non-positivist approach to feminism, informed and transformed by an awareness of racism, classism, and homophobia...characterized by a focus on individualism and anti-essentialism, alternative and diverse sexualities, contradiction and contrast, and multiculturalism.”<sup>14</sup> Originating in the 1960s and 1970s, and largely distinguished by its liberal social theories and direct political activism, second-wave

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<sup>12</sup> Stacy Gillis and Rebecca Munford, “Genealogies and Generations: The Politics and Praxis of Third Wave Feminism” *Women’s History Review* 13 no.2 (2004): 166.

<sup>13</sup> For a more nuanced analysis of the terms post-feminism vs. third-wave feminism, refer to Gillis and Munford.

<sup>14</sup> Conrad, 13.

feminism and its goals and achievements (fighting for women's equality in the workplace and elsewhere and facilitating safe and legal access to abortion and reproductive rights among others) are extended by third-wave feminism. However, the third wave also seeks to differentiate itself from the second wave in that it acknowledges previous feminist accomplishments and advancements but also claims to offer an improved feminism. The third wave recognizes and responds to "all those things missing from women's lives because of an earlier prescriptive feminism."<sup>15</sup> For instance, although activities such as knitting or sewing may have been considered anti-feminist by the second wave due to their primarily 'domestic' significations, the third wave regards such activities as sites of personal expression and utility. In other words, third-wave feminism embraces (or does not specifically condemn) activities such as knitting, cooking, and crafting, as well as things like cosmetics, feminine-style clothing, the colour pink, and other signs that have traditionally symbolized femininity and domesticity, and it allows for multiple perspectives and fluctuating desires. According to Ann Braithwaite, "for many third-wave feminists a defining feature of their self-identified brand of third-wave feminism is precisely its refusal of the second wave's politics of rejection of signifiers and practices of traditional femininity in favor of a politics of contradiction, incorporation and negotiation."<sup>16</sup> Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake define third-wave feminism as a "movement that contains elements of second wave critique of beauty culture, sexual abuse and power structures while it also acknowledges and makes use of the pleasure,

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<sup>15</sup> Ann Braithwaite, "The Personal, the Political, Third Wave and Postfeminisms," *Feminist Theory* 3 no.3., 338.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 339.

danger, and defining power of those structures.”<sup>17</sup> It is in this context, and through Heywood and Drake’s definition, that I will utilize the term “third-wave feminism” in my study.

Established in 1993 by Debbie Stoller, Marcelle Karp, and Laurie Henzel, *BUST* magazine is a glossy, mass-produced, independently owned, American-based publication targeted at women over the age of eighteen.<sup>18</sup> Its slogan purports that it is “The Magazine for Women with Something to Get off Their Chests,” and many critics, scholars, and readers have identified the magazine as supporting a third-wave feminist perspective and agenda.<sup>19</sup> According to Conrad, *BUST* has consistently maintained its commitment to a multiperspectival, anti-essentialist attitude characteristic of previous third-wave feminist publications throughout its publication history.<sup>20</sup>

In every *BUST* issue, there are sections entitled “Real Life” and “Looks,” each containing crafts, recipes, and directions to complete various DIY activities. The crafts sections typically contain patterns, detailed instructions, and example pictures of finished goods. Recent examples include instructions on how to make Mexican style Day of the Dead sugar skulls, tote bags crocheted out of recycled plastic grocery bags, decal enhanced shoes, and a necklace strung out of vintage buttons. Crafting culture and the handmade/DIY movement are clearly represented in the editorial content of *BUST*. The magazine also features many purveyors of handmade goods in its editorial content, some of whom are current sellers on *Etsy*. A large number of advertisements in *BUST* magazine are placed by women or men who sell their goods through *Etsy*. In this sense,

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<sup>17</sup> Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake, eds., *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 3.

<sup>18</sup> Conrad, 3.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

the relationship between the third-wave feminist *BUST* magazine and the crafting marketplace *Etsy* is clear.<sup>21</sup>

### *Crafting, Feminism, and Resistance*

In a historical context, crafting has been repeatedly used as a resistance tactic against mass production (i.e. the Arts and Crafts movement).<sup>22</sup> Contemporary craft, like that of more than a century ago, still stands in opposition of mainstream consumer culture. According to Bruce Metcalfe,

Craft still stands against the anonymity of mass-production and for the personalized object. Craft still stands against ugliness and, on occasion, for beauty. Craft still stands against big-money capitalism and for small-scale entrepreneurship. Craft stands against corporate labour, where most workers are replaceable parts in a bureaucracy, and for individual self-determination. Craft stands for the rich potential of the human body at work and against disembodiment in all forms. Craft continues to be a social movement, often intuitive and without leadership.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, the potential of craft as a resistance mechanism is well documented. In *The Subversive Stitch*, Rozsika Parker traces the history of embroidery and its significations of femininity. Parker explains the emergence of the hierarchical classification of and distinction between “fine arts” and “crafts.” According to Parker, “The fine arts – painting and sculpture – are considered the proper sphere of the privileged classes while craft or the applied arts – like furniture-making or silver-smithery – are associated with

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<sup>21</sup> The research gathered on *BUST* magazine and third-wave feminism originally stemmed from a group project for MS 701 with Melanie Preston and Riva Symko. It was through this study that I first became interested in the discourse of feminism and crafting.

<sup>22</sup> Naylor, 7.

<sup>23</sup> Metcalf, 16-17.



the working class.”<sup>24</sup> Parker points out that needlecraft has traditionally been classified as a craft or “women’s work” with overtly domestic significations, rather than a fine art, even though embroidery is almost entirely ornamental and decorative rather than functional. Parker makes the conscious decision to refer to embroidery as “art” rather than “craft,” because, “it is, undoubtedly a cultural practice involving iconography, style and a social function.”<sup>25</sup> Parker also notes the role of embroidery in feminist political movements, most notably, the Suffrage movement and the Women’s Liberation Movement in the 1970s. Parker contends that, “Limited to practicing art with needle and thread, women have nevertheless sewn a subversive stitch – managed to make meanings of their own in the very medium intended to inculcate self-effacement.”<sup>26</sup> It is then apparent how and why craft today is being embraced women and third-wave feminists. However, the emergence of a specifically third-wave feminist crafting discourse in academia is a relatively recent phenomenon.

In *DIY: The Rise of Lo-Fi Culture*, Amy Spencer examines the DIY movement specifically as it relates to feminist zines. She briefly touches on the emergence of the craft movement, which she claims stems from the DIY community.<sup>27</sup> Spencer also notes that “for many, this new wave of craft as a lo-fi activity, is a form of feminism,”<sup>28</sup> and it marks a new form of domesticity that allows women to “link feminist principles with the idea that crafting is an enjoyable and valued activity and one which should not be rejected as part of an oppressive culture.”<sup>29</sup> Betsy Greer of *Craftivism.com* sees the recent

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<sup>24</sup> Roszika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch* (London: The Women’s Press Limited, 1986), 5.

<sup>25</sup> Parker, 6.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>27</sup> Amy Spencer, *DIY: The Rise of Lo-fi Culture* (New York: Marion Boyars, 2005), 65.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

revival of crafting as a revolutionary and political act. According to Greer, "Craft has taken on a revolutionary role. Instead of knitting, weaving, or sewing because we have to, with all of the technology that is available, people are choosing to. It is in this choice to spend one's leisure time making something that one could be easily purchased where there is resistance."<sup>30</sup> Greer's Master's thesis entitled *Taking Back the Knit: Creating Communities via Needlecraft*<sup>31</sup> is widely cited in discussions of craft, feminism and activism. Spencer, in *The Crafter Culture Handbook*, describes a "New Domesticity," in which women are reclaiming crafts traditionally thought of as "women's work" by adding subversive or political messages to the finished product.<sup>32</sup> According to Spencer,

The movement holds strong ties in punk rock 'Do-It-Yourself' communities, stemming in part from the Riot Grrl underground movement of the early 1990s where women challenged the male dominance of the music scene. It is a distinct part of an independent cultural ethos set apart from the commercial world, a resourceful way to live your life, a way to personalize your own environment.<sup>33</sup>

In *Next Wave Cultures: Feminism, Subcultures, Activism*, Kristen Schilt and Elke Zobl examine the Riot Grrrl movement and punk rock feminism and their relationship to zines and DIY. They note that, "Riot Grrrl also inspired young girls and women to create zines. The appeal of zines lies in the DIY ethos, the ability of anyone with an opinion to put pen to finger (or finger to keyboard) to create a written record of their life."<sup>34</sup> According to Carly Stasko, "At the roots of DIY culture is the simple act of doing things independently in creative ways so as to compensate for a lack of finances, infrastructure,

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<sup>30</sup> Spencer, *DIY*, 66.

<sup>31</sup> Betsy Greer, *Taking Back the Knit: Creating Communities via Needlecraft* (Goldsmith College, University of London, Thesis, Master of Arts, 2004).

<sup>32</sup> Spencer, *Crafter*, 162-163.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>34</sup> Kristen Schilt and Elke Zobl, "Connecting the Dots: Riot Grrrls, Ladyfests, and the International Grrrl Zine Network," in *Next Wave Cultures* ed. Anita Harris (New York: Routledge, 2008), 175.

professional training and often permission. DIY culture nurtures communities where people share skills, ideas, and creative expression, thereby fueling connectivity.”<sup>35</sup> DIY culture is also rooted in anti-consumerist ideals, and the spirit of DIY “stands in resistance to the popular notion that this is just the way things are, and that we might as well get used to it because it can’t be changed.”<sup>36</sup>

Recently, Minahan and Wolfram Cox examined the “stitch’n bitch” movement, where women gather in small groups to knit, crochet, and “chit chat.” While the term “stitch’n bitch” is used internationally to describe these groups, it stems from a book authored by *BUST* editor Debbie Stoller, aptly titled *Stitch 'n Bitch: The Knitter's Handbook*.<sup>37</sup> According to Minahan and Wolfram Cox, “*Stitch 'nBitch* may well be a form of resistance to the traditional placing of women in terms of physical location (the home compared with the third place e.g. the pub), of isolation (the private home compared with the public place), and in response to the low status of traditional women’s textile crafts such as knitting.”<sup>38</sup> Thus, the intersection of third-wave feminism, crafting, and resistance is one that is still new, but that certainly warrants academic attention.

### *Online Communities*

Because *Etsy* is examined in this thesis in the context of online crafting communities, relevant literature in the field must also be touched upon. Siddhartha Menon notes that literature examining online communities and computer-mediated

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<sup>35</sup> Carly Stasko, “(r)Evolutionary Healing: Jamming with Culture and Shifting the Power,” in *Next Wave Cultures* ed. Anita Harris (New York: Routledge, 2008), 200.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Debbie Stoller, *Stitch 'N Bitch: The Knitter's Handbook* (New York: Workman Publishing, 2004).

<sup>38</sup> Minahan and Wolfram Cox, 14.

communication (CMC) can be split into two broadly defined levels of debate. According to Menon,

The first involves the debate over whether CMC-related communities function as real or legitimate communities according to a rather strict sense of the term or are merely fly-by-night forums with no communal rules, social norms, or attachments that resemble the strong social bonds that tend to define the traditional community experience of face-to-face communication.<sup>39</sup>

Scholars aligned with this type of thinking include Doheny-Farina,<sup>40</sup> Stoll,<sup>41</sup> and Bird.<sup>42</sup>

On the other side of the debate are those who believe that online communities are indeed possible and serve to foster civic engagement, activism, and empowerment. Turkle,<sup>43</sup>

Bakardjieva,<sup>44</sup> Baym,<sup>45</sup> and Rheingold<sup>46</sup> are some scholars aligned with this side of the debate. In *The Virtual Community*, Rheingold confronts criticisms of the potential of online communities. He states,

What should those of us who believe in the democratizing potential of virtual communities do about the technological critics? I believe we should invite them to the table and help them see the flaws in our dreams, the bugs in our designs. I believe we should study what the historians and social scientists have to say about the illusions and power shifts that accompanied the diffusion of previous technologies. CMC and technology in general has real limits; it's best to continue to

<sup>39</sup> Siddhartha Menon, "A Participation Observation Analysis of the Once & Again Internet Message Bulletin Boards" *Television & New Media* 8 no. 4 (2007): 345.

<sup>40</sup> Stephen Doheny-Farina, *The Wired Neighborhood* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996).

<sup>41</sup> Clifford Stoll, *Silicon Snake Oil: Second Thoughts on the Information Highway* (New York: Doubleday, 1995).

<sup>42</sup> S. Elizabeth Bird, "Chatting on Cynthia's Porch: Creating Community in an E-mail Fan Group" *Southern Communication Journal* 65 (1999).

<sup>43</sup> Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995).

<sup>44</sup> Maria Bakardjieva, "Virtual Togetherness: An Everyday-Life Perspective" *Media, Culture & Society* 25 (2003): 291-313.

<sup>45</sup> Nancy Baym, "Interpreting Soap Operas and Creating Community: Inside a Computer-Mediated Fan Culture," *Journal of Folklore Research* 30 (1993): 143-77.

<sup>46</sup> Howard Rheingold, "A Slice of Life in My Virtual Community. In *High Noon on the Electronic Frontier: Conceptual Issues in Cyberspace*, edited by Peter Ludlow and Mike Godwin (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 413-36.

listen to those who understand the limits, even as we continue to explore the technologies' positive capabilities. Failing to fall under the spell of the "rhetoric of the technological sublime," actively questioning and examining social assumptions about the effects of new technologies, reminding ourselves that electronic communication has powerful illusory capabilities, are all good steps to take to prevent disasters.<sup>47</sup>

Turkle demonstrates her ideas about the potential of CMC early on in her seminal text

*Life on the Screen:*

In cyberspace, hundreds of thousands, perhaps already millions, of users create online personae who live in a diverse group of virtual communities where the routine formation of multiple identities undermines any notion of a real or unitary self. Yet the notion of the real fights back. People who live parallel lives on the screen are nevertheless bound by the desires, pain, and mortality of their physical selves. Virtual communities offer a dramatic new context in which to think about human identity in the age of the Internet. They are spaces for learning about the lived meaning of a culture of simulation.<sup>48</sup>

While online communities were still in their early stages when the text was written,

Turkle accurately foresees that they will change the way we think about communication, technology, and identity.

*Gender and CMC*

Because this thesis deals primarily with women, relevant literature on gender and computer-mediated communication was also examined. In her earlier work on gender and technology, Turkle notes that women's traditional relationship with technology affects their relationship with the male-dominated computer, keeping women "fearful and

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<sup>47</sup> Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 320.

<sup>48</sup> Turkle, 267-268.

far away from the machine.”<sup>49</sup> In “Gender, Technology and Computer-Mediated Communications in Consumption-Related Online Communities,” Maclaran et al. discuss the gender-switching/gender-neutralizing capabilities offered by certain virtual environments, but contend that “Despite the potential afforded by the Internet to gender-switch and to adopt gender-neutral identity, a major reason why Internet communications often fail to mask the gender of their originator is that there are clear differences in the ways that males and females use language.”<sup>50</sup> In their “netnography” of a digital camera forum, Maclaran et al. found that certain elements of the forum were gendered male (i.e. technical discussions of cameras) and that women who join in discussions in the forum “do so on male terms and most frequently use ‘male talk.’ As their postings tend to be ignored more frequently, they devise discursive strategies of gaining attention, particularly calling on the ‘expertise’ of other (male) members.”<sup>51</sup> However, certain topics of the forum discussions (portrait and wedding photography) “are constructed in community discourse as the softer, more social and feminine side of photography that requires less high-tech equipment.”<sup>52</sup> Relevant literature to this topic will also be examined in Chapter 2, which deals specifically with crafting communities online.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Sherry Turkle, “Computational Reticence: Why Women Fear the Intimate Machine” in *Technology and Women’s Voices: Keeping in Touch* (New York: Routledge, 1986), 41.

<sup>50</sup> Maclaran et al. “Gender, Technologies and Computer-Mediated Communications in Consumption-Related Online Communities,” in *Elusive Consumption*, eds Karin M. Ekstrom and Helene Bremebeck (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2004), 151.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> A comprehensive analysis of gendered discussions in craft-related forums merits additional research, but is beyond the scope of this thesis.

## *Consumption*

In examining the act of crafting as a mechanism of resistance, it is imperative to investigate exactly what it is that the act is resisting. Like the term “crafting,” consumption has come to mean many different things and as Tim Edwards notes, “no adequate definition of consumption or its related concepts yet exists.”<sup>54</sup> According to Edwards,

Historically, consumption has been understood in a variety of ways. These have included seeing it as central to the maintenance of status and class position, as a mechanism for fantasy and day-dreaming related to the rise of city cultures, or as a modern form of justification for economic exploitation through production (Veblen 1934; Adorno and Horkheimer 1973; Benjamin 1973). And, more recently, attention has focused on consumption’s role in the formation and maintenance of identities as part of the development of style cultures (Ewen 1988; Featherstone 1991; Lury 1996).<sup>55</sup>

Edwards suggests that there are three elements to the practice of consumption. The first element is *consumerism* (activities of consumers such as shopping, and on a more theoretical level, the relationship between subject and object or the significance of the commodity). The second involves *leisure* (the consumption of commodities and services), and the third is the activity of *consuming* itself (eating, drinking, viewing, listening, purchasing, etc.).<sup>56</sup> For the purpose of this study, I will utilize Grant McCracken’s simplified definition of consumption, “the process by which consumer goods and services are created, bought, and used.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Tim Edwards, *Contradictions of Consumption: Concepts, Practices and Politics in Consumer Society* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000), 2.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>57</sup> Grant McCracken, *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), xi.

According to Neva R. Goodwin, the majority opinion worldwide is that a consumer society is a good one.<sup>58</sup> However, there are alternate views within theories of consumption that are relevant to this thesis. Some of the literature on consumption specifically examines it as a cultural phenomenon (McCracken<sup>59</sup>). Other studies locate practices of production within an ideology and context of consumption (Nye and Pederson,<sup>60</sup> Edwards<sup>61</sup>). Still others in this vast and rapidly increasing field of consumption studies focus on consumer practices (Gabriel and Lang,<sup>62</sup> Paquet,<sup>63</sup> and Klaffke<sup>64</sup>). The issue of resistance is one that arises frequently in discussions of consumption. Goodwin notes that there are several environmental criticisms of western consumption, as well as the concern for welfare of poorer people and nations who "make inappropriate decisions on what to consume, and reduce their savings and investment, because they are misled by seeing the consumption of richer people and nations."<sup>65</sup> Thomas Walz and Edward Canda suggest that "U.S. consumption levels have a systematic, largely negative impact on Third World development," due to the U.S.'s role as a creditor, American corporations using the third world for its cheap labor, and its frequent use of third world natural resources.<sup>66</sup> The high levels of western and American consumption and their exploitation of poorer nations to achieve this, presents a fruitful

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<sup>58</sup> Neva R. Goodwin, "Volume Introduction," *The Consumer Society*, eds. Neva R. Goodwin, Frank Ackerman and David Kiron (Washington: Island Press, 1997), xxviii.

<sup>59</sup> McCracken.

<sup>60</sup> David E. Nye and Carl Pedersen, eds., *Consumption and American Culture*. (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1991).

<sup>61</sup> Edwards.

<sup>62</sup> Yiannis Gabriel and Tim Lang, *The Unmanageable Consumer: Contemporary Consumption and its Fragmentations* (London: Sage Publications, 1995).

<sup>63</sup> Laura Byrne Paquet, *The Urge to Splurge: A Social History of Shopping* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2003).

<sup>64</sup> Pamela Klaffke, *Spreed: A Cultural History of Shopping* (Vancouver, Arsenal Pulp Press, 2003).

<sup>65</sup> Goodwin, xxx.

<sup>66</sup> Thomas Walz and Edward Canda, "Gross National Consumption in the United States: Implications for Third World Development," in *The Consumer Society* eds. Neva R. Goodwin, Frank Ackerman and David Kiron (Washington: Island Press, 1997), 330-331.



ground for resistance by consumers. Gabriel and Lang describe the history of the consumer as “activist,” and suggest that there have been four waves of consumer activism. The first wave, “co-operative consumers,” occurred in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The second wave of consumer activism, “value-for-money consumers” was built upon US consumer initiatives of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but took its modern form in the 1930s. The third wave, Naderism, emerged in the US in the 1960s, and the fourth and most recent wave, the “alternative consumer,” emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. According to Gabriel and Lang,

The [alternative consumer] movement has many elements: green, ethical, Third World solidarity and fair trade organizations. Initially, the most influential of these was green consumerism which introduced the argument that the consumer should play a leading part in protecting the environment in a number of ways, from purchasing more environmentally-friendly products to resisting consumerism altogether.<sup>67</sup>

Gabriel and Lang also note that left wing politics in North America have continually pushed for the idea of the consumer as citizen, encouraging and envisioning a “responsible... socially aware consumer... who thinks ahead and tempers his or her desires by social awareness... whose actions must be morally defensible and who must occasionally be prepared to sacrifice personal pleasure for communal well-being.”<sup>68</sup>

This idea that one can enact social change by directing his/her dollars toward goods and services deemed ethical or socially responsible is the very reason why the handmade movement is so politically subversive. The act of creating goods by hand makes a political statement, intentional or not; it ignores the market forces of corporations that mass-produce goods and gives alternative consumers the option of

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<sup>67</sup> Gabriel and Lang, 163.

<sup>68</sup> Gabriel and Lang, Second Edition, 175.

buying ethically produced products. The creators of these goods control their own labor, wages, and means of production, and stand in direct opposition to corporations that seek to maximize profits, minimize costs, and produce and sell commodities that dominate the marketplace.

Handmade goods can thus stand in as substitutes for mass-produced goods, and ultimately challenge corporate domination of the marketplace. In his discussion of the craft consumer, Colin Campbell describes the return to crafting as “an oasis of personal self-expression in what is an ever-widening ‘desert’ of commodification and marketization.”<sup>69</sup> Buying crafts can thus be understood as a form of personal expression and individuality with a focus on unique aesthetics, in addition to a form of ethical consumption with resistance elements. While some may question the conflict between selling and marketing crafts and resisting consumerism, it is important to consider that handmade goods constitute an ethical form of production and purchasing them facilitates the avoidance of mass-produced goods. Although consuming crafts is still a form of consumption, it is also a means to consciously oppose buying from corporations and rather, to support small-scale entrepreneurs and skilled work. It is within this conception of the alternative consumer, and consuming in an “ethical manner” that crafting as a mechanism of resistance against corporate dominated consumer culture will be examined in this thesis.

While this literature review demonstrates that there is an interest in the resurgence of craft, craft as a means of feminist protest, craft as a means of resistance against mass consumerism, and third-wave feminists texts and their relevance to

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<sup>69</sup> Colin Campbell, “The Craft Consumer: Culture, Craft and Consumption in Modern Society,” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 5 no.1 (2005): 37.

handmade culture, none of the research deals with the intersection of all of these facets and the cultural significance that occurs when they merge. Earlier studies have dealt with each of these separately, or varying combinations of these issues, but up until now there has been no thesis-length research that deals with each facet and the effect that occurs when they become one whole. Hence, this study is unique in examining the very specific intersection of online craft communities like *Etsy* with third-wave feminist texts such as *BUST* magazine, in the context of consumerism and resistance.

### Research sites

#### *BUST Magazine*

As mentioned previously, *BUST* magazine is a significant text for this study due to its intersection with third-wave feminism and the craft-production and marketing cycle. *BUST* constitutes a somewhat mass-produced, and yet non-mainstream publication that situates itself in the midst of the DIY and feminist crafting movement. According to Lettie Conrad, “in the absence of status-quo promoting commercial forces, independent and self-produced print media freely express unorthodox thought, connect and educate political movements, and preserve the theoretical and aesthetic attributes of revolutionary communities.”<sup>70</sup> In this context, *BUST* presents itself as a significant means to gain insight into current discourse and key areas of discussion within the third-wave feminist movement. Conrad notes,

Addressing a range of topics, from music and fashion to date rape and masturbation, riot grrrl zines and glossy Third Wave feminist magazines offer forums for expression not available through commercial media. As Third Wavers react to the

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<sup>70</sup> Conrad, 1.

theories and politics of Second Wave feminism (feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s), Third Wave feminist publications express ways in which young feminists negotiate the cultural terrain of late 20<sup>th</sup> century and early 21<sup>st</sup> century America.<sup>71</sup>

### *Etsy.com and Craftster.org*

Little to no academic work has been done on *Etsy* and *Craftster*. The sites are rapidly gaining popularity and press coverage in various newspapers, magazines, and blogs, but to date no published scholarly work has been done on these online spaces as creative and innovative sites aimed at buyers and creators of craft goods. Spencer notes that the format of such sites (she references *Craftivism.com*, *Craftster.org* and *Getcrafty.com* specifically) contain characteristics of the zine format, specifically the demand for interaction from those who view the site. According to Spencer,

The discourse created between creator and reader is blurred as interaction is encouraged. One dominant feature of such sites is the use of online forums, where those who view the site are asked to share their own crafting ideas... The sharing of ideas and skills is fundamental to this craft community, which promotes accessibility and community – key aspects of the DIY movement as a whole.<sup>72</sup>

*Etsy* was launched in June 2005 by entrepreneur and handmade enthusiast Rob Kalin and his friends as a place for people to buy and sell handmade goods. At present, there are almost one million members, 150,000 of them being registered vendors on the site. But these numbers are increasing daily. Aside from the obvious commerce occurring on the site, members also gather and discuss everything from crafts to politics to parenting in the *Etsy* forums. The goods sold on *Etsy* run the gamut from traditional

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>72</sup> Spencer, *DIY*, 65-66.

“country crafts” to artisan created glasswork, jewelry, and paintings. *BUST* magazine frequently features items from *Etsy* sellers, and there are a number of sellers peddling handmade goods with overtly feminist messages.

*Craftster* was founded in 2004 by Leah Kramer.<sup>73</sup> At present, there are approximately 144,000 members. *Craftster* is not a commercial enterprise, but rather, a forum-based site designed to facilitate the creation of a crafting community for crafters and DIYers. There are no fees, and the little advertising from craft suppliers and crafty individuals provides just enough revenue to cover operating costs. Crafters showcase items they have made and offer tutorials and tips so that other *Craftster* members may attempt to make similar projects. Together, *Etsy* and *Craftster* signify the reemergence of a crafting movement that stands in opposition to corporate fueled consumerism, and the subversive act of crafting that these sites advocate serves to bring into question the negative aspects of consumption.<sup>74</sup>

#### *Additional Research Sites and Emerging Craft Resources*

In addition to *Etsy* and *Craftster*, several other craft-related websites are examined in this thesis. *BurdaStyle.com* and *buyhandmade.org* are two sites that very recently emerged (*BurdaStyle* was launched in January 2007 and *buyhandmade.org* emerged in fall 2007) and exist to help foster crafting communities and raise awareness about the emerging handmade movement. These sites, in addition to other crafting sites

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>74</sup> Stacie Stukin, “Pretty Crafty,” *Time* (March 1, 2005): <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1032358-2,00.html>.

and sources<sup>75</sup> and blogs were examined and consulted as invaluable resources in this thesis. A recent PBS documentary series entitled *Craft in America* (2007) was also consulted for this research.

The television show, *She's Crafty*, which started airing on HGTV in 2007, features host Wendy Russell, founding member of the Vancouver Craft Mafia, a division of the famed Austin Craft Mafia<sup>76</sup> riding her Vespa around Vancouver and offering hip how-tos for young and eager crafters. The show's website states:

When stitchin' became bitchin' and knit cafes began popping up in the trendiest of neighbourhoods, it became clear that crafts weren't just for grannies anymore. Host Wendy Russell demonstrates that crafting is fun, easy and a great way to liven up the home, as well as offering up tips like how to knit a laptop bag or reinventing ways to reuse an old tee-shirt.<sup>77</sup>

*She's Crafty*, while not explicitly examined in this thesis, is demonstrative of the pop culture elements of crafting and how the act of crafting is gaining popularity and interest on a mass level.

As this thesis is being written, a documentary on craft and the handmade movement is currently in production. *Handmade Nation*<sup>78</sup> will examine the new crafting and DIY movement and the impacts on consumerism, mass-production and community. According to the Myspace page for the documentary,

This movement created by craft forges a new economy, lifestyle and burgeoning art community that is based on creativity, determination and networking. The heart of the new wave of craft is the community. Artists, crafters, makers, organizers, critics, curators, cultural theorists and historians

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<sup>75</sup> *Indiepublic.com*, *Craft Magazine*, *Adorn Magazine*, *Venus Zine*, and *Designspongeonline.com* were among the various resources consulted but not specifically cited within this thesis.

<sup>76</sup> "Biography," [http://www.wendyrussell.com/?page\\_id=4](http://www.wendyrussell.com/?page_id=4).

<sup>77</sup> "She's Crafty," <http://www.hgtv.ca/ontv/titledetails.aspx?titleid=111458>.

<sup>78</sup> Faith Levine, "Handmade Nation: The Rise of DIY, Art, Craft, and Design," (blog) <http://indiecraftdocumentary.blogspot.com/>.

come together to create a community that shares the desire to produce change through the passion to create. By sharing ideas and encouragement they work together to nurture entrepreneurialism, preserve feminine heritage and wield great economic power.<sup>79</sup>

The documentary is slated for release in 2009 and thus will not make it into this thesis, but the issues and points it raises demonstrate a need for more academic attention in the field of craft, resistance against consumerism, feminism, and community, and how these issues all intersect with one another.

### Methods

This thesis employs multi-methods research and considers the following question: Is crafting a significant feminist form of resistance against corporate consumer culture, and if so, what specifically is it about the act of making goods by hand that compels feminists to embrace craft as a resistance mechanism? To answer this question, this research focuses, first, on the act of crafting itself as a mode of feminist resistance, and second, how the websites such as *Etsy* and *Craftster* and the magazine *BUST* serve to promote the act of crafting and mobilize active resistance through crafting.

In Chapter One, I employ a semiotic analysis of *BUST* magazine. Seven issues in total are examined, in chronological order from June/July 2007 to June/July 2008. *BUST* is published biannually and thus the six issues constitute an entire year's worth of the magazine. However, the seventh (and most recent issue at the time this thesis was written) of *BUST* is also examined because it is the fifteenth anniversary issue and features a retrospective look at the magazine's origins as well as greater context about the issues and ideas represented within *BUST*. In using a semiotic method of analysis, I draw

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<sup>79</sup> <http://www.myspace.com/indiecraftdocumentary>.

from the work of Barthes on semiotics and mythic language<sup>80</sup> as well as work of Ellen McCracken on semiotics and women's magazines.<sup>81</sup> McCracken's emphasis on women's magazines and consumption<sup>82</sup> is particularly beneficial to my own analysis of consumption in the more underground women's magazine, *BUST*. According to McCracken, "[women] learn to conceive of themselves as inherently in need of improvement and that the most direct path to pleasure and fulfillment is consumption."<sup>83</sup> Despite its comparatively underground position as a feminist women's magazine, *BUST* is nevertheless situated alongside more mainstream magazines such as *Glamour* and *Cosmopolitan*, and does feature sections also found in mainstream women's magazines (i.e. fashion, beauty, advice). However, *BUST*'s emphasis on independent designers and handmade goods (in both editorial and advertisements) uniquely situates its promotion of consumption in an alternative context. Again, drawing on the work of Colin Campbell on craft consumers,<sup>84</sup> *BUST*'s featuring of unique and individualized style through independent designers, in addition to ethical and alternative modes of consumption demonstrates its unique position as a women's magazine outside of the norm. Semiotics is therefore a highly beneficial tool in delineating *BUST*'s role as an alternative women's magazine through the examination of editorial and advertising content.

The data for this research was gathered using a variety of qualitative methods including interviews with practicing crafters and visual and textual analyses of *BUST* and various crafting websites, primarily *Etsy* and *Craftster*. Semi-structured interviews with

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<sup>80</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000).

<sup>81</sup> Ellen McCracken, *Decoding Women's Magazines: From Mademoiselle to Ms.* (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1993).

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>84</sup> Campbell, 37.



active crafters, *Etsy* and *Craftster* members, *BUST* readers, and self-identified feminists provided me with insight into the crafting movement and how it intersects with feminism, consumerism, and resistance. Textual and visual analyses of *BUST*, *Etsy* and *Craftster* were used to demonstrate the ways in which crafting discourse, aesthetics and marketing converge to appeal to a third-wave feminist audience and ultimately garner feminist crafting activities and resistances. This analysis focuses on the continually changing websites *Etsy* and *Craftster*, as well as *BUST* issues from June/July 2007 to June/July 2008. Interviewees were selected initially through advertisements they have placed in *BUST* magazine, website listings on *BUST*'s Girl Wide Web<sup>85</sup>, and relevant *Etsy* storefronts. Eleven crafters were contacted through this method. Of those contacted, ten expressed interest in participating; six of those initially contacted sent me completed questionnaires. After realizing that obtaining the desired number of participants through selective contacting would be difficult, I decided to write a recruitment article<sup>86</sup> for *Etsy*'s online newspaper, *The Storque*, explaining the details of the study and calling on interested parties to contact me for interview materials. The story was published on January 30, 2008 and resulted in seventy-five *Etsy* users contacting me. Ultimately, nineteen respondents completed the questionnaire after the article was published in *The Storque*. Finally, I sent out a follow-up email<sup>87</sup> to all respondents who had yet to send their completed questionnaires. Following this, two more people sent their completed questionnaires. The total number of questionnaires completed and used for data analysis

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<sup>85</sup>The Girl Wide Web is *BUST*'s online directory of feminist shops, blogs and websites. <http://www.bust.com/girlweb/>.

