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"Yeah, I taught myself on YouTube": young women and navigating the world of traditional crafting

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“YEAH, I TAUGHT MYSELF ON YOUTUBE”
YOUNG WOMEN AND NAVIAGTING THE WORLD OF TRADITIONAL CRAFTING

A Thesis Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Designation
University Honors

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This Study by: Emily Gardner

Entitled: "YEAH, I TAUGHT MYSELF ON YOUTUBE"

YOUNG WOMEN AND NAVIAGTING THE WORLD OF TRADITIONAL CRAFTING

has been approved as meeting the thesis or project requirement for the Designation

University Honors

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Abstract

In this study I work to understand how US women ages 18 to 24 navigate the world of crafting (e.g., crocheting, knitting, quilting, etc.) and how their motivations and methods may differ from the older women that traditionally inhabit that space. In-person interviews with ten younger women and results from an online mixed methods survey show that young women who participate in crafting show that young women primarily use crafting as a way to cope with stress from school and work, they participate in informal groupings to develop friendships and gain technical crafting insight, and they use internet sites extensively for ideas and assistance. This research aims to start to fill a gap that exists in the literature about feminine leisure activities.

Keywords: *crafting, young women, leisure, stress relief*

Introduction

My interest in researching crafting and making developed from my own involvement with crocheting. While in college, I learned to crochet from a friend. I had an opportunity to do research on a subculture for a paper in a Sociology of Culture class, so I studied the subcultural elements of women who crochet in the United States. Through this project, I learned about the history of crochet and how it fits into society, which resulted in me (of course) having more questions. I was interested in why women chose to craft, what kept them crafting, and how they went about learning to craft. I also wanted to know if this increase in crafting I was personally observing (seeing young women like myself learning to crochet or knit) was also happening other places and to other women. I saw young women using crafting as a leisure activity, something that helped them to relax. However, in doing my research, I learned that we rarely let women “just relax” and instead, expect that women, even young women, are helping others and are being productive (e.g., volunteer work, carework, etc.). Would this also be the case with crafting?

Craft is a “skilled practice of making beautiful objects” (Gauntlett 2011:22) Handicraft, having a similar definition, involves the use of ones hands. The word “making” has often replaced “handiwork” to describe the hand crafts in which people engage, and is linked to the “Do It Yourself” (DIY) subculture, as well as hipster and homesteading cultures. Crafting includes, but is not limited to, activities such as knitting, crocheting, quilting, embroidery, sewing, spinning, weaving, beading, and scrapbooking. Similar to other researchers using inductive methodologies, I found that it was more important that my study participants identified themselves as crafters and makers as opposed to limiting their participating in the study based on the activity they in which engaged.

Throughout my research, I have found that young women crafters are an understudied population, and that this has to do with a variety of reasons. One reason is that we as a society, study women's activities less than men's activities, including leisure. Additionally, when we do study women's activities, we typically focus on how women fare in comparison to men, rather than study women on their own, or about women's interests independent of men. This is certainly the case with research on feminine leisure activities, such as crocheting, knitting, and quilting. And, when looking at research on women's crafting, there is an age bias—we tend to study older women more often than younger women. As such, there is some research on feminine leisure activities of women above the age of 30 but even less on young women under the age of 30 and their feminine leisure activities. My research seeks to fill that gap. I interviewed ten women between the ages of 18 and 24 in order to better understand why they craft and how they navigate the world of crafting as well as administered an online survey open to crafters of all ages.

The organization of my Honor's Thesis is as follows. First, I review the relevant literature, demonstrating the gaps in the research. Then, I discuss how I designed the study, including how and why I chose qualitative interviews and a mixed methods online survey with which to collect data. Next, I delve into my research findings, discuss the findings, and then conclude the thesis, noting both the study limitations and biases, and plans for future progress on this topic.

Literature Review

The following literature review gives a brief overview of the research and literature available on feminine leisure activities.

Leisure is often defined as “free time” and “activity” as well as a state of mind (Lashua and Parr 2004). Feminine leisure activities are those leisure activities that are traditionally associated with women. These activities are often considered a form of resistance performed by women as they are deliberately taking time for themselves rather than taking time for their roles as wives and mothers (Green 1998). The research on feminine leisure activities is very limited. Young women are almost never studied and there are only a select few studied on older women and their leisure activities. There are several potential reasons for why young women go relatively unstudied. Obtaining IRB approval is more complicated and challenging when researchers study human subjects under the age of 18 which can create research roadblocks. It is also possible that there has been an age and gender gap between researchers and desired population. Older researchers and men may have a hard time entering into the community and conducting research, as compared to younger scholars. The following literature review gives a brief overview of the research and literature available on feminine leisure activities. I have broken the literature into four distinct sections; age and crafting, crafting as social, space and time, and the new domesticity. Each of these will provide the foundation for my study of young women crafters.

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Age and Crafting

From 2002 to 2008, the US based national organization, Craft Yarn Council, reported a 100% increase in craft participation among 18-years-and-under group and a 150% increase in the 25-34 age group (CYC 2008). Other portions of the study and subsequent studies (CYC 2011,

2014) identify the main reasons for knitting and crocheting are to provide a creative outlet, the enjoyment from making, and the sense of accomplishment. In 2014 the CYC noted that younger crafters also used knitting and crocheting as a way to cope with stress. While the surveys done by the CYC point out an increase in the number of young knitters and crocheters, the CYC does not go into much more detail, speculation, or analysis about why and how younger people participate in crocheting and knitting in the US.

In an online quantitative survey, crafters under the age of 34 cited that they used crafting to relieve stress (CYCA 2014) but there is very little qualitative data about crafters between the ages of 18-24. While young crafters indicated that they used crafting to relieve stress, it is unclear both why crafting is stress relieving, and what stressors may be present in young peoples' lives that needs relief from crafting. In general, surveys that focus on crafters also focus on women in their thirties or do not state ages of young women at all (Minahan and Cox 2008; Ruland 2010). And, when scholars study women crafters under the age of 30, the analysis is often centered on their interaction with other women that are older than them, rather than investigating why women of younger ages engage in craft (Ruland 2010). Clearly, this research is at an early stage in recognizing that women's interests, and women's feminine interests, are worth academic pursuit.

Crafting as Social

Leisure is both individual and social. Arai and Pedlar (2003) state that a majority of leisure is for consumption (i.e., paying to see art, paying to see the opera) and therefore individualized but as communication and technology continue to grow and become easier, leisure becomes part of a shared meaning between people and therefore requires interaction with others.

Women like to spend time together when they craft. Sometimes, they refer to this as a “Stich’nBitch” which became a newsworthy item in the 2000s, as news stories reporting women and men gathering in coffee houses alerted Americans that crafting was again becoming popular (Stoller 2003). The emergence of the Stitch’nBitch (Stoller 2003) has created a social atmosphere for the crafting woman. A Stitch’nBitch is a “highly social form of creative leisure production” (Minahan and Cox 2008:6) where women get together to knit/crochet/quilt and socialize. They often take place in the evening on a Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday at a less popular café with reduced foot traffic (Stoller 2003). Minahan and Cox (2008) discuss young women creating a social space where they craft and reducing the amount of social isolation they may be experiencing in the postmodern society. Postmodern society is constantly in a state of flux and individuals find it hard to maintain a coherent sense of self (Fine et al. 2014:47). The creation of a social group can help to alleviate the stress from a constantly changing postmodern society.

The Stitch n’Bitch has also emerged as a place for activism among women. Not only do Stitch n’Bitch participants engage in discussing current issues, but they create items to donate or give to organizations and charities that are important to them (Bratich and Brush 2011;Minahan and Cox 2008). Examples include knitting hats for premie babies, scarves for the homeless, and the like.

Many of these Stitch n’Bitch groups use technology as a conduit for their activism, or craftivism (craft + activism). The groups use technology, like email, social media, and personal websites, to connect with other similar groups to recruit members and share in the carework of volunteer activities. An example is connecting with an organization that donates knitted hats to kids.

The use of social media (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr) has also become important for young crafters. Minahan and Cox (2008:6) call this new cyberculture “new materiality”.

Minahan and Cox (2008:6) define the new materiality as “a new way of connecting that is based on material production using traditional craft skills and yarns as well as the optical fibre and twisted pair cable used for telecommunications.” The new materiality is a mixing of the old – tradition craft skills – and the new – technology and the internet.

Bratich and Brush (2011) extend crafting sociality to internet groups such as the Viral Knitting Project, where knitters connect online to knit and socialize, and in-person groups like the Stitch’nBitch: “Virtual crafting is an exchange of information, skills, and even products” (Bratich and Brush 2011:242). Crafters get together on blogs, vlogs, and social media to interact with each other—so the combination of engaging in craft alone or with others is supported in important ways with spending time (in person or virtually) with those who share similar interests in crafts, very much like a subculture.

The introduction of crafting groups such as Stitch’nBitch, Knitting Bee’s, and Quilting guilds (Minahan and Cox 2008; Ruland 2010; Stalp 2006) show that crafting socially has value for some women but understanding its value for young women has not yet been researched extensively. These groups are used as a “time to socialize and time to get the domestic work done” (Ruland 2010:19). They can range from very formal to very informal. In Stalp’s (2006) research on midlife leisure quilters, she discussed how quilt guilds follow an organizational format when they meet as large groups, as they follow Robert’s Rules of Order and elect candidates for official positions for the year (e.g., President, Vice President, and the like), but these large guilds would often split into more smaller informal groups, where more intimate

conversations and forms of social support, as well as individual and group quilting efforts, were likely to occur.

It is clear that sociality is important for some women and their crafting but why is it important? While it is generally assumed that young women engage in technology as a way to socialize, it has gone unstudied. The next area of literature and research is focused on women's use of space and time to engage in their crafting and making.

Space and Time

Crafting is linked with the feminine, and the feminine is often restricted to private spaces in the home (Bratich and Brush 2011; Winge and Stalp 2013). According to Stalp (2006), space and time for personal use like leisure is even limited for women inside the home. This is ironic, as the "home" is the space stereotypically designated for women. In Stalp's (2007) research, leisure quilters in the US did not have much access to private or public (family) space in the home, which became more noticeable and more problematic when women became interested in quilting at midlife. In fact, the family home often neglects women's interests, as noted by the feminist geographer Daphne Spain (1992), who documents how men's space needs in the home are often met before women's space needs. Many quilters have a hard time balancing their role and life as mother and wife with their desire to quilt and participate in a leisure craft activity, and quilters, both men and women quilters experience the negative gendered devaluation of quilting, even when they practice quilting as a profession, instead of a hobby (Stalp and Conti 2011). Much of Stalp's (2006, 2007) data are taken from interviews with women in their 40s, 50s, and 60s, although women aged 20-70 participated in the study. Despite all of this research on women and crafting, there is still a lack of analytical data regarding how women ages 18-24 use space to craft.

Crafting is often referred to as “at home leisure” (Stalp and Conti 2011; Stalp 2015), but the Stitch’nBitch phenomenon of the early 2000s changed this by bringing knitting groups into public spaces like coffee shops (Stalp 2015; Stoller 2003; Winge and Stalp 2013). If women take crafting out of the home, they are often judged harshly through the public gaze. For example, Bratich and Brush (2011) tell the story of a woman who was knitting at a professional conference. A local (non-knitting) blogger was bothered seeing a woman knitting in a space where women were striving to be viewed in a more professional light. The blogger penned that the knitting woman was unprofessional and

...that working women might need to consider how professional they look knitting at an industry conference. While I think we all agree that knitting helps us pay attention, so much of business success is based on others’ perceptions of us, like it or not. (Bratich and Brush 2011: 237)

It is clear from the blogger’s comments that knitting is not a professional activity. This creates a clear distinction between what is meant for the professional world and what is meant for the home. A woman who knits in public is potentially thought less of by the public (and certainly by the blogger). The reaction of the blogger to the public knitting incident indicates that crafting women face scrutiny in public, and are limited in their space and time when they craft. They are confined to the home and are restricted in terms of time and space for crafting. It is unclear whether women aged 18 to 24 experience the same sort of reaction from crafting in public as this woman at the conference did.

Crafting and Feminism - The New Domesticity

Third-wave feminism has three major pillars; 1) Third-wave feminists work to emphasize the intersectionality of the multiple identities of women. It is not enough to accept that women are women but to accept that women also have a race, a socioeconomic status, and other

identities; 2) Third-wave feminism desires action and multivocality; 3) Third-wave feminism want to reduce the number of boundaries placed on women by the feminist political (Snyder 2008). Third-wave feminism is engaging in a reclaiming of domesticity. Third-wave feminism works to be less rigid and judgmental of the feminist generation before them. Second-wave feminism focused on uniting women as one which resulted in a perceived lack of appreciation of minority women (i.e., women of color, women with disabilities).

Third-wave feminists want to play with their femininity more than the generation of second-wave feminist before them (Snyder 2008). This is to say that third-wave feminists want to try out different versions of femininity and be allowed to experiment with it. Feminist magazines such as *BUST* and *Bitch* emphasize this desire to reclaim domesticity. These magazines feature articles about how to be domestic. For example, one article in the feminist magazine *BUST* titled “Shiz-Knit” told readers to “join the knitting revolution” (Groeneveld 2010:260). The same article states that knitting is used as a stress relief, a way for the modern woman to detox from her day full of computers, phones, and consumers (Groeneveld 2010:263). Third-wave feminism also uses new domesticity to challenge the current social structure in which women are unappreciated and undervalued (Groeneveld 2010).