<sup>86</sup> See Appendix 6.

<sup>87</sup> See Appendix 1g.

was twenty-seven. Each participant was assigned a number from 1 to 27 and will be referred to by their craft and assigned number in this study.

All participants are active members of *Etsy* with *Etsy* storefronts. A number of *Etsy* buyers (without shops) contacted me indicating their desire to participate, but ultimately, all questionnaires were completed by sellers. Of the twenty-seven participants, eight are also members of *Craftster*. While gender was not explicitly addressed in the questionnaire, based on names and profiles of participants, twenty-six are likely to be female, while one participant's gender is ambiguous.<sup>88</sup> Age was also not asked in the questionnaire, but the age ranges of participants likely falls into the average age range of *Etsy* and *Craftster* members discussed in Chapter Two. The minimum age was eighteen due to ethical concerns, and there was no maximum cutoff point. However, I estimate that the oldest participants were in their mid-to-late fifties. In terms of region and nationality, all participants were from either Canada or the US (the majority being the latter). While several crafters contacted me from international locations, including Britain and Australia, these contacts did not result in completed questionnaires.

Interviews were conducted exclusively via email due to the varying geographic locations of respondents. Some responses posted to the forums on *Etsy* and *Craftster* were incorporated into the research data. These forums are accessible to the public and are a significant resource in that *Etsy* sellers can (and do) freely discuss varying topics of relevance to this thesis. Additionally, profiles of and interviews with crafters published in various online news media, books, and blogs were drawn upon when appropriate. This material was closely examined to unearth similar trends and larger themes in the discourse. The interviews and forums provided primary data for both a thematic and

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<sup>88</sup> This participant had a name typically associated with males, but self-identified as a crafting feminist.

textual analysis. Articles and advertisements in *BUST* were used as well, as the magazine is situated in a third-wave feminist context and frequently features crafting and the handmade movement in its editorial content. These articles and advertisements were also used to unearth trends and noteworthy crafting phenomena, using visual semiotic analysis.<sup>89</sup>

### Presentation

The first chapter of the thesis, “Craft or Bust: Feminism’s Crafty Third Wave and the Case of *BUST* Magazine,” introduces and describes the relevance of third-wave feminism and *BUST* magazine to the current crafting movement. This chapter uses a case study of *BUST* magazine as a key example of the intermingling of third-wave popular texts and craft culture. *BUST*’s origins as a third-wave feminist text are examined, as well as its position within the women’s magazine industry. Key themes are identified and examined using semiotic analysis of editorial and advertising content.

The second chapter, *Close Knit(ting) Communities?: The Emergence of Etsy.com and Craftster.org*,” discusses the significance of *Etsy* as a mode of the exchange of handmade goods, as well as the fostering of crafting communities through the *Etsy* and *Craftster* forums. This chapter considers the ways in which crafting websites give way to community building, and whether the notion of commerce and financial transactions for handcrafted goods affect these communities.

The third chapter, “Crafting Resistance: Fighting Mass Produced with Pins and Needles,” discusses the act of crafting as mode of resistance to corporate-dominated

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<sup>89</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse*. (New York: Routledge, 2003).

consumerism. This chapter carries on the discussion of previous chapters and examines the link between crafting, feminism, and resistance. Illustrated within this chapter are the various ways in which craftspeople are using craft as a mechanism of resistance, and some conclusions about the future of craft, consumption and feminism working together are drawn.

## Chapter One – Craft or Bust: Feminism’s Crafty Third Wave and the Case of *BUST* Magazine

### Introduction

This chapter introduces and engages the significance of third-wave feminism and *BUST* Magazine to the current crafting movement. Using a case study of *BUST* and employing a semiotic analysis of recurrent themes and ideas, this chapter demonstrates the relationship between feminism and crafting in a popular culture<sup>90</sup> context. Before delving into a thematic/semiotic analysis of *BUST* advertisements and editorial content, I situate the magazine within a crafting and feminist discourse, and also examine the magazine’s position within the women’s magazine industry.

### *BUST* and the Riot Grrrl Movement

*BUST*’s origins are tied directly to the Riot Grrrl movement of the early 1990s.<sup>91</sup> In an excerpt from *The BUST Guide to the New Girl Order*, a collection of seminal *BUST* articles from 1993 to 1999, the magazine’s founders Debbie Stoller and Marcelle Karp explain how the idea for *BUST* emerged:

In the media, women our age were being represented as either corporate clones or jazzercising jigglebunnies. And except for an outspoken group of younger women who were calling themselves “Riot Grrls” it looked like our generation if feminists were getting swept under the rug. Out of sight, out of mind. The more we talked to each other about this sorry state of affairs, the clearer it became that we needed to do something. Not only did we want to let the younger girls know that we older girls had never given up on feminism, but we also wanted to create a place where girls of all

<sup>90</sup> See Stuart Hall’s “Notes on Deconstructing ‘The Popular’” for an analysis of this term.

<sup>91</sup> Conrad, 6.

ages could let their voices be heard, in all their fierce, funny, feminist glory. Thus, the idea for *BUST* was born.<sup>92</sup>

Ednie Garrison defines Riot Grrrl culture as “an alternative subculture built around opposition to presuppositions that young (usually white) American girls and women are too pre-occupied with themselves and boys to be interested in being political, creative and loud.”<sup>93</sup> According to Conrad, the Riot Grrrl movement began as a loose network of women from Olympia WA, and Washington D.C., and “offered young women a sisterhood of Third Wave feminist musicians and artists, as well as a forum for feminist action to reclaim radical activism from apathetic, male-dominated punk communities.”<sup>94</sup> Conrad also notes that the Riot Grrrl movement was the first visible movement of third-wave feminism<sup>95</sup> and was derived from the indie music scene.<sup>96</sup>

In “Duality and Redefinition: Young Feminism and the Alternative Music Community,” author Melissa Klein and self-identified third-wave feminist, opens with a rather bold and matter-of-fact description of her tattoo and what it signifies:

I am twenty-five years old. On my left upper arm I have a six-inch long tattoo of a voluptuous cowgirl. One of her hands rest jauntily on her jutting hip. The other is firing a gun. An earlier feminist might frown upon my cowgirl's fringed hot pants and halter top as promoting sexual exploitation, and might see her pistol as perpetuating male patterns of violence. Yet I see this image as distinctly feminist. Having a tattoo signifies a subculture that subverts traditional notions of feminine beauty. That this tattoo is a pinup girl with a gun represents the appropriation and

<sup>92</sup> Marcelle Karp and Debbie Stoller. *The BUST Guide to the New Girl Order*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), xii.

<sup>93</sup> Ednie Kaeh Garrison, “U.S. Feminism—Grrrl Style!: Youth (Sub)Cultures and the Technologies of the Third Wave,” *Feminist Studies* Spring (2000): 142-3.

<sup>94</sup> Conrad, 13-14.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-15.

<sup>96</sup> Multiple studies and analyses of the Riot Grrrl movement cite specific indie music artists as being vital components to Riot Grrrl and third-wave feminism. While music's role in the third wave is not a component in my research, this relationship, as well as the representation of these artists in *BUST* could be a fruitful project for the future.

redefinition of sexuality, power, and violence—ideas characteristic of third wave punk feminism.<sup>97</sup>

Klein states, “Third wave feminism is certainly not confined to punk culture,” and that, “Our politics reflects a postmodern focus on contradiction and duality, on the reclamation of terms.”<sup>98</sup> Third-wave feminism’s punk origins and the socio-political events of the late eighties and early nineties paved the way for a new form of feminism, born out of the backlash against the gains made by second-wave feminism (namely reproductive rights), as well as “reactionary politics and rat-race economics.”<sup>99</sup> While Klein focuses specifically on music and third-wave feminism,<sup>100</sup> she traces the origins of the Riot Grrrl movement to the early 1990s. According to Klein, “in July 1992, the weekend-long Riot Grrrl Convention took place in D.C. Women gathered together for workshops on topics including sexuality, rape, unlearning racism, domestic violence, and self-defense, as well as attending two shows featuring female bands and spoken-word performers, and the All-Girl All-Night Dance Party.” In this vein, the Riot Grrrl Movement centered on a more inclusive form of feminism, thus distinguishing itself from the second wave.

According to Naomi Zack, “The most promising path to a new coherence runs through the sharpest criticisms of second wave feminism—the claim that white middle-class feminists did not speak for all women.”<sup>101</sup> In “The Punk White Privilege Scene,” Kristen Schilt analyses the Riot Grrrl movement in relation to race and privilege. She contends that while Riot Grrrl culture was not able to facilitate a truly inclusive, racially

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<sup>97</sup> Melissa Klein, “Duality and Redefinition: Young Feminism and the Alternative Music Community,” in *Third Wave Agenda* eds. Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 207.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> Bratmobile and Bikini Kill are frequently cited as Riot Grrrl bands.

<sup>101</sup> Naomi Zack, *Inclusive Feminism: A Third Wave Theory of Women's Commonality* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005), 1.

aware form of feminism, it did “provide girls with the tools to investigate whiteness and white privilege in alternative feminist movements,”<sup>102</sup> and ultimately, that, “feminist awakenings for young women may more quickly be followed by race cognizance.”<sup>103</sup>

While the relationship between race and third-wave feminism is not specifically examined in this thesis, it is important to note that scholars deem third-wave feminism as a more inclusive form of feminism than the second wave, and that consequently, notions of reclamation, pleasure, and activism become that much more significant.<sup>104</sup>

In “Riot Grrrl Is...,” a manifesto of sorts for the Riot Grrrl movement that is often reprinted in zines associated with the movement, the authors<sup>105</sup> explain the purpose, mission, and ideologies associated with Riot Grrrl.

**BECAUSE** us girls crave records and books and fanzines that speak to US, that WE feel included in and can understand in our own ways.

**BECAUSE** we wanna make it easier for girls to see/hear each other's work so that we can share strategies and criticize-applaud each other.

**BECAUSE we must take over the means of production in order to create our own meanings.**<sup>106</sup>

**BECAUSE** viewing our work as being connected to our girlfriends-politics-real lives is essential **if we are gonna figure out how what we are doing impacts, reflects, perpetuates, or DISRUPTS the status quo.**

**BECAUSE** we recognize fantasies of Instant Macho Gun Revolution as impractical lies meant to keep us simply dreaming instead of becoming our dreams **AND THUS seek to create**

<sup>102</sup> Kristen Schilt, “The Punk White Privilege Scene,” in *Different Wavelengths* ed. Jo Reger (New York: Routledge, 2005), 52.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, 54.

<sup>104</sup> Of the seven issues of *BUST* examined, two featured non-Caucasian women. The magazine also features a number of articles on minority women and ethnic artists, demonstrating that the magazine’s target audience is not limited to white readers.

<sup>105</sup> Kathleen Hanna, singer of Bikini Kill, and the band itself are attributed to writing this manifesto.

<sup>106</sup> Capitalized emphasis added by authors, bold emphasis added by me.



**revolution in our own lives every single day by envisioning and creating alternatives to the bullshit christian capitalist way of doing things.**

**BECAUSE** we want and need to encourage and be encouraged, in the face of all our own insecurities, in the face of beergutboyrock that tells us we can't play our instruments, in the face of The Man who says our bands and zines are "the worst" things he's seen and claims the only reason we even exist is to profit from girlzine bandwagon hype.

**BECAUSE** we don't wanna assimilate to someone else's (Boy) standards of what is or isn't "good" music or punk rock or "good" writing **AND THUS need to create forums where we can recreate, destroy and define our own visions.**

**BECAUSE** we are unwilling to falter under claims that we are reactionary "reverse sexists" and not the truepunkrocksouls crusaders **WE KNOW** we really are.

**BECAUSE** we know that life is much more than physical survival and are patently aware that **the punk rock "you can do anything" idea is crucial to the coming angry grrrl rock revolution which seeks to save the psychic and cultural lives of girls and women everywhere, according to their own terms, not ours.**

**BECAUSE** we are interested in creating non hierarchical ways of being **AND making music, friends and scenes based on communication + understanding, instead of competition + good/bad categorizations.**

**BECAUSE** doing/reading/seeing/hearing cool things that validate and challenge us can help us gain the strength and sense of community that we need in order to figure out how bullshit like racism, able-bodyism, ageism, speciesism, classism, thinism, sexism, anti-semitism and heterosexism figures in our own lives.

**BECAUSE** we see fostering and supporting girl scenes and girl artists of all kinds as integral to this process.

**BECAUSE** we hate capitalism in all its forms and see our main goal as sharing information and staying alive, instead of making profits or being cool according to traditional standards.

BECAUSE we are angry at a society that tells us Girl = Dumb,  
Girl = Bad, Girl = Weak.

BECAUSE we are unwilling to let our real and valid anger be  
diffused and/or turned against us via the internalization of sexism  
as witnessed in girl/girl jealousy and self defeating girlytype  
behaviors.

**BECAUSE I believe with my holeheartmindbody that girls  
constitute a revolutionary soul force that can, and will change  
the world for real.**<sup>107</sup>

These tenets coincide with the feminist handmade movement and DIY mode of  
production, articulating a need for women to create their own means of production, and to  
create their own meanings. They also reinforce the idea that women can do anything, that  
women need to form communities, that women need to create their own forums for  
discussion, and that women need to foster artistic endeavors of one another.

The Riot Grrrl notion of creating one's own means of production is at the very  
root of the DIY ethic also associated with Riot Grrrl ideals. As noted by Conrad, "DIY  
(do-it-yourself) refers to both a utilitarian understanding of a self-made, hands-on  
lifestyle, characterized by such things as handmade clothing and homegrown food, as  
well as an ideological commitment to a corporate-free, autonomous existence, often  
adopted by anarchists."<sup>108</sup> The DIY ethic of punk and Riot Grrrl culture, while typically  
associated with zine-making and alternative publications, also extended itself to crafting  
things like sewn and knitted goods to avoid buying into capitalism. The current  
handmade movement may be an extension of the Riot Grrrl movement, with similar anti-  
capitalist, pro-labor principles.

<sup>107</sup> "Riot Grrrl Is..." Riot Grrrl #6 ½, December 1991, Arlington VA, reprinted in *Cultural Resistance Reader* ed. Stephen Duncombe (New York: Verso, 2002). 178-180.

<sup>108</sup> Conrad, 4.

*BUST*, as stated previously, originated from Riot Grrrl zine culture and the crafting elements within the publication are a further extension of the magazine's origins. In *Stitch 'n' Bitch: The Knitter's Handbook*, Stoller states, "Knitting is part of the same do-it-yourself ethos that spawned zines and mixed tapes. By loudly reclaiming old-fashioned skills, women are rebelling against a culture that seems to reward only the sleek, the mass-produced, the male."<sup>109</sup> In *Stitch 'n' Bitch Crochet: The Happy Hooker*, Stoller explains how craft projects found their way into *BUST*:

Blissfully immersed in stitching, I feel peaceful and centered, my mind both fully relaxed and entirely focused, as I make satisfying progress stitch by stitch, row by row. The feeling, in a word, is delicious. Yet, for many years, I forsook the way of the stitch. Throughout the eighties and most of the nineties, while I was in college, then in grad school, and then starting my own business, I didn't make much time for needlework. That all changed when we decided a number of years ago to begin running craft projects in *BUST*, the women's magazine that I cofounded and still edit. We introduced the idea with a simple crocheted kerchief. I hadn't crocheted in years, but, to test out the directions of the pattern, I bought myself some pretty cotton yarn and a nice crochet hook.<sup>110</sup>

So where does crafting for pleasure come in? If DIY is a form of resistance and activism against capitalism and the status quo, how and why did crafting emerge as a feminist form of pleasure? How do activities deemed by second-wave feminism as repressing remnants of domesticity serve to liberate women and uphold the values of third-wave feminism? Stoller addresses these queries quite clearly:

Today, there are over 38 million knitters in the United States, with 4 million newcomers to knitting in the last few years... Younger women especially are taking up the craft... Why do they knit? It's a strange mix of pragmatism, politics, and the desire to be fashionable. Some "crafty" feminists, like myself, are reclaiming what have been called the "lost domestic arts," realizing

<sup>109</sup> Stoller, *Stitch 'N Bitch*, 10.

<sup>110</sup> Debbie Stoller, *Stitch 'N Bitch Crochet: The Happy Hooker* (New York: Workman Publishing, 2006), 3.

the importance of giving women's crafts their due. Others are more interested in freeing themselves from a dependence on what they see to be an exploitative corporate culture...<sup>111</sup>

Thus, the relationship between Riot Grrrl, DIY, *BUST* and crafting is quite clear.

Concurrently, crafting emerged as a fragment of the DIY culture and became an element of *BUST* because of its politics. As a form of consumer resistance, crafting serves as a tool to avoid mass consumer culture and provides alternatives to supporting giant corporations. As an element of third-wave feminism, crafting serves as a means to reclaim what was once repressive by the patriarchy, and later what was forbidden by the second wave. To third-wave feminists, crafting pays homage to the often belittled women's artistry of yesteryear, offers a means to resist a culture of mass consumption, and is simultaneously a means to gain personal pleasure. Many participants in my research articulated their views on crafting and feminism. For example, Participant 7, a jewelry maker, states:

Crafting is often regarded negatively as an unimaginative activity of housewives or moms who don't have the ability to be "artists." I think of my work as reclaiming that. Most of my work does not have an inherently feminist message, but I have recently been working on some new pieces that make a more edgy, feminist statement. I've taken vintage advertising cuts that portray antiquated gender roles and digitally redesigning them to redistribute the power to the woman in the cut.

In *BUST*'s most recent issue (June/July 2008), Diablo Cody, writer of the Oscar-winning film, *Juno*, describes herself as a radical feminist.<sup>112</sup> Despite the numerous feminist critiques of *Juno* that have emerged since the film's release, *BUST* interviewers do not challenge her on her representation of "choice" or other feminist concerns that

<sup>111</sup> Stoller, *Stitch 'n' Bitch*, 10.

<sup>112</sup> Jenna Wortham, "Speak of the Devil," *BUST*, June/July 2008, 70.

have emerged about the film.<sup>113</sup> Cody mentions at the end of the interview that “In a desert of shitty magazines, *BUST* is an oasis for the parched. I am definitely a fan. Although I can’t knit [*laughs*]. I probably shouldn’t say that!”<sup>114</sup> It becomes wholly obvious, through this admission and consequent allusion to feeling shame about her lack of crafting abilities, that feminism and craft are interconnected in third-wave feminist pop culture texts, namely, *BUST*.

### *BUST* as a Women’s Magazine

Because the third wave is generally thought to be more receptive to and allowing of pleasure than second-wave feminism, feminist scholars such as Jennifer Drake examine the relationship between feminism and pleasure. In “The Mis/Education of Righteous Babes,” Drake argues that,

On the road towards individual and collective redefinitions of feminism, third-wave women and men talk a lot about pleasure. Could be because we’re young, or because we’re such well trained consumers, or because we’re into some kind of playful postmodern aesthetic, or because we watched too much TV growing up, but I can’t dismiss this, it’s such a hunger and a joy in third-wave talk and work. Clearly, the pleasure-seeking impulses makes its unruly way through this generation’s personal and political play with sex and sexuality, practices particularly informed the intersections between third-wave feminism and queer culture and politics, but the pleasure-seeking impulse also consistently informs third-wave claims to feminism itself.<sup>115</sup>

In discussing the relationship between feminism and pleasure, women’s magazines emerge as a highly relevant topic. In *Decoding Women’s Magazines: From Mademoiselle*

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<sup>113</sup> An analysis of *Juno* and the feminist critiques surrounding the film are warranted, but will not be attempted in this thesis.

<sup>114</sup> Wortham, 71.

<sup>115</sup> Jennifer Drake, “The Mis/Education of Righteous Babes,” in *Growing up Postmodern* ed. Ronald Strickland (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 183.

to Ms. Ellen McCracken argues that, "...women's magazines exert a cultural leadership to shape consensus in which highly pleasurable codes work to naturalize social relations of power."<sup>116</sup> These codes often play on women's insecurities and emphasize through advertising the commodities that will implicitly rectify these insecurities.<sup>117</sup> In this sense, women's magazines serve the status quo by reiterating women's role as a consumer first and foremost, and second, as flawed members of patriarchal society who need to be "fixed" through their consumption practices.

*BUST* is positioned as a women's magazine, but because it self-identifies as feminist and has a relatively narrow niche market (third-wave feminists), it is not mainstream and serves as an alternative to traditional and commercial women's magazines. In *The BUST Guide to the New Girl Order*, Stoller and Karp clearly define *BUST* as an alternative women's magazine that stands in direct opposition to more mainstream options:

With *BUST*, we wanted to start a magazine for women like ourselves women who couldn't relate to the body sculpting tips of *Cosmo* or the eyebrow tweezing directions of *Glamour*. Women who wore ripped sweaters instead of angora ensembles that were being modeled in *Vogue*. A magazine for broads who weren't afraid of any f-words—from feminism to fucking to fashion—where we could work out the kinks of our ideology while trying to figure everything else out—like how to deal with the apparent epidemic of boy disease, the general lack of creative career opportunities, and how to live without being economically dependent on every paycheck. Wouldn't it be nice, we thought, if we could feel pleasure and pride in reading a women's magazine rather than shame and alienation?<sup>118</sup>

It is noteworthy that Stoller and Karp clearly differentiate their own publication from other women's magazines. They refer to *Cosmopolitan*, *Glamour* and *Vogue*

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<sup>116</sup> McCracken, 3.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>118</sup> Karp and Stoller, *BUST Guide*, xiii.

specifically, indicating that these publications do not mesh with the feminist ideals of *BUST*. Stoller and Karp ultimately state that commercial women's magazines induce shame and alienation in women rather than empowerment. While pleasure is still a prominent element in *BUST*, it is pleasure associated with pride, independence, and knowledge, rather than pleasure associated with guilt and insufficiency.

Despite the relatively obvious comparison to *Ms.* magazine (both self-identify as "feminist" magazines), the founders of *BUST* also sought to differentiate themselves from this foundational second-wave feminist publication. "The name came to us in a flash. *BUST* was at once sexy and aggressive, a joke that would be instantly recognizable by the girls we wanted to reach—it was a mystery wrapped up inside an enigma. This was not going to be *Ms.* magazine for juniors, but rather *Sassy* for grown-ups."<sup>119</sup>

There are undeniable similarities between *BUST* and *Ms.* McCracken notes that, "Overall, the articles in *Ms.* presuppose a more rather than less intelligent reader instead of addressing what many magazines assume to be the lowest common denominator of the mass audience"<sup>120</sup> However, there are differences as well. *Ms.* was heavily criticized in the 1980s because it was substantially supported by advertising revenue.<sup>121</sup> According to McCracken, "the advertisements in *Ms.* promote a consumption-based model of women's liberation and sometimes undercut the magazine's positive editorial messages."<sup>122</sup> With major national advertisers such as Maybelline,<sup>123</sup> *Ms.* promoted a mainstream consumerist ethic. Additional criticisms of *Ms.* were that the magazine was elitist,

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<sup>119</sup> Karp and Stoller, *BUST Guide*, xiii.

<sup>120</sup> McCracken, 281.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 280.

targeting primarily white, middle-class and heterosexual female readers.<sup>124</sup> *BUST* also features numerous advertisements for everything from cosmetics to cloth pads to animal rights advocacy. However, there are very few national advertisers in *BUST*. Cosmetics companies advertising in the magazine are independently owned and operated. The same goes for the vast majority of advertisers in *BUST*. The only recurrent national advertiser observed in the seven issues of *BUST* I analyzed is Natural American Spirit Cigarettes, which, despite the controversy of the commodity, claims to practice ethical and environmentally responsible business operations.<sup>125</sup>

*BUST* is very much pro-consumption and pro-pleasure. Every issue features shopping sections, product reviews, fashion sections, etcetera. In this sense, the magazine is similar to other mainstream women's magazines. However, *BUST* generally features "indie finds" (goods made by independent, non-mass producers), handmade goods sold through *Etsy* and elsewhere, environmentally friendly products, ethically produced products, and so forth. In this context *BUST* successfully generates discussions and reader consciousness about consumption patterns and being a more ethical consumer. Pleasure is derived from conscientious consumerism, knowledge, and empowerment, and shame or inadequacies are not invoked. Participant 4, a zine-maker, had this to say about *BUST*:

I've never placed an ad with Bust, but I am a reader of the magazine. It appeals to me because of that feminist take on things. For one thing, the magazine shows a whole lot of respect toward female musicians, and that is just not the norm when it comes to music magazines, or most mainstream publications. Bust treats them like actual artists, whereas in other magazines, women are generally written off as some sort of a novelty act. Also, the range of topics discussed in Bust is pretty diverse. Everything from music and movies, to DIY projects, to worldwide feminist

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<sup>124</sup> McCracken, 282.

<sup>125</sup> "Our Story," <http://www.nascigs.com/OurStory/tabid/148/Default.aspx>.



activism. I think it's a really important magazine that a lot more women should be paying attention to. I'm not saying it's not without faults, but it's still way cool. I think it's got a connection to sites like Etsy.com and Craftster.org, just because Bust features tutorials for DIY projects in every issue, and also promotes other women's crafty shops and ideas. I just feel like they really support women who are starting their own businesses, or just generally trying to break out from the norm.

While *BUST* is usually the go-to magazine for representations of third-wave feminist pop culture, the publication and what it stands for does not go without criticism. Critics of third-wave feminism (often second-wave feminists) believe that the focus on individualism has neo-liberalist or neo-conservative parallels<sup>126</sup> and does not facilitate collective action. According to Baumgardner & Richards,

The fuzzy sense of where we've been plays out when something like *Bust* or Bikini Kill or the phrase "girl power" turns masses of females on to feminism—and then peters out after that first rush. Having no sense of how we got here condemns women to reinvent the wheel and often blocks us from creating a political strategy.<sup>127</sup>

Despite its critics, the third wave offers a means of insightful cultural critique, reevaluations of feminism and what it means to be a feminist, and an updated cultural viewpoint that reflects our current consumer culture. It is hard to escape consumption in our current mega-capitalist, corporate-fueled economy, but *BUST* demonstrates that there are alternatives and that we can still consume without supporting the unethical practices of corporations such as third world labor, cheap production, and environmentally damaging products and methods. As Participant 4 explains,

I think it's [the crafting movement] being embraced by so many feminists for a few reasons. One is simply because of the way the handmade movement has been promoted in magazines like *Bust* and *Bitch*- when you

<sup>126</sup> Gillis and Munford, 180, note 37.

<sup>127</sup> Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000), 152.

see someone who's making really awesome dresses on their own, you might be inspired to learn how to do it yourself. Secondly, there's a lot of power that comes with skills. If you have the skills to sew, to paint, to make things, your potential is endless. You can make your own wardrobe. You can print zines and share your opinions with the world and meet like-minded folk. You can make gifts for friends. You can start your own business. You can protest big business. You can organize events. You can make merchandise for local bands. Crafting opens the door to so many opportunities. What feminist wouldn't want the opportunity to take control of their future, and to connect with other feminists? Even learning a skill as simple as making your own cloth menstrual pads suddenly makes you more powerful- you have the power to contribute less waste to the environment, to stop supporting the corporations that distribute mass-produced disposable "hygienic" products, and to save the money that you would normally spend on those products every month every month.

### Themes

Several recurrent themes within *BUST*'s editorial and advertising content emerged and are examined using semiotic analysis.<sup>128</sup> While these themes were not quantified, they occur repeatedly across the seven issues examined.<sup>129</sup> Advertisements deal directly with consumption, but the advertisements in *BUST* are unique in their differences from those found in magazines such as *Cosmo*. As mentioned previously, *BUST* has very few national advertisers and does not feature advertising of mainstream cosmetics or skincare companies that would be found in *Cosmo*, *Glamour*, or *Vogue*. For the most part, *BUST* advertisers are independent companies or musicians, and a mass form of consumerism is not advocated. *BUST* editorial content also deals occasionally with consumption (featured "buys" and "finds"), but again, the goods featured are predominately not mass-produced or associated with large corporations. Articles were also examined. Again, it was not my intention to quantify instances of thematic representation. Rather, certain advertisements and editorial

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<sup>128</sup> For semiotic/textual analyses of women's magazines see: McCracken (1993); Carrington and Bennett (1996); McRobbie (1997); and Kitch (2001). Also see Barthes 2000.

<sup>129</sup> See Introduction for a rationale of my methodology.

content are selectively analyzed due to their thematic relevance. The key themes identified and examined include the environment, reclamation, and DIY/crafting. Other themes that were noted but will not be examined include ethics, sexuality and gender issues, and empowerment.<sup>130</sup>

### *Environment*

Ecofeminism was an important facet of second-wave feminism and persists in the third wave. According to Colleen Mack-Canty, "In the United States, ecofeminism began during the second wave of feminism as (mostly) women in the peace movement began to perceive the interrelationships of militarism, sexism, racism, classism, and environmental damage. Ecofeminism contributes a significant additional strand to the project of reweaving the nature-culture duality."<sup>131</sup> Third-wave ecofeminist principles are evident in *BUST* magazine, which advocates environmental awareness and responsibility and frequently features advertisements that adhere to these principles. Mack-Canty argues that,

Ecofeminism emphasizes local activism, but it also maintains the importance of a global perspective. Ecofeminists see everything as interdependent. They are concerned for women in the third world, who are suffering from the environmental devastation of their natural resources...Ecofeminism also works for the reconstruction of more viable social and political forms. It is an especially relevant part of third wave feminism today in a world in which women, people of color, third world people, and the natural environment are suffering.<sup>132</sup>

<sup>130</sup> While these are indeed important themes to third wave feminist discourse, they are beyond the scope of this thesis. See Appendix 2 for themes/issues.

<sup>131</sup> Colleen Mack-Canty, "Third Wave Feminism and Ecofeminism: Reweaving the Nature/Culture Duality," in *Different Wavelengths* ed. Jo Reger (New York: Routledge, 2005), 198.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 208-209.

The advertisements and editorial content analyzed under the theme of “environment” tend to depict ecofeminist elements and involve subject matter such as recycling, reuse, “natural” body and personal hygiene products, reduction of waste, and so forth.

For example, every *BUST* issue examined contained at least three advertisements for natural or reusable menstrual products. The companies included Lunapads, Gladrags, and Jade Pearl. Chris Bobel has examined the relationship between menstrual activism and third-wave feminism, and found that while the current incarnation of menstrual activism is derived from and quite similar to earlier menstrual activism (i.e. the 1970s), it differs from earlier in activism in two key ways.

First, a Punk sensibility opposed to mainstream cultural products... Through a process of education and empowerment—facilitated by DIY/self-help paper and e-zines, consumers can take back their menstruation and achieve health at low cost to self and planet... Thus the themes of resisting the dominant/status quo standard of care and replacing it with empowered self-knowledge and self-help (or DIY) are at work in both phases of the movement. Second, contemporary menstrual product activists draws on Third Wave feminism to update the movement and produce a form more relevant to many contemporary young feminists.<sup>133</sup>

In the Lunapads.com ad shown in Figure 1, Rhea, a woman in her late twenties or early thirties, states her endorsement of the company: “Lunapads completely changed my attitude toward my period, and I hadn’t even realized I had an attitude about it in the first place! My period stopped being something I needed to clean away and has become something that is an important part of being a woman.”<sup>134</sup> This type of discourse coincides with the menstrual activist discourse of the 1970s – that menstruation, a common embodied experience of women, has been overtaken by corporations that produce sanitary products and

<sup>133</sup> Chris Bobel, “‘Our Revolution Has Style’: Contemporary Menstrual Product Activists ‘Doing Feminism’ in the Third Wave,” *Sex Roles* 54 (2006): 342.

<sup>134</sup> *BUST*, April/May 2008, 92.

essentially transformed into something disposable rather than something natural.<sup>135</sup> By indicating that she once thought periods were merely something to be “cleaned away”, the woman illustrates the mainstream notion of menstruation as unsanitary or dirty, and how she has been reeducated by Lunapads to think otherwise. Also, by suggesting that periods are an “important part of being a woman,” she is reiterating the menstrual activist belief that menstruation is a natural embodied experience of women and should not be shunned or tossed away in the garbage. The subheading of the advertisement reads “happier periods, naturally” and the text at the bottom of the ad states that “Lunapads and the DivaCup are smart alternatives to disposable pads and tampons.”<sup>136</sup> The terms “naturally,” “smart,” and “alternatives” connote that a wise, healthy choice is being made by purchasing cloth pads or a reusable menstrual cup.

The ad’s creators seek to create in consumers a problematic view of the unwise, unnatural alternative to the commodity being advertised – the disposable menstrual product. As mentioned previously, magazines like *Ms.* and *BUST* assume a certain level of intelligence from their readers, and the Lunapads ad reinforces this. Firstly, the reader must understand that her period is not something to loathe and “clean away.” Second, she will then realize that there are problems with the alternative disposable menstrual products. Thirdly, she is concerned about the environment and nature, hence the term “naturally” being used to connote positive lifestyle choices, and contrarily, the term “disposable” being used in to connote poor decision making regarding menstrual products (“smart alternatives to disposable pads and tampons”). The ad suggests through its lively pink and green color scheme, its featuring the endorsement of a common, everyday woman who once could care

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<sup>135</sup> Bobel, 332.

<sup>136</sup> *BUST*, April/May 2008, 92.

less about her period but now embraces it, and its use of wording that an educated woman should know better than to use disposable menstrual products. The transformative ability of Lunapads is showcased (“Lunapads completely changed my attitude”) and it connotes that any wise or intelligent woman will allow Lunapads to help her change her ways.

**Lunapads.com**  
happier periods, naturally

"Lunapads completely changed my attitude towards my period, and I hadn't even realized I had an attitude about it in the first place! My period stopped being something I needed to clean away and has become something that is an important part of being a woman."  
RHEA L., USA

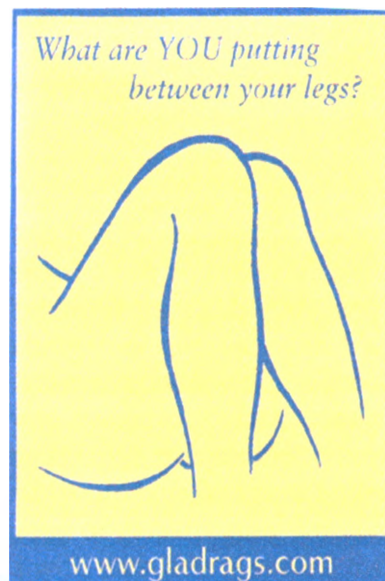
Lunapads and the DivaCup are smart alternatives to disposable pads and tampons. Exclusive offer for Bust readers: receive 10% off orders over \$25.00. Quote promo code BUST082. Offer expires June 1, 2008 and is not valid with other offers.

Visit [www.lunapads.com](http://www.lunapads.com) or call 1-888-590-2299 for a free catalog.

**Figure 1: Lunapads, *BUST* (Apr/May 2008).**

In the advertisement for [www.gladrags.com](http://www.gladrags.com), reproduced in Figure 2, the reader is presented with a stylized drawing of a woman's lower half, her calves positioned strategically to block the view of her vagina and anus. The reader is questioned “What are YOU putting between your legs?” The ad in its simplicity is quite powerful. The reader is forced to question her own body and what problematic things she might be doing to it. The message is fairly covert, as the only reference to menstrual products is in the website address

at the bottom – [www.gladrags.com](http://www.gladrags.com). The term rag is frequently used as a slang term for menstruation or menstrual products (i.e. “I’m on my rag”). Again, the advertisers assume their reader is intelligent enough to make this connection.<sup>137</sup> The questioning of menstrual product safety is again tied in with menstrual activism, and the Gladrags ad implores its viewer to reexamine her own menstrual practices in terms of product usage. The image of the female lower half invokes a cold, sterile feeling, while the phrasing “What are YOU putting between your legs?” reads as almost accusatory. If the reader evaluates what SHE is putting between her legs and deems that something is wrong with it, she MUST find a better, happier alternative. This is where the glad in Gladrags comes in. While the ad at face value is simple and seemingly straightforward, it employs use of fear or at least uncertainty about the reader’s menstrual practices and implies that the reader must remedy her problematic habits.



**Figure 2: Gladrags.com, *BUST* (Dec/Jan 2008).**

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<sup>137</sup> “Glad rags” is also a colloquial term for stylish or fancy clothing.

The ad for JadeandPearl.com (Figure 3) is much less period focused than Lunapads and Gladrags, and rather, emphasizes nature and the environment more overtly. At the top of the ad, the words “Sustainable,” “Chemical free,” and “Conscious” serve as the heading. Images of trees and greenery reside in the background, invoking a sense of returning to nature. The products featured include reusable sea sponge tampons, natural body butters, and cycle charting beads to determine fertility. The bottom half of the ad features a natural and organic quit smoking kit. The ad’s text and images are positioned on a background of leaves and trees, suggesting sense of tranquility, and implies that tranquility will be reached when the reader is being environmentally friendly. Unlike Lunapads and Gladrags, there is no direct reference to the embodied experience of menstruation, but the presentation of the sea sponge tampon and cycle charting beads as natural and tranquil invokes a positive, non-condescending attitude toward menstruation.

While not inherently obvious in the pages of *BUST*, an element of third-wave menstrual activism involves handcrafting ecofriendly pads. As Bobel notes,

The commitment to self and body awareness is clearly a legacy of the feminist health movement when women gathered in their living rooms armed with hand held mirrors, flashlights, and plastic specula and began to examine their own cervixes. Usually, however, cervical self-exam was conducted in a group setting. I am not aware of a similar group dynamic at work among the menstrual product activists. Bleeding is still a private matter, even if less stigmatized and shamed. It would be a bit more logistically challenging to gather a group of menstruating women to examine their blood or experiment with their new Keepers, for instance, but it would not be impossible. Why, then, are women not “working at familiarization” together? Women do, however, gather for “pad making workshops,” sometimes called “Stitch n’ Bitch,” in which they teach one another how to make their own cloth, reusable, menstrual pads.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Bobel, 336-337.



The relationship between menstrual product activism and third-wave feminism is clear. Derived from an ecofeminist ethic, third-wave advocates of reusable/natural menstrual products are demonstrating their concern for their environment, their refusal to allow large corporations to control their embodied female experience of menstruation, and their acceptance of their own bodily processes. While *BUST* did not have any specific editorial content featuring menstrual product activism, their consistency across issues in running three ads from natural/reusable menstrual product companies demonstrates that this type of product is an appropriate one for *BUST* readers. Also, while *BUST* did not feature any patterns or similar DIY projects for making cloth pads, there is a relevance to crafting in that many proponents of washable pads make their own. Additionally, *Etsy* has a number of cloth pad sellers and frequent discussions emerge in the forums about the use of washable menstrual products. When asked about the relationship between feminism and consumerism, Participant 5, a screen-print artist, used the example of washable menstrual pads to explain her feelings on the topic:

When I first saw an ad for them in the back of Bitch magazine, I was like, "That is the sickest thing EVER! Who would reuse something like that?" I was honestly horrified. But then as I became more immersed in feminist culture, it was actually reading the book *Cunt* by Inga Muscio that totally flipped a switch. It's like, this consumerist culture makes us feel like we are gross and dirty and need to buy this wasteful plastic bleached stuff made by some white dudes in some company here who have never had to even think about wearing a tampon or a pad EVERY MONTH and they're making all this money and this stuff is filling landfills and it's uncomfortable and *that* is what's really gross! So I'd rather buy something made by a lady who knows that it sucks to get your period and you don't want to wear a diaper and bleach in your vagina is toxic so they make these things with other women in mind. It's a very personal product, and now I get my period and its like, put on my uterus undies and pick out my favorite pattern of Moon Pad and just kind of revel in being a woman be in my body instead of feeling at odds with it. I mean, 51% of the population have menstrual

cycles, there's nothing wrong with is. Have you ever read *The Red Tent*? It's like that. And even the bigger companies of those reusable things are still tiny companies of women. It's a small thing.



Figure 3: Jadeandpearl.com, *BUST* (Feb/Mar 2008).

Because *BUST* posits itself as an alternative and forward thinking publication, advertisements and editorial content focusing on environmental-friendliness are common subject matter. The February/March 2008 issue of *BUST* features a six page spread entitled “The Lazy Environmentalist: An underachiever’s guide to saving the world with tips even you can use.”<sup>139</sup> The article suggests five key areas of energy conservation (using less water, reducing light usage, reusing goods, driving less, and developing a more eco-friendly beauty routine). While serious in content, the article is written in a humorous, no-bullshit style. The

<sup>139</sup> Maggie Marton, “The Lazy Environmentalist,” *BUST*, Feb/Mar 2008, 54-59.

author states at the beginning of the article, "But do we all need to become hemp-wearing, makeup-eschewing naturalists in order to make a difference? Hell no! I am a lazy, TV-watching, video-game-playing, newspaper-reading, lipstick-buying, beer-drinking environmentalist. And while I will never chain myself to a redwood, everyday I attempt to make greener choices."<sup>140</sup> The author's assertion that she will not deny herself enjoyment while transforming her life to benefit the environment is indicative of a third-wave feminist discourse. While environmental movements of the past (such as second-wave feminism's environmental advocacy) seemed to deny pleasure for its participants, third-wave feminist environmentalism allows pleasure and activism to coexist. The article closes with the statement, "Select one of these tips to implement today, or try them all. Ultimately, it's not about making radical life changes, it's about maximizing your everyday choices. With a little bit of practice, sustainability becomes second nature."<sup>141</sup> It is interesting to note in this passage the negative connotation of the term "radical." The third wave of feminism differentiates itself from the second wave, as mentioned previously, by allowing what was previously forbidden in terms of pleasure and domesticity, and questions some of the militant elements of the second wave. Klein states,

I was born in 1971 and am a part of a generation of young women women who grew up during or after the feminist "second wave" and who, as a result, have mixed feelings about traditional feminism. Many young women hesitate to take on the mantle of feminism, either because they fear being branded as fanatical "feminazis" or because they see feminism not as a growing and changing movement but as a dialogue of the past that conjures up images of militantly bell-bottomed "womens libers".<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Marton, 56.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>142</sup> Klein, 207.

In this sense, the third-wave rejection of second-wave radicalism is clearly articulated.

Participant 3, a crocheter and candle-maker, exemplified this type of rejection and differentiation with her response to the question “Do you identify yourself as a feminist? Please explain.” She replied,

Well, that’s a complex question. I grew up thinking I wasn’t because all I’d heard was the fem-nazi stereotype. I got older, took some women’s lit and learned it was all about equality and decided I was. Now I still see the most publicized feminists seem in favor of preferential treatment and have a hard time supporting that or identifying a movement with those goals. Like I said a bit complex.

Despite Participant 3’s sense of not being able to define exactly what feminism currently entails, twenty-two participants in the study do consider themselves feminist, while only two responded that they did not consider themselves feminist, and two others in addition to Participant 3, claimed they did not know whether they are feminists.

Numerous other advertisements and editorial content in the seven issues of *BUST* fit under the theme of environment, including an article featuring cloth shopping bags from different indie designers,<sup>143</sup> an article about a clothing company that uses organic materials and ethical labor practices,<sup>144</sup> among others, as well as numerous advertisements that feature the terms “organic,” “natural” and etcetera. *BUST*’s frequent inclusion of environmental-oriented articles and advertisements suggest that the magazine is in favor of more sustainable lifestyle and a more environmentally-friendly form of consumption. It is also worth mentioning that at the bottom of every *BUST* masthead, the phrase, “*BUST* Magazine is printed on recycled paper” is present.

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<sup>143</sup> *BUST*, Oct/Nov 2007, 31.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid*, 45.

### *Reclamation*

The idea of reclamation is central to third-wave feminism and third-wave feminist texts such as *BUST*. Because the third wave embraces what was once forbidden by second-wave feminism (signifiers of domesticity, girlhood, and femininity),<sup>145</sup> things deemed traditionally non-feminist are in essence reclaimed and branded as feminist by the third wave. The pleasure element discussed previously is central to this discussion, as deriving pleasure from things like makeup, crafting, and cooking is both allowed and applauded. As Klein notes, “Our politics reflects a postmodern focus on contradiction and duality, on the reclamation of terms. S-M, pornography, the words *cunt* and *queer* and *pussy* and *girl*—are all things to be reexamined or reclaimed.”<sup>146</sup> Crafting and the handmade movement are also derived from the idea of reclamation, namely because of the domestic signification that comes with needlework and similar handicrafts. *BUST* emphasizes the notion of reclamation through its advertisements and editorial content. By showcasing crafts (commodities and how-to’s), fashion, and beauty, *BUST* is reiterating the third-wave mentality that domesticity can be reclaimed for the good of feminism. According to Gillis and Munford,

Where early feminist engagement with popular culture had largely focused on the oppressive ideology underlying media representations of women, the writers of zines such as *Bitch* and *BUST* built on the innovations of the mainstream *Sassy* magazine of the late 1980s to forge a space which combined critique of dominant constructions of femininity and a reclamation and celebration of girlhood.<sup>147</sup>

Advertisements for corsetry were examined using semiotic analysis to demonstrate how fashion previously condemned as reinforcing female oppression is now reclaimed in a feminist context. Corsetry was an integral part of women’s fashion during

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<sup>145</sup> Braithwaite, 338.

<sup>146</sup> Klein, 208.

<sup>147</sup> Gillis and Munford, 171-172.

the Victorian and Edwardian eras,<sup>148</sup> and began to die out as a fashion staple in the 1920s. The first-wave of feminism's suffrage movement elicited questions about the corset as an oppressive force against women.<sup>149</sup> Body shaping still existed in the form of girdles and the less intense waist cinchers, but corsets were gradually relegated into the seedy underbelly of fetish.<sup>150</sup> Corsets as fetish-wear became popularized by pinup models such as Bettie Page, and later by pop icon Madonna. Subculture groups such as goths and punks also adopted the corset as a form of alternative fashion. According to Valerie Steele,

As we enter the twenty-first century, the corset shows no sign of disappearing. During the 1990s, some observers worried that the reappearance of fashionable corsets indicated a "backlash" against feminism. This type of interpretation fails to do justice to the multiplicity of meanings conveyed. Especially within the world of fashion, cultural signs, like the corset, have no fixed meaning. Many fashionable corsets can be interpreted in terms of the assimilation of fetishistic imagery into popular culture. Although some women remain ambivalent or hostile to fetish fashion, for others the look is strong and sexy. Once the punks adopted fetish corsets as a defiantly perverse statement, it became increasingly possible to interpret at least some corsets as an ironic, postmodern manipulation of sexual stereotypes.<sup>151</sup>

Figure 4, an advertisement for Sugar Kitty Corsets, has a rather simple layout and relies on its bold pink color scheme for interesting aesthetics. The model featured is punk in appearance with fuchsia hair, facial piercings, and bold eye makeup, lipstick, and exaggerated drawn-on eyebrows. She is wearing a white and pink polka dotted corset, and a necklace with a silver star. At face value, the ad seems to convey an alternative fashion

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<sup>148</sup> Corsetry dates back to pre-Christian times, but it is not my intention to examine this history. Corsets became mainstream staples of women's fashion much later.

<sup>149</sup> Jill Fields, "'Fighting the Corsetless Evil': Shaping Corsets and Culture, 1900-1930," *Journal of Social History*, 33 no.2 (1999): 355.

<sup>150</sup> Valerie Steele, *The Corset: A Cultural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 91.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

message, featuring a non-mainstream model. The implicit message goes a bit deeper. Despite her alternative appearance, she is outwardly feminine, with large pouty lips and long flirty eyelashes. She is posing seductively, yet aggressive in appearance. Her arm is behind her head in a traditional pinup pose, but her facial expression indicates anger. She is at once a vixen and a threat. She has embraced gendered commodities such as makeup and revealing fashion, but she is not repressed, oppressed, or a victim. She looks as though takes her own victims. Her sexuality is aggressive, and it belongs to her. She is bound by the constraints of the corset, but not limited to it. Her corset is about empowerment, not oppression. She is nobody's darling, or housewife, or possession. She possesses herself and her sexuality. She is in control.

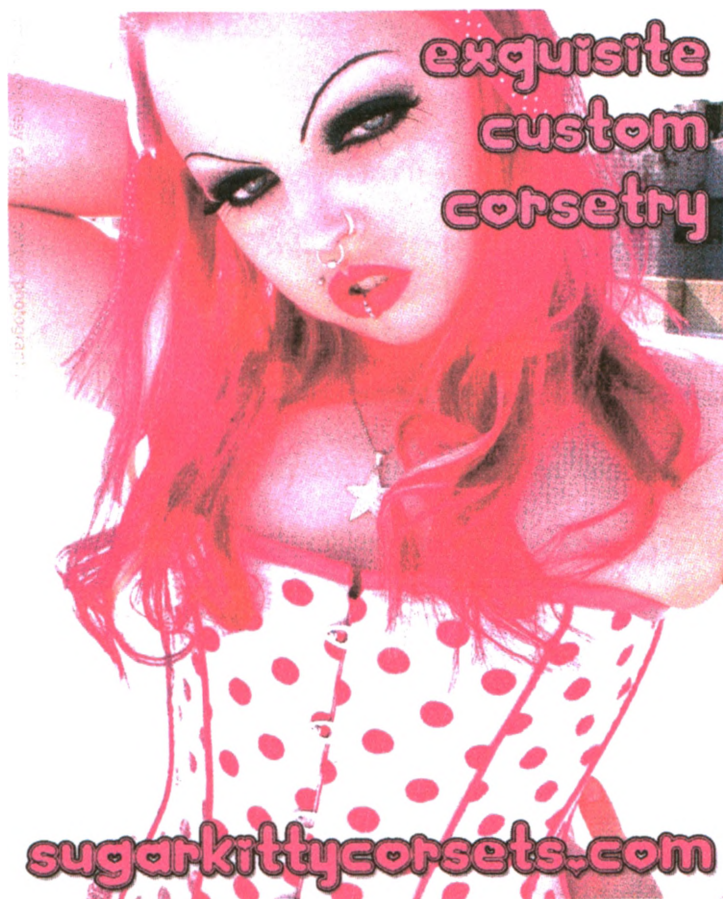


Figure 4: Sugar Kitty Corsets, *BUST* (Oct/Nov 2007).

This type of imagery is synonymous with the third-wave feminist ideal of reclamation. What was once used as a means to oppress, constrain, and confine women, is now embraced by them as a tool of power. The use of corsets in fetish culture has led to the corset as a sign of dominance rather than weakness and oppression. The corset revival in alternative fashion scenes coincides with the idea of reclaiming something problematic from the past and transforming it into something meaningful. There are other ads in *BUST* for corset makers, which indicates that the third wave does not disregard the corset in the way that first and second wave feminists did. Also noteworthy is the term “custom corsetry,” which alludes to the handmade, artisan-created nature of the corset, which serves as yet another example of emphasizing indie, handmade, and DIY in third-wave discourse. Several corset makers have set up shop on *Etsy*, and a punk/goth aesthetic is evident when viewing these shops.<sup>152</sup>

In addition to advertisements, *BUST* also features editorial content that coincides with the notion of reclamation. In the June/July 2007 issue, an article in the magazine describes an artist who “pimps”<sup>153</sup> household appliances such as ovens and fridges (Figure 5). Katie Pell, inspired by car culture and NASCAR, adds interesting paint jobs, hydraulics, and other car shop features to traditionally banal household goods. Entitled “Bitchen” (rhymes with kitchen), Pell is demonstrating an artistic reclamation of appliances historically confined to the sphere of women. By integrating macho car culture elements with domestic signifiers, Pell depicts a third-wave feminist ethos.

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<sup>152</sup> I personally have purchased a handmade corset off of *Etsy*, from a seller based in Latvia. She frequently tags her items with the term “punk”.

<sup>153</sup> This is a reference to MTV’s popular show *Pimp My Ride*, where average or lackluster cars are detailed and updated.



## if you can't stand the heat...

**KATIE PELL REINVENTS THE KITCHEN  
WITH BITCHEN**

**XZIBIT MAY PIMP** your ride, but Texas-based artist Katie Pell will pimp your stove. The self-described "unhip" 40-year-old's idea to customize household appliances was first inspired by local car culture. "When you drive around San Antonio, you'll see superexpensive cars parked in front of really low-income houses," says Pell. "I wondered, What makes people put \$70,000 into their cars and \$20,000 into their houses?" That line of thinking led to her latest art project, Bitchen, in which tricked-out stoves, blenders, and toasters superimpose masculine aesthetics on feminine products to get discussion cooking.

Sporting features gleaned from macho low rider, NASCAR, and monster-truck cultures, Pell's customized appliances include a flame-painted stove with hydraulics that cause it to rock and bump like a '78 hoopty and a slow-turning dryer with a leopard-print-lined cocktail bar and disco lights inside. For a typical project, she'll buy an appliance and first figure out any technical enhancements, like how to make flames shoot out of a Maytag stove, before plotting out the design and color scheme. Then she takes it to one of the local car shops she frequents for painting, where male-mechanic reactions have ranged from enthusiastic to condescending (one dismissive employee



remarked, "It looks like a chick's dryer.") Finally, she'll remove exterior metal for chroming and add finishing touches like pink fur to line the inside. "My favorite piece is the Allman Brothers commemorative toaster," says Pell. "It's really very powerful." Accompanying the collection is a comic book, filled with Pell's pen, ink, and colored-pencil drawings, in which female employees of "All-mart" file a gender-discrimination lawsuit against the corporation and funnel their winnings into souping up their kitchens.

Pell puts Bitchen items on display in galleries and car shows, gaining fans in both the art world and car culture. "It's cool for us to be able to intersect with each other and get a broader idea of what's going on in San Antonio, 'cause the art scene's pretty small," says Pell. Wherever she goes, her pimped-out kitchen always gets a big response, and she's constantly working on new ideas. "It can go on forever," she says. "What would low rider birth-control containers look like?" [EMILY MCCOMBS]

Figure 5: *BUST* (June/July 2007).

Other examples of reclamation within *BUST* include feature articles about women who have chosen to become nuns<sup>154</sup> and women who have made careers out of waitressing.<sup>155</sup> Career and lifestyle choices that were once thought to be oppressive, repressive, or forced on women because of a lack of other options and are often ignored or

<sup>154</sup> Jennifer Chen, "Get Thee to a Nunnery," *BUST*, Aug/Sept. 2007, 62-65.

<sup>155</sup> Candacy Taylor, "Dishing It Out," *BUST*, Feb/Mar 2008, 72-77.

undervalued are depicted as valid by third-wave feminists as long as the women involved have chosen to be there. As the author of "Dishing it Out" notes,

They [career waitresses] have made deep connections with their regular customers. They are financially stable (averaging \$20 an hour); many own their homes, drive new cars, and have college-educated children. In addition, they are models of healthy aging; the mental stimulation of memorizing orders keeps their minds sharp, and the physical labor of waitressing keeps the joints lubricated and healthy.<sup>156</sup>

Thus, *BUST* illustrates that domesticity and "women's work" can be positive so long as women have choice in participating. Reclaiming things and circumstances that were once oppressive and deeming them potentially feminist serves to shift the balance of power in favor of women.

*DIY/Craft (tutorials, tradition, handicrafts, "handmade", one-of-a-kind)*

Most significant to this thesis is the presence of crafting discourse in *BUST*. Again, crafting as a third-wave feminist activity is derived from the DIY roots of Riot Grrrl punk feminism. *BUST*'s origins are also tied to the Riot Grrrl movement, and consequently, the DIY ethic was carried forward into the magazine's editorial content. As discussed previously, *BUST*'s founder and current editor Debbie Stoller has been enamored with needlecraft for most of her life, and sought to introduce craft projects to *BUST* in the late 1990s. Showcased prominently in every *BUST* issue are tutorials for various DIY or crafting items, running the gamut from bath bombs to bug spray to hand-sewn computer cases. Some projects demand that the reader already has specific crafting skills (i.e. knitting and crocheting skills, or knowledge of sewing), while others are more appropriate for beginning crafters. Typically included in the magazine sections entitled "Real Life" or "Style," craft projects are a frequent

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<sup>156</sup> Taylor, 72.

motif and *BUST* readers must have an appreciation for craft in order to appreciate the magazine as a whole. According to Conrad,

Several general features of *BUST* exemplify its Third Wave feminist mentality. The magazine's use of reader submissions creates a publication that is truly multicultural and multiperspectival. *BUST* takes a defiantly Third Wave stance with its regular zine, pornography, and sex-toy reviews, as well as erotic stories called "One-Handed Reads." The *BUST* approach is 100% unconventional, always looking for the unusual and countercultural spin. Even the beauty product recommendations are cynical and creative, promoting things such as body paint in new shades for Halloween and hemp soap made by a company that does not test on animals. And "She's Crafty," the regular do-it-yourself arts and crafts how-to segments, defy the stereotype of domestic arts as oppressive to women.

The sections have changed since Conrad wrote her thesis, but the emphasis on domestic arts remains. Occasionally, craft tutorials fall under the heading "Buy or DIY" and they offer both directions to make a project, as well as purchasing information for similar items created by indie designers.<sup>157</sup>

Examples of craft projects featured in the seven issues analyzed include a button bracelet tutorial, directions on how to make natural bug spray, DIY bath bombs, handmade laptop sleeves, a rag rug tutorial, directions on how to alter a hoodie, make-your-own candles, a handcrafted leather bracelet and headband set, a rock and roll themed quilt, a jewelry box, an altered sweater, hand-decorated wallpaper, and in the most recent issue, handmade soap and a lamp base made out of old hardcover books. Again, the creators of some of these projects assume that the reader already has experience with sewing or knitting, while others, like handmade soap, target a beginner.

*BUST* is consistently dense with craft imagery and references, and the most recent issue, the fifteenth anniversary issue of *BUST*, is especially jam-packed with craft-related

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<sup>157</sup> Sellers on *Etsy* are often featured here.

content. A feature story showcased on the issue's cover is entitled "A Stitch in Time", and examines several female artists who sew and embroider as part of a fine art project and gallery showing. The author explains,

The elevation of needlework to fine art has taken on new and exciting life via a movement of artists who often refer to their work as paintings—not crafts—regardless of the materials they use. stitch by stitch, they embrace many elements of traditional and work while questioning or discarding previously held assumptions and stereotypes about what that work means.<sup>158</sup>

The prominent position of craft in *BUST* is evident here, as well as the third-wave feminist notion that what was once previously deemed domestic now as artistic merit and can serve as a means for feminist artists to express themselves.

*BUST* also advocates craft as means of activism. In an article entitled "Pretty Knitty Titty Committee" (shown in Figure 6), the power of crafting to support a cause is clearly articulated. Toronto-based knitter and breast-cancer survivor Beryl Tsang developed her own hand-knitted breast prosthesis as a more comfortable and handcrafted alternative to medical-grade prostheses. In an excerpt from the article, the author explains the significance of a hand-crafted alternative to traditional medical approaches to breast cancer:

In addition to listing resources for medical information and support, she encourages women to make their own Tit-Bits by providing the pattern online. In doing so, she hopes the homemade prosthesis will become a way for women to "take back the tit" from cancer and a male-run health-care system. "Crafting is a creative outlet that allows women who are living through transitions the opportunity to make a difference," says Tsang.<sup>159</sup>

In this context, it is clear that craft is being used as a feminist form of activism and to raise awareness for issues that concern women and society as a whole.

<sup>158</sup> Susan Beal, "A Stitch in Time," *BUST*, June/July 2008, 61.

<sup>159</sup> Liz Donovan, "Pretty Knitty Titty Committee", *BUST*, Dec/Jan 2008, 46.

Carrots



## pretty knitty titty committee

**A CANCER SURVIVOR FILLS OUT HER CHEST WITH A HANDMADE BREAST**

**WHY STUFF YOUR** bra with silicone when you can use cashmere? That was the question posed by Toronto-based knitter and breast-cancer survivor Beryl Tsang, the mastermind behind Tit-Bits, a crafty alternative to prosthetic breasts.

After her mastectomy, Tsang found conventional prostheses to feel freakishly similar to raw liver. But instead of going boobless, Tsang grabbed her knitting needles and busted out a breast. She loved the soft, comfortable result, and soon other breast-cancer survivors were clamoring for knit tits of their own. Tit-Bits cost \$65 to \$95 each and come in 3 styles: "everyday" (made from cotton in natural hues), "fancy" (featuring cute colors and patterns), and the more luxurious "floosie" (think bright red with faux-fur trim). Each can be customized with your choice of high-quality yarn. If you're feeling naughty, you can even personalize your new breast with titillating features, such as a piercing or an erect nipple. But Tsang's business is more than just a boob factory. "My site is really a social enterprise intended for political education about breast cancer," she explains. In addition to listing resources for medical information and support, she encourages women to make their own Tit-Bits by providing the pattern online. In so doing, she hopes the homemade prostheses will become a way for women to "take back the tit" from cancer and a male-run health-care system. "Crafting is a creative outlet that allows women who are living through transitions the opportunity to make a difference," says Tsang.

If you're not knitting-needle savvy and prefer to order one of Tsang's masterpieces, she asks that you be patient, as delivery takes about five to seven weeks. But the quality is worth waiting for. "You can't really mass-produce something like this," she says. "Each one has to be made for someone with love, care, and attention." If you're feeling up to the crafty challenge, we've included her pattern for a watermelon Tit-Bit. So gather your stitchin' bitches, and get started on a boob job you can all enjoy. See Tsang's racks at [www.titbits.ca](http://www.titbits.ca). [LIZ DONOVAN]

046 / BUST // DEC/JAN

**Figure 6: *BUST* (Dec/Jan 2008).**

Of the seven issues examined, four have overt references to craft (either the words “craft” or DIY”) featured on the cover, thus revealing the significance of crafting to *BUST*’s agenda. Articles on crafters, independent artists, and artisanship are consistently featured in the editorial content, and advertisements emphasizing a handmade or DIY ethic are an integral component of the magazine’s advertising base. Noteworthy craft-related advertisements have been identified and are analyzed below.

The advertisement for Singer sewing machines, shown in Figure 7, depicts three young women in brightly colored vinyl coats wearing vibrant makeup, each sporting a modern variation of a bob haircut and a neutral facial expression. The heading reads “end wardrobe monotony!” while the text in the middle of the ad states, “do your part: make a statement with the SINGER FUTURA sewing and embroidery machine.” The sewing machine being advertised is prominently featured in the center of the advertisement. The text at the bottom of the page reads, “Stop the spread of cookie-cutter, copy-cat, yawn-inducing clothes. Follow your fashion conscience and awaken your creativity with the SINGER FUTURA sewing and embroidery machine. It’s the responsible thing to do.” The ad denotes an ideal of creativity and individualism and targets crafty gals who oppose mass-produced fashion. The terms “cookie-cutter,” “copy-cat,” and “yawn-inducing” connote a negative view of mass-produced clothing and the ad calls for young women to create their own sense of fashion rather than depend on mainstream normative fashion ideals. The “do your part” and “it’s the responsible thing to do” discourse implies a call for activism against monotony and a social movement in opposition to “cookie-cutter” clothing (mass production). This type of phrasing draws on vintage war propaganda calling the populous to do their part in the war

effort.<sup>160</sup> In essence, this ad signifies a war on mass-production and monotony and coincides with the third-wave feminist ideals of individuality, self-expression, and self-sufficiency.

While the sewing machine itself is a commodity that must first be purchased (and thus is part of consumer culture), it gives women the tools to oppose mass-produced clothing and textiles and ultimately create their own alternatives to mass-consumption. The machine also features a mechanized embroidery system, which allows users to design their own needlecraft and produce it with a machine rather than by hand. While the mechanized component of embroidery seems to contradict the third-wave notions of handmade craft and artistry, it provides users with the ability to generate original artwork and quickly create textile forms.

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<sup>160</sup> The most mainstream examples are with vintage "Rosie the Riveter" posters, featuring Rosie flexing her muscles and exclaiming "We Can Do It!" <http://www.rosietheriveter.org/>

**end**  
wardrobe monotony

**do your part**  
make a statement with the SINGER FUTURA sewing and embroidery machine.

Stop the spread of cookie-cutter, copy-cat, yawn-inducing clothes. Follow your fashion conscience and awaken your creativity with the SINGER FUTURA sewing and embroidery machine. It's the responsible thing to do.

**Embroidery Software Features**

- 120 Embroidery Designs
- Powered by PC via USB Cable
- 600 Stitches per Minute
- Built-In Tutorial
- Link to Thousands of Designs
- Easily Send Designs to the Machine
- 5 Popular Fonts
- Repeat, Select and Paste Designs
- Live Software Updates

**Bonus Software Included**  
AutoPunch® - Convert clip art into embroidery.

**S SINGER | Futura™**  
Personalized by me.

Tap into your creativity at [singerco.com](http://singerco.com)

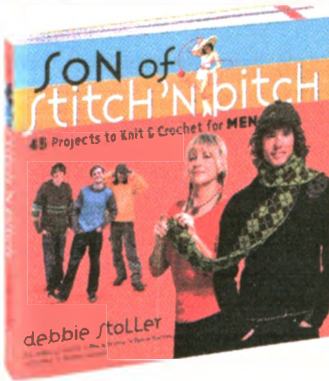
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Figure 7: Singer, *BUST* (June/July 2008).



*BUST* editor Debbie Stoller's own personal involvement with crafting has already been discussed, as has her authorship of several needlecraft books. Figure 8 depicts an advertisement for Workman Publishing, the firm that publishes Stoller's collection in addition to other crafting books. The ad's heading exclaims, "Get Your Craft On!" and six books are showcased in the body of the ad, four of which are authored by Stoller. The titles include: *Son of Stitch 'N bitch* (Stoller), *SEW: Sew Everything Workshop* (Diana Rupp), *Generation T: 108 ways to transform a T-shirt* (Megan Nicolay), *Stitch 'N bitch: The Knitter's Handbook* (Stoller), *Stitch 'N bitch Nation* (Stoller), and *Stitch 'N bitch Crochet: The Happy Hooker* (Stoller). The caption underneath the images of available books reads, "The books that started it all" and "From 'knitting superstar' (*San Francisco Chronicle*) Debbie Stoller, the *New York Times* bestselling hip knitting guides and its *voulez-vous crochet avec moi?* companion. Together, 130 fresh funky patterns." At the very bottom of the advertisement, the ad's creators remind their audience, "And don't forget your crafty friends this holiday season." It makes sense that an advertisement for books authored by *BUST*'s editor would appear in the publication, and it makes even more sense that this ad is for crafting books. The terms "craft" and "crafty" are prominent in the ad, and the bright colors and lively images of book covers invoke a sense of excitement and fun. The context of the ad's dialogue suggests that crafting is a hip "fresh funky" hobby perfect for young women and the *BUST* reader. The book covers all feature young, hip, and fashionable people, and connote that crafting is an activity for hip people, implicitly denying the association of craft with matronly or domestic women. As *BUST* advocates in general, this ad suggests that we should all "get our craft on" for personal pleasure and fashionable utilitarianism.