Matchar (2013) discusses the resurgence of handicrafts and DIY home projects occurring in contemporary times. Women (and men) interested in the homebound movement are likely motivated to become so through a concern for the environment, self-sufficiency, and their families (Matchar 2013). Distrust of the government and publicly funded institutions such as public schools and hospitals can assist toward devoting time to learning handicrafts, hunting, foraging, cooking, and canning while staying at home.

These young women who are homebound by choice (upper 20s and low 30s) blog and vlog about their experiences in deciding to “go back to the good times.” Campbell (2005:25) describes the push to return to the past in this way: “Consequently, present-day advocates of craftwork have tended to be labelled romantics, uneasy with the modern world and either yearning for a return to an earlier preindustrial age or nurturing unrealistic dreams of future postindustrial utopias.” Campbell (2005) supports what Matcher (2013) claims in that modern craftworkers are hesitant to trust the modern world and want to proceed into a simpler life. Both Matchar’s (2013) crafters and Campbell’s (2013) crafters want to separate themselves from the modern hustle and bustle of their society.

In Matchar’s (2013) work, the women she interviewed discussed how the internet has closed the gender gap on DIY information as women in her study are able to learn to do things (e.g., knitting, gardening, canning) that were traditionally passed down from older family members. Bratich and Brush (2011) explain the new domesticity as a reweaving of old domesticity. Women still do domestic work such as knitting and quilting in the home but with the utilization of technology, women are no longer silenced by being in the home. They are able to meet other women online through blogs and social media and form groups where they can knit and quilt in public and share their ideas.

Third-wave feminism is centered on women returning to the femininity that fits them best. This includes the resurgence of traditional crafting activities. Matcher (2013) goes on to claim that the increase of these activities is due to distrust in public institutions (except for new technologies, like the internet and social media of course, which are supported by government infrastructure). The emergence of third-wave feminism the development of the new domesticity gives insight into why young (late 20s to early 30s) women are engaging in crafting. The pull of

the new domesticity may also be fueling young women ages 18-24 but there is a lack of data to make that claim.

The women Matchar (2013) interviewed were engaging a full lifestyle change. Are women who participate in crafting as a leisure activity doing it for the same reasons as the Homeward Bound women? It is clear from both Matchar (2013) and Bratich and Brush (2011) that technology and the internet are important outlets for their participants. Is this true for a slightly younger audience? The current research surrounding technology and young crafters is lacking in clear results. Much of the data surrounding the relationship between the internet and crafting is secondary to other research.

The previous research done on crafters and makers shows that there has been an increase in the number of young women who craft but there is a lack of qualitative data regarding why they craft and how they go about learning and engaging in their craft. The literature indicates that crafting women place great importance on being a group and the social component of their craft. This social aspect has been supplemented with the increased use of the internet and the ability for women to engage with each other virtually. Older women are generally discouraged from crafting, especially by their families. They are not given the time or the space to engage in a feminine leisure activity, inside or outside of the home. Finally, it is unclear whether young women are engaging in a reclaiming of domesticity. Their crafting may be a way for them to develop their femininity that works best for them. My study aims to find why young women craft. This includes how they got involved, why they stay involved, and what role crafting plays in their lives.

Methodology

Procedures

I conducted semi-structured in-person interviews using open-ended questions. In-person interviews allowed me to ask questions and create an open dialogue with my participants. I was able to gauge their reactions through body language, facial expression, and tone which allowed to me to understand their crafting better. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed participants to express their opinions and ideas about the topic much more openly (Esterberg 2002:87-88). While I had interview questions prepared, I allowed my participants to guide the interview. I worked to hit each topic area. Topic areas included space and time, crafting process, introduction to crafting, and finances (refer to Appendix A for interview questions).

As participants were able to ask me questions about my research and my personal experiences, it was more likely they would open up about the role of crafting in their lives (Oakley 1981). In order to make the interview more a dialogue between the participant and myself, I conducted interviews in informal attire at a time and location that was comfortable and familiar for the participant. I am an insider in the crafting community therefore it was useful for me to disclose parts of myself to my participants. My insider status allowed a more open and honest dialogue as I can relate, at least in part, to my participants (Beoku-Betts 1994; Esterberg 2002:90-91).

I also created an online survey (with quantitative and qualitative questions) that was administered through SurveyMonkey.com. Conducting an online survey added additional support to the in-person interviews and allowed me to have a larger sample size in order to draw conclusions. The online survey asked questions very similar to those asked during the in-person interview (See Appendix B for online interview questions). The survey participants were able to skip questions or leave them blank. The survey was assessable from computers as well as cell phones and was not timed.

Recruitment Procedures

After obtaining IRB approval from my university to conduct this research with human subjects, I recruited interview participants through already established connections in the crafting community and a subsequent snowballing effect. The snowballing effect utilized informants as references to find other research participants (e.g., after an interview is completed, I asked the study participant, “Do you know anyone else who is a crafter that I could talk to as well?”). While snowball sampling is effective, it may result in a homogeneous sample (Esterberg 2002:93-94). In CYCs surveys, young crafters are more often than not considered between the ages of 18-34, which I feel is too large an age category to capture generational differences of crafters. Subdividing the category of young crafters, as I do in my study by focusing on women aged 18-24 will give us better insight into how and why younger women craft as opposed to their older counterparts.

Participants had to be between the ages of 18 and 24, identify as a woman, and be an active crafter or someone who participates in knitting, crocheting, quilting, stamping, beading, scrapbooking, cross-stitch, weaving, and/or spinning. Since I engaged in data collection near a college campus, it is highly likely that participants were also students, but student status was not required. All participants signed an informed consent and were asked to be tape recorded for the purpose of transcription (See Appendix C for informed consent). Participants also received a copy of the consent form for their records.

Online survey participants were recruited through advertisements posted on campus, local crafting stores, coffee shops, and given to local crafting groups (e.g., guilds) (See Appendix E for advertisements). Participants were required to agree to the consent form before continuing with the survey (See Appendix C for informed consent). While the focus of the survey was

women ages 18 to 24, the survey was open to all ages and genders. Demographics of the survey will be discussed in further sections.

Data Analysis

In-person interviews were tape recorded and transcribed for data analysis. After transcription, tape recordings were erased. All names and identifiable information from online surveys and in-person interviews was either removed or coded as to ensure confidentiality and privacy of participants. Transcriptions and responses were coded in order to identify patterns in young crafters lives. I coded and analyzed the in-person interviews and online surveys together. I started with open coding and then transition to focused coding in order to find patterns (Esterberg 2002:158-161). Open coding starts with a quick read through of the transcriptions in order to find themes from there focused coding centers on those themes to develop into findings. No computer software or coding programs were used to code data.