# GET YOUR CRAFT ON!\*



## KNOCK HIS SOCKS OFF

An attitude-packed guide to knitting and crocheting for the men in your life with 45 awesome projects—sweaters, scarves, hats, gloves, and cool Look Sharp socks.

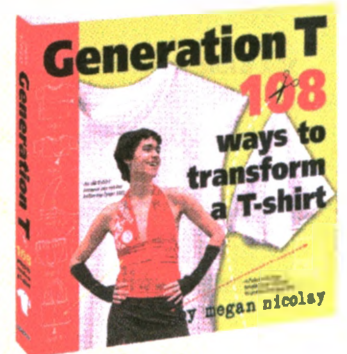
□ *Son of Stitch 'N Bitch*, by *Debbie Stoller*



## BRING THE WORKSHOP HOME

The complete beginner's sewing book and pattern kit, and an amazing value with 25 cool projects and 10 original paper patterns for skirts, dresses, yoga pants, and more.

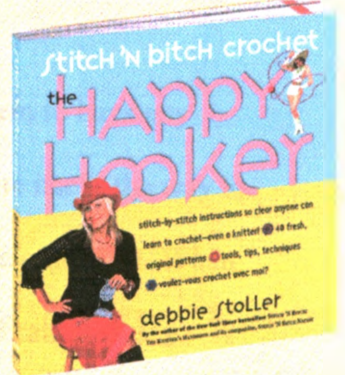
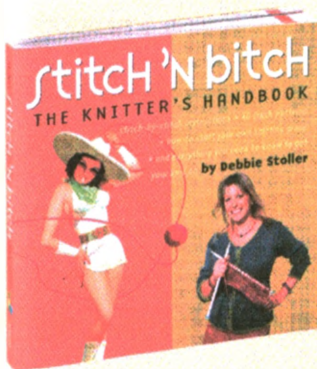
□ *Sew Everything Workshop*, by *Diana Rupp*



## SLASH IT. SCRUNCH IT. SEW IT.

Make it yours, with the bestselling guide to transforming T-shirts into tank tops, tube tops, customized tees, T-skirts—even handbags and leg warmers.

□ *Generation T*, by *Megan Nicolay*



## THE BOOKS THAT STARTED IT ALL

From “knitting superstar” (*San Francisco Chronicle*) Debbie Stoller, the *New York Times* bestselling hip knitting guides and its *voulez-vous crocheter avec mois?* companion. Together, 130 fresh funky patterns.

□ *Stitch 'N Bitch*, by *Debbie Stoller*

□ *Stitch 'N Bitch Nation*, by *Debbie Stoller*

□ *The Happy Hooker*, by *Debbie Stoller*

**\*AND DON'T FORGET YOUR CRAFTY FRIENDS THIS HOLIDAY SEASON**  
Available wherever books are sold. • WORKMAN • [www.workman.com](http://www.workman.com)

Figure 8: Workman Publishing, *BUST* (Dec/Jan 2008).

Figure 9 depicts an advertisement for *Etsy*. As part of a recently implemented cooperative advertising program,<sup>161</sup> *Etsy* is now buying up full-page advertising space in selected publications (these include *BUST*, *Venus Zine*, *Craft Magazine*, *Mary Engelbreit's Home Companion*, and *Readymade Magazine*)<sup>162</sup> and offering small spots to *Etsy* sellers for more affordable prices than if the sellers were to buy ad space on their own. The ad under analysis is relatively simple in appearance, with a basic layout of thirty equal sized squares each featuring an item from the showcased sellers' shops, in addition to their shop names, the category of the item, and the price of the item. At the top of the ad is *Etsy*'s logo, with the text underneath reading, "Your place to buy and sell all things handmade." At the bottom right of the page, large bold text states "Buy Handmade," and in smaller font, "Discover these unique creations and more, with over 1,500,000 handmade goods and supplies for sale on Etsy. To find any of the times above, each in their own shop, go to: [www.shopname.etsy.com](http://www.shopname.etsy.com)."

While the ad does not appear overtly political and does not seem to have any underlying message other than to showcase *Etsy* sellers and the website itself, the way in which the phrase "Buy Handmade" is situated and positioned suggests otherwise. When examining that simple statement, it is noteworthy that it is a command rather than a suggestion or descriptive phrase. In stating "Buy Handmade" rather than something such as "Please Support Handmade" or "Handmade is Better," *Etsy* is articulating a sense of force with its bold text and simple two-word phrase, and in essence, not giving the reader a choice in the matter. There is no option in this phrasing other than to buy handmade. There is also no explanation of why the reader should buy handmade, other than the use of the term

<sup>161</sup> "Etsy Cooperative Advertising Pilot Program," 01 February 2008.

<http://www.etsy.com/storque/section/etsyNews/article/etsy-cooperative-advertising-pilot-program/1128/>

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

“unique” and the rather striking statistic of how many goods are available for purchase on *Etsy*. The creators of this ad assume that the reader understands the importance of buying handmade and knows why he/she should support the handmade movement. The lack of overtly politicized rhetoric and simplicity in phrase selection forces the audience to reflect on the term “handmade” and come to its own explanation of why it should heed *Etsy*’s command. Ultimately, this reflection is quite effortless for *BUST*’s target audience.

A relationship between *BUST* and *Etsy* is evident through the numerous paid advertisements for *Etsy* shops, through editorial shopping features that showcase goods found on *Etsy*, *Etsy*’s sponsorship of *BUST*’s biannual “Craftacular” (a large indie/DIY oriented craft fair), and more overtly in the most recent two issues of *BUST*, full-page advertisements purchased by *Etsy*. *BUST*’s frequent support of companies and businesses that are independently operated, sell or showcase handmade or artisan created goods, as well as its own editorial content highlighting indie designers, non-mass produced goods, and craft and DIY projects demonstrates its own agenda of bringing crafting and the handmade movement to the forefront third-wave feminist pop culture discourse.



**Etsy**  
Your place to buy and sell all things handmade™

 Jewelry \$238	 CorinneElaina Jewelry \$41	 vol25 Art \$20		
 Jewelry \$30	 allisonstertag Art \$10	 etcetrix Jewelry \$42	 JenArthur Art \$20	 glapet Jewelry \$36
 Bags & Purses \$18	 JewelsofLuxury Jewelry \$20.95	 strawberryluna Art \$25	 daniellejewelry Jewelry \$340	 laurabucci Bags & Purses \$45
 Jewelry \$95	 dollface design Art \$20	 sherrytrutt Jewelry \$42	 Xenotees Clothing \$20	 vivametal Jewelry \$36
 Jewelry \$20	 SarahLynneDesigns Jewelry \$45	 HidenSeek Art \$11	 mykonos Jewelry \$49	 estasketch Art \$55
 Jewelry \$15	 aNGrYGiRLGear Clothing \$90	 meganauman Jewelry \$90	 MSPottery Ceramics & Pottery \$14	 ticklebean Jewelry \$48
 Jewelry \$18	 loopsdesigns Jewelry \$36			

# Buy Handmade

Discover these unique creations and more, with over 1,500,000 handmade goods and supplies for sale on Etsy. To find any of the items above, each in their own shop, go to: [www.shopname.etsy.com](http://www.shopname.etsy.com)

Figure 9: Etsy.com, BUST (June/July 2008).

## Conclusion

Because of its DIY/Riot Grrrl origins, *BUST* is a uniquely situated women's magazine that emphasizes a more ethical and conscientious consumerism, specifically articulating handcrafted or independent goods as an alternative to mainstream/mass consumerism. While *BUST* is similar to traditional women's magazines (*Vogue*, *Cosmopolitan*, etc.) in that it tends to feature sections such as fashion, beauty, advice, relationships, etcetera, and focuses on recreation and pleasure, its third-wave feminist leanings and showcasing of independent designers and ethical/environmental consumerism mean that it is isolated and separate from more mainstream magazines targeting women. As a proponent of handmade, DIY and indie goods, *BUST* forms alliances with marketplaces geared toward this type of product market. Consequently, *BUST* has established a relationship with *Etsy* that is made obvious through *BUST* editorial and advertising content, the more recent full-page advertisements purchased by *Etsy*, and most notably, *Etsy*'s sponsorship of *BUST*'s biannual craft fair, the "BUST Craftacular" (Figure 10).

As an online craft/handmade marketplace comprised of ninety percent women,<sup>163</sup> *Etsy*, like *BUST*, is positioned as an alternative media source that provides access to and information about ethically produced goods and counters mass-production. Due to its membership demographics, *Etsy* also has a large feminist patronage. As a side note to the call for participants I published on its online newspaper, *The Storque*, *Etsy* administration articulates that,

Etsy's core mission is to help artists and crafters make a living from what they make. This may seem like an innocuous enough statement, but truth be told, the socio-political-cultural-economic

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<sup>163</sup> "Call for Feminist Crafters: Crafting Resistance & Community," January 30, 2008. <http://www.etsy.com/storque/section/craftivism/article/call-for-feminist-crafters-crafting-resistance-community/1130/>

state in which we live makes this a rather bold rallying cry. We want to make history's "way of doing things" undergo a change and Rob aka Rokali's recent announcement about Etsy's future explains how we seek to grow the company in contrast to many corporations. Etsy is part of a larger movement and we at Etsy want to learn more about the consciousness of feminist crafters in our midst...<sup>164</sup>

With this statement, *Etsy* positions itself as an opponent of mass consumerism and large corporations. It also discloses its own political agenda of being part of the handmade movement, and it is in this context that the following chapter will explore *Etsy* and other craft-oriented online spaces as community-building forces within the feminist-handmade movement.

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

**2007 BUST  
MAGAZINE  
HOLIDAY  
CRAFTACULAR**

200 + VENDORS,  
DJ'S, DANCING, AND DRINKS!

**DEC 8. 2007 METROPOLITAN PAVILION**  
125 WEST 18TH STREET, NYC **10AM-8PM**  
VENDORS APPLY AT [WWW.BUST.COM/CRAFTACULAR](http://WWW.BUST.COM/CRAFTACULAR) BEFORE OCTOBER 15TH


SPONSORED BY 

Figure 10: Bust Craftacular, *BUST* (Oct/Nov 2007).



## Chapter Two – Close Knit(ing) Communities?: The Emergence of *Etsy.com* and Online Craft Communities

### Introduction

This chapter examines the way in which online spaces such as *Etsy.com*, *Craftster.org*, *BurdaStyle.com*, and various blogs facilitate the development of virtual crafting communities. This chapter considers the intersection of consumption and market-oriented crafting communities (*Etsy*) and how they function in comparison with non-commodified online spaces (*Craftster* and *BurdaStyle*) geared to crafters. While few of these websites claim to be explicitly feminist in design or content (with the exception of certain blogs), their mostly female participants situate them within the feminist-crafting context discussed in the previous chapter. This chapter will draw primarily from analyses of *Etsy.com*, *Craftster.org*, and *BurdaStyle.com*, existing literature in the field, and interviews with *Etsy* and *Craftster* members.

### Crafting Communities

Crafting can facilitate face-to-face communications and community (i.e. stitch'n bitch<sup>165</sup> needlework sessions) as well as online communities. While the majority of respondents interviewed have friends and acquaintances in real life that share their interest in craft, a few stated that they felt alone in their real-life crafting and relied upon the internet to feel part of a community. Participant 18, a book arts and mixed media artist stated:

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<sup>165</sup> Stoller, *Stitch 'N Bitch*.

I've taken some classes at NYC's Center for Book Arts, but I don't particularly feel part of that community. I'm more inclined to think that art is a largely solitary pursuit, like writing. I do belong to a number of mailing lists, however, and that feels more like a community to me. There's a lot of sharing of information and tips as well as final products. There's a lot of encouragement to try new methods, too, which is important for novices like me. I haven't found the Center for Book Arts a particularly welcoming community, but the online communities don't seem to have the same "cult of personality" problems I've seen in the "live" groups. When I started blogging regularly about book and paper arts, all kinds of people in various related arts dropped by to comment and add helpful links to the ones I'd gathered. Etsy seems very similar to this, as does Brooklyn. Yes, I belong to a couple of online communities (Live Journal and Yahoo) in Book Arts. They're great places for sharing ideas, getting questions answered about techniques, materials, and resources, and to get feedback on your own work. I like that they don't function as advertising space, but rather as teaching resources. There's a lot of sharing of links and online tutorials.

Likewise, Participant 11, a cloth pad maker, explains that she "turned to internet communities because I don't have much community. It's nice to connect with people with the same interests. These communities are friendly, supportive, and interesting."

While the act of crafting is rapidly gaining popularity and mainstream attention, some crafters still feel isolated in their everyday lives because they are not members of physical craft communities. However, the abundance of online resources and community-building tools allow these isolated crafters to become members of virtual communities. Below, examples of online craft communities are examined.

### *Etsy*

*Etsy.com* is first and foremost an e-commerce site, and secondly, an online crafting community. The community elements are fairly prominent when exploring the website, but upon initial observation of the front page, one is immediately viewing

handmade goods available for sale. The front page's most obvious feature is the block of twelve images that comprise the featured "treasury" of goods (Figure 11). Treasuries are created by *Etsy* members and typically feature a selection of goods chosen based on common theme (i.e. color, type of good, content, material and so forth). Treasuries are found through a link on the left-hand side of the screen and expire after a few days. At any given time, a few hundred treasuries are available to view. The element of a member-created treasury of featured goods on *Etsy* reinforces the site's emphasis on community and member involvement, and although the front-page treasuries are carefully selected by *Etsy* administration, they are at first created by an *Etsy* member.

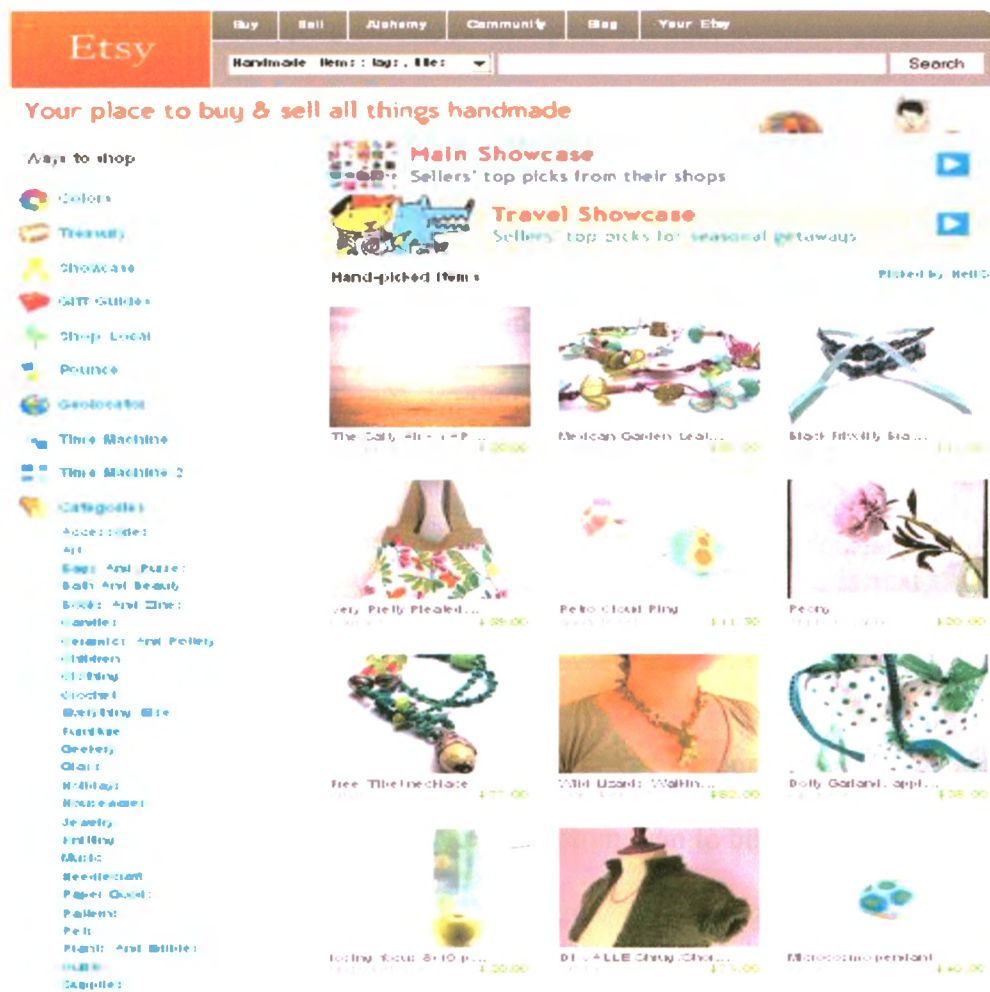


Figure 11: *Etsy.com* front page retrieved June 21, 2008

In addition to the featured treasury, the front page of *Etsy* also showcases a “featured seller,” links to various ways of shopping and finding goods and new articles in *The Storque*, *Etsy*’s online newspaper. The featured seller is selected by *Etsy* administration and a few of his/her goods are shown on the front page with a small image of the seller, and a link to their interview and shop. The various methods of shopping include shopping by color, through the treasuries, through a showcase whereby sellers pay for positions, through thematic gift guides, by locality, by listing time, by recently sold items, and by item category. *Etsy*’s front page is very consumption-oriented and the most prominent elements involve goods available for purchase, or sellers purveying these goods. In regards to shopping on *Etsy*, Participant 4 stated:

I think that a lot of people have a real entrepreneurial spirit, but they can’t do it entirely alone. Websites like Craftster.org and Etsy.com give people the little push that they need to learn new tricks and sell their wares. And a lot of buyers are sick of the same old crap everyone else has. You know that feeling when you buy a new t-shirt and you love it, and you think it suits you so perfectly, but then you go to a party and someone else is wearing the same thing? I think a lot of people are just plain sick of that stuff. You don’t want to buy things in the mall because everybody else already has it, and if they don’t, they will soon. Everyone wants to have something one-of-a-kind. With the cool search features on Etsy.com, you can type in a few keywords (like say, pink vegan messenger bag) and find something perfectly suited to you, at a good price, that no one else is going to have. And there is that added bonus that you’re giving your money to someone who loves their work, and works hard to make a good product, as opposed to sweatshop-labour-loving corporate big box stores.

At the top of *Etsy*’s front page, there are links for “Buy,” “Sell,” “Alchemy” (a shopping tool whereby buyers can request a custom item to be made and sellers bid on this item), “Community,” “Blog,” and “Your Etsy.” The “Blog” link takes the user to the website of *The Storque*, the “Your Etsy” link takes the user to his/her personal account if

he/she has previously registered, or prompts the user to register with the site. The “Community” link takes the user to a portal of various community options, including “Forums,” “Virtual Lab,” “Chat,” “Teams,” “The Storque,” and “Resources.”

The forums follow a typical message-board format, but the “Virtual Labs,” “Chat,” and “Teams” applications all require Adobe Flash Player to view and are rich with graphics and video. According to *Etsy*, the “Virtual Labs” (Figure 12), “are a multi-user online representation of the Etsy Labs using Workshop rooms. We use the Virtual Labs to connect with our community, host events, put on streaming webcam how-to's, host team meetings, demos, and shop critiques!”<sup>166</sup> *Etsy*'s physical headquarters are located in Brooklyn, New York, and along with offices and administrative space, offer members use of the “Etsy Labs” space, in which various crafting classes, workshops, tutorials, or Street Team meetings can be held. The “Virtual Labs” are intended to act as a virtual representation of the physical space where members distanced by geographic proximity can still participate in activities at the headquarters. In this sense, *Etsy* is attempting to foster community despite geographic distances.

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<sup>166</sup> “Etsy Launches Virtual Labs,” January 21, 2008.

<http://www.etsy.com/storque/section/etsyNews/article/etsy-launches-the-virtual-labs/622/>.

**Virtual Labs** Join us! Click any of the colored rooms below to enter View upcoming events



The screenshot shows a grid of virtual rooms on the left and a list of events on the right. The rooms include LOUNGE, SUPPORT, TREEHOUSE, BUSINESS, TEAMS, LIBRARY, RED ROOM, SHOP SETUP, and ENGINEERING. The event list includes:

Date & Time	Title
Wed 8:00pm June 25 <b>Live now!</b>	<b>First Impression Critiques</b> On the spot critiques with HeyMk at 9 if you wanna critique!
Wed 9:30pm June 25	<b>Eastern Washington Etsy Team</b> Private Team Meeting
Thu 3:00pm June 26	<b>Storque Office Hours</b> Come join us and talk about ideas! We are mainly focusing on planning and kids
Thu 6:00pm June 26	<b>Office Hours with MaryMary</b> Come share your ideas for the sit Community Advocate!
Thu 8:00pm June 26	<b>The New New Team Meeting</b> Private meeting
Thu 9:00pm June 26	<b>Big Damn Crafters Team Meetir</b> Private meeting
Thu 9:00pm June 26	<b>NORCAL Etsy Street Team</b> Private team meeting
Fri 10:00am June 27	<b>Office Hours With Matt</b> Weekly open office hours with Matt by and share what's on your mind

**Figure 12: Etsy Virtual Labs retrieved June 25, 2008**

The “Teams” section (Figure 13) serves as a platform for teams of *Etsy* members unified by geographic proximity (i.e. Ontario, Scandinavia, Arkansas, Singapore), craft type (i.e. PolymerClayArtists, FiberArts, EtsyMudTeam), or a common ideology (i.e. ChristianArtists, Green & CleanGuild, Etsy for Animals). Members can join teams on the Teams page, read team profiles, learn about team workshops, or look at a public calendar for various team events. According to *Etsy*,

Etsy Teams are groups of organized Etsy members who network, share skills, and promote their shops and Etsy together. A Team forms around a shared location, crafting medium, or another interest. Etsy's 250+ teams make us not just a marketplace of

individuals, but an interconnected and diverse artistic community. Teams are Etsy's biggest and most creative grassroots engine for support, networking and marketing – for each team member's shop, for the Teams themselves, and for Etsy as a whole.<sup>167</sup>

Again, *Etsy* is both a marketplace and a community, and this is obvious within the discourse presented on various pages of the site. Teams can meet online or in person, facilitating both virtual and real life crafting communities.



Figure 13: *Etsy* Teams retrieved June 25, 2008

“Chat” (Figure 14) operates as a fairly straightforward multi-room chat application. Registered members can choose an existing room they would like to chat in,

<sup>167</sup> <http://team.etsy.com/index.html>.

or they can create their own. Additionally, chat rooms can be restricted to certain members or Teams and kept private. The chat rooms are frequently in use but rarely full, and most *Etsy* members prefer to chat in the forums because there are a wider variety of discussions going on, and they are more populated. In one thread from January 20, 2008, an *Etsy* user states, "Don't know why, but every time i stick my head in the etsy chat rooms, i feel like I'm crashing someone elses party. Just cause I never go in there, not cause anyone has ever said anything that would make me think i'm not welcome. It's really just me being a dork. Sigh."<sup>168</sup> A large number of posters agree with this user about their chat room intimidation, but at the end of the thread, another user states, "Sometimes I feel that way about the forums. I think I have issues from high school and feeling like I didn't fit in. I should probably get over it."<sup>169</sup> Another reason why forums are used more than chat rooms by *Etsy* members is that forums are asynchronous; they are archived and can be accessed at later dates. Even if posters are busy for a few hours, they can look up the thread and contribute to the conversation despite having left earlier. In contrast, the chat rooms are in real time and leaving and re-entering means a participant may lose out on some of the discussions that are occurring. However, the ability to create private rooms makes chat an attractive feature for groups and teams involved in more personalized discussions.


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<sup>168</sup> "I'm a little afraid of going in the etsy chat rooms," 20 January 2008, [http://www.etsy.com/forums\\_thread.php?thread\\_id=5427102](http://www.etsy.com/forums_thread.php?thread_id=5427102).

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, [http://www.etsy.com/forums\\_thread.php?thread\\_id=5427102&page=6](http://www.etsy.com/forums_thread.php?thread_id=5427102&page=6).



## Chat Rooms

ACEO Babes Community Team: 2008/02/26 

Buy Sell Trade  
CaliforniaCreations

DIYscene team  
SewOeno

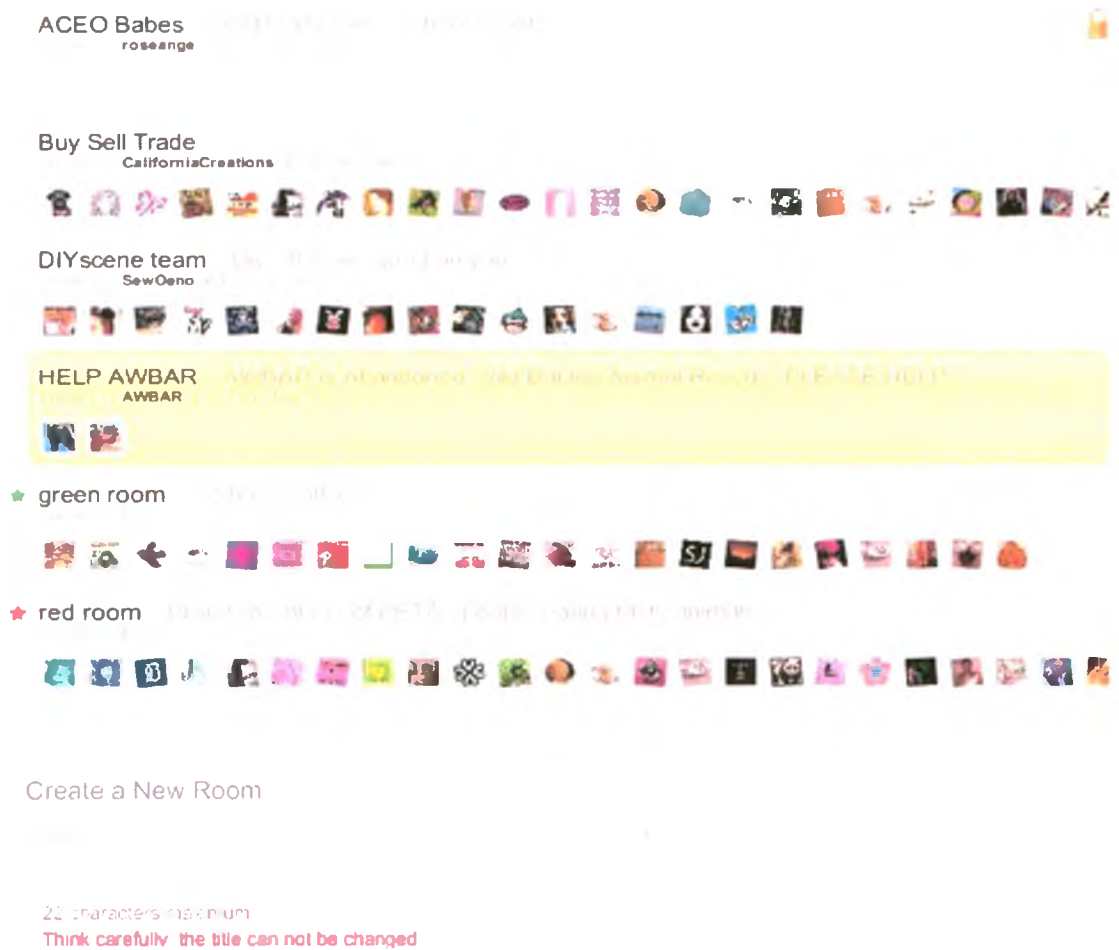
HELP AWBAR  
AWBAR

★ green room Community Team: 2008/02/26

★ red room Community Team: 2008/02/26

Create a New Room

20 characters maximum  
Think carefully the title can not be changed



**Figure 14: Etsy Chat Rooms retrieved June 25, 2008**

The forums are by far the most popular community application on *Etsy*. At any given time there are hundreds of *Etsy* members posting in categories ranging from “Site Help,” “Business Topics,” “Critiques,” “Techniques and Materials,” “Teams and Events,” “Ideas,” “Bugs,” “Promotions,” and “Etc.” The forums are situated in such a way to allow both buyers and sellers to assist one another in the buying and selling process, to create dialogue and a community dynamic through the input of and discussion with others, and in essence, to assist in the formation of relationships of “Etsians” with

other members of the site. Occasionally the administrative team (“admin”) chimes in to discuss various issues, creates new posts asking for members’ opinions, or to lock threads that have gotten out of hand.<sup>170</sup>

For the most part, all the forum categories are business or site related and the vast majority of posts are relevant to these topics. However, the “Etc.” forum is an anything goes category of sorts, and discussions range from rather chatty and trivial topics such as hairstyles and makeup to heavily politicized and polarized topics such as abortion and global warming. While the majority of Etsians who participate in the forums are politically liberal or moderate,<sup>171</sup> there are several very vocal Republican *Etsy* members and the debates that they instigate demonstrate the community dynamic on *Etsy* in the true sense of the word. Cass Sunstein’s concept of “The Daily Me” is relevant in this context. Because *Etsy* is a website with diverse membership and perspectives, members in public forums frequently encounter opposing view points that foster debates and ultimately, a community dynamic. Sunstein argues that as internet usage becomes more personalized and individualized, users only read, watch and hear content geared to their own interests, and consequently reduce possibilities for chance encounters with new information and different perspectives. This effect, according to Sunstein, serves to diminish the democratic possibilities of CMC and online communities.<sup>172</sup> However, *Etsy* attracts members from across the globe in various socio-economic statuses<sup>173</sup> and the

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<sup>170</sup> The censorship and thread locking on *Etsy* forums is a hot topic on the site right now. There are terms of service and “Do’s and Don’ts” available for members to get a sense of what is allowed and forbidden, but it is unclear at this point exactly what may lead a thread to get locked.

<sup>171</sup> I have no statistics to support this. This is based on my daily observation of the Etc. forum and relations between topics for over a year.

<sup>172</sup> Cass Sunstein, *Republic.com* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>173</sup> A discussion of the digital divide is merited here. All *Etsy* users must have internet access, which suggests that even though there may be members of lower-income levels, they at least have certain levels of access to computers and information. Chapter 3 will further address this issue.

forums serve as a place where democratic discussions can be had on a variety of topics. An example of this is a thread started on June 27, 2008 entitled “I don’t understand people who support Bush...”<sup>174</sup> The thread attracted Democrats and Republicans alike, and was for the most part, conducive to a respectful debate regardless of some extreme political differences. The fact that *Etsy* members can debate with people of opposing viewpoints is demonstrative of the community dynamic present on the site.

Because *Etsy* is a primarily a site of commerce, the administration team constantly monitors the forums to ensure that discussions deemed “inappropriate” to the marketplace facet of *Etsy* are quickly locked or deleted. Topics that are highly critical of *Etsy* are often closely observed and shut down if “necessary,” although the administrative team also frequently posts topics asking for member input about flaws in the administration and operation of *Etsy*. For the most part, the forums serve as a means of democratic and community-oriented conversation and debate and the censorship element is kept to a minimum. The commercial element of *Etsy* does influence the way the forums are administered, but from my own observation, threads that diverge significantly from business or consumption-related topics are allowed to persist and in practice, generally thrive.

The democratic and participant-friendly approach utilized by *Etsy* in their newspaper *The Storque* is exemplified by my own ability to publish a story about my research and calling for participants. In dealing with *Etsy* administration during this process, it became very clear to me that *Etsy* is genuinely concerned about fostering community and advocating member involvement in the processes involved as *Etsy*

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<sup>174</sup> “I don’t understand people who support Bush...” 27 June 2008, [http://www.etsy.com/forums\\_thread.php?thread\\_id=5686087&page=1](http://www.etsy.com/forums_thread.php?thread_id=5686087&page=1).

undergoes change and evolves as a website facilitating crafting commerce and community. When asked how *Etsy* is different from other online stores, Participant 1, a crocheter, explained:

I'm beginning to think it's not all that different. In the end, the object is the same: to make money. The forums/ community aspect of it marks *Etsy* out somewhat, because there is support available and some sense that everyone is working for some kind of greater good...*Etsy* allows 'swaps', but the items swapped must have been priced at the exact same value before the swap is allowed. Exchange rates affect *Etsy* sellers the same as they would mass-producers.

Because the primary goal of *Etsy* is to turn a profit through the commodification of handmade goods, the community element is secondary and its users seem fully aware of this ranking. Regardless of its capitalist leanings, *Etsy* does offer its members substantial community-building tools, and does successfully foster a crafting/commerce community. As Participant 19, a jewelry maker explains, *Etsians* are concerned about both selling and community, and *Etsy* allows for these two facets to happily coexist:

*Etsy.com* is different from other online stores because not only is it a collection of sellers, but it's also a community of people who appreciate the value of handmade items. *Etsy* is made up of sellers and buyers, but they aren't separate. Often buyers who sign up to buy one item become regular *Etsy* shoppers and begin to communicate with the sellers, joining their community. The forums on *Etsy* are an especially good place to see this. Here you have input from buyers and sellers about technical things on *Etsy* such as business matters, as well as random threads about current news or somebody's day to day life etc. There are groups of people who somehow seem to all know each other (I'm not in on that, so I can't really comment much on it) and make threads with special names for certain days of the week (there's a Saturday night sale thread, a Wednesday hump thread, and some obsession with hussies that I haven't figured out yet, every week). Rather than competition, everyone is really helpful and supportive of each other, even if another shop might sell similar items. You can always get constructive criticism about your *etsy* store on the forums. Then there's the chat room, which I've only been in once

or twice but is usually buzzing with etsiers. Etsians think of themselves as a big community and if you happen to see another one on the web somewhere or even offline (bumper stickers are popular) you feel as though you have something in common even if you don't know them: the Etsy mentality, the value of handmade items over mass-produced ones, the pride you feel in your hobby and the promotion of your skills as a creator

### *Craftster*

Unlike *Etsy*, which is both a crafting community and site of commerce, *Craftster.org* (Figure 15) is strictly forum-based and is not intended to function as a commercial website. *Craftster* is primarily a place of information sharing regarding craft projects, but also serves to facilitate tutorials, general conversation, and trades. *Craftster* is a different type of community from *Etsy* due to the lack of commercial activity, where bartering and sharing are much more prevalent and the attempted selling of goods is frowned upon.<sup>175</sup> *Craftster* demographics are similar to *Etsy*'s (ninety-six percent female and seventy-five percent are between the ages of eighteen and thirty-four<sup>176</sup> whereas *Etsy* is about ninety-six percent female with an average user age of thirty-two to thirty-five)<sup>177</sup> and thus positions the site as a primarily young, female community of crafters.