Sample Characteristics of In-Person Interviews

At the conclusion of their interview, all participants were asked to fill out some simple demographic information. This included their age, gender, racial group, marital status, and student status and year, if applicable. The small questionnaire allowed participants to write in their own answers instead of selecting from options. All participants indicated their gender as “female” and their marital status as “single”. Ages ranged from 18 to 21 (see chart 1 in Appendix D). All participants were students and ranged from their first year in school to their fourth (see chart 2 in Appendix D). Nine of the ten participants identified as white, the tenth identified as Caucasian. There were five main crafting types present in the sample although several of the participants engaged in more than one craft. These five are knitting, arm knitting, crocheting, miscellaneous making, and creating jewelry (see chart 3 in Appendix D). One person in my

sample had only been crafting for about a month whereas two had been crafting for ten years (see chart 4 in Appendix D).

Sample Characteristics of Online Survey

At the start of the online survey, participants were asked several demographic questions (See Appendix B for questions). Participants could skip questions or leave them blank if they did not want to answer them. Twelve of the thirty-four online survey respondents were between the ages of 18 and 24 (See chart 5 in Appendix D). The respondents were able to write in their own responses for marital status and answers that did not fit into “married”, “divorced”, or “single” were coded as “other” (See chart 6 in Appendix D). The marital status of respondents was fairly balanced between married and divorced with a few respondents indicating they were single. Thirty-three of the respondents self-identified as women and one identified as transgender. Twenty-eight respondents identified as white/caucasian, three as multiracial, one as Latino, one as Asian, and one respondent skipped this question. Sixteen respondents indicated that they were currently in college. Knitting, crocheting, weaving, quilting, cross stitch, sewing, and spinning were the most common types of crafting (each had five or more mentions in the survey) although several more were listed and many respondents listed three or more crafts when asked what type of crafting in which they engaged. The respondents had crafting experience ranging from one year to fifty years.

Findings

Through analyzing ten in-person interviews and thirty-four online survey responses, three major themes developed. Young women used crafting to deal with stress, they used crafting as a way to build and strengthen relationships, and the internet played a large role in their crafting experience. For much of the findings, I will combine the in-person interviews and online survey

responses, I will refer to these findings as total responses. When I am referring to either the in-person interviews *or* online survey, I will directly state that.

Crafting to Deal with Stress

Crafting to cope with stress was found in twenty-two of the forty-four total responses. While several participants specifically indicated they used their craft for stress relief, others used words such as relaxation, mental break, and calm down. Liz (all names are pseudonyms), a 19-year-old knitter said:

I'm kinda introverted so when I have an hour to like relax and I don't want to talk to anybody, it's kind of a nice way to focus on something that's not school work or work or anything stressful and unwind.

Liz identified herself as an introvert and needed time to be alone. She was able to find comfort in her knitting. She went on to discuss issues with anxiety and how doing things such as painting, coloring, and knitting helps her to calm down and are “an outlet” for her. McKenzie said “...art also gives me an outlet where I can be a little more flashy...”. This was further echoed by Sarah, a 21-year-old crocheter:

I actually set aside time in my week where I have a TV show that I watch and I crochet during it so that I'm not always doing something. That's just my time to be by myself and relax.

All of the women I interviewed were college students. Several said classes and homework were causing their stress. A few of them also cited their job as a stressor in their lives. Claire, a sophomore in college, also uses knitting as a break from classes:

I usually spend a couple of hours crafting a week it just depends on the amount of free time I have or when I need a break from class or studying [*sic*].

Allison, a 20-year-old knitter, said her knitting was a therapeutic stress reliever because “...I don't have to rush this because there is no due date”. There were several different reasons as to why crafting was a stress reliever. Audrey, a senior in college, said crafting is “Relaxation. And

the chance to be creative without being graded for it.” For Allison and Audrey, the lack of a due date and grading created a relaxing environment. For Destinee, a 19-year-old knitter and crocheter, the repetitive nature of the process helped her to relax:

Interviewer: What do you get out of [knitting and crocheting] by yourself?

Destinee: Just relaxing. It’s just something repetitive that I can just do with my hands but I can sit there and think or sit there and watch something.

The repetitive nature of knitting allowed Destinee the time to think or watch TV. Mia also enjoyed the repetitive aspect of knitting, “Repeating movements like knitting help me to relax”. While Destinee and Mia enjoyed that time to think, Sarah enjoyed the exact opposite. Sarah said “...it is something I can do *without* thinking (emphasis added)”. Carly, a second year student, compared crafting to meditation “It is similar to meditation for me. I am able to sit and relax and destress from my day”. Most of the women interviewed said that their craft was most stress relieving or relaxing when they were doing it alone.

Twenty-one of the forty-four participants mentioned that they wish they had more time to spend on their craft. Some women over the age of 24 in the online survey did cite stress relief and relaxation as a reason for crafting but it was often secondary to gift giving or making to sell. Many older women also cited “artistic expression” as a reason for crafting. This could be interpreted as stress relief although it is hard to conclude with the information gathered from the online survey.

Older crafters often justify their activity by making meaningful gifts for others (Stalp 2006). However, I did not find this to be the case in my study, for according to the total responses, young women only gift a portion of their final product and do not state selling (or giving gifts) as their first reason for crafting. They primarily use crafting for themselves and their

own personal gain. Older woman may use crafting for others, to give final products away or to sell, and therefore do not think of crafting as something for personal gain.

Crafting as Relationship Building

Thirty-three of the forty-four participants stated that they learned how to craft from a family member, friend, or through a group or class. Of those who did not learned from another person, they said they self-taught, many with the help from the internet (i.e., Youtube.com, Pinterest.com, Ravelry.com). The most common family members to teach a craft were a mother or grandmother; this was consistent in women of all ages. Chloe, a freshman knitter, discussed her crafting relationship with her grandmother:

My grandma and I made a bunch of things, knitting, crochet, sewing, embroidery [sic]. If we found something we wanted to make, we did it, or tried. It was a lot of fun and brought us closer together.

Chloe learned to craft from her grandmother and continued to work with her on projects. For Chloe, crafting is more about spending time with her grandmother and building their relationship rather than having a final product.

All ten of the women I interviewed and twenty-one of the thirty-four online respondents had, at some point, participated in a group. Most of the groups consisted of other crafters in the same medium (knitters would knit with other knitters, and so on), with knitting and crocheting overlapping in some instances. According to the ten in-person interviews, the groups, with the exception of one, were always with women (and some men) of the same age range. The groups provided ideas and technical support as well as a social atmosphere. Allison enjoyed the sense of community that developed from knitting in a group:

So, we were all just down there knitting scarves so that was nice. Like its nice when you can just sit and you're all focused on the same thing so you don't necessarily have to sit and talk to each other about it which is cool. It's fun. I like knitting in a group as opposed to sitting by myself and knitting alone. I think that's nice. It's a nice sense of community.