While *Craftster* does not allow its users to market their goods through the site, it was recently acquired by an internet company called NameMedia and the advertising on *Craftster* for external craft-related companies is expected to increase.<sup>178</sup> NameMedia, in regards to its *Craftster* acquisition, states the following:

<sup>175</sup> "Please Don't Use Craftster to Advertise Things You Sell," 11 August 2006, <http://www.craftster.org/forum/index.php?topic=113668.0>.

<sup>176</sup> "Craftster's Moving Onward and Upward!" 16 May 2008, <http://www.craftster.org/forum/index.php?topic=246423.0>.

"Survey Says: The Results Are In," March 6, 2008, <http://www.etsy.com/storque/section/etsyNews/article/survey-says-the-results-are-in/1369/>.

<sup>178</sup> "Onward and Upward," <http://www.craftster.org/forum/index.php?topic=246423.0>.

With Craftster, it was love at first site. NameMedia is always on the lookout for vibrant online communities that we can add to our new and growing Enthusiast Sites division. We believe in the rewards of bringing people together based on passionately shared interests. We love the refreshing and contemporary aesthetic on Craftster, the emphasis on green and recycled crafts, and that Craftster is so supportive of those who “push the boundaries” of creativity in the form of crafting. NameMedia is honored to welcome Craftster to the Namemedia family of sites, and proud to welcome Leah Kramer and Jean Reed as employees of our company. The site will benefit from the increased attention, experience, and resources that our company can provide while ensuring that Craftster continues to inspire people to make amazing things and share ideas, advice and support. Craftster is exactly the type of community that we look for. Engaged. Enthusiastic. Passionate. It had us at “No Tea Cozies Without Irony.”<sup>179</sup>

NameMedia’s other holdings include Cats.com, Tarot.com, Mommy.com, Geeks.com, and numerous others, and the types of online communities it fosters, in contrast to *Etsy*, are exemplary of Sunstein’s “The Daily Me,” whereby like-minded people share information in a community that is exclusionary of opposing viewpoints. In the context of *Craftster*, it seems that when the capitalist element of selling crafts is removed, there are far fewer Republicans present, and the community is left with like-minded, politically liberal members. However, *Craftster* is not entirely devoid of politically conservative members. In a thread from 2004 entitled “Viva Bush!!!” one *Craftster* member showcases her hand-altered pro-Bush shirt and states emphatically, “That’s right guys, I’m a hardcore republican craftster and not ashamed of it! ... Good times. Hope ya’ll voted today! Whatever your stance.”<sup>180</sup> Despite this proudly defiant post, a search for the term “republican” and “conservative” results in more forum posts demonstrating criticism

<sup>179</sup> “NameMedia is proud to announce a new addition to our family of Premium Websites - Craftster.org.” <http://www.namemedia.com/craftster>,” <http://www.namemedia.com/craftster>.

<sup>180</sup> “Viva Bush!!!” 2 November 2002, <http://www.craftster.org/forum/index.php?topic=16324.0>.

of these political alignments than ones inclusive of them. When asked the difference between *Etsy* and *Craftster*, Participant 2, an illustrator, offered this response:

The main difference between Craftster and Etsy is that the focus on selling products. Craftster is aimed at the sharing of knowledge freely without cost or purchase, whilst on Etsy it is full of independent crafters trying to protect their livelihood. Craftster frowns on promoting, selling products and using the forums to plug a store. They believe very strongly in making information open for acceptance by anyone of any difficulty level.

The strict emphasis on community rather than profit situates *Craftster* in a much different position from *Etsy*, but both share obvious commonalities and linkages, as well as members. Of the twenty-seven participants in this study, all were members of *Etsy* and eight were members of both *Etsy* and *Craftster* (approximately thirty percent). This is demonstrative of the unifying potential of craft communities and community members seeking multiple venues to develop relationships with like-minded people.

Help | About | Contact | Press Clippings | Advertise | Terms

**Craftster**  
No tea parties without irony.

News: 6/18/08 - We've just launched a special new campaign called **Creativity 350!** Check it out!

Total Members: 142928  
Currently Running With Scissors:  
497 Guests, 174 Users

New projects updated weekly at The Sewing Republic.

Check 'em out!

Play

BERNINA

Home My Craftster Members Calendar Blog Help

Search: [ ] Submit Results: [ ] Advanced search

Welcome, Guest  
[ ] [ ]  
[ ] [ ]  
[ ] [ ]  
[ ] [ ]

Most Recent Posts  
Recent With Pics  
Hot and New Topics  
View Topics By Tag  
Recent Lapsed Posts  
Replies To Your Posts

**BizLand Crafters**

Web Hosting for Crafters  
[ ] Blog  
[ ] Forums  
[ ] Shopping Cart  
[ ] Your Own Domain  
[ ] And More!

**BurdaStyle.com**  
Patterns, tutorials, community and more

HOT NEW PROJECTS FROM ALL CATEGORIES

NEWEST PROJECTS FROM ALL CATEGORIES

FEATURED PROJECTS

CURRENT CRAFTSTER CHALLENGE

**Other Forums**

**NEWS AND DISCUSSION ABOUT CRAFTSTER**  
Find out what's new with Craftster, give feedback, report bugs, and make suggestions.

**CRAFTSTER CRAFT CHALLENGES**  
Monthly Craft Challenges with fabulous prizes to win!

**ORGANIZED SWAPS**  
Do you have things? Exchange new, reusable items!

**OPPORTUNITIES FOR CRAFTERS**  
Have an item to sell? A craft to sell? Selling handmade goods, publications, TV shows, sewing classes, classes for artists, etc.

**CITY GUIDES FOR CRAFTSTERS**

**Craft Forums**

**BATH AND BEAUTY**  
Hair, skin care, makeup, perfume, etc.

**CLOTHING**  
Sew from scratch or remodeled clothing. Plus making your own shoes and more.

**COOKING**  
The ultimate recipe site.

**CRAFTING FOR GOOD AND NOT EVIL**  
Only crafting for good causes.

**CRAFTY BUSINESS ADVICE**  
Simplify, streamline, boost Craftsters who sell their wares.

Figure 15: *Craftster.org* retrieved June 26, 2008

### *BurdaStyle*

A newer website among those of the online crafting community, *BurdaStyle*, emerged in January, 2007 as an open-source sewing site where members can download free patterns and discuss sewing projects with one another. *BurdaStyle* patterns are issued without copyrights, allowing members to market creations made from their patterns without fees. *BurdaStyle*, like *Etsy* and *Craftster*, also offers users a forum in which to participate, a frequently updated blog, a “Sewpedia” (an encyclopedia of sewing-related



entries) that members can contribute to, various tutorials (“How Tos”) on elements of clothes-making and alterations, free patterns, and a gallery of member creations (“Creations”). *BurdaStyle* currently has 73,016 registered members<sup>181</sup> and that number is increasing daily with its exposure in *Craftster* (Figure 15) and *BUST* (Figure 16) and popularity among crafting circles. In its “About Us” section, the creators explain the purpose and origins of *BurdaStyle* (emphasis added):

Welcome to BurdaStyle, your destination for **do-it-yourself style**. We like to think of this website as a **virtual sewing circle**, an open-source hub of ideas, expertise, and amazing patterns you can download and sew at home... We're offering our ideas, expertise and downloadable patterns to the BurdaStyle **community**, and we hope that you'll contribute, too.

#### SEW WHAT?

**It's not entirely coincidental that BurdaStyle headquarters used to be in shared office space with Etsy.com. Not only can BurdaStyle members upload their Etsy-mini shop onto their personal homepage- but we like to think that both BurdaStyle and Etsy are in the business of using new technology to drive old-fashioned craft. BurdaStyle is a celebration of the handmade and the heartfelt, the individual and idiosyncratic things we make ourselves, and is intended as a platform for experts and beginners alike. We can't wait to see what you create.**<sup>182</sup>

The terminology employed in the “About Us” page coincides and aligns with the current crafting movement, specifically in the context of *BUST* and *Etsy*. Words and phrases like “do-it-yourself,” “virtual sewing circle” and “community” reflect the greater discourse of the third-wave feminist handmade culture. Most noteworthy is *BurdaStyle*'s self-disclosed relationship with *Etsy*, which suggests that alliances are being formed among crafting websites and communities are being expanded and united. Also noteworthy is the

<sup>181</sup> As of June 22, 2008. <http://www.burdastyle.com/member/index>.

<sup>182</sup> “About Us,” [http://www.burdastyle.com/content/about\\_us](http://www.burdastyle.com/content/about_us).

fact that *BurdaStyle* is a regular advertiser in *BUST*, thus demonstrating that *BUST*, *Etsy*, *Craftster*, and *BurdaStyle* are all interrelated as both fragmented and unified crafting communities, populated mostly by women who follow a third-wave feminist approach to making goods by hand.



**Figure 16: BurdaStyle *BUST* (Dec/Jan 2008)**

### *Blogs*

In addition to the online crafting communities based in official websites, craft-related blogs (short for “web logs”) serve to connect crafters and foster information sharing and community building. Several participants identify blogs as being a crucial element of their involvement in online craft communities. Participant 12, a textile artist, states,

I’m planning on redirecting my blog to one focusing on my art complete with how-to s, RSS feed to my Etsy store, etc. I love to write and will continue with that but my bread and butter is my

art/craft work. Blogs are essential to networking, getting your name out there, creating a buzz for your stuff. Lots of promotion going on. Also, ideas are shared, methods, marketing and commiseration. It's important in that most art and craft is a solitary occupation. The network is the new village square and lady's tea and terrorism society club.

Blogging is an important part of networking, but as Participant 19 explains, it's also important to the crafter's marketing scheme: "It helps to have a blog that other crafters read so that they begin to identify with you as an individual and want to support your items."

The number of craft-related blogs is staggering.<sup>183</sup> Some feature handmade "finds" available through marketplaces such as *Etsy*, while others focus on the process and final product of the craft act, while still others emphasize the activist potential of making goods by hand. Regardless of their intent, craft bloggers help facilitate yet another means of building crafting communities online and uniting like-minded individuals through the process of information sharing and creating alliances. Richard Kahn and Douglas Kellner note that, "blogs make the idea of a dynamic network of ongoing debate, dialogue, and commentary come alive and so emphasize the interpretation and dissemination of alternative information to a heightened degree."<sup>184</sup> A large number of craft and feminist-related personal blogs can be found through *BUST's* Girl Wide Web<sup>185</sup> and elsewhere, and these blogs are an important networking tool for women involved in the craft movement.

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<sup>183</sup> It is beyond the scope of this thesis to estimate the number of craft-related blogs available for viewing online.

<sup>184</sup> Richard Kahn and Douglas Kellner, "Virtually Democratic: Online Communities and Internet Activism," in *Community in the Digital Age: Philosophy and Practice* eds. Andrew Feenberg and Darin Barney (Maryland :Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2004), 194.

<sup>185</sup> <http://www.bust.com/girlweb/>.

### Gender and Online Communities

Because *Etsy* and *Craftster* are each comprised of approximately ninety-six percent female members, a discussion of gender and online communities is warranted. In *Gender & Community in the Social Construction of the Internet*, Leslie Regan Shade notes that while there are still hindrances to universal female access to the internet,<sup>186</sup> women and feminist groups use the internet for “empowerment, edification, and enjoyment.”<sup>187</sup>

Shade discusses cyberfeminism as a feminist response to “technoculture and cyberspace theorizations” that emerged in the early 1990s.<sup>188</sup> According to Hawthorne and Klein, cyberfeminism “acknowledges, firstly, that there are differences in power between men and women specifically in the digital discourse; and secondly, that cyberfeminists want to change that situation... cyberfeminism is political, it is not an excuse for inaction in the real world, and it is inclusive and respectful of the many cultures which women inhabit.”<sup>189</sup>

Shade discusses Sadie Plant’s analysis of the subversive relationship between women and machines, and Plant’s comparison of women workers in textile and clothing industries to women working in low-wage electronics assembly jobs.<sup>190</sup> Shade also notes how, “One of the more hotly contested Internet copyright issues now is not downloading music, but women swapping cross-stitch patterns.”<sup>191</sup> As quoted in Shade, Cryderman<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Leslie Regan Shade, *Gender & Community in the Social Construction of the Internet* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2002), 108.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>189</sup> Hawthorne, Susan, and Renate Klein “Introduction” in *CyberFeminism: Connectivity, Critique, Creativity*, ed. Ellen Balka and Richard Smith. (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), 2.

<sup>190</sup> Shade, 47.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>192</sup> Kelly Cryderman, “Cross-stitchers Keep an Eye on the Net” *The Ottawa Citizen* August 8, 2000: A4.

states, "Cross-stitch, as well as the whole needle-works genre of sewing, needlepoint, crocheting, and knitting, has become the passion of a community of techno-savvy Net addicts whose newsgroups and Web sites feed their love of chatting about such activities."<sup>193</sup> It is interesting how issues of copyrighted patterns have changed over time, specifically with *Burdastyle*'s approach to open-source patterns. The free access to patterns offered by *Burdastyle* in addition to the sharing of information and patterns among sewers and crafters is an interesting phenomenon that demonstrates a changing ethos in crafting, emphasizing sharing and democratic participation rather than simple profit.

Whether feminists using online interfaces to showcase their crafts and build virtual crafting communities falls into the category of cyberfeminism or not, the phenomenon certainly has similarities to cyberfeminism in that "cyberfeminists can link the historical and philosophical practices of feminism to contemporary feminist projects and networks both on and off the Net, and to the material lives and experiences of women in the New World Order..."<sup>194</sup> This is much in line with the notion of crafting in the context of reclamation, where the historical and traditional practice of craft as women's work is linked, through the use of technology and online communities, to present-day acts of craft as a feminist tactic of resistance.

When asked if she feels part of a community, Participant 5 stated:

I really really do. I really make a big effort to connect with other women and encourage them to get creative and help connect them with other crafters or stores or fairs or whatever. My friends and I have craft nights where we just get together and bring projects and hang out and talk and drink and it's really bonding. It's a major topic of conversation and even people who aren't really into doing

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<sup>193</sup> Shade, 48.

<sup>194</sup> Faith Wilding, "Notes on the Political Condition of Cyberspace" *Art Journal* 57 (Summer): 46, 1998b.

crafts can really appreciate it and have respect for the awesomeness of it.

The community this respondent describes is one constituted solely of women. Crafting, for Participant 1, is a means to connect with others, and to create bonds. Her community is one of like-minded women who use craft as a means of finding commonality.

When asked to describe the craft community she is part of, Participant 9, a fiber artist, explained:

It is a fiberart group. It is all women because mostly women do fiber art. I also belong to a knitting guild, and it has one male member. However, this group is not so much of an art group in that none of them but me create their own designs. Both groups are friendly, comforting groups to be in. I was in a regular artist guild years ago, and it seemed more competitive and judgmental. I was surprised that artists could be so close-minded, but the "craft" groups are less uptight about their work.

This respondent clearly articulates how her crafting community is entirely comprised of women, with the exception of one male member. She explains how "craft" groups are more welcoming than artist guilds, and that craft communities are friendly and comforting.

In describing the craft community she belongs to, Participant 6, a bookbinder, stated: "It is many talented, interesting women joined together to discuss craft and making, as well as anything else. And it is these same women coming together to promote each other and put on shows as a collective."

Shade describes the feminization of the internet, a process in which "the creation of popular content privileges women's consumption rather than encouraging their critical

analysis.”<sup>195</sup> She cites Women.com and gURL.com as examples of this process and ultimately, “how community has been transformed by the process of commodification, and how users are conceived not as active agents or citizens, but as consumers.”<sup>196</sup>

Despite its market orientation, *Etsy* situates its female users as producers, active agents, and consumers. Because *Etsy*'s market is based on handmade goods, both sellers and buyers are active agents in a movement geared towards social change and ethical consumption. Female sellers are producers of the commodities, active citizens within the community, and consumers when they purchase other handmade goods. Shade shows how despite the fact that online retailers are capitalizing on the female market, and that women account for fifty-five percent of web shopping,<sup>197</sup> women Internet entrepreneurs are challenging mainstream corporate e-marketplaces by offering women consumers “what they desire, such as community and women's culture.”<sup>198</sup> Indeed the shops on *Etsy* fit into this category, as crafty, majority female entrepreneurs offer shoppers an alternative to corporate e-commerce enterprises, and provide this alternative in a community, feminist, and activist context.

In his study of the online feminist community NOW Village, Michael D. Ayers examines the role of collective identity in political groups and whether or not collective identity leads to activism. Ayers found that “Forming a collective identity in cyberspace may be difficult—because of the distance between group members,”<sup>199</sup> and that “An

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<sup>195</sup> Leslie Regan Shade, “Gender and the Commodification of Community: Women.com and gURL.com” in *Community in the Digital Age: Philosophy and Practice* eds. Andrew Feenberg and Darin Barney (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2004) 143.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>197</sup> Shade, *Gender & Community*, 58.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>199</sup> Michael D. Ayers, “Comparing Collective Identity in Online and Offline Feminist Activists,” in *Cyberactivism: Online Activism in Theory and in Practice* eds. Martha McCaughey and Michael D. Ayers (New York: Routledge, 2003), 181.

online social-movement group must have some level of activism in the 'real' world if the changes it seeks politically are to go beyond the realm of the Internet itself."<sup>200</sup> Indeed the activist potential of online crafting communities and the 'real' world effects of this movement are still not clear, but the potential of crafting communities to foster social change exists, and will be further analyzed in the following chapter.

### Conclusion

An online community that fosters debate about politically significant issues can inadvertently also foster civic action and engagement, and ultimately, activism. Kahn and Kellner note that,

Online communities are arguably an increasingly important domain of the global Internet that are creating the base and the basis for unprecedented worldwide antiwar/pro-peace and social justice movement during a time of terrorism, war, and intense political struggle. Correspondingly, the Internet itself has undergone radical transformations during this time toward becoming a more participatory and democratic medium... Contemporary Internet subcultures are potentially involved in a radically democratic social and educational project that amounts to the mass circulation and politicization of information and culture.<sup>201</sup>

Kahn and Kellner suggest that new forms of online communicative design including blogs and wikis are enabling participatory and democratic global citizenship.<sup>202</sup> I argue that online craft communities serve a similar function in uniting crafters through a collective identity and enabling political action and social change through crafting.

*Etsy*, *Craftster*, *BurdaStyle* and numerous blogs all serve to unite the online crafting community and facilitate a socially progressive handmade movement that seeks

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<sup>200</sup> Ayers, 162.

<sup>201</sup> Kahn and Kellner, 185.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.



to challenge large corporations on their unethical production practices and allow for a reclamation of labor and a celebration of artisanship. Because the majority of these communities are comprised of women, many of whom identify as feminists, the message of crafting also includes updated feminist perspectives on reclaimed domesticity, traditional women's work, and women's labor. Linking these concepts together, crafting emerges a feminist tactic of resistance against mass consumer culture, a form of activism, and ultimately, social change. The following chapter will examine the role of crafting as a specifically feminist response and mode of resistance against a culture of mass-consumption and corporate dominance.

## Chapter Three – Crafting Resistance: Fighting Mass-Produced with Pins and Needles

There is clearly another imperative at work now in our exercise of the old crafts. It has to do with reclamation, with reparation. The world seems not to need us any more to make 'the things of life'. Machines make more and cheap. The system needs us to do the maintenance jobs and to run the machines that produce the so-called 'goods', to *be* machines in the consumer societies which consume and consume and are empty. Our turning to craftwork is a refusal. We may not all see ourselves this way, but we are working from a position of dissent. And this is a political position.

Faith Gillespie<sup>203</sup>

### Introduction

The previous chapters examined the intersection of craft and feminism, and craft and online communities. This chapter serves to unite the elements of craft, feminism, community, and resistance. Craft, as a mode of feminist resistance, has its roots in the DIY movement of Riot Grrrl culture, but extends to present day in a specifically anti-corporate context. The climate of corporate dominance paired with a third-wave feminist crafting discourse facilitates a form of craft-activism and resistance against corporate consumer culture. This chapter demonstrates the interweaving of craft, feminism and resistance by exploring participant responses regarding these issues, and the idea of "craftivism" (craft + activism).

Faith Gillespie, a female woodworker, eloquently sums up the way in which craft serves as a mode of resistance in the above quote. She cites "reclamation" and "reparation" as key elements in the return to craft. According to Gillespie, humans are essentially cogs in the wheel of mass production. But the return to craftwork is a political

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<sup>203</sup> Faith Gillespie, "The Masterless Way," in *Women and Craft* eds. Gillian Elinor, Su Richardson, Sue Scott, Angharad Thomas, and Kate Walker (London: Virago Press, 1987), 178.

position, and one that advocates refusal to be part of an “empty” consumer society. Gillespie says that turning to craftwork is a form of refusal and dissent, and in essence, is fighting against a morally bankrupt capitalist system and returning to a more ethical and meaningful mode of production. This is the view of many involved in the current handmade movement, and suggests that crafting is not only a means of resistance, but that in its inherent politicization, it is also a means of activism. This view is echoed in numerous participant responses, which are outlined and examined below.

### Participant Responses

Of the twenty-seven participants that were interviewed, twenty-four state that the act of crafting definitely, sometimes, or potentially makes a political statement. One respondent did not answer the question, and two responded that the act of crafting does not make a political statement whatsoever. Because approximately eighty-nine percent of the respondents agree that crafting can be or is political, it is important to carefully examine their perspectives on the topic. Participant responses to survey questions were categorized into four broad thematic categories: “Politics/Ethics,” “Buying Crafts and Finances,” “Feminism,” and “Aesthetics.”<sup>204</sup>

#### *Politics/Ethics*

The first category, “Politics/Ethics” encompasses concerns about production practices of large corporations and the political and activist nature of crafting. Terms like “cheap,” “mass-production,” “ethical,” “sweatshop,” “corporation,” “underpaid,” “factories,” “commercialization,” “consumers,” “consumption,” “environment,” “China,”

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<sup>204</sup> See Appendix 5.

“children,” “Wal-mart,” “starving,” “exploited,” and “anonymous” frequently dotted responses that fit this theme.

When asked whether she thought it was better to buy handmade goods, Participant 1 replied:

I think it **can** be better to buy handmade – it can be more ethical (you know that the maker was not in an anonymous factory environment, that they are able to set their prices, etc), but...many of the supplies used were probably produced in sweatshops or factories. Also, I think it can be hard for crafters to make a really fair price for their goods, because many consumers are spoiled by the incredibly cheap prices attached to mass-produced goods.

Here, Participant 1 addresses the issue of mass-production and its relationship to crafting.

As she explains, while crafting itself is an act of fair and equitable labor, the crafters' supplies may have been mass-produced in an exploitative factory that the crafting movement is supposedly boycotting. In this sense, those involved in the handmade movement may be both supporting and protesting corporations simultaneously. However, this is entirely dependent on the type of craft. For instance, many knitters and crocheters dye, spin or weave their own yarn, or purchase handcrafted yarns from other fiber artists.

Participant 5 addresses the issue of mass-produced materials in craft:

... You go to Michaels (the big chain craft store) and there are just tons of tiny baubles and stuff that I wonder if they are even being used? Or sitting around someone's house, or thrown away? And they're all in tiny packaging that is just wasteful. It's probably made in China, maybe by kids, who knows, I wouldn't be surprised. But then there is stuff remade from things at Goodwill, or recycled items, or even small craft stores that sell things in bulk bins so it's not using up so much packaging.

Additionally, Participant 1 discusses the price-driven consumer market and how it may be difficult for crafters to compete with mass-produced low-cost goods. A craftsperson in the developed world cannot charge for his/her labor what a craftsperson in the third world

might make, due to cost of living and a plethora of other factors. When also asked if it is better to buy handmade products, Participant 2 responded:

I'd choose handmade over mass produced any day of the week. I'm already very aware of what I buy around the home, and do, and how it affects the world around me. I try to keep a simple way of life with organic food and living, but I will be more determined to uphold this further when I have children. I have a big problem with mass produced goods and the fact the majority are produced in China by children who aren't even earning a minimum wage. Also they use cheap products that are quite often tainted with chemicals that cause adverse reactions in a great number of people. More people are getting ill, developing allergies, being diagnosed with cancer and a number of other ailments. I want to purchase products where I know what they are made out of, where they are made and feel comfortable that person isn't an underpaid and starving factory worker.

This participant demonstrates in her response the fear that producing goods at low costs will lead to low, and even dangerous quality goods that can in effect harm the consumer. Additionally, her concern for the exploitative labor practices of corporations with overseas production facilities is evident.

With regard to whether crafters are making political statements, Participant 4 responded:

I think that crafters make political statements in a few different ways. Firstly, there is the obvious bit about buying handmade instead of buying from chains and big box stores. Secondly, there is the overt way of displaying your political statement on the handmade item itself. For example, I make pins with the phrase "I Love My Cunt" on them, which is a definite reclaiming of a "dirty" word that I'd like to make good again, and I think, a very powerful feminist statement in a world where we are taught to ignore, or even hate our own bodies. A few other examples would be people silkscreening their own anti-Bush t-shirts, making cloth menstrual pads, and writing political zines. Those are all instances where the political statement is right there in your face. I think that everyone is making a political statement on Etsy.com though, whether they realize it or not- even the sweet old ladies who are selling handmade children's sweaters!

This participant explains that crafting can be political in different ways: by creating consumer alternatives to “big box stores,” or by politicizing the handmade good itself. She also indicates her belief that the act of crafting is inherently political, regardless of intent. By creating goods by hand, one is effectually creating an alternative to mass-produced goods, which is a political act in itself. This sentiment was echoed by several other participants, including Participants 2, 3, 7, 8 10, 11, 12, 13, 19, 22.<sup>205</sup>

When asked why *Etsy* and *Craftster* have recently become so popular, Participant 8, a crocheter, replied:

A resurgence in DIY culture has really made a comeback in the last few years. I don't know if this has to do with 9/11 or global warming; and the realization that people may have had that we could lose everything at any time, and that skills to make your own things might come in handy one day. The social & environmental movements have hopefully made people think about their consumerism, and maybe people have decided to act more ethically now (in terms of sweatshops, free trade, etc) and start making some things themselves. I also think the waves of feminisms are colliding with each other: I think in the 80s & 90s women really felt pressure to have a career and live in “a man's world” and didn't embrace “housewifey” things like crafts. Now women can do both, (and more!) and can feel more comfortable in doing both. In turn, fashion has followed in this whole cultural movement and reflects the DIY style; which explains why you can buy things that look handmade, but actually aren't.

This participant's response considers ethical issues involving mass-production and corporations, feminist issues and DIY fashion and aesthetics in her response. She explains that while there are indeed socially progressive benefits associated with the handmade movement, there is also a trendy element as well that can lead to corporations trying to mimic a DIY/handmade aesthetic and presenting yet another challenge to the handmade movement. However, because many of the people participating in the

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<sup>205</sup> See Appendix 5.

handmade movement do so because of the ethical considerations, it is likely that only those who support mass-produced goods in general would fall prey to this masquerade.

With regard to the political nature of crafting, Participant 12 responded:

I feel that the revolution in crafts during the 60s and 70s and the return to the love affair with handmade are the result of the maturing of the political and cultural movements of the times then. There was a great deal of emphasis put on Mother Earth, Peace, Love, War Protests. There's a feeling of vindication in the air for many latter day hippies now that we were right about those things. The great collective THEY can say, "I told you so," to those who ignored the warnings and went after consumerism, commercialism, and aggressive anger politics -- the 'straight laced' who are now our leaders. Again, I think it's a reflection of the common culture of North Americans to balk against being herded and huddled into sameness. Making stuff by hand is as radical politically that you can get! It says, "I reject your cookie cutter products. I reject what you say I have to look like and what I have to buy. I refuse to support the culture of consumerism promoted by corporations and the wealthy hierarchy behind them." If we don't buy from THEM, they lose money.

She addresses earlier handmade movements as means of political and cultural protests, and how these protests served as warnings about the social ills of consumerism and mass-production. Participant 12 contends that this wave of crafters was correct in returning to a handmade ethos. She states that "making stuff by hand is as radical politically that you can get!" and explains that handmade culture emphasizes a politics of resistance and rejection against mainstream corporate culture. However, her response also raises questions about the fleeting nature of craft, and why the earlier handmade movements failed.<sup>206</sup> Regardless, Participant 12 believes that the act of crafting can and will make a political difference and posts a genuine challenge to exploitative corporate practices. Faced with the same question about the political elements of crafting, Participant 19 stated:

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<sup>206</sup> These questions are beyond the scope of this thesis but certainly merit additional research.

I think that along with the recent upswing in popularity of “green” things, shopping and eating locally, and being organic in as many ways possible, the handmade revolution has a lot to say politically. I have mentioned previously that handmade items are more environmentally sustainable and anti-consumerist and anti-corporate. The entire idea of “do it yourself” (DIY) is to take the power away from The Man or whoever and put it back into your own capable hands, whether you’re crafting for family or friends or yourself, or selling your items. A lot of the younger sellers of DIY, including myself, are very “counter-culture.” dyed hair, piercing, maybe a tattoo, eyeliner, attitude. They are very aware that what they are doing is not the norm: they are not going to a store to buy things to make themselves look a certain way, and thus following the capitalist trend, rather they are creating their own personal style and statement about themselves to present to the world. When you wear a pair of earrings from Claire’s, you haven’t said anything about yourself except that you were taken in by a lot of expensive advertising and cheap labor to buy something you thought looked cool. When you buy a pair of handmade earrings, you have denied all of that and received something that was made by somebody similar to you and in that way you have avoided mainstream consumer culture altogether.

This response echoes previous ones in raising issues of corporate exploitation, the environment, DIY, and uniqueness. According to this participant, purchasing cheap, mass-produced accessories says little about one’s sense of style and more about his/her succumbing to expensive advertising campaigns and willingness to fuel exploitative labor practices. Some of the most egregious concerns about mass-production and corporate labor practices mentioned frequently by participants include the labor practices of Wal-Mart, sweatshops in the third world, child labor, big box stores, low-wage labor, and rampant consumerism in developed countries. A large percentage of respondents think that crafting and a return to the handmade can help challenge these issues often associated with large corporations, and provide a means of alternative, conscientious consumption. While some participants did indicate that not all crafters are making an intentional political statement, in the climate of mass-production, mass-marketing, and



mass-consumption, a shift to handmade production practices stands in opposition to corporate mass-production practices, regardless of intent. There is a general consensus among participants that buying handmade is superior (both morally and in the context of quality), but there is also a concern about the perceived high costs of handmade goods. These concerns are examined below.

### *Buying Crafts and Finances*

The second thematic category is “Buying Crafts and Finances” and takes into account participant responses that demonstrate skepticism about the affordability of a handmade lifestyle, or feel that it still may be strictly an upper-class or elitist way of life. Terms identified in these responses include “upper-class,” “afford,” “wealthy,” “financial conditions,” “budget,” “expensive,” and “prohibitive.” Despite the belief that a handmade lifestyle may not be practical in all cases and may cost more, there is a general consensus that corporate dominance of production and consumption is a negative thing. The responses below exemplify these ideas, indicating that some *Etsy* members think that the involvement in the handmade movement is one that requires a higher socio-economic status:

Participant 8, crocheter:

People always want to consume, our capitalist system depends on it. So there is definitely a connection between them. It is sad that it is often the wealthy can afford quality, handmade items. I think crafting in itself presents a whole new opportunity for an alternative commodity that may focus more on trading, gift-giving, and alternative forms of currency. If you are a crafter, you are more easily able to distinguish the amount of work that has went into something.

Participant 17, lampwork glass artist:

I'd prefer to buy everything handmade, but that's hard to do on my budget.

Participant 21, knitter and felter:

I think it is better to buy handmade if one can afford it. It feels more like being a part of a process that is life affirming than buying from Wal Mart.

Participant 24, card and jewelry maker:

In theory, this [buying handmade] is great. I adore the uniqueness of handmade goods, but at the same time, I can not always afford to choose handmade over mass-produced. I think it is better, but not always realistic.

Each of these responses indicates an association of handmade goods with high cost, but despite this perceived downside, all participants concerned with craft and finances indicate that it is better to buy handmade if one is in a position to do so. It is worth noting that corporate consumer culture emphasizes cheap, mass-produced goods that are affordable to most people in developed countries. However, these goods are often produced at such low costs because of exploitative labor practices in developing nations and thus, the perceived low prices are costing workers a great deal more. The majority of participants express an awareness of labor costs and a desire for fair dealings. Several participants demonstrate their awareness of the link between sweatshop labor and women. This connection is discussed in the following section, which explores the relationship between crafting and feminism.

### *Feminism*

The third category of participant responses is "Feminism" and considers the way in which feminism and crafting intersects, the idea of women's work and domesticity, as well as reclaiming the old crafts. Terms like "power," "empowerment," "feminism,"

“feminist,” “subversive,” “DIY,” “Bust,” “Bitch,” “cunt,” “menstrual,” “riot grrrl,” “gender,” “reclamation,” “women’s work,” “first-wave,” “second-wave,” and “third-wave” are characteristic of responses that fit into this category.

When asked if the goods she created include any sort of feminist message,

Participant 6 responded:

My inherently feminist message is: I made these with my hands, support myself through making things, I don’t want to be part of a male-run financial system, I want to support other women who make and support themselves. I think that is a huge part of most women who are making goods, that supporting yourself = at least partial freedom from a male-run system of making money.

Participant 6 asserts that her ability to choose her livelihood, control her own labor, and earn her own living through her chosen field is inherently feminist and serves to separate her from a male-dominated economy. Her self-sufficiency through making goods by hands also helps to support other female artisans and foster a more woman-centered economy with greater emphasis on equitability.

When asked about the relationship between feminism, crafting, and anti-consumerism, Participant 10, a mixed media artist, explained:

It seems kind of silly to suggest that the crafting movement supports "anti-consumerism." Heck, I want people to buy my product, thus that involves "consumerism!" I think consumerism needs to be defined. There are "ways" of consuming! If I am going to follow the "feminist" approach to being a consumer, I will think about the choices I make, and consume according to the traditions I value. We are ALL consumers- it’s the way we do it that makes the difference.

Her response demonstrates the tricky terrain of an anti-consumer movement that relies on a form of ethical consumerism to gain validity. “Buying handmade” still involves buying, and to say that the movement is “anti-consumerist” is untrue. Rather, the handmade

movement draws upon a form of ethical, conscious consumerism that facilitates consumer knowledge, empowerment, and choice.

Participant 12, a self-identified "daughter of one of the founders of the second wave feminist movement in the early 1970s," offered this response to the same question:

Consumerism is built on the backs and sweat of women -- and children across the world in Free Trade Zones and sweat shops. Women do some huge percentage of the world's labor. I forget the numbers, but it's cited in *Women In American Society* by Virginia Sapiro. I think the zeitgeist of the times will reflect an awakening in women to their potential in all areas of culture. The disgust with war, greedy corporations and crooked politicians may just trigger another feminist movement. It may be helped as well by the increasing fundamentalism promulgated by the patriarchal culture of the religious right we're seeing today. I think that the 'Jesus Movement' of the 60s and 70s was a direct result of the challenge to established culture by the Hippy Movement. The Jesus Movement concurrently stirred up the feminist movement when women started questioning traditional roles expounded and admonished to them by religious zealotry -- they literally accosted you in the parking lots and grocery stores as is happening nowadays. The Feminine Mystique, Bella Abzug, Steinem et al were reactionary. The time is overripe for it to happen again if state mandated apathy by media hasn't taken a total hold. I find myself now reacting as I did then when having religious pamphlets and male centered dogma is foisted on me. I'm going for the throat. All of us are tired of the me first mentality of the corporate machine and government. Crafting is a small act of sabotage.

The reality of exploited third world labor being primarily women and children situates the handmade movement in a feminist context. Resisting the message of corporations that cheaper is better and supporting a handmade culture serves to promote an ideology of equality and an end to exploitation. As Participant 12 notes, crafting is a small act of sabotage, but can ultimately have big effects.

When asked if she thinks that crafting is currently being embraced by feminists Participant 19 responded:

I do think that crafting is being embraced by feminists, but rather than saying most feminists are crafters I would say that most crafters would fit into a feminist category (if perhaps not self-labeled)...crafting went out of style with the first couple of Feminist waves because it was looked upon as an obligation that stay-at-home women used to occupy themselves by doing domestic things. However, the gains made by the movements paved the way for a freedom of choice, and many women (myself included) simply enjoy domestic things. The beauty of feminism is that it isn't any one path, but rather the option to choose any path. You can be a feminist and a mom, even a stay at home housewife mom. The point is you do it because you want to, not because you have to because society says so. Crafting is the same way. It was historically a woman's job, first to make things for her family, and then to occupy herself while her husband was at work all day. The past woman didn't have the option to choose whether she enjoyed to make things or not, because nobody enjoys anything they HAVE to do or are doing because they have nothing else to do. Now that crafting is no longer an obligation or anything, it's a fun hobby. It's also got some retro attraction to it, kind of like vintage clothing or corsets: now that you don't HAVE to wear it just because everyone else is, it's suddenly cool to CHOOSE to wear it. Most of my friends learned how to knit when they were 12-15, and I don't think any of their grandmothers taught them (I learned from another 13 year old, personally.) Knitting is hugely popular now with seemingly everybody BUT grandmothers (I suppose they got sick of it.) However, just because you choose to craft doesn't mean you're a feminist. But a lot of feminists who choose to craft recognize that their choice has been provided by a lot of women fighting for that choice.

Notions of crafting for pleasure, reclamation and choice are all elements of this response.

The element of choice is crucial in crafting as a feminist act. Prescriptive domesticity and the idea of "women's work" were inherently anti-feminist, but being able to choose to partake in traditionally repressive acts and enjoy them is inherently political and feminist.

According to Participant 16, a horticulturalist and fiber artist,

Feminism isn't just about equality, respect, and power for women in the workplace anymore, and it shouldn't be. That is just as limiting as being confined archaic roles. In order to be truly comfortable in society and one's own skin, everyone needs to be able to explore options and select what is best for them without

reprimand. But more than that, folk art and crafting have a basis in women's former roles. Reshaping them in the image of fair trade and human rights could have a significant impact on popular belief.

This response demonstrates the notion that choice is integral to feminism, and that any sort of prescriptive role is counter to feminist ideals. Participant 19 also addresses this issue:

It's the appeal of choice that makes crafting a viable hobby. We craft because we want to, not because we have to. We craft because it's fun and relaxing and it builds confidence to be good at something, and because anybody can do it. Also because it fits within feminism's political standing: overall, feminism embraces a liberal point of view, which nowadays envelops environmentalism and isn't fond of patriarchal corporate greed and corruption. Crafting is anti-corporate and environmental. So it's a natural fit.

The element of choice within notions of feminism is also depicted in a recent *Etsy* forum thread entitled, "How do you define feminism?"<sup>207</sup> "Choice" and "Equality" are terms that frequently emerge as definitional of feminism, and, interestingly, one poster in this thread states, "Being a feminist is also why I avoid sweatshop companies as much as possible. Women and children are more likely to be working in those factories. It carries over into every part of my life."<sup>208</sup>

A number of participant responses echo the notion of crafting as a feminist act in the context of reclamation. Participant 25, a jewelry maker, explained:

For some time women have worked to gain equality with men. Many women in the past worked to distance themselves from traditionally "female" activities to prove their equality. However, I think now that we have made strides (though given pay and other discrepancies we still aren't there) we feel we should be able to embrace those crafts and other "girlie" activities we love without sacrificing anything to do so. Not only are we smart, competent,

<sup>207</sup> "How do you define feminism?" 25 June 2008, [http://www.etsy.com/forums\\_thread.php?thread\\_id=5682925](http://www.etsy.com/forums_thread.php?thread_id=5682925).

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, [http://www.etsy.com/forums\\_thread.php?thread\\_id=5682925&page=7](http://www.etsy.com/forums_thread.php?thread_id=5682925&page=7).

and capable, but we're creative, too. And then to be able to make money doing those things...that's empowering to me.

Empowerment, reclamation, choice and equitable labor practices frequently emerge in participant responses and demonstrate that the crafters in this study believe that their own actions and involvement in the handmade movement have strong feminist messages.

As examined in Chapter One, third-wave feminism expresses concerns for the environment, for reclamation, for equality and fair treatment of women from all socioeconomic statuses, and emphasizes DIY and craft as a means to resist dominant patriarchal and corporate ideologies. These concerns are also voiced by participants in this study, suggesting an alliance between craft, feminism, and commerce. Third-wave feminism also embraces individualized, non-mainstream aesthetics in fashion, and the crafters in this study also display a concern for unique aesthetics. This category of responses will be examined as follows.

### *Aesthetics*

The final thematic category is "Aesthetics," and considers how craft buyers favor the uniqueness, individuality, and artistic qualities of handmade goods over mass produced ones. Terms like "unique," "individual," "beautiful," "artisan," "same," "boring," "mass-produced," "talented," "custom," "funky," and "one-of-a-kind" are frequently encountered in responses categorized under "Aesthetics."

Participant 3, crocheter and candle-maker:

In a culture of instant gratification and consumerism taking the time to hand craft something does say something about who you are and perhaps what you value. I actually made a funky purse that is clearly handmade and definitely falls into the ugly glamorous category and threw a Chanel keychain on it for kicks. I guess my

message with that would be “What’s so great about designers when I can do it too?”

Participant 15, beaded jewelry:

Consumerism is all about mass production, buy buy buy, of many many things. Almost doesn't matter what is being bought. Crafting emphasizes the product itself as a unique thing -- perhaps even a work of art -- something made, with love, by a person and not a machine.

Participant 18, book arts and mixed media:

Yes, [there is a relationship between crafting and consumerism] in the same sense that there’s a relationship between art and the art market. The craft/consumerism relationship is somewhat healthier than the art market’s because there’s less critical input and less gallery interference. I think there is a large segment of the population that wants beautiful, one-of-a-kind hand made things in their life to reconnect with the human element that mass produced goods don’t provide.

In addition to the political message of buying handmade goods, there is also an aesthetic value. Customization, individualization, uniqueness and one-of-kindness are all bonuses in supporting the handmade movement, and the above responses reiterate Campbell’s notion of the craft market as “an oasis of personal self-expression in what is an ever-widening ‘desert’ of commodification and marketization.”<sup>209</sup> Participant 22, a t-shirt designer and gourd crafter states:

I love that there are so many unique products, many of them made with attention to environmental concerns. I have really become a fan of handmade soaps. Anything made in someone’s kitchen has got to be better for you than something made in a factory. I also really love being able to find arts/crafts that speak to me, not just the general public, or the popular fad of the day. It’s not just the object, but the crafter that you end up connecting with.

This response also demonstrates a concern for spaces of production. The studio, home, or small-scale production facility is equated with both superior working conditions and superior quality. The factory is associated with potentially dangerous chemicals (in the

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<sup>209</sup> Campbell, 37.



context of soap), lack of environmental concerns, poor quality, and standardization. Additionally, the studio or home production of goods is also associated with greater personalization and ultimately, a “connection” with the person who made it. A key element of the earlier Arts and Crafts movement was a concern for the aesthetic decline that accompanied mass production. According to Eileen Boris, “The crafts aesthetic promoted an ‘organic’ correspondence between design, materials, work process, and use. It praised roughness, irregularity, and variety; it condemned machined perfection.”<sup>210</sup> This is yet another example of how the current handmade movement embraces similar ideals and motives as the Arts and Crafts movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

While the theme of aesthetics may not seem relevant to craft as a resistant act, it is important in both the context of third-wave feminism and as a means of drumming up interest in handmade goods. As explored in Chapter One, the Singer sewing machine ad (Figure 7) emphasizes unique aesthetics and implores us to “end wardrobe monotony” and ultimately challenge mass-production and factory-produced goods.

### Buying Handmade as a Resistant Act

The website *buyhandmade.org* emerged in the late fall of 2007 and was widely linked on *Etsy*, *Craftster* and other craft-related websites. The site asks users to sign a pledge to only purchase handmade goods during the holiday season. The site’s goal is to raise awareness about supporting handmade products over mass-produced ones, and promotes this message on primarily ethical grounds. According to its “About” page,

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<sup>210</sup> Eileen Boris, *Art and Labor: Ruskin, Morris, and the Craftsman Ideal in America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 14.

Buyhandmade.org is a collaboration between Etsy, Craftster, indiepublic, Craft Magazine, Interweave, Burdastyle, The Austin Craft Mafia, Design\*Sponge, and The American Craft Council, nine prominent forces in the DIY and handmade worlds. Calling ourselves The Handmade Consortium, we have banded together to encourage people to buy handmade this holiday season.

The ascendancy of chain store culture and global manufacturing has left people all dressing, furnishing, and decorating alike. The connection between producer and consumer has been lost. Buying handmade helps them reconnect. We created the pledge as a call to action for consumers to be conscious of how they spend their money this holiday season. We want people, whenever possible, to support independent creators and shop outside the big boxes.<sup>211</sup>

*Buyhandmade.org*'s "About" message raises issues of mass-produced aesthetics, creating a link between producers and consumers that has been lost in mass-production, conscious consumerism, and supporting independent artists and crafters over big box stores. To date, *buyhandmade.org* has collected 21,176 unique pledges from visitors, and despite being far past the holiday season, new signatures appear on the site daily. At the far right of the main page, there is a link that reads, "Why Buy Handmade?" The user is then faced with a rationale for purchasing handmade products, as well as a number of resources categorized under "The Handmade Movement," "On Conscious Consumption," "Challenging the big-box stores," and "Documentaries." According to *buyhandmade.org*, we should buy handmade because: "Buying Handmade makes for better gift-giving.... Buying handmade is better for people....[and] Buying handmade is better for the environment."<sup>212</sup> Again, the rationale for buying handmade includes aspects of supporting crafters and artisans over corporations, fostering a one-of-kind and unique gift exchange, supporting a more environmentally friendly form of consumption, and ultimately, challenging large corporations. As it states on the site, "Every item you make

<sup>211</sup> "About," <http://www.buyhandmade.org/about>.

<sup>212</sup> "Why Buy Handmade?" <http://buyhandmade.org/why-buy-handmade>.

or purchase from a small-scale independent artist or crafter strikes a small blow to the forces of mass production.”<sup>213</sup> These ideas and ideals in favor of the handmade movement reinforce participant responses on the political and resistance aspects of crafting.

The crafting sites behind *buyhandmade.org*, calling themselves “The Handmade Consortium,” are comprised of nine commercial and non-commercial websites, magazines, organizations and publishing companies including *Etsy*, *Craftster*, *Craft Magazine*,<sup>214</sup> *DesignSponge.com*,<sup>215</sup> *Indiepublic.com*,<sup>216</sup> the Austin Craft Mafia,<sup>217</sup> the American Craft Council,<sup>218</sup> *Burdastyle*, and Interweave Press.<sup>219</sup> Through their politicization of the handmade movement, these craft-related websites and companies are positioning themselves as entities resistant to large corporations and mass-production. The discursive features of the current handmade movement are outlined clearly above in the explanation of “Why Buy Handmade?” Associations with uniqueness and one-of-a-kindness, skill and craftsmanship, issues of consumption, mass-production, and global manufacturing, and the environment and global warming are all cited above as reasons for buying handmade and coincide frequently with participant responses on the issue of handmadeness.

The *buyhandmade.org* website articulates craft consumption as a resistant and political act. In encouraging visitors to pledge to only purchase handmade goods during the season known for excessive levels of consumption, *buyhandmade.org* and its

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<sup>213</sup> <http://buyhandmade.org/why-buy-handmade>.

<sup>214</sup> <http://craftzine.com>.

<sup>215</sup> <http://www.designspongeonline.com/>.

<sup>216</sup> <http://www.indiepublic.com/>.

<sup>217</sup> <http://www.austincraftmafia.com/main.html>.

<sup>218</sup> <http://www.craftcouncil.org/>.

<sup>219</sup> <http://www.interweave.com/>.

affiliates are encouraging the public to boycott corporations, chains and big box stores and support entrepreneurial, local, and ethical economies. This message emphasizes the idea that people vote with their dollars and that social change can be created through ethical consumption practices.

Certain rhetorical elements of *buyhandmade.org* echo discourse of the Arts and Crafts movement and the crafting resurgence during the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>220</sup> The idea of reconnecting a craftsperson with his/her own labor, and also fostering a greater connection between producer and consumer is reminiscent of the discourse associated with the Arts and Crafts movement, while the evident environmental concerns can be aligned with the Vietnam-era crafting movement. While crafting may seem to simply be an old solution to a new problem, it is nevertheless a solution that merits greater consideration, practically and academically speaking.

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<sup>220</sup> See Introduction.

# PLEDGE HANDMADE



I PLEDGE TO BUY HANDMADE THIS HOLIDAY SEASON, AND REQUEST THAT OTHERS DO THE SAME FOR ME.

- 21243 [judy firenno](#) in Dallas /
- 21242 [Nike Teresa](#) in Indonesia /
- 21241 [mochadesigns](#) in Scotland / [www.myspace.com/mochadesignsca](http://www.myspace.com/mochadesignsca)  
"I love designing my cards and creating bespoke cards. The smiles on the customers faces as they receive them does it for me."
- 21240 [Tracy](#) in Massachusetts / [www.tracyville.etsy.com](http://www.tracyville.etsy.com)  
"It's a pure joy to buy and sell handmade goods."
- 21239 [Stephanie](#) in Crestview, Fl / [www.stephaniecrow.etsy.com](http://www.stephaniecrow.etsy.com)
- 21238 [Pam Forgnone](#) in Hilmar,ca / [www.myspace.com/allywallysbrac](http://www.myspace.com/allywallysbrac)  
"Hand made jewelry"
- 21237 [Rene](#) in Vermont / [www.freedrawnetsy.com](http://www.freedrawnetsy.com)
- 21236 [tudo de trapo](#) in Portugal / [www.flickr.com/photos/tudodetr](http://www.flickr.com/photos/tudodetr)  
"I love that you are promoting handmade! \*\*\*"
- 21235 [Margaret Finley](#) in Oregon /  
"What a wonderful idea!"
- 21234 [Margaret](#) in Oregon City, OR /  
"What a wonderful idea!"
- 21233 [Jane](#) in Saratoga Springs, UT / [janeleescards.blogspot.com](http://janeleescards.blogspot.com)  
"Support your locals as well as 'mom and pop' businesses."
- 21232 [Wein](#) in Indonesia / [islamic-es.blogspot.com](http://islamic-es.blogspot.com)  
"Personality is unique, hand made items show it --not like impersonal mass product"
- 21231 [Lis Pyper](#) in Salt Lake City / [TheOrangePlum.etsy.com](http://TheOrangePlum.etsy.com)  
"Gotta love handmade stuff!"
- 21230 [M Douglas](#) in Seoul, South Korea /  
"because it's an amazing way to create, spread knowledge, share genuine wishes and not make the global corporations and richer!"

**WHY BUY HANDMADE?**  
→ **CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE.**

Total Pledges: 21176  
Tell A Friend About BuyHandmade.org

## Take The Pledge:

Name:  required

Location:  optional

Link(URL):  optional

Quote:  optional

Email address:  We will never spam you.

Subscribe to the Buy Handmade newsletter

The Handmade Consortium

Etsy

Craftery

indiepublic

Figure 17: Buyhandmade.org retrieved June 29, 2008

## Craftivism

As I have shown in previous chapters and above, the current crafting climate is one of reclamation and resistance. In terms of ethical production and labor practices, environmental concerns, concerns of materiality, and concerns of active citizenship, crafting has the potential to stand up against corporate consumer culture. However, the potential of crafting still goes beyond these things, and also provides a fertile ground for other forms of social change. The term “craftivism,” first publicized by Betsy Greer on her blog *craftivism.com*, implies that crafting can be used as a mechanism of progressive change to benefit society. As Greer states on her website,

My whole idea for this site is based on the idea that **activism + craft = craftivism**. That each time you participate in crafting you are making a difference, whether it's fighting against useless materialism or making items for charity or something betwixt and between. It's about the not-so-radical notion that activists can be crafters, and crafters can be activists.<sup>221</sup>

Greer's idea of “craftivism” is spreading quickly. The term has widespread usage in online crafting communities, and this implies that crafting is rapidly being embraced as a mechanism of resistance and social change. In an *Etsy* forum thread entitled “Buying handmade - what are your reasons?” one *Etsy* member replied simply, “craftivism against the big corporations...”<sup>222</sup>

*Etsy*'s online newspaper, *The Storque* (from which the majority of my participants were recruited) features various sections including “Spotlight” (focusing on one particular craft or crafter), “This Handmade Life” (covering experiences and personal accounts of crafters), “How-To,” “Reviews,” “Etsy News” (press coverage), and most

<sup>221</sup> Betsy Greer, “What,” <http://craftivism.com/what.html>.

<sup>222</sup> “Buying handmade - what are your reasons?” 30 September 2007, [http://www.etsy.com/forums\\_thread.php?thread\\_id=5253226&page=2](http://www.etsy.com/forums_thread.php?thread_id=5253226&page=2).

notably, there is a section called “Craftivism.” The Craftivism section covers various crafters and charitable organizations that craft for a social cause. Animal rights, breast cancer awareness, and environmental concerns are but a few of the causes taken up by *Etsy* crafters. This craftivism serves as a prime example of the potential of crafting and creating goods by hand to resist corporate-capitalist ideology by generating awareness of social issues and using craft to either raise money or serve as donated goods to said causes.

Some recent examples of craftivism in practice include knitting jumpers for penguins living near oil spills in Australia and Tasmania,<sup>223</sup> the Afghans for Afghans project, in which hand-knit blankets and apparel are sent to the “beleaguered people” of Afghanistan,<sup>224</sup> and the Mother Bear Project, which calls upon generous knitters and crotchetters to make teddy bears for children affected by HIV and AIDS in developing nations.<sup>225</sup> Crafting has also historically been used to support social causes. Women would often knit goods for soldiers in the war, and this was especially true of WWI and WWII. The American Red Cross launched a massive campaign during the First World War to send goods knitted on the home-front to soldiers serving in Europe. According to the Red Cross Museum archives, “As soon as the call went out, thousands of Americans began knitting the required socks, sweaters, mufflers, afghans, helmets, and wristlets based on detailed instruction booklets and patterns that had been approved by the armed forces.”<sup>226</sup> During World War II, the call went out once more for hand-knitted goods for

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<sup>223</sup> Tasmanian Conservation Trust Inc., “Penguin Conservation in Tasmania”  
<http://www.tct.org.au/jumper.htm>.

<sup>224</sup> <http://www.afghansforafghans.org/>.

<sup>225</sup> <http://www.motherbearproject.org/>.

<sup>226</sup> Afghans for Afghans, “The Red Cross Knitting Tradition,”  
[http://www.afghansforafghans.org/red\\_cross.html](http://www.afghansforafghans.org/red_cross.html).

those serving in Europe. Immediately, the Red Cross “once again appropriated the massive quantities of khaki wool needed and republished instruction sheets.”<sup>227</sup> War-time knitting campaigns were also common in Canada and Britain. Canadian campaigns were often organized through associations including the Women's Institute, the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire, religious orders or guilds of all denominations and also the Canadian Red Cross.<sup>228</sup>

Some craftivist groups also embrace on-the-ground activism and protests. The Revolutionary Knitting Circle, founded in Calgary, Canada, by Grant Neufeld in 2000 and with groups across Canada, in the USA, and in various parts of Europe, is an activist group that uses knitting and other textile handicrafts in their efforts to bring about social change. Tactics involve knitting at protest sites, creating banners and other knitted goods with protest messages, and disseminating protest-related patterns through the internet.<sup>229</sup> The Revolutionary Knitting Circle’s “Manifesto” includes concepts and ideas that coincide with the ideals of the handmade movement as expressed by *buyhandmade.org*.

Some of these include:

By sharing in the skills and resources of our communities, we shall become free to cast off dependencies on global trade for our subsistence. In so doing, we shall all be able to enter fairly into meaningful and equitable trade of not only goods, but also those cultural intangibles that are necessary if we are to bring about understanding, justice and peace to truly enrich our individual lives and our communities.

By returning production of the essentials of life to the community, we can eradicate the dependence imposed by the elites - giving communities the freedom to guide their own destinies.

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Carrie Ellis, “Remembrance Day – War Time Knitting Part I” 10 November 2006, [http://threadandthimble.blogspot.com/2006\\_11\\_01\\_archive.html](http://threadandthimble.blogspot.com/2006_11_01_archive.html).

<sup>229</sup> Wikipedia Contributors, “Revolutionary Knitting Circle,” *Wikipedia*, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolutionary\\_Knitting\\_Circle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolutionary_Knitting_Circle).



We call upon all people who would see their communities freed from corporate slavery to come forth to share in action dedicated to removing the production of essential goods from the hands of multi-national corporations and returning that production to the people.

We will remind ourselves - and those who would have us believe there is no alternative to the corporate doctrine - that we can have the ability to produce what we need without the destructive hand of the investment banker and his ilk at our throats.

This is our constructive revolution.<sup>230</sup>

The Revolutionary Knitting Circle is first and foremost concerned with unethical and exploitative corporate labor practices and seeks to enact positive social change by challenging this corporate mentality and dominance. Much in line with the ideals of the handmade movement at large, the RKC is just one example of a craftivist group doing genuine, mobilized activist work through handicrafts.

### Criticisms of the Handmade Movement

While the revolutionary and activist potential of the handmade movement is often exalted by those directly involved in the movement, crafting as a mode of resistance does not go without its criticisms. Politicizing a pleasurable act, the cost of buying handmade goods, and the digital divide are some chief concerns of skeptics regarding the potential of the handmade movement. These issues are addressed below.

On November 3, 2007, Columbia's Institute for the Study of Women and Gender in the Arts and Media brought four panelists with extensive DIY backgrounds to discuss the possible link between feminism and crafting. The panel, "Crafty Culture: Feminism,

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<sup>230</sup> Revolutionary Knitting Circle, "Proclamation of Constructive Revolution," <http://knitting.activist.ca/manifesto.html>.

Activism and the D-I-Y Ethic,” featured crafter and DIY Trunk Show founder Cinnamon Cooper, Time Out Chicago and former *Venus DIY* editor Annie Tomlin, painter and poet Alejandra Valera and former editor-in-chief of *TENbyTEN* magazine Annette Ferrara as moderators where they discussed the politicization and activist potential of craft. The intersection between crafting, feminism and craft activism was discussed and there were different perspectives on this intersection.

In a *Columbia Chronicle* article about the panel, author Jennifer Sabella states that Tomlin’s chief concern was that, while crafting is fun and has the potential to be political, relegating craft into an activist act may take away from the on-the-ground activism.<sup>231</sup> Indeed, crafting alone indoors and chatting online does not constitute activism, but the act of crafting does constitute a resistant act and political craft groups, if and when mobilized, can make and are making overt activist statements.<sup>232</sup> According to Sabella, “While all panelists agreed that making a scarf instead of buying it from a corporation that uses child labor or pays extremely low wages is a good idea, Tomlin, along with several audience members, mentioned that many women can not spend the time or money on materials to have a DIY lifestyle.”<sup>233</sup> This concern, as outlined earlier in this chapter, is echoed by a number of participants in this thesis. However, the merits of buying handmade outnumber the downsides, according to participant responses that voiced the concern of cost. Because the handmade movement is fundamentally concerned with equitable labor practices, paying a little bit more for ethically created goods serves

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<sup>231</sup> Jennifer Sabella, “Third wave craftivism? DIY panel explores relationship between feminism, crafting” *The Columbia Chronicle* (May 12, 2008): <http://www.columbiachronicle.com/paper/campus.php?id=1872>.

<sup>232</sup> See Craftivism section above for a more in-depth discussion of this.

<sup>233</sup> Sabella.

to boost the local economy as well as potentially challenge exploitative corporate production methods.

In addition to concerns about politicizing craft, and the affordability of “buying handmade,” issues of the digital divide frequently emerge in criticisms of the handmade movement. Minahan and Wolfram Cox note that,

It appears that while crafts such as stitching and embroidery may be a positive and social occupation for many, there are still far too many women around the world who are required to work at these tasks for poor pay rates and in difficult conditions. The ‘digital divide’ is very real for these women, and they are firmly placed on its ‘have not’ side. They live in a world of very basic and inadequate technology and where this is no nostalgia for craft – it is a reality that brings income to the household. And even in more affluent circumstances, knitting may not signify nostalgia.<sup>234</sup>

Because so much of the current handmade movement is dependent on internet access to craft-related websites (even Stitch’n Bitch and other activist craft groups use chat rooms, email and blogs to arrange real-life meeting times)<sup>235</sup> and a certain level of tech-savviness, the handmade movement seems to exclude anyone who does not have computer or internet access. Questions of inclusion, action and participation arise in this context.<sup>236</sup> However, it is frequently those (primarily women) on the “have-not” side of the digital divide who are employed by the very corporations the handmade movement seeks to challenge and resist. Thus, if crafting and the handmade movement are successful in achieving the goals of their activism and resistance (including fairer labor practices and better wages for third world laborers), those victims of the digital divide could actually benefit.

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<sup>234</sup> Minahan and Wolfram Cox, 15.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>236</sup> Terry Flew, *New Media, An Introduction*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

Finally, one of the most obvious criticisms of the handmade movement is that in an effort to fight consumerism and mass-consumption, buying handmade still requires buying. It seems contradictory to suggest that the fight against consumerism and mass-production lies with a new form of consumerism. Indeed, those involved in the handmade movement must contend with this contradiction. An example of this conundrum among crafters is articulated in an *Etsy* thread entitled "BUY NOTHING DAY -- This Friday!" The OP (original poster) explains her dilemma regarding the day of anti-consumerism founded by Vancouver artist Ted Dave and heavily promoted by *Adbusters* magazine. Buy Nothing Day calls for participants to buy nothing on that day to raise awareness about rampant consumerism. In the forum thread, the OP explains:

So I'm in an ethical quandary (albeit a minor one, as ethical quandaries go). Friday is Buy Nothing Day, and I support Buy Nothing Day. So do I show my support for this important day of activism by a) shutting down my store, and leaving an announcement about why I'm doing it or b) leaving my store open, so that people who are inspired by Buy Nothing Day to at least explore alternatives to big box stores and the Mall? Opinions? Reflections? Other possibilities?<sup>237</sup>

The posters who contribute to this thread also cannot reach a consensus about whether or not buying nothing includes buying handmade or not. One poster states:

I don't think Adbusters have ever had an issue with etsy, or with any artisans/craftspeople, either selling. Those who really don't want to spend can always try bartering.<sup>238</sup>

This post demonstrates the perspective that buying handmade is a superior form of consumption and one that is not problematic in the grand spectrum of mass consumption. However, another poster asserts that, "I will be buying nothing, not even handmade.

<sup>237</sup> "BUY NOTHING DAY -- This Friday!" 21 November 2007,

[http://www.etsy.com/forums\\_thread.php?thread\\_id=5332342](http://www.etsy.com/forums_thread.php?thread_id=5332342).

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., [http://www.etsy.com/forums\\_thread.php?thread\\_id=5332342&page=2](http://www.etsy.com/forums_thread.php?thread_id=5332342&page=2).

It's actually quite liberating feeling!" But if other choose to shop, so be it! Let them eat cake!<sup>239</sup> Yet another poster explains that,

While I agree that it's much, much better to buy from a small artisan (or a local farmer, independent bookstore, etc.), it can be (and has been) argued that just switching all your buying to the small, independent sellers is still a form of consumerism, if you're still consuming more than you need and resting a portion of your identity on your choice of products. If I buy into the Brand of Nike, then I'm engaging in consumerism. If I buy into the Brand of Handmade, I'm still kind of mixing up my identity and my purchasing habits. Just food for thought.<sup>240</sup>

On the last page of the thread, the OP announces her decision regarding her dilemma: "In case anyone's curious on what I decided, I decided to close the shop for the day. A day of lost sales is hardly going to sink my business, but the gesture means something to me. I appreciate everyone jumping in and contributing to this thread -- it's really interesting to read everyone's thoughts on this!"<sup>241</sup> This thread demonstrates the rather contradictory position of craft and buying and selling handmade as a solution to, or resistant act against mass consumerism. As evidenced by the thread on Buy Nothing Day, some crafters believe that craft and handmade goods are exempt from the revolt against mass-consumption, while others are not so sure. Regardless of the ongoing debates this dilemma may lead to, crafting and buying handcrafted goods does constitute a form of consumerism, but also presents a viable, more ethical alternative to supporting corporations and consuming mass-produced goods.

While the potential of crafting and the handmade movement to resist mass-production and challenge corporate labor practices does exist, issues of politicizing leisure, immediate cost of purchasing handmade goods, and exclusion through the digital

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., [http://www.etsy.com/forums\\_thread.php?thread\\_id=5332342&page=3](http://www.etsy.com/forums_thread.php?thread_id=5332342&page=3).

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., [http://www.etsy.com/forums\\_thread.php?thread\\_id=5332342&page=4](http://www.etsy.com/forums_thread.php?thread_id=5332342&page=4).

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., [http://www.etsy.com/forums\\_thread.php?thread\\_id=5332342&page=9](http://www.etsy.com/forums_thread.php?thread_id=5332342&page=9).

divide present challenges to the revolutionary and activist potential of crafting. Whether or not the handmade movement can move beyond these issues and create significant social change is still yet to be determined.

### Conclusion

The current crafting movement is one that encompasses values of resistance and activism, with overt ties to feminism. While crafters may not be consciously resisting capitalist consumer culture, they are nevertheless situated in a unique position whereby they control their own labor and means of production, produce goods that stand outside of the mass produced, offer consumers an alternative to the aforementioned mass produced goods, and produce messages of female entrepreneurship and artisanship. The active crafters interviewed for this study articulate their perspectives on the political and resistant nature of crafting, and their responses indicate overwhelmingly that they view craft as a resistant and often political act. Many participants in this study observe clear ties to crafting and feminism, view crafting as a feminist act and see the handmade movement as one that opposes mass-production and corporate labor exploitation.