This sense of community was a common theme in other interviews as well. Michelle, a 20-year-old crocheter said she like crocheting in a group because “you just have people to talk to”. Tara, also a 20-year-old crocheter said “...I don’t mind [crocheting] by myself but I like doing it in a group because you can still have fun and talk and stuff but you still get stuff done, too”. Most of these gatherings were informal. While young crafters enjoyed crafting with others, it did not always matter that the others were also crafting. Alex, a senior, said:

I craft in my dorm room usually with the door open. People can come in, sit down, and chat and watch or just listen if they want.

This is further echoed by Taylor, 5th year college student who crochets:

[I craft] by myself, or sometimes in the presence of others but they’re not crafting. I just craft next to them.

Another reason groups were popular was the ability to get help and ideas from other, more experienced makers. Rose, a 20-year-old knitter, said she prefers to knit in a group:

And I probably prefer to do it with other people because if I have a question, like my friend is a pro at [knitting], and I like if I really messed up, she can help me. If I don’t know how to cast off, she can help me. The starting and finishing I’d rather do with people...

Rose liked having a group of experienced knitters to help her do more the challenging stages such as starting and finishing. Amy also said it was helpful:

Emily: Do you also think [being in a group] helped with your skills?

Amy: Oh yeah, cuz if you mess up and you’re freakin’ out someone can come help you. I think it helps a lot to have them in there, like, they told me I how to do this, I can do this. Especially if you mess up they’re like “Oh, I gotchu”.

A few of the women under the age of 25 in the online survey mentioned that crafting and making classes were important to their process.

There were two occasions of formal groups for crafters under the age of 24. Two interviewees discussed wanting to start a club for crocheters and knitters while another discussed knitting with women at a yarn store during scheduled group hours. The presence of formal groups was popular in online respondents over the age of 24. Half of the respondents over the age of 24 mentioned crafting with a group specifically designed for crafting. No crafters under the age of 25 named formal groups. These groups included quilting, weaving, and spinning guilds, yarn and quilt shops, and a Stitch'nBitch (Stoller 2003).

Participation in a group was very different from working on a project with a group. When asked about working on a project with a group, only four of the thirty-four online respondents had worked on a single project with others. Of these four, only two said they enjoyed the process. Carly said, "I have never worked on one project with another person. I do my own project while they also do their own." Taylor was more adamant about her dislike of group projects, "No. Group work is Satan's playground." Taylor showed her avoidance of group work through her demonization of the activity. While crafters enjoyed sharing space with other crafters, they did not like working on one project as a group. For the participants, working on one project with others took away the stress relieving aspect of crafting. Alex, a senior, describes the stressful nature of group work:

Stressful to the max...It takes so much time out of my work to baby them till they get their portion done. Especially if my half is dependent on their half...

Shhhh, I'm a Crafter, but Don't Tell Anyone, LOL☺

Ten respondents (a mix of the online and in-person participants) stated that they did not talk about their crafting to non-crafters. Audrey, a senior, said "I don't [tell non-crafters about my crafting]. They don't get it". This sentiment was echoed by several other crafters. While none of the data was conclusive in explained what non-crafters "don't get", the data may lead some

speculation. Question #21 of the online survey asked respondents about the amount of crafting equipment they currently have (see Appendix B for questions). Sixteen respondents mentioned their large amounts of material in language that suggests guilt. They said things such as “a crap ton”, “more than I should have”, “too much yarn”, and “A LOT ha ha”. These women could feel guilty about the amount of material and therefore money they spend when speaking with non-crafters.

The Internet as a Resource

Nine of the ten women who participated in an in-person interview utilized various internet sites to assist them in their craft. Many of the internet references were simple such as Marissa, an 18-year-old crafter. She said “I made gumball machines off of Pinterest” (note: Gumball Machines is the name of a pattern). She did not go into detail about her internet use but it was still part of her making process. Others made a point to discuss how the internet developed them into a crafter. The internet was used in two main ways; to get inspiration and to obtain technical help.

Many participants used Pinterest.com to get creative inspiration. Pinterest is an image collecting site that allows users to pin pictures to personal boards as a way to save them for later. The young women of my study used Pinterest to get inspiration for new projects, patterns, and styles. Marissa had a board just for crafts:

I have a board of crafts. Like I’ll go through there and find one to do on a rainy day or if I get bored or if I don’t have any homework on a weekend I’ll do crafts. But somedays I feel like doing *this* and I’ll go find different ideas.

When trying to overcome a technical roadblock, crafters were more likely to go to YouTube.com for help. Youtube.com is a video-sharing website. Destinee was introduced to knitting by her grandma as a child but went to YouTube to relearn how to knit in high school:

Yes, I retaught myself. YouTube. YouTube is what I go for. Yeah, I taught myself on YouTube because my grandma only taught me how to knit when I was younger and then my friend, when she taught herself through YouTube, learned how to do the knit two purl two pattern and I was like “That’s cool” and she’s like “Go to YouTube and type in knit two purl two infinity scarf”....And then I just did the same thing with crocheting. I was gonna have Tara teach me but I was impatient and so I got on YouTube.

Six of the ten participants had previously encountered their craft, knitting and crocheting, through older family members, mostly their grandmothers. Their family members taught them as a child and when they got older, participants retaught themselves via YouTube. Sarah said YouTube was the most helpful when working on a pattern:

Technical [roadblock] I think I would go to YouTube or something to try and figure it out. When I am looking at the pattern, I understand what the single crochet is, what the double crochet is, that kind of stuff but I can’t figure out...if there is a stitch other than that, then I can’t figure it out. I’ll usually go to YouTube...It helps me to see it in that aspect.

Being able to see what needed to happen instead of just reading about it was helpful for Sarah and for a few other women in the sample.

Ravelry.com is a community site, an organizational tool, and a yarn & pattern database for knitters and crocheters. Ravelry has 5,813,566 registered users (Ravelry 2015). Only two of my participants under the age of 24, Liz and Chloe, mentioned Ravelry when asked about internet based resources. Liz was also the only interview participant that had experience at a specialty yarn store. Most of her knitting experience was with older women, a majority in their 50s. Chloe had learned to knit from her grandmother and continues to spend time with her working on projects.

Women between the ages of 18 and 24 appear to be using Pinterest and YouTube instead of websites made for knitters and crocheters such as Ravelry. For the young women in my sample, connecting and showcasing their work online was less important than just finding inspiration or technical help. In my sample, women over the age of 24 spent time on the internet

connecting with other crafters through Ravelry and taking online crafting classes as well as showcasing their products on their social media accounts. Violet, a crafter between the ages of 25 and 34, said:

Yes [I do keep records]. I have a blog where I post some of my projects, and I have a Ravelry account to keep track of my knitting and crochet. I also have a list of things I want to make, and several Pinterest boards for ideas

The young women in my study were already connecting with other crafters in person and therefore were not looking for that community online. Their process is also less about product and more about process so showcasing a final product is not the most important part of their making experience.