*BUST* Magazine and websites such as *Etsy.com* and *Craftster.org* are media vital to creating awareness and disseminating these messages about craft's potential for resistance. The location of craft outside of corporate consumer culture unequivocally demonstrates that it is a mode of resistance, with even larger potential to enact social change. "Craftivism" and its activist call to arms through crafting has demonstrated throughout history its potential to make a difference and produce a positive social outcome. The craftivism movement's relationship to third-wave feminism has been

demonstrated in previous chapters, but merits further academic investigation. The idea of crafting for a cause is still alive and well, and “craftivist” activities illustrate the enormous potential of the handicrafts to resist the negative aspects of capitalism, discriminatory international policy, and institutional disregard for the environment, and to simultaneously enact positive social change. As Faith Gillespie argues, crafting is an act of refusal and dissent, and it is indeed a political position.<sup>242</sup> In this sense, those involved in the handmade movement are most certainly crafting resistance.

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<sup>242</sup> Gillespie, 178.

## Conclusion - Weaving Together Some Final Thoughts

I believe many "crafters" do so for the love of it, and because I believe the need to "create" is inherent in the human psyche. I do think there is a movement world-wide which recognizes the soulless world of corporate control, mass-production, expense, waste, and decreased product quality. Many crafters and artisans do so with the goal of selling their product - thus one cannot separate crafting and consumerism. I think the key is "conscious consumerism;" individuals will continue to buy the things they want or need, but maybe the difference is "do I buy my fibers from the farmer down the road, or from the corporate-owned retailer." One discovers that it may be a bit more expensive to buy from the farmer, but the money stays in the community rather than going from my pocket to an overseas operation. The community benefits in the long run, or maybe even the "short-run." – Participant 10

The previous three chapters discussed the intersection between crafting, third-wave feminism, and resistance against consumerism and corporate exploitation. In Chapter One, "Craft or Bust: Feminism's Crafty Third Wave and the Case of *BUST* Magazine," the relationship between third-wave feminism and crafting was examined using a case study of *BUST* magazine. *BUST*'s DIY and Riot Grrrl origins, paired with its creators' involvement in these aforementioned movements, as well as its emphasis on indie culture and handmade/craft-oriented topics through both editorial and advertising content situates the magazine in a third-wave feminist and crafting discourse. Semiotic analyses were conducted on advertising and editorial content in the seven most recent editions of *BUST*. Divided into three major thematic groupings (Environment, Reclamation, and DIY/Craft), this content reflects the greater discourse and foci associated with third-wave feminist thinking. Further, the magazine's relationship to the craft-Mecca websites *Etsy.com* and *Craftster.org* is evidenced through its advertising relationship with these



companies and its frequent featuring of goods sold through *Etsy* sellers. The intersection between crafting and third-wave feminism is depicted through the magazine's frequent showcasing of craft tutorials and craft-content, as well as through its do-it-yourself origins and ethics.

Chapter Two, "Close Knit(ing) Communities?: The Emergence of *Etsy.com* and Online Craft Communities," investigated the role of crafting websites *Etsy.com*, *Craftster.org* and *BurdaStyle.com* in fostering a craft community and activist ethos within this community. The community spaces of these websites were analyzed using relevant scholarship and literature, and the challenge of fostering community in a commoditized environment (*Etsy*) was examined. Despite its commercial orientation, *Etsy* does successfully facilitate a diverse crafting community, as does the non-commercial *Craftster.org*. Because of their primarily female members, these online spaces also cater to a feminist and predominantly liberal patronage. Ultimately, these online communities serve to foster a common identity that may lead to activism and social change. However, involvement in the handmade movement seems to require internet access which may be problematic due to its exclusionary circumstances.

Finally, in Chapter Three, "Crafting Resistance: Fighting Mass-Produced with Pins and Needles," this study examined the resistant and activist elements of the current handmade movement. Drawing primarily on in-depth interviews with *Etsy* and *Craftster* members, Chapter Three demonstrated a common goal of crafters to enact positive social change through the act of crafting. Many participants viewed purchasing handmade goods as an act of ethical consumption that challenges corporations' exploitative labor practices and fuels a local, ethical and environmentally-friendly economy. In addition to

the political position of craft as an opposing force to mass-production and corporations, many respondents also saw an inherently feminist message in the act of crafting. Crafts and handmade goods also generate aesthetic value and serve the desire for “one-of-a-kind” or unique commodities. This chapter also examined the website *buyhandmade.org*, created through the unified efforts of several crafting websites, as an example of the growing popularity and breadth of the handmade movement.

### Limitations

While this thesis cannot be generalized to all crafters and crafting communities, I nonetheless think that the study provided here successfully demonstrates the link between crafting, feminism and resistance against consumerism for those who self-identify as feminist crafters/activists. To fully understand this link in a broader context, interviews with crafters who are not part of online communities and who sell their wares primarily at craft shows and festivals are necessary. Additionally, a greater analysis of craft theory and discourse is merited to more thoroughly comprehend the role of crafting as a resistant or activist act.

While my sample was sufficient to find connections and cohesion among self-identified feminist crafters, a larger sample would be beneficial to future research. In this vein, quantitative and statistical analyses would serve to address any unanswered questions about the extent and reaching of the current handmade movement. A regional analysis would also serve to address questions about geographic elements of handmade culture, as all of my participants were either from the US or Canada, but the handmade movement has an international reach.

### Sew What Now?

Crafting as a mode of resistance is not a new phenomenon. The British and American Arts and Crafts movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century sought to reconnect laborers with their craft as well as with the buyers of the goods produced. Also, the movement came into fruition because of a concern for the poor conditions in factories, and a concern for mass-produced aesthetics. A more recent resurgence in craft as an oppositional force occurred in the 1960s and 1970s due to worries about the decline of natural resources. The handmade movement of today has similar concerns as the ones of yesteryear.

Handmade culture is a form of ethical consumption that provides a viable alternative to purchasing goods from large corporations. By refusing to support the often exploitative labor practices of large corporations with factories abroad (and often in third world nations), supporters of handmade culture are in essence boycotting these companies on moral grounds and demonstrating that they simply will not stand for unethical production practices. Additionally, the handmade movement seems to be a predominantly female one, with origins stemming from third-wave feminism and Riot-Grrrl/DIY culture. The feminist origins of the current crafting movement situate it as a means of feminist resistance against the powers that be (corporations headed by white males). As it stands, the handmade movement is one of resistance, and crafting is a resistant act, intentional or not. However, craft's capacity for change is limited to whether or not it becomes embraced by mainstream consumers. Whether its members are very vocal or not, an effectual boycott of large corporations needs to occur on a massive scale to create any significant forms of social change. Also, issues of access and the digital

divide mean that handmade culture will be a privileged phenomenon rather than a global one. Because so many of the crafting communities exist online, internet access is mandatory for participation in these groups. However, because handmade culture is one that opposes sweatshop labor and calls for ethical treatment of workers, there would be a direct effect on people in the third world if the handmade movement is successful in its goals. Because exploited labor abroad often tends to be women and children, crafting and supporting handmade goods is constitutive of a feminist act much in line with first and second-wave feminism, because it in essence calls for equality in labor and equitable working conditions for all.

Whether or not the current crafting movement creates dramatic or large-scale change is still yet to be seen, and will merit additional research. However, it is clear that this movement has the potential to facilitate activist action, and, even if this action occurs on a small scale, or on a local level, it still serves as a form of civic engagement and participation, and is demonstrative of the political position of craft. Those who are involved in the crafting movement are passionate about the act of crafting and the message it disseminates – and ultimately, it takes passion to foster change.

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June/July 2007

December/January 2008

June/July 2007

August/September 2007

February/March 2008

October/November 2007

April/May 2008

## Appendix 1a: Ethics Approval



*Office of the Dean*

### Ethical Review of Research Involving Human Subjects

All non-medical research involving human subjects at the University of Western Ontario is carried out in compliance with the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Guidelines (2002). The Faculty of Information Media Studies (FIMS) Research Committee has the mandate to review FIMS student research proposals for adherence to these guidelines.

#### 2007 – 2008 FIMS Research Committee Membership

- |    |                                |    |                         |
|----|--------------------------------|----|-------------------------|
| 1. | T. Carmichael, Dean and Chair* | 5. | A. Quan-Haase*          |
| 2. | E. Cornor*                     | 6. | V. Rubin (alternate)*   |
| 3. | T. Craven*                     | 7. | D. Spencer (alternate)* |
| 4. | G. Leckie, Associate Dean*     | 8. | L. Vaughan (alternate)  |

Research Committee members marked with \* have examined the research project entitled:

#### **Crafting Resistance: Handmade Culture as a Third-Wave Feminist Response to Consumerism**

as submitted by: *Carole Farber (Principal Investigator / Supervisor)*  
*Sherilyn Williams (Co-investigator / Student)*

and consider it to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects under the conditions of the University's Policy on Research Involving Human Subjects.

Approval Date: *Sept. 14, 2007*

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Tom Carmichael,  
Dean and Chair

*The University of Western Ontario*  
North Campus Building, Room 240 • London, Ontario • CANADA - N6A 5B7  
Phone: 519-661-3542 • Fax: 519-661-3506 • www.fims.uwo.ca

**1b: Letter of Invitation A (via selective sampling)**  
**Crafting Resistance: Handmade Culture as a Third-Wave Feminist Response to Consumerism**

Dear [name or online username],

You are being invited to participate in my study entitled *Crafting Resistance: Handmade Culture as a Third-Wave Feminist Response to Consumerism*. The study will fulfill the thesis requirement for the Master of Arts in Media Studies program at the University of Western Ontario, under the supervision of Dr. Carole Farber, Faculty of Information and Media Studies. The object of the study is to examine crafting and handmade culture as a third-wave feminist response in the context of corporate capitalism and consumerism. The study will use interviews with crafters or people involved with the crafting movement such as yourself, as well as case studies of *Etsy.com*, *Craftster.org*, and *BUST* magazine, which are recent sites of crafting activity. If you are willing to participate you will be one of approximately 30 craft sellers/buyers interviewed for the study

After observing *Etsy.com*, *Craftster.org*, and *BUST* magazine, your [to be personalized- Etsy store, Craftster profile, or BUST ad] has been identified as highly relevant to the study, and your opinions and thoughts on crafting and consumerism are sought. Your participation involves completing an interview outline sent via email (or instant messaging/online chat or telephone if you prefer) that will take approximately one hour to complete. Any personal information you offer will be held in strict confidentiality and you will not be personally identified in any documents resulting from this study. I have attached a letter of information to explain to you a little more about the study and what is expected of you as a participant.

Please remember that participation is completely voluntary and if you in any way feel uncomfortable with being interviewed, you may decline participation. There are no risks involved with your participation. If you do choose to participate, your contributions will be extremely valuable in examining the intersection of crafting, feminism, and consumerism. Please read the letter of information that follows and respond to me about whether or not you would like to participate. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Sherilyn Williams

Candidate for the degree of Master of Arts in Media Studies at the University of Western Ontario

xxxxxx@xxxxxx

(xxx) xxx-xxxx

Supervisor, Dr. Carole Farber xxxxxx@xxxxxx

University of Western Ontario

Sherilyn Williams (xxx) xxx-xxxx or xxxxxx@xxxxxx &

Dr. Carole Farber (xxx) xxx-xxxx ext. xxx or xxxxxx@xxxxxx

**1c: Letter of Invitation B (following Storque article)**  
**Crafting Resistance: Handmade Culture as a Third-Wave Feminist Response to Consumerism**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your response indicating your interest in the study! I have attached a consent form and the questionnaire itself. Because the interview is being conducted via email, the consent form does not require an actual signature, but simply that you read it. If you agree to the interview, your consent will be implied by completing the questionnaire and emailing it back to me.

The questionnaire contains several open-ended questions. Please feel free to write your thoughts and opinions on the questions being asked. There is no minimum or maximum length for responses. If there are any questions that you feel uncomfortable answering, or that you believe do not apply to you, please write N/A as your response.

Please take your time filling out the questionnaire. Detailed responses are ideal. However, I do ask that you submit your responses to me within two weeks. If this is problematic or impossible, please contact me and we will work out another timeline for you.

I look forward to sharing the results of my study with you upon its completion. Once again, please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions or concerns. Thank you so much for your interest and participation!

All the best,  
Sheri Williams



**1d: Letter of Information**  
**Crafting Resistance: Handmade Culture as a Third-Wave Feminist Response to Consumerism**

**Introduction:** Thank you for your interest in this study of crafting and resistance. I, Sherilyn Williams, am a Masters student in the Faculty of Information and Media Studies at the University of Western Ontario under the supervision of Dr. Carole Farber. The information I am collecting will be used in my Masters thesis.

**About the Study:** You are being invited to participate in a research project that seeks to examine the relationship between crafting, feminism, and consumerism. The purpose of this attachment to your letter of invitation is to provide you with the information you require to make an informed decision about participating in this research. In addition to online forums, popular and scholarly articles, documentaries and craft blogs, this study will draw on approximately 30 people who are craft sellers/buyers. Your participation is requested to assist in identifying trends and themes in the field by offering your insights and experiences.

**Participants:** If you choose to take part in this study, you will be asked to engage in an interview of approximately 60 minutes at a time or delivery mode convenient to you. The interview questions ask you about your experiences of and opinions about participating in the handmade movement, in online crafting communities such as *Etsy.com* or *Craftster.org*, your involvement with *BUST* magazine, or all of the above. Interviews will be conducted via email or if you would prefer, through instant messaging/online chat or via audiotape telephone conversation. Your contributions to the forums on *Etsy.com* and *Craftster.org* that are deemed relevant to the study may also be used with your permission.

**Risks and Benefits:** There are no known risks to participation in this research. You will not benefit directly from involvement with this study but your participation will contribute to an understanding of the relationship between crafting, feminism, and resistance.

**Withdrawal:** Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no affect on your future. There are no consequences if you choose to decline participation or withdraw.

**Confidentiality:** Your identity will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will be used in all reports and any publications that may result from the study. Your identity or the information you have provided will not be released or published without your specific consent to do so. All transcripts, e-mail records, records via the *Etsy.com* and *Craftster.org* messaging systems, and any additional materials will be kept by the researcher on a password protected computer and destroyed/deleted within 5 years after the completion of the study, with the exception of those materials which you have provided and request for your own records.

**Contacts:** If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact Sherilyn Williams at

(xxx) xxx-xxxx, Dr. Carole Farber at (xxx) xxx-xxxx ext. xxx or xxxxxxxx@xxxxxxx  
 or the UWO Office of Research Ethics at (xxx) xxx-xxxx.

**1e: Consent Form**  
**Crafting Resistance: Handmade Culture as a Third-Wave Feminist Response to Consumerism**

**PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

Due to the nature of the interviews being conducted and the difficulty in acquiring signed consent from participants, informed consent will be acquired once you read the information sent to you and complete the surveys through email, telephone, on instant messaging/live chat. Please read the following consent form, and, assuming that you give your consent to participate, respond to me indicating that you have read this form and are willing to participate, and I will promptly send you the interview materials.

In agreeing to be a participant in this study, "Crafting Resistance," I have read the letter of information and all questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I also understand the purpose, general nature and procedures of this study, as explained by the researcher.

I understand that all identifying information resulting from my participation will be kept confidential.

I further understand that I may withdraw from this study at any time and for any reason without repercussions by notifying the researcher of my wish to do so.

I hereby agree to:

1. participate in interviews via e-mail, instant messaging/online chat, audiotaped telephone, or through the Etsy.com or Craftster.org conversation system; and
2. allow any information I have posted in the Etsy.com or Craftster.org forums that is pertinent to this study to be used in the body of research; and
3. permit the use of the data, including interviews, forum postings, research notes based on online observations, and other information resulting from research, for educational, research and publication purposes.

**1f: Questionnaire**  
**Crafting Resistance: Handmade Culture as a Third-Wave Feminist Response to Consumerism**

Please expand the form with your responses as necessary.

**1) Questions about crafting in general**

- a) For the purpose of simplification, the terms “crafting” and “crafter” are employed in this questionnaire as generic phrasing for making goods by hand, participating in the DIY movement, and artistry and artisanship. However, I am interested in what terms you use to refer to your own hand-crafted goods and activities. Do you consider yourself a crafter, an artist, a DIYer, or something else? Please explain.
- b) What is your primary craft/medium?
- c) When did you first become interested in crafting?
- d) Is it a hobby or a career? Do you consider crafting as full-time?
- e) Does your craft have any elements of tradition (passed on by family members, etc.)? (please elaborate)
- f) Are you a member of Etsy.com, Craftster.org, or both? If yes, what draws you to these sites and what prompted you to become a member?
- g) Why do you think Etsy.com and Craftster.org have become so popular recently?
- h) Do you like to purchase handmade goods? (please elaborate) What types of handmade goods or crafts do you like to purchase? Do you have favourite sellers/buyers? What makes them your favourite?

**2) Questions about crafting and consumerism**

- a) Do you think that there is a relationship between crafting and consumerism? If so, explain what you think this relationship is.
- b) Do you think it's better to buy handmade goods rather than mass-produced goods? Please explain your opinions on this in detail.
- c) How is Etsy.com different from other online stores, or is it?
- d) If you visit Craftster.org, do you feel there are any significant differences between this website and Etsy.com? If so, what might they be? Are there any similarities?

- e) Do you think crafters and producers of handmade goods are making any sort of political statement? Why or why not?
- f) How would you describe the relationship between buyers and sellers on Etsy.com?

### 3) Questions regarding crafting and feminism

- a) Etsy is about 90% women. Why do you think there are so many female sellers on Etsy.com?
- b) If you have placed an ad with Bust magazine (or are on the Girl Wide Web), have been featured in Bust, or consider yourself to be a Bust reader, what draws you to this magazine? Do you think that there is any sort of connection between Bust and Etsy.com/Craftster.org? If so, what kind of connection do you think exists?
- c) Do you read any other magazines aimed at women or crafters? If so, which ones? Have you noticed an increase in craft-related content?
- d) Do you think that crafting is being embraced by feminists of today? If yes, how so?
- e) Do you identify yourself as a feminist? Please explain.
- f) Do you want the goods you produce to have an inherently feminist message or appeal? Why or why not? If so, how do you create that message or appeal?
- g) Why do you think so many self-identified feminists are embracing the handmade movement? (please elaborate)
- h) Are feminism and anti-consumerism related in the new crafting movement? If you think so, please explain your thoughts on this relationship.

### 4) Questions regarding crafting and community

- a) Do you think you are a member of a crafting community? What features of the community make you feel as though you belong?
- b) If you think that you are a part of a crafting community, how would you describe the crafting community?
- c) Do you think there are different types of crafters, or are crafters united under one generic umbrella of handmade goods? How do you become known within the community?
- d) Do you participate in online message boards or forums? Could you explain how they work in the online crafting communities?

**1g: Follow-up Email**  
**Crafting Resistance: Handmade Culture as a Third-Wave Feminist Response to Consumerism**

Hi there,

This is a follow-up email regarding the crafting study in which you expressed an interest in participating. At this point in my research, I have received a number of completed surveys and am beginning the process of analysis and writing. However, if you are still interested in completing the survey, your participation would be greatly appreciated.

Please let me know your decision either way. I have re-attached the survey materials.

Thanks again. I appreciate your interest in my research.

Sincerely,  
Sherilyn Williams

## Appendix 2: *BUST* Ads and Editorial Content by Theme

THEMES	BUST					
	JUN/JUL	AUG/SEPT	OCT/NOV	DEC/JAN	FEB/MAR	APR/MAY
ENVIRONMENT	-Luna pads ad p107 -Natural bug sprays p26 -JadePearl ad p102 -gladrags.com ad p111 -SweetSkins ad p114	-JadePearl ad p107 -Lunapads ad p110 -gladrags ad p111 -mod to modern ad p114	-Fabric shopping bags p31 -Tierra DelForte article p45 -Lunapads ad p112 -JadePearl ad p112 -mod to modern ad p115 -Sweet Skins ad p117	-Jadepearl ad p108 -Gladraggs ad p111 -recycled vintage ad p119 -Qgarden herbals ad p120 -Buzz jewelry ad p123 -Least likely 2 breed ad p125	-article "Lazy Environmentalist" p54 -Lunapads ad p103 -Jadepearl ad p103 -Earthbitch.etsy.com ad p107 -ecoboutique ad p110-	-Green party candidate p20 Aguacate & co skincare ad p35 -Chemical free shampoo p42 -Lunapads ad p92 -Jade and pearl ad p92 -Gladraggs ad p13
CONSUMPTION (ethical/fair-trade etc)	-Book trade site p30		-Shock Doctrine ad p15	-gifts made of garbage fair trade p25 -eConscious Market p25 -Doybags recycled Philippines p26		
RECLAMATION	-Bitchen oven p16	-joining nunnery p62 -blooddrop corsetry ad p112 -sugar kitty corsets ad p115	-sugarkitty corsets ad p111		-article on career waitressing p72	
DIY (tutorials etc)	-Exit 9 Gift ad pg15 -Button bracelet tutorial p23 -Bug spray p25-26 -hair highlights p 39-40 -yeast infect p103	-bathbombs p25-26 -computer sleeves p27-28 -guide to clamming p30 -DIY manicure p42 -Fashion by the Book (knit your own looks guide)	-rag rug tutorial p25 -roach control p34 -hoodie p40 -bouffant hair p46	-candles p23 -leather headband and cuff p38 -beer p77	-rockin' quilt p21 -jewelry storage p27 -Asian hairstyle p36	-Ernie sweater p23 -Velvet wallpaper p27
SEXUALITY / GENDER	-Dance cards p11 -Girl skateboarders p27 -Babeland ad p106 -Women's welding workshop ad p113	-baseball lady p33 -book reviews (women and wrestling) p102	-arranged marriages p65	-vintage board game gendered p11 -black girls burlesque p17 -FGM fought with comedy p18		-Murray Hill drag king p33 -Le Tigre p61 -faux queens p63 -surfer girls p70 -Women's welding workshop ad p103
ETHICS	-Animal cruelty ad p13	-Animal cruelty ad p10 -philanthropy p22 -Medusa makeup ad "animal testing" p31	-Animal cruelty ad p10 Medusa makeup ad "animal testing" p41 -Lollibomb ad p115 -Secret Society of Vegans ad p117 -Kaight NYC ad p5	-Donate animal to poor family p25 -Release Restitution ad p26 -animal cruelty ad p92 -appreciate design ad p120 -Secret society of vegans ad -121 -Herbivore Clothing ad p125 -Lollibomb ad p125 -Madre.org ad p125	-Release and Restitution ad inside cover -animal testing ad p99 -Lotions & potions ad p111	-Release and Restitution ad p13 -Candy Violet ad ("Sweatshop free" p37 -animal cruelty ad p89 -Secret society of vegans ad p102 -Sweetskins ad p102
EMPOWERMENT		-Cover (brass knuckles) -dangerous curves p67		-wide girl web p18 -pretty titty committee p46	-exploited girls photography p14 -Goldfrappe childfree p63	-Women's Voices Women Vote p22
INDIE	-Indie Finds ad p17 -ad Artists	-ad Buy Olympia p9 -Indie Finds ad	-ad Buy Olympia p49 -Indie Finds ad	-Pilates for indie rockers ad p7 -ad Buy Olympia	-Buy Olympia ad p7 -Indie Finds ad p30	-Buy Olympia ad p7 -Indygrrrrl ad

	against hunger p91	p29 -Style Scene ad p43 -Indy Grrl ad p116 -Wickedly Chic ad p116	p54-55 -Buyers Market ad p118	p15 -Indie Finds ad p100-101 -blenderclothing p116 -Buyers Market ad p122 -Wren Eleven ad p122		p100
<b>CRAFT (tradition, Handicrafts, "handmade", "one-of-a-kind" etc)</b>	-Quilters of Gee's bend p18 -Sublime stitching ad p.33 -Open source sewing patterns p.38 -ad Classic Hardwear p91 -Allyson's designs ad p109 -a simple bag ad p109 -Artitude Ezine ad p109 -Craftster kitsch ad p110 -So Charmed ad p113 -Supermaggie ad p113	-sewing machine ad p15 -Quiltsryche p20 -Singer sewing machine review p32 -Sublime stitching ad p43 -Classic Hardwear ad p49 -bawdybotanicals ad p112 -Maggie ad p113 -honeybear designs ad p113 -Supermaggie ad p115 -So charmed ad p116 -Squasht ad p117 -Sarah Apple ad p117 -Artitude zine ad p117 -Tatty Devine ad p118 -Taylor made clothes ad p119 -Chronicle Books ad inside back cover	-Quirkbooks.com ad p9 -Bust holiday craftacular ad p42 -Sublime stitching ad p101 -MadebyAmy ad p113 -The Bubble Roome ad p113 -Dandy brand ad p114 Maggie ad p114 -dot iris ad p114 -orangyporangy ad p114 -knit and destroy ad p115 -Mumblepeg ad p115 -Sheenix ad p116 -So Charmed ad p116 -Scrub Your Butt ad p116 -Supermaggie ad p117 -Artitude zine ad p118	-Janome sewing machine ad p31 -Burda style open source ad p.33 -Craft Mafia ad p33 -Naughty secretary ad p33 -Workman books (stitch n bitch) ad p35 -Crafty How To books p104 -Sublime Stitching ad p107 -Allyson's designs ad p115 -badshannon ad p115 -bubble roome ad p116 -freshie and zero ad p117 -harrilu ad p117 -Mabel handbags ad p118 -Natha Perkins ad p118 -treehouse Brooklyn ad p119 -Retro Robot ad p120 -Supermaggie ad p121 -thepage ad p122 -Artitude zine ad p123 -Brookadelphia ad p123 -Sheenix ad p126 -OrangyPorangy ad p127	-Burda style ad p25 -Naught secretary ad p25 -Sublime Stitching ad p43 -Craft Mafia ad p91 -Craftster.org ad p103 -badshannon ad p107 -Natha Perkins ad p109 -Sheenix ad p110 -Naked Art ad p111	-Naughty Secretary club ad p21 -Sublime Stitching ad p21 -Craft Mafia ad p21 -Crafty Chica ad p29 -Craftster.org ad p39 -Burda Style ad p39 -"Bust's Craft Lady's World" p68 -Hellcats ad 097 -MyBrownEyes ad p98 -Bolsa Bonita ad p99 -Sewn Fresh Daily ad p99 -Glitteryblue ad p100 -Harrilu ad p100 -Jewelry by Jessica ad p100 -Bubble Roome ad p104 -How to knit in the woods book ad p104 -Bust craftacular ad inside back cover
<b>ETSY (editorial/ad)</b>	-Merch search p43 (1)	-Page O shit p39 (1) -Fab Finds p47 (3)	-Bust holiday craftacular ad p42 (sponsored by Etsy) -Page O Shit p44 (1) -Booty Call p51 (3)	-Bust craftacular ad p43 -Page O Shit p45 (2) -shoes p47 (1) -Gift Guide p64 (2) -xangetsu ad p123 -doingitherself ad p124	-Page o Shit p39 (1)	-Etsy ad! P43 -trashydeluxe.etsy.com ad p102
<b>FEMINISM</b>	-Mormons and feminism p54-5) -Book reviews p97, 98, 100, 101, 102	-female pay gap p24 -abortion p24	-p71 EV Day feminist artist -independent abortion films p100 -p105 book review "kill the princess" -p106 book review "well behaved women"	-Beth Ditto p50-57 -Taras Naughty Shop ad p122		-Vagina monologues p11 -Flight of Concorde p59 -book review Riot Grrrl p89 -book review Winning the Vote p91 -Freechoice reproductive rights ad p92 -Vagina Monologues ad inside back cover

### Appendix 3: Participant Responses to Key Questions

Participant	Questions						
	Are you a member of Etsy or Craftster?	Do you think there's a relationship between crafting and consumerism?	Do you think crafting makes a political statement?	Do you read BUST or have been featured?	Do you identify as a feminist?	Do you participate in forums? Do you feel like you're part of a crafting community	Are feminism and consumerism related to the new crafting movement?
1	Y, both	Y, it's complex	Some Y	N/A	Y	Y participates are important resources Y, a "peripheral" member	Y
2	Y, both	Y, strongly	Y, strongly	Featured, is in Girl Wide Web, doesn't read	N (but I'm a "strong willed determined women and believe anyone can achieve anything they put their mind to")	Y participates Y, definitely feels like member	Not sure
3	Y, Etsy	Absolutely	Some more than others	N/A	It's complex	Y participates "almost" feels like a member	Y, crafting is a reaction against advertising
4	Y, Etsy	Y	Y, in different ways	Is a reader	Definitely	Y participates Definitely w/ zine community, sort of with Etsy	Y
5	Y, both	Definitely	It depends, but the trend is political	Reads, has been featured	For sure!	Posts occasionally, reads blogs, but "really really" feels part of a community	Y (cites menstrual pads as an example)
6	Y, Etsy	Y	Y, environmental, ethical	Y, reads	Very much so!	Active in blogs, Y is part of community	Most definitely
7	Y, Etsy	There has to be	Definitely	Has not read but wants to subscribe	Y	Participates in forums, feels part of community "for the most part"	-----
8	Y, Etsy	Definitely a connection	Definitely, it's a statement of direct action	N/A	Y	Participates in forums, feels part of online community, but not a physical community	Y
9	Y, Etsy	I don't think it's related	I think that often they are	Is aware of Bust, liked what she saw	Y	Does not participate, but is part of a Fiber Artist group that meets in person and is part of a community	Maybe
10	Y, Etsy	Y	It depends on their intention, but the "craft movement" as a whole has definite political undertones	N/A	I espouse feminist ideals	Occasionally participates, is a member of a local crafting community and online	Y If I am going to follow the "feminist approach to being a consumer, I will think about the choices I make...
11	Y, both	Y	Y, we vote with our dollars	Is a subscriber	Y	Participates online, is a member of	Y



						online crafting communities	
12	Y, both	Crafting is a response to rampant consumerism	Y	N/A	Damn right I'm a feminist	Some participation online, belongs to several craft groups	Y
13	Y, Etsy	I would think so	For sure they are	Is a Bust reader	Completely	Is in online communities, but not crafting ones, does feel part of a crafting community	----
14	Y, Etsy	Y	Some are	Y, Stitch'nBitch too	Y, feminism to me is about the ability to choose	Y, the knitting community, Y participates in Etsy and Ravelry forums	----
15	Y, Etsy	Y, absolutely	Sometimes	N/A	Yes!!!	Y, Part of an online community facilitated by message boards and email,	I'd like to think so
16	Y, Etsy	----	----	-----	Not really	Y, several communities Y some forums	-----
17	Y, Etsy	Y	Well sure	Unclear (is familiar and know the link between Etsy and Bust)	Not sure ("I believe in women empowering themselves, doing for themselves, loving themselves as women. I don't dislike men...")	Y, part of a community but still making the connections, Y, participates online	Not sure, but I think so
18	Y, Etsy	Y	Not so much political statement, but cultural, and an economic protest element as well	Reads Bust	Absolutely, right from childhood.	Does not feel part of a community, Y, participates online	Yes, but it's a complicated relationship.
19	Y, both	"Crafting is a kind of fuck-you to consumerism	The handmade movement has a lot to say politically	Y, reads, discovered it recently	Y, self-identified since high school	Y, feels part of the community, Y participates and message boards are a "wonderful part of the community"	Y, crating is about empowerment
20	Y, Etsy	Y	Some (when they're into DIY)	N/A	Y	N N	Possibly
21	Y, Etsy	Of course	Some of them	Recently looked at Bust	Yes, emphatically so.	Y, feels part of a community, considers self a "lurker" online	Doesn't know, but likes the idea
22	Y, Etsy	The two are opposites	It may not be intentional, but many end up doing so	N/A	Doesn't know	Y, feels part of online communities (not in real life), Y, is member of Etsy street team	Y
23	Y, Etsy	Y	No	N/A	Of course.	Y, feels part of many crafting communities Sometimes	Y

						participates online	
24	Y, both	Y	Definitely so	N/A	I do, but not "stereotypically"	Y, part of community, Y participates online	Y, we are taking control of consumption
25	Y, Etsy	Y	Y	Not very familiar	Y	Y, is part of community N to forums, but is part of email groups	I think so
26	Y, Etsy	Y	Y	Is a reader	Y	Y, part of community, Y participates online	Y
27	Y, Etsy, lurks on Craftster	Definitely	It depends	Is occasional reader	Y	Not really part of community, not really participates	I believe they are

### Appendix 4a: Participants by Craft/Medium

Participant #	Craft/Medium
1	Crochet
2	Illustrator – drawing and painting
3	Crochet and candle-making
4	Zines and pinback buttons
5	Screen-printing
6	Bookbinding
7	Jewelry-making, sewing
8	Crochet
9	Fiber art and mixed media
10	Greeting cards, mixed media dolls, journals
11	Sewing, knitting, spinning yarn
12	Fiber and cloth art
13	Zines
14	Knitting/fiber
15	Beaded jewelry
16	Orchid growing (horticulture) and fiber art
17	Lampwork glass beads and jewelry
18	Book arts and mixed media
19	Jewelry-making
20	Reclaimed fabric and polymer clay
21	Knitting and felting
22	T-shirt designs and gourd rattles
23	Metalwork
24	Greeting cards, gift tags and jewelry
25	Jewelry-making
26	Sewing, recycled clothing and accessories
27	Pin-back buttons