Discussion

There is a difference between young women and older women in the world of crafting. Young women use crafting to reduce stress, they are more likely to engage in informal crafting groups, and they use popular internet sites to get inspiration and technical help. My findings support the research done by Minahan and Cox (2008); that leisure is both individual and social in nature. Young women use crafting to destress and take a break from everyday pressures but they are use crafting to create a social network of people who understand their leisure activity of choice.

My findings support the Craft Yarn Council's claim that young knitters and crocheters use their craft to cope with stress (CYC 2014). Many women showed a desire to have more time crafting. None of the women directly stated why they wanted more time with their craft but one possible explanation is the desire to have more leisure time and ability to relax. This may also support previous research done on women's leisure. There is often a lack of time and space for

women's leisure (Stalp 2006, 2007). This lack of time and space is reflected in my respondents desire to craft more.

Older women who craft do not claim stress relief as much as younger women do (CYC 2014) but it would seem as though older women would have more stress than younger women since older women are more likely to have families and careers. It is possible that older women, while still having stress, just have different motivations when they are crafting. Older women are more likely to gift their final product whereas younger women do not. This shows that younger women use their craft for more personal gain (i.e., stress relief and relaxation) rather than for others (i.e., gifting).

My data supports the need for a crafting community and a desire to work with others, either formally or informally. These mostly informal groupings show that young women do place value on making in a group. Whereas the Stitch'nBitch, Knitting Bee's, and Quilting guilds have been populated by older women (Minahan and Cox 2008; Ruland 2010; Stalp 2006) as supported by the online survey data, it is possible that young women mostly participate in informal spontaneous groups and it is therefore hard to track their involvement. The previous research and my research support the claim that women do value spending time together to socialize and produce something for either themselves or others (Ruland 2010). Young women do not participate in organized groups as much as older women. This could be contributed to their status as university students living with other students. Being in close proximity to other women allows ease of organization and spontaneity. Young women may also have fewer responsibilities (i.e., children, careers, husbands, etc.) and therefore have the ability to be spontaneous and do not need formal groups. The younger women in my study also did not use crafting in a group as stress

relief. They found it more relaxing to craft alone and primarily used the group to socialize and develop that sense of community.

Is this crafting by young women a reclaiming of domesticity? If domesticity is understood through Matchar (2013), then no, it is not a “new domesticity.” Mather’s (2013) idea of new domesticity is a total lifestyle change. The young women of my study were not engaging in a lifestyle change. Rather, they were participating in one part of domesticity. Many participants said that crafting was an alternative to purchasing items and was sometimes a cheaper option but it seems as though it is an afterthought. I think it is more appropriate to place the activities of crafty young women in third-wave feminism. These young women are finding the femininity that fits them best. The women in the study were unapologetic about their desire to craft and their love of it. Many women proudly did their craft in public. These young women, without realizing it, are engaging in resistance against a social structure that does not appreciate women and the work that they do.

The internet plays an interesting role in the lives of women crafters. They use the internet to gain inspiration and assistance but rarely to show-off their final product. Older women are almost opposite. They use the internet to show-off products but not to get help. This shows how different generations of women do the same activity very differently. While young women need the sociality of crafting, they also value the alone time and use the internet to supplement that time. The internet is making things like crafting far more accessible. Women are able to self-teach and learn new crafting techniques without attending a class or learning from another woman. This may also account for the surge in young crafters that the Craft Yarn Council reported in 2008. Previous research states that women use the internet to showcase their product and to connect with other crafters (Minahan and Cox 2008). This research is consistent with

women over the age of 25. Women over the age of 24 may not have that “ready-made” community that a university offers and therefore look for online communities to find support and connect with other crafters.

Limitations and Biases

In further research, I would like to gain a larger sample size. Due to my small interview sample size and snowballing sampling method, I obtained a fairly homogenous sample. A larger sample of in-person interviews would provide further insight into the world of crafting. While the online component added support for the in-person interviews, it is hard to extract clear themes from the online data as it resulted in fairly short, surface level answers. As with most research, self-selection bias is present in the data. Participants chose to take the survey as well as do an interview with me.

My status as a crocheter made me an insider in the community of crafting and allowed a level of relatability between me and my participants. While this was helpful in creating rapport, my insider status could have also created biases in my findings. I went into this research with an idea about what I would find, as many researchers do. My data did support several of my initial thoughts about the crafting world of young women. My own involvement in the community most likely shaped the way I read and interpreted the data.

Possibilities for Future Research

Several of my participants discussed the tendency for people to call them “old ladies” and discuss their craft as an “old person” activity. In further research, I would like to ask more direct questions just about this component and how young women navigate the stigma that associated with crafting. After conducting interviews, I discovered that young women did not spend much time at formal crafting locations or groups. This finding resulted in the decision to not conduct

field observation at guilds or craft shops. Although, doing field work may provide further insight.

Of the twenty-two women who were under 24 years old, only one was married. Further research would look at the intersectionality of age and marital status as it relates to crafting. Research shows that women who are married and have children often have a hard time balancing their craft and other obligations (Stalp and Conti 2011). Their husbands also play a large role in this (Spain 1992). This research was done on older women and the inclusion on young married women could generate interesting results.

Conclusion

I have often been told to go where the data takes me. This research was no different. In starting this thesis, I had an idea of what the data would say. I came in with expectations. The women I studied, however, told me a different story. Conducting this research project was both frustrating and exciting. I was frustrated by the sheer amount of data collection and interpretations I needed to do and was nervous at the thought of interviewing women by own age about one of their passions. After getting over those nerves, I found that talking to young women about their craft was more than just discussing an act. Rather, they gave me a glimpse into their lives – their stressors, desires, goals, histories, and hopes.

I found that through discussing crafting, we were talking about life and experiences. Analyzing the responses of the in-person interviews, as well as the online survey responses, demonstrated to me that these women were doing more than just creating a product, they were engaging in a passion that meant something in their lives. They were relieving stress, finding a community, and building relationships. To reduce crafting down to one simple action is to reduce the lives of the women who participate in crafting to one simple character. Engaging in

qualitative methods allowed me access to information that I would not have obtained through quantitative methods. Qualitative methods allowed me to discover deeper meanings in the answers my participants gave. I was able to ask questions, get clarification, and build a relationship that created an open dialogue.

Through learning about other women's experiences with crafting, I discovered more about my own motivations for crocheting. I use my craft, similar to the young women I interviewed, to reduce stress. I enjoy having that time to focus on myself and what I am doing. I also find that productivity is large part of my crafting process. I enjoy being able to produce something from my spare time. My own motivations and the motivations of others shed light onto the reasons why crafting is an important pastime for women of all ages.