**4b: Craft Type Groupings**

<b>Craft Type</b>	<b>Participant #</b>
Crochet	1,3, 8,
Zines	4, 13
Jewelry Making	7, 15, 17, 19, 24, 25
Pinback Buttons	4, 27
Fiber Art	9, 12, 14, 16
Greeting Cards	10, 24
Mixed Media	9, 10, 18
Sewing	7, 11, 26
Knitting	11, 14, 21
Reclaimed/Recycled Fabric	20, 26

## Appendix 5: Detailed Participant Responses by Theme

**POLITICS/ETHICS (cheap, mass-production, ethical, sweatshop, corporation, underpaid, factories, commercialization, consumers, consumption, environment, China, children, Walmart, starving, anonymous)**

### Participant #1

*There seems to be a new trend for handmaking, for wanting something unique, for getting away from mass-production. Whether this is fuelled by the rise and rise of multinational corporations – where everyone has the same choice of shops to purchase from, all containing the same items – or by the realisation that many products sold in the western world are made in appalling sweat-shop conditions, or something else, I don't know.*

### Participant #2

*Yes I think that the 'buy handmade' is a strong political statement. Each person has their own take on that statement depending on the products they make, their cultural background and the way they sell it. Some crafters are more upfront about their political stance then others proudly announcing their opinion on their products. There are those who needlework swearwords, others who paint presidential candidates. Then there are those who create body parts for cats to play with, and others who make incense sticks with rather lewd imagery as the selling point. I don't think there is a general political statement that is made by crafters and producers of handmade goods as a consensus. I find that the statements are definitely individual and aimed at everything from politics to environmental and social issues.*

### Participant #3

*Crafting started out as just DIY and subsistence home economy. Why buy the one at the shop when you can make your own cheaper? Now it's a reaction against consumerism for many as well as its own economy. Why buy it from Wal Mart when you can make your own, buy from someone who can or don't even need it in the first place?*

### Participant #5

*I definitely think there can be this thing, like with more upper class people who would never make anything themselves but think they are somehow better because they buy "organic this, handmade that, art, and whatever else. But I also think that for the lowly lower class people like me, it slows consumerism a bit because if you buy one handmade item for \$20, you're not buying 5 plastic pieces of crap that are only \$4 and mass produced and made in China or something. And I am definitely not one to talk. I love to go to Target as much as the next American, but I definitely hold a huge value to handmade stuff that is one of a kind. I definitely shop handmade in a fun way, not in a pretentious way to show off how 'artistic, authentic, and inspired' my life is.*

### Participant #6

*By buying mass-produced goods, you're saying that it is alright to pay people slave wages, that it is alright to allow terrible conditions in sweatshops, that some people's work matters less than others, that it's alright to ship goods thousands of kms to our*

*doorsteps. By supporting handmade goods – and by handmade I mean made locally, made by someone you can talk to, etc – you are saying that people deserve to be paid fairly, that communities matter and supporting local makers matters, and it's about putting your money back into a community, into people who will in turn support other makers, and attempt to turn the entire way of buying goods around, so that it's no longer at the expense of others.*

*As mentioned, I think that crafters are saying that they want to support a local community, for so many reasons – environmental, ethical, etc – and that it's not right to buy cheap goods made by people who we are actively taking advantage of. I think the entire world of goods and commerce needs to be checked – cheap goods are not sustainable, having to ship cheap, replaceable goods internationally is not sustainable. What is sustainable, and has always been sustainable, are local economies, and people who are skilled at making goods.*

#### **Participant #7**

*I think they [crafters] are saying that society has put too much value on mass-produced goods over handmade goods and that there needs to be a return to some kind of balance. Luckily, the Internet can facilitate that, to some degree. Many (but not all) crafters are also making statements about creating environmentally friendly products.*

#### **Participant #8**

*Definitely, it's [crafting] a statement of direct action, we are taking matters into our hands (literally) and rejecting cookie-cutter culture, mass production, sweatshops. We promote individual creativity & expression, and an alternative economy that is not based on quantity, but quality. That in itself rejects the current capitalist system. Crafting isn't an efficient occupation, it's a labour of love.*

#### **Participant #10**

*I think it depends on the product. If I am buying Art, I prefer a one-of-a-kind piece. I think affordability, unfortunately, also plays a role. I am not going to buy my furniture set from the local craft shop because I cannot afford to do so. Also, even "mass-produced" goods are still hand made by some one. Perhaps "conscious consumerism" dictates that we investigate how the mass-produced items we purchase are made- are they produced in sweatshops? Are workers exploited? etc. At least this gives us a moral choice in deciding who and what we support when purchasing mass-produced products. And with the age of information at our fingertips, we have plenty of options in taking a little bit of time in learning more about the products we consume.*

*I think the "craft movement" as a whole has definite political undertones- many are becoming more aware of the implications of mass-production; including such factors as pollution, billions spent/wasted on advertising, sweat-shop products, unfair trade practices, job-outsourcing, etc. I think this is another reason why sites such as ETSY are becoming so popular; they are helping to get the word out about such issues. The younger generation is going to live with the consequences of what our leaders are doing today, and it's not a pretty sight. Thus the "Pledge to Buy Hand Made," and other calls to "shop local." Yes, it's still "consumerism" at work, but the argument can be made that*

*"conscious consumerism" is the moral, practical, and maybe even planet-saving choice. And so, some crafters are just swept up in the movement unknowingly, while others have made a conscious choice to make, sell and buy hand made as much as possible. I strive for conscious choice.*

### **Participant #11**

*I think many people are starting to be aware of the impact of consumerism on the planet and the human rights issues connected to sweatshops. For these reasons they are buying more handcrafted goods.*

*I am conscious of everything I buy. I try to think about where it comes from, the process that goes into making it, who benefits from my purchase and the impact to the environment. I believe that the way we spend our money sends a message. Handmade things are more lovingly made and better quality than mass-produced. Buying handmade helps a fellow artist make a living, whereas buying mass produced helps a corporation get richer. Often these corporations are only interested in making money with no concern for the environment or their workers. I prefer to buy from a real person.*

*We vote with our dollars. The way we spend money makes a statement about the kind of world we want to live in.*

### **Participant #12**

*I think that there is a resistance to materialism and the mass produced as a natural outcome of our commercialized society. I believe people are more interested in quality, one-of-a-kind goods that make them stand out as individuals as a result of marketed commercialism. Individuality and the individual as a maverick is ingrained in the North American psyche. Since Canada and the US was settled by self-reliant individuals who were forced to make do with what they made to live in the new frontier, it's become part of the cultural genome for us. There is a human reaction to great stress and rapid change when cultures and individual societies are subject to it. Like the Cargo Cults in preindustrial-industrial societies, many people look to the nostalgia and ways of the past to comfort and anchor them. I've seen several craft revivals during my life. They seem to be cyclic, although I've never seen this addressed. During the 1970s and late 1960s, folkloric crafts - embroidery, pottery, weaving and dyeing along with smithing had a huge following. There were a number of periodicals and books that were written on crafts. I recently saw one of those magazines - a Ladies Home Journal needlecraft magazine - sell on eBay for hundreds of dollars. There is a resurgence today in knitting and crochet. Many are taking it up. I believe it's in response to the great technological gains we're making and the stress that individuals are under with the economy, war and climate change. It's simple, tactile and absorbing.*

*I believe that crafting is a response to rampant consumerism. I feel crafting is a direct reaction to all the advertised 'have to haves' done by the media and Wall Street*

*Buying locally from artisans breaks the chain of dependence on foreign oil, and is better for the environment. Large amounts of mass produced goods take vast amounts of*

*resources - especially coal and gas - to make and transport. Coal and gas are strip mined and drilled from the earth destroying ecosystems and polluting the environment to manufacture the gas and coal. Mass produced goods accumulate in landfills and many are made with substances that will remain for many hundreds of years. Crafters tend to use natural materials or redux extant items into their arts. Buying from artisans also helps support a cottage industry economy.*

### **Participant #13**

*I'd say over half the things I own right now are handmade. I tend to do a lot of zine trades or purchases since I am in this industry and also love buying silk screened shirts and hand crocheted items like Beanies, scarves and arm warmers. Most of the stuff I buy now is from a specific DiY artist Ayrn (Saveayrn.com) who is making DiY pieces (Such as Vagina shirts, Beanies, Scarf's, Shirts, arm warmers and more) to pay off her medical bills. So all my recent buys have been to her because she will make whatever you want if you ask for a cheap price. There's something awesome about purchasing something that you know is made just for the love of making it. I mean all DiY products aren't being made for money. The person making them normally is lucky if they make a profit so supporting someone who is doing their art for them, for their own good is just a rad thing to do.*

*For sure they are [making a political statement] by making their own stuff they are saying they don't need a place like Walmart or a Mall to buy there clothes they can do it themselves. They can make it themselves and they are taking a stand against consumerism and supporting bullshit companies that don't care about you and me.*

### **Participant #14**

*Some sellers are making a conscious political statement, I've seen a few Boobs not Bombs t-shirts lately, others are just finding an alternative life style that works better for them than the 9-5, five day work week prevalent in North America.*

### **Participant #15**

*I think there's a real desire from folks to move away from mass produced stuff, to forge connections with a real person who made something with love. Etsy allows for those connections. There's a vitality and an overwhelming diversity to the marketplace, also, which makes it appealing. I tell my friends that you can buy almost anything on etsy, and I really believe it's true!*

### **Participant #17**

*I think that there's a growing number of people turning to local or local-feeling crafters/artists because they're tired of the mass-production. Tired of empty consumerism. The online sites are making it much easier for people to connect and to find things that give them a feeling of individuality.*

*If the definition of mass-produced is factory-produced, or in sweatshops, or with child labor, then obviously yes - it's better to buy handmade as a protest. It's also a very good*



*thing to promote the artist and to help support them, to promote creativity and diversity. Handmade goods tend to have a much better environmental footprint as well.*

*Well sure – some of them [crafters] are obviously making activist or political statements through their work. They're also trying to show that one person can do something, can create art, can make an impact on the world. One crafter can be an option for a consumer flooded with Target and Wal-mart ads – an agent for choice of sorts.*

#### **Participant #18**

*[Crafting is] not necessarily a political statement so much as a cultural statement, although in some cases there is an economic protest element as well. This is especially true of the DIY movement, more so than the crafter's, I think. The crafters I know craft both because they enjoy it and because they think the art they practice is an important part of the culture that's in danger of being superseded by mass production. But there is, I admit, a sense that crafting and buying hand-made frees you from dependence on corporations, in the same way the Slow Food movement and organic movements free you from factory farming.*

#### **Participant #19**

*Crafting is kind of a fuck-you to consumerism. There's this one crafter named My Little Monster whose slogan is "the one woman anti-sweatshop movement" or something like that. What we do is take something that might have been originally corporate produced (a t-shirt, beads, or even a non-craft item like a coke can or some random found object) and recreates it into something beautiful and unique and handmade. Most crafting is essentially up-cycling, even if the materials used were all new. The finished product from a crafter is more personal because you can communicate with the actual seller, and know where the item really came from, as opposed to the anonymity of the corporate world. When someone buys a handmade item, they know that what they're purchasing is unique, creative, and made using fair labor practices. Likewise, if you craft something for yourself, you no longer need to buy it, which is anti-consumerism in itself and self-sustaining.*

*I think it's better to buy certain handmade goods. For example, I'd rather buy skincare products from a pharmaceutical company than from somebody who makes stuff in their kitchen. Also, it's not always economically feasible to buy handmade goods all the time – mass produced items tend to be way cheaper. Aside from those 2 considerations, I do think it's better to buy handmade goods. That way you are supporting someone who has good intentions (they aren't just greedy capitalists out for the money, or they'd obviously be in another more profitable business) and receiving a product that will typically be very well-made and skillfully created. It is also more environmentally sustainable, as there is less packaging as well as energy (from factories and whatnot) used to create and ship out a handmade item. Also, you can be sure that there were no sweatshops or other sketchy corporate antics involved in the making of your product.*

**Participant #20**

*I do prefer purchase hand made items that are sweat shop free. I like this because I feel like I am supporting everyday people versus big corporations and factories in other countries. I am a minimalist, so I only purchase items I feel I need in my life.*

**Participant #21**

*I'd rather give my money to the little guy, rather than Wal-mart, for instance. The little guy needs it more, and takes more pride in his/her product.*

**Participant #22**

*I don't think that most of them [crafters] intend to make a political statement, but end up doing so. I think the people who have made a point of buying handmade items are making a bigger statement. It is so convenient for most of us to go to the mall or local Wal-mart, but when you purchase handmade from the "little guy" instead, you're telling the chain stores that they do not rule the world.*

**Participant #25**

*I think it is part of a larger movement against profit-driven, impersonal business. Bigger than that, my hope is that it reflects a desire to value individuality, what each person has to offer, and to move away from the negative aspects of individualistic thinking and more toward building community.*

*I think that many people have tired of large business that care only about getting consumers' money. I think the pendulum is swinging in the other direction so that we are moving back toward the personalized service previous generations enjoyed. I know that I, personally, get frustrated with advertising whose goal I know is only to extract money from me with no concern for me personally – the lead in items from China is one example.*

*I think we [crafters] are showing that individuals matter, that we are not lemmings, and, in a world where we seem to distance ourselves from interpersonal interactions (talking on a phone when having dinner with your family), we are working to establish real connections.*

**Participant #27**

*Crafting is a strange mix of anti-consumerism and consumerism. On one hand, crafting can be seen as a response to a society that over consumes. The idea of making your own product instead of consuming another's is the best sort of anti-consumption I can think of. However, when you start selling your craft, you are essentially entering into a competition of consumption.*

*[It is] totally better to buy handmade. I think generally, handmade goods are made with a lot more care than something mass-produced. They generally have to be, as they don't have the quantity or the marketing of a company that is going to sell mass-produced goods. Also, I like the idea of a more fair distribution of wealth, and most crafters offer products that are alternatives to the mass-produced ones sold in large chain stores, so if*

*you buy handmade, you're distributing the wealth away from huge corporations and giving it to smaller businesses.*

**BUYING CRAFTS AND FINANCES (upper-class, afford, wealthy, financial conditions, budget, expensive, prohibitive)**

**-there is still the association with handmade to higher cost – but a conscious notion of overthrowing corporate exploitation**

**Participant #9**

*Yes, I do like to purchase handmade goods. I have not necessarily been a huge collector in the past, due to financial conditions, but when I can get something that is handmade or mass produced for roughly the same price, I would lean toward the hand made. I enjoy buying handmade paper to use in my own art. I enjoy handmade clothing, but generally can't afford it and have to stick to discount stores. I do indulge in going to a fiber fair in Michigan each summer, at which I purchase fiber goods (wool and silk from the producer for felting and knitting.)*

**Participant #27**

*I do when I can afford it. Handmade is much more expensive and is a bit prohibitive sometimes for a poor, loan-ridden college student, but I like to support people who are making alternatives to all that corporate crap produced out there. I see myself as someone who is trying to make it without sacrificing artistic morals/morals in general, and I would like to support other such individuals when I get the chance.*

**FEMINISM (power, empowerment, feminism, feminist, subversive, DIY, Bust, Bitch, cunt, menstrual, riot grrrl, gender, reclamation, women's work)**

**Participant #1**

*I do think they (feminism and anti-consumerism) are related. My thoughts on this are rather un-formed, but I believe it has to do with the reclamation of undervalued feminine skills, and the rejection of corporate dominance and homogeneity in our lives. To make something which is not only beautiful but useful gives (or can give) a feeling of power to the producer, which makes the objects produced more valuable.*

**Participant #4**

*I think it's [the crafting movement] being embraced by so many feminists for a few reasons. One is simply because of the way the handmade movement has been promoted in magazines like Bust and Bitch- when you see someone who's making really awesome dresses on their own, you might be inspired to learn how to do it yourself. Secondly, there's a lot of power that comes with skills. If you have the skills to sew, to paint, to make things, your potential is endless. You can make your own wardrobe. You can print zines and share your opinions with the world and meet like-minded folk. You can make gifts for friends. You can start your own business. You can protest big business. You can organize events. You can make merchandise for local bands. Crafting opens the door to*

*so many opportunities. What feminist wouldn't want the opportunity to take control of their future, and to connect with other feminists? Even learning a skill as simple as making your own cloth menstrual pads suddenly makes you more powerful- you have the power to contribute less waste to the environment, to stop supporting the corporations that distribute mass-produced disposable "hygienic" products, and to save the money that you would normally spend on those products every month every month.*

#### **Participant #5**

*I think the fact that this "trend" has gotten so huge is sort of a political statement in itself. I suppose it depends on your perspective, but to me it seems sort of like an aspect of feminism that has some back around to accepting the feminine and domesticity. I think women are allowed, to a certain degree, to embody more androgynous characteristics. You know like, "She can knit and she can build a deck on the back of her house."*

*I think it is just one of the branches of the diy movement which could also include artists, builders, or people who just like doing all kinds of projects themselves. I think there is a sort of awareness that patriarchy has attempted to render women helpless by convincing us we can't do things that we surely can. We can change our own oil, we can make repairs around the house, we can support ourselves on an income of handmade items that we can make all on our own. I think there is also a movement in general, that is being embraced by feminist, of just being more aware of the environment and taking yourself out of the addictive consumer loop. Maybe it is a sort of a slowing down of life. We have created all these conveniences that have ended up being destructive. Instead of making those chores hassles, they are becoming more integrated into life, like cooking your own meals, growing a garden, riding bike, just getting rid of the conveniences and enjoying the processes of life: transportation, eating, making, etc.*

#### **Participant #6**

*I think it's all about the reclamation of craft, about picking things up from your mother, grandmother, aunt, and turning it into something specific that you can make. It's about the need to be productive and make something with your hands. It's about a social circle made up of interesting, innovative women. There are a million reasons why it's women heading this movement - it is just a movement towards some sort of basic equality, towards knowing what your work is worth, knowing what makes up a product, knowing that you can make something, and well. And as a feminist, those are all things that I want/am concerned with. So in turn, there must be other feminists thinking in similar terms.*

*It[the crafting movement] is about people saying that they don't want mass produced goods, that they want to support local crafters/artists/makers, and those crafters/artists/makers are predominately women. So women, especially feminist women, are being supported by an anti-consumerist community.*

**Participant #7**

*Crafting is typically portrayed as a feminine activity, although "art" is considered gender-neutral. In fact, most male sellers that I have noticed sell items that are closer to "art" than "craft," such as photography or paintings, or items that are explicitly gender neutral, like screen-printing t-shirts. Also, I think the web interface, in which conversation is typed, particularly appeals to women (who respond more to language).*

**Participant #8**

*Crafting is traditionally a women's art- women are re-embracing it. I think a lot of women would like to try selling the things they make, and etsy gives a real opportunity to do that. It's great for stay at home moms, as they can do it from home as well.*

**Participant #10**

*I prefer to say I espouse "feminine ideals," as mentioned above, attributes which are usually defined as having a focus on creation, protection, fairness, community, nature, tradition...and the items I create and sell definitely reflect this thought. And getting back to "crafting as a political statement"- I was impelled to create with this philosophy in response to the last seven years of pre-emptive, aggressive American foreign policy, a government focused on division, destruction, propaganda, fear-mongering, lies and untruths. This is why I think many men today could also be described as "feminists," having rejected the traditional "masculine" values as defined by the last several years of US Government leadership.*

**Participant #11**

*I make cloth menstrual pads which are utilitarian, but i believe they do have a feminist message. Obviously, they are only used by women, but choosing to use cloth pads also benefits women because:*

- 1. They are healthier for our bodies than chlorine bleached disposables.*
- 2. They will save you money*
- 3. Your money goes to an independant artist rather than a large, polluting, human rights violating company.*

*It [Crafting] can empower women, allow them to make their own instead of buying sweatshop-made products and allows some to make a living doing something they love.*

**Participant #13**

*Crafting is being embraced because the feminist vibe is so DiY. Like we can do anything we want if we try. And crafting is doing what we want and trying so it's a perfect pair. I think also with the Riot-GRRRL movement and the riot-grrrl manifesta that talks about making our own zines, our own music and creating our own beings and letting our self be seen it really talks about crafting and talks about it being feminist.*

**Participant #15**

*I think there's a lot of natural overlap[between feminism and anti-consumerism]. The folks who identify as feminist are often also identifying as anti-consumerism, so the two inform each other.*

*I think books like "stitch & bitch" and the resurgence of all sorts of traditionally female crafts (knitting, crochet, quilting) allows for a revaluing of skills that is quintessentially feminist.*

**Participant #17**

*Mass-produced objects seem to be produced by corporate male-driven economics, while they target mainly women in their ads. The crafting movement is much less overt/obnoxious? The object can be rude or blatant, but you're not buying it because it was force fed to you.*

**Participant #18**

*"Craft" has always been the domain of women and men are more likely to think of what they do as art and to aim to sell it through more traditional channels. I think there's some element of subversion in Etsy, too, a way of bypassing corporate capitalism, and being an independent seller. I have a hunch (but I don't know for sure) that a lot of the people selling on Etsy are pretty young (unlike me) and are using it to build a sense of community. It's a small business model that doesn't involve a lot of paperwork or hassle, too. A lot of crafters seem to be moms, and I think Etsy offers a way for them to have a shop without the complication of having a brick and mortar business*

*To some extent, I think [feminism and anti-consumerism are related], but it's a complicated relationship. Consumerism and mass production aren't all bad. Mass-produced consumer goods made it possible for women to step out of the house into the world of work and gain financial independence. Rampant consumerism also makes them slaves to those jobs and to their homes. So I think the crafting movement is a reaction against the induced desire for consumer goods. Whether that's necessarily feminist varies from person to person. I think it might also be more a rebellion against unbridled capitalism than just consumerism.*

**Participant #19**

*Patriarchy has always been to woman's disadvantage, and consumer culture is very patriarchal. Consumer culture stuffs sexist advertising down our throats, tells us what's wrong with us and invents products to "fix" these invented problems. Craft advertising does not do that – mostly it showcases the skills of the seller and tries to bring in customers honestly with its quality. Capitalism exploits impoverished workers, many of whom are women. Crafting does not exploit anybody, and is often a one-person creation. Crafting is also empowering because not only does it build your confidence, but it also provides you with your own source of income (however little), and feminism is all about empowering yourself.*

**Participant #22**

*I think it [feminists embracing craft] has a lot to do with "sticking it to the man." They're sending the message to the Wal-marts and JC Penny's of the world saying that we don't need them. I can buy a dress from the lady down the road who sews, and I know that there was no child labor involved. If I buy soap from a vendor at a local craft show,*

*chances are that no animals were harmed. Some people are just being more choosy with who they are giving their money to.*

**Participant #23**

*There is just tooooooo much stuff that we are told that we need to buy to be happy, whole, worth while and attractive. If you spend your life( and I do not use that term loosely) buying stuff, and not feeding your soul, you are cheating yourself. You bought the big lie, the consumerism lie. I really think that this goes back to TV, and I wish that you might do something along those lines to connect the two. Anyway, if you work to buy stuff that has no soul in it, you cannot ever buy enough. You are like a dog chasing its tail. Hand made things have soul.*

**Participant #24**

*I think our culture is shifting and re-discovering our past times but with a new twist. We're not seamstresses because it's one of the few jobs available for women, we sew because we enjoy it. We have the control.*

**Participant #25**

*I think they[feminism and anti-consumerism] are tied by the desire for freedom of thought and choice. Consumerism promotes a lemming mentality. Both feminism and anti-consumerism support thinking for oneself and choosing what is best for oneself and others rather than on what is being dictated by corporation or authority.*

**Participant #26**

*Sure,[the relationship between feminism and anti-consumerism is that] so many mass produced items are being made by impoverished women and children.*

**Participant #27**

*I think the DIY aspect is embraced by feminists today as it is a way for female expression, activism, and empowerment.*

*Women are especially targeted to consume by being told they constantly need something. They are socialized to like shopping, to use crappy products made by men to make a profit off of women. Feminism and anti-consumerism go hand in hand. If you make your own stuff, you can rely less and less on crap made to take advantage of you. By crafting, one is essentially taking more power away from the patriarchal society we live in and is giving it back to an individual.*

**AESTHETICS (unique, individual, beautiful, artisan, same, boring, mass-produced, talented, custom, funky, one-of-a-kind)**

**Participant #2**

*I think people are sick of commercialism and buying the same products as everyone else. Those products seem to be lacking life, inspiration and a general sense of good workmanship. Nowadays we have lost so many artisans I think this is the world's way of*

*getting into touch with the past, yet still keeping it modern by purchasing products made by artists & crafters of the world. I also think it has strong ties with the current Environmental focus in society and the need to stop reproducing products in factories.*

#### **Participant #4**

*I think that a lot of people have a real entrepreneurial spirit, but they can't do it entirely alone. Websites like Craftster.org and Etsy.com give people the little push that they need to learn new tricks and sell their wares. And a lot of buyers are sick of the same old crap everyone else has. You know that feeling when you buy a new t-shirt and you love it, and you think it suits you so perfectly, but then you go to a party and someone else is wearing the same thing? I think a lot of people are just plain sick of that stuff. You don't want to buy things in the mall because everybody else already has it, and if they don't, they will soon. Everyone wants to have something one-of-a-kind. With the cool search features on Etsy.com, you can type in a few keywords (like say, pink vegan messenger bag) and find something perfectly suited to you, at a good price, that no one else is going to have. And there is that added bonus that you're giving your money to someone who loves their work, and works hard to make a good product, as opposed to sweatshop-labour-loving corporate big box stores.*

*Like I said before, people are just sick of the same old mass-produced stuff. Everybody wants to have something special, something unique. Buying handmade (and vintage) is a really good way of protesting major chains stores, living out your politics, and being creative.*

#### **Participant #9**

*Crafters are those who appreciate the qualities of handmade individual products. This is naturally contrary to those that are mass-produced. Thus crafters may be anti-consumerists by default.*

#### **Participant #16**

*In a nutshell, I think Etsy fills a need that was previously not met very well on the internet. There is a more conscious trend toward global economy and an interest and indeed a need to be more aware of the personal nature of the goods one purchases. There are a number of on-site craft shows that allow people to sell their goods, but these vary wildly in the type of goods and buyers they attract, and often require a large number of goods to sell in order to balance the large sum you need to rent a space, provided you can get one. Further, they are by definition local, and sometimes unknown. Etsy allows a crafter or artist to access a worldwide market that appreciates and is looking for hand made goods. It also allows people to try selling their crafts even if there are only a few items to list because the cost is low and pay-as-you-go.*

*For buyers there has evolved a collection of unique items of all kinds made with a labor of love, rather than a labor of desperation. Mass-produced consumer goods frequently have a high price tag but only fractions of a penny go to the actual hands that made them. And sadly, conditions for those hands are sometimes very poor.*



**Participant #26**

*[Etsy is so popular] because each item is unique, not manufactured. You can find something organic, non sweatshop made, vegan, and handcrafted by someone. And you know the money is going to support them.*

**Participant #27**

*I think there is definitely a push to do things more like the old days where everything was done by hand. People are getting sick of cheaply made, mass produced things that everyone has. People are looking for a new identity and are starting to embrace the individuality of crafting and making their own stuff*

## Appendix 6: Storque Article for Participant Recruitment

Login Register Help

Etsy's future explains how we seek to grow the company in exciting new directions. Etsy

Buy Sell Alchemy Community News Buy Your Etsy

1000 Dolls (100% about craft and handmade items) (The New School) And

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### Call for Feminist Crafters: Crafting Resistance & Community



Story by pinupchick  
Published on January 30, 2008 in Craftivism

Photo by nicasaurusrex on flickr

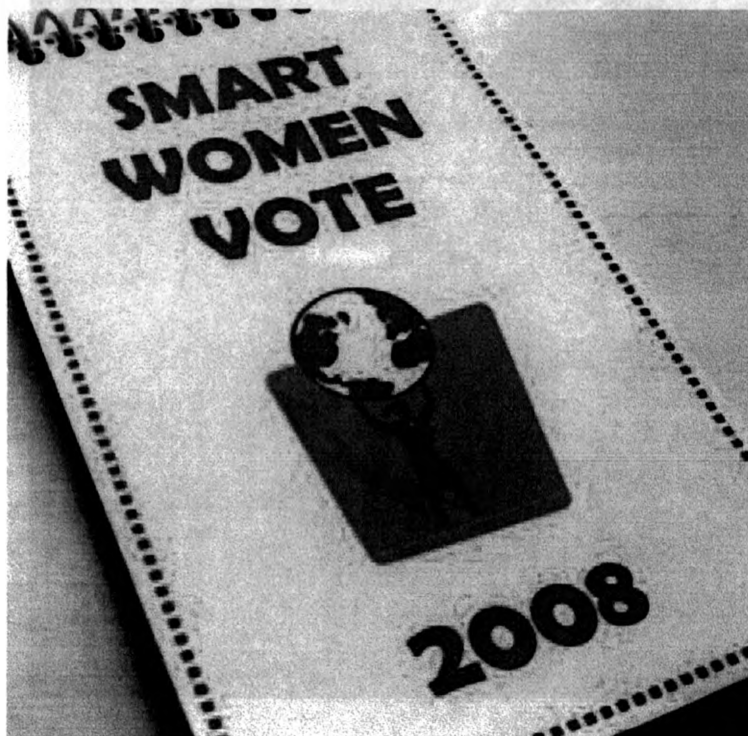
**Attention crafting feminists! Academic researcher pinupchick wants to hear your reflections and stories!**

*Etsy's core mission is to help artists and crafters make a living from what they make. This may seem like an innocuous enough statement, but truth be told, the socio-political-cultural-economic state in which we live makes this a rather bold rallying cry. We want to make history's "way of doing things" undergo a change and Rob aka Rokali's recent announcement about Etsy's future explains how we seek to grow the company in contrast to many corporations. Etsy is part of a larger movement and we at Etsy want to learn more about the consciousness of feminist crafters in our midst (See Beth's post about Craft and Protest at the New School). And so we were excited to hear about pinupchick's call for participants in her research study. We hope that you choose to participate and make your opinions and experiences known!*

*(Fun fact: Etsy is about 90% women)*

Crafting seems to be all the rage these days, and websites like Etsy are certainly helping the handmade movement gain momentum. Of course the popularity of crafting is completely dependent on all you talented sellers (and buyers with excellent taste!), and a little press here and there can't hurt either. But in addition to this, crafting is becoming a popular topic of study in the academic sphere.

Crafting and DIY movements are becoming crucial areas of research in the liberal arts, social sciences, and humanities. This is where I come in. Not only am I an avid Etsy fan and buyer, I'm also a graduate student at the University of Western Ontario. I'm currently pursuing my Master's degree in Media Studies, and my thesis is on crafting as a mechanism of resistance against corporate-fueled capitalism, focusing specifically on feminist crafters. For my study, I will be conducting e-mail interviews with crafters (and craft buyers) that make or buy goods with feminist messages, or craft with feminist beliefs at heart. I'm also interested in speaking with Etsy sellers who advertise or have been featured in *BUST* magazine (*BUST* has overt ties to third-wave feminism and often features goods from Etsy sellers).



I'm interested in studying crafting as a resistance mechanism: in the age of mass-production, corporate mega-profits and the resulting unethical production practices such as the use of sweatshop labor, crafting (and buying handmade goods) stands in opposition to the unethical labor and production practices of certain large corporations. Feminism is a natural extension of this, as historically textile work, sewing and needlecrafts have been located within the sphere of women. And now, crafters (some motivated by feminism), are reclaiming the once domestic significations of handicrafts as both liberating and pleasurable, and embracing this new domesticity as a form of feminist resistance and subversion.

Crafting as a form of feminist resistance is being examined by a few other scholars, but as far as I know, I am the only one looking specifically at Etsy and the crafts production and marketing cycle. Because craftwork provides an alternative to mass-production, I believe that buying and selling handmade goods is a politically subversive act that allows for a fair, equitable, and ethical form of capitalism. Ultimately, the handmade movement can help create positive social change.

But I can't conduct this study without you! If you are at all interested in participating in my study, please convo or email me. I will provide detailed information about the time requirements and will forward you the required documents. Together we can show academia how important crafting really is to the world!



*Post your comments below and let us know what you think! Have you heard of other researchers working on this topic? Have you found any books that address these ideas?*

#### Additional Resources

Craftivism.org

Craftster.org

GetCrafty.com

Bust.com

#### Related Items

This article was reported by:



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**Tags**

academia, crafting resistance, crafts production, feminism, mass-production, politics, research, women

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11 comments



**operatic says:**

As a feminist artist and crafter I'm totally into this. Convo on its way to you ... :)

1/30/08 at 11:19p.m.



**OpulentOddities says:**

Awesome idea.

And I'm happy to see desktopdistractions in this article!

1/31/08 at 2:10a.m.



**SpankMe says:**

can relate to this - all our designers are women  
- have one man - who can sometimes pass for  
a woman, please pass on your documents...  
thanks Loula

1/31/08 at 8:17a.m.



**CrowbirdieBeads says:**

I would very much like to be a part of this, but  
I'm not sure if my beads can be counted as  
part of a movement! What a fantastic idea. I'm  
so happy to have found Etsy.

1/31/08 at 10:13a.m.



**blondechicken says:**

Oh this is great research! I'm about to start my  
MBA program and my focus is on women and  
entrepreneurship!

1/31/08 at 12:51p.m.

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