This research gave a glimpse into the world that is young women crafters. It provides a starting point for further research. Young women crafters continue to be relatively unstudied. There is little research done on feminine leisure activities in general. So, why is studying young women who craft important? The women I studied, and women who engage in traditional crafting practices, are reclaiming a part of femininity that is often undervalued and downplayed by a society dominated by masculine culture. Women, in being unapologetic about their craft, are engaging in resistance against a society that dictates how they should act and who they should be.

This research will add to the literature on feminine leisure and its importance to understanding modern gender roles. The importance of crafting should not be reduced to just a product. While creating a product is part of the process, it is not the same for a woman to go buy a sweater rather than making one. The results of this study demonstrate that an action is not without motivations. Nothing exists in a vacuum, just as crafting means something to the women

who participating in it, other actions mean things in society. Crafting, and those who participate in it, are doing it to relieve stress and to connect with each other in ways that are often overlooked. Studying feminine leisure adds to research on stress, relationship building, girl culture, gender roles, and a variety of other topics.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide for In-Person Interviews

- Tell me the story of how and why you started (craft type)
 - How did you learn?
- Do you have a favorite project? Tell me about it.
 - How did you go about making it?
 - How long did it take you? Is this typical?
 - Were other people involved?
 - What did you like least about your process? Most?
 - Was there a time when you hit creative roadblocks? How did you overcome those?
 - Did you keep a record of it?
 - Do you usually keep records? Why or why not?
 - How did you feel when it was done?
 - Did you show it to anyone? Tell me about their reaction
 - What did you do with it?
- How do you tell people about (craft type)?
 - Does it come up in conversation?
- Tell me about the last time you told someone new about (craft type)
 - How did they react?
 - Is this typical?
 - How did you feel about their reaction?
 - Has anyone ever encouraged/discouraged you from (craft type)? Tell me about that experience.
- Walk me through your work space
 - How is it set up?
 - Where do you keep your materials?
 - Are they visible or stashed? Why?
- Think back to the last time you shopped for (craft type) equipment. Tell me about that trip.
 - Where did you go?
 - What did you buy?
 - How much did you spend? Do you wish you could've spent more? Less?
 - Is this typical?
- Have you ever taken (craft type) on a trip? Tell me about that.
 - How did it play into the trip?
 - How did others react?
- Is there anything else you would like to tell me or anything I haven't asked about that is important to you and your craft?

Appendix B: Questions used in Mixed Methods Online Survey

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Marital Status
4. Race
5. College?
6. College Year
7. Do you currently participate in making crafts? If so, what do you make?
8. How long have you been making crafts?
9. Do you make stuff for fun, income, or both?
10. How did you get involved in making crafts?
11. How did you learn? (self-taught like YouTube or Ravelry.com, family, friends, classes)
12. How do you talk about making crafts (crafting) to non-crafting others?
13. What do you get from crafting (personal fulfillment, giving to others, social aspects, artistic process, income source)?
14. How do you craft--with others or by yourself, or virtually with others?
15. Have you ever worked on a project with others? What was that like?
16. What is your process like--how do you go about creating what you do?
17. What do you turn to for inspiration when you get stuck (if you ever get stuck)?
18. Sometimes people keep records of what they make or are going to make--do you do this? Why? For how long?
19. Where do you create? How do you organize your creative space (where you store materials)?
20. How much time do you get to/want to spend making crafts each week? Is this about average? Is this how much you would like to spend doing this, or how much time you can make for it?
21. Do you have people who encourage and/or discourage you in your crafting? Can you give me an example?
22. How much crafting equipment do you have (fabric, yarn, sewing machine, etc)?
23. Approximately how much do you spend each month on your crafting materials? Is this typical?
24. Where do you shop for your equipment and materials (online, in stores)?
25. Do you integrate crafting into your already scheduled trips (business travel, vacations, visiting family/friends)?
26. What do you do with something when you've finished with making it (keep, give as gift, sell)?
27. Is there anything I haven't asked you about crafting that you would like to share with me?

Appendix C: Informed Consent

**UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA
HUMAN PARTICIPANTS REVIEW
INFORMED CONSENT**

You're invited to participate in the study, *Crafting and Age in Contemporary Handwork Practices* through the University of Northern Iowa. The investigators doing the study are Dr. Marybeth C. Stalp, Emily Gardner & Ashley Beard.

The University requires that you give your signature as proof of agreement to participate in this project.

We are interested in studying the social world of handwork, or crafting, particularly for younger crafters in their 20s and 30s. We want to know how, when, and why people make crafts today—is this for fun, for relaxation, for money?

If you choose to be in the study, one of the investigators will meet with you to conduct an in-person interview. During this time, you will be asked a series of interview questions. Your interview will take approximately 45 minutes, and will be audio-taped. Interviews will be transcribed, and coded with a fake name to replace the participant's real name. Photographs may be taken of the crafting process and product, creative space, and/or equipment, with permission—all identifying information will be omitted from interview transcripts, and/or erased from any images. Faces will be distorted in images such that they cannot be identified by viewers. All data (interviews and photographs) will be destroyed 5 years after the study is completed.

To protect your privacy, any information obtained during this study which may identify you will be kept strictly confidential. The information may be published in an academic journal, or presented at scholarly conferences. Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from participation at any time or to choose not to participate at all, and by doing so, you will not be penalized. Risks are minimal and there are no direct benefits for participating in this study.

If you have questions about the study or desire information in the future regarding your participation or the study generally, you can contact Marybeth C. Stalp at 319-273-6235 at the Department of Sociology, Anthropology & Criminology at the University of Northern Iowa, or the office of the IRB Administrator, University of Northern Iowa, at 319-273-6148, for answers to questions about rights of research participants and the participant review process.

Agreement:

I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to participate in this project. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent statement. I am 18 years of age or older.

(Signature of participant)

(Date)

(Printed name of participant)

(Signature of investigator/advisor)

(Date)

Appendix D: Charts 1 Through 4 – Data from In-Person Interviews. Charts 5 and 6 – Data from Mixed Methods Online Survey

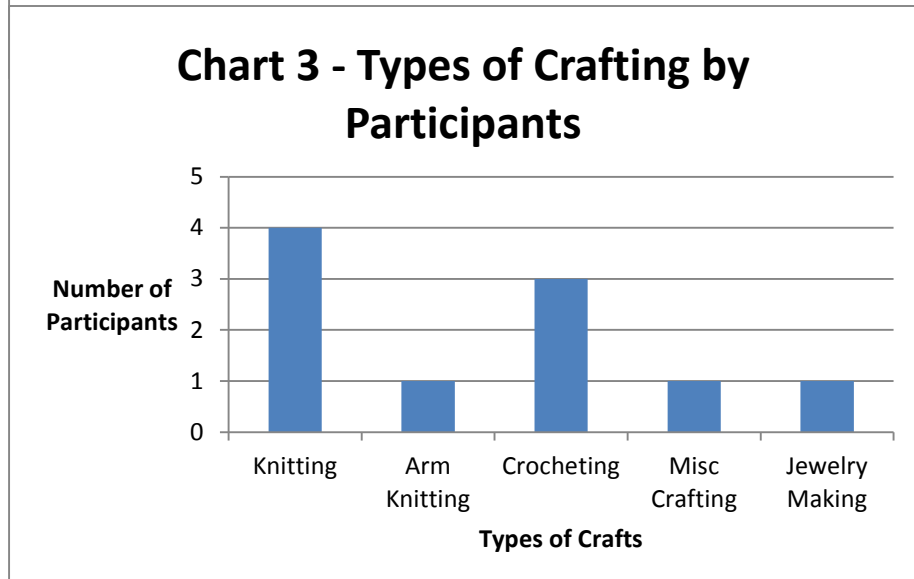
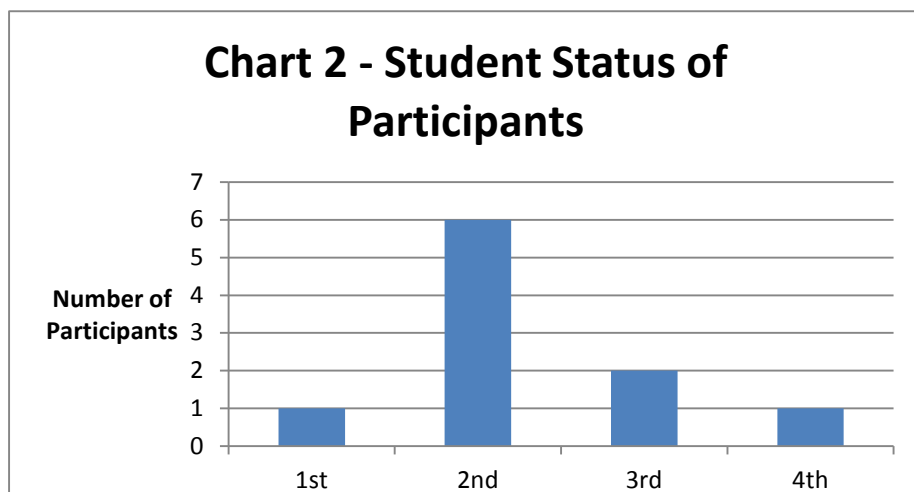
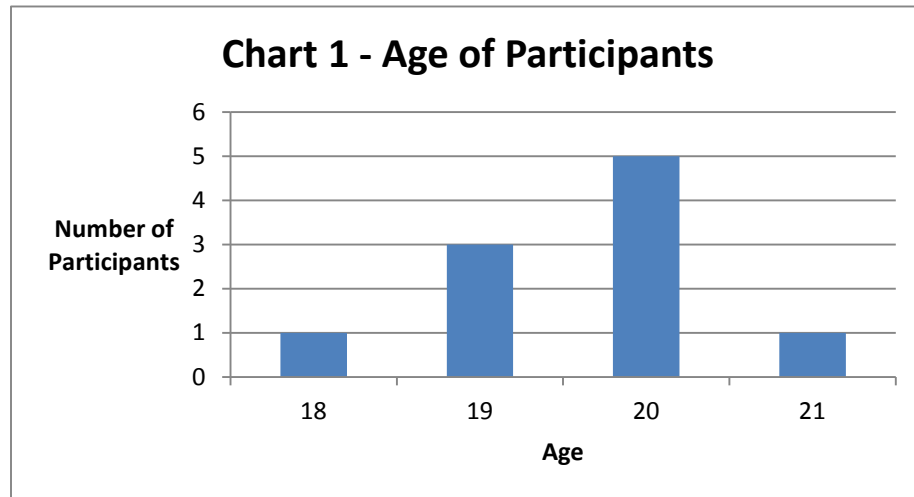


Chart 4 - Years of Experience of Participants

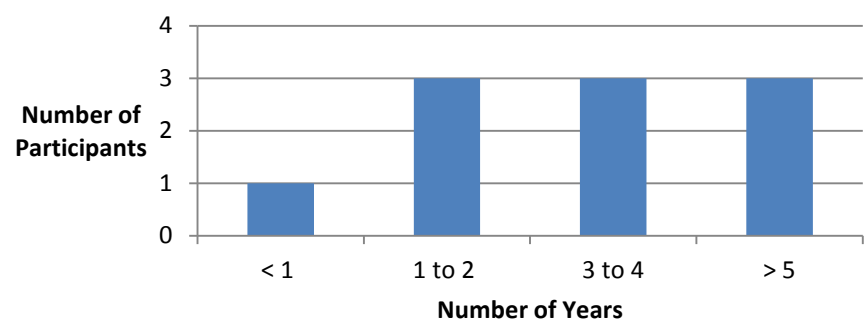


Chart 5 - Age of Respondents

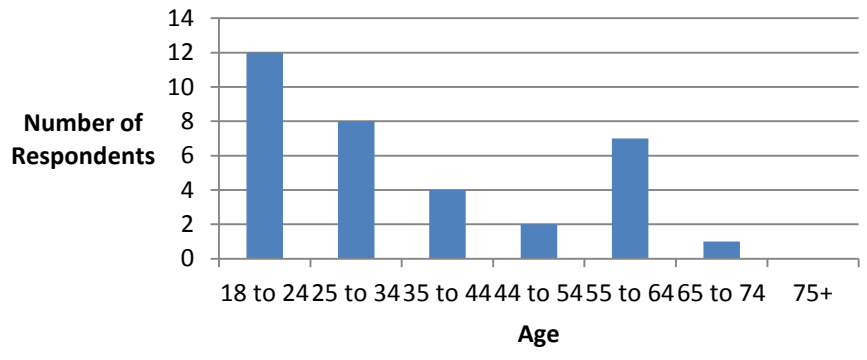
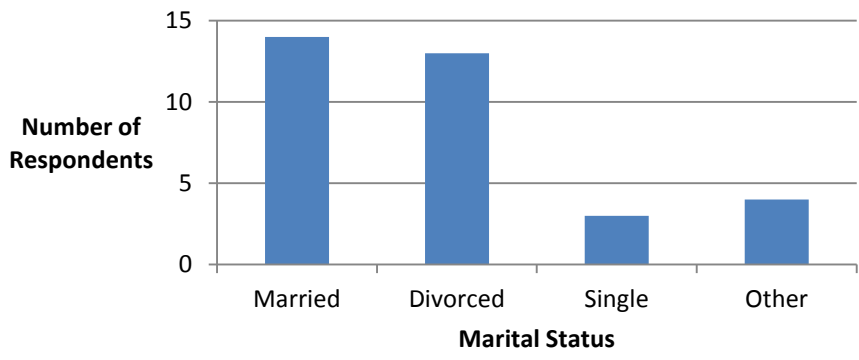


Chart 6 - Marital Status of Respondents



Appendix E: Data Collection Advertisements

