

Máire O Sullivan, Beyond the Cute

“Overthinking it”: A rejection of feminist meaning by an ostensibly third-wave feminist group.

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The call for papers by Stalp, Winge and Turney asks whether crafting can truly be considered an activist pursuit or if it has become a 'fluffy' distraction from efforts at progression and feminism. The craft consumer is one who takes an *“active and creative role”* (Watson and Shove 2005, 11) and exercise control over the consumption process and *“bring skill, knowledge, judgement, love and passion to their consuming”* (Campbell 2005, 27). As these consumers are *“manipulating commodities to produce symbolic meanings and constitute identities”* (Williams 2008, 315), it is perhaps unsurprising that for some craft consumers these meanings and identities would be political, feminist or subversive in nature. Several papers have considered and discussed crafting as subversive and how political subversiveness has come to *“play a role in defining contemporary handcraft culture”* (Winge and Stalp 2013, 73).

The results of a longitudinal, ethnographic study carried out in an Irish Stitch 'n' Bitch context would suggest that third wave feminist ideals hold little interest or relevance for some contemporary crafters. Far from being 'subversive' (Parker 2010; Winge and Stalp 2013), the members of this local Stitch 'n' Bitch resisted any efforts to label their craft consumption as political and even dismissively suggested that those with an interest in the area (Alkenbrack 2010; Bratisch and Bruschi 2011; Groeneveld 2010; Myzelev 2009; Pace 2007; Pentney 2008; Portwood-Stacer 2005; Pritash 2014; Robertson 2007; Wallace 2013; Winge and Stalp 2014, and indeed the author) *‘may be over thinking it’!*

Though Debbie Stoller (the founder of Stitch 'n' Bitch as a movement and editor of feminist magazine BUST) describes the movement in terms of reclaiming the feminine and promoting 'women's work', all but one member of the Irish group were entirely unaware of Stitch 'n' Bitch's ostensible feminist orientation, prior to the author's approach. While Kelly (2014) suggests that knitters could perhaps be participating in a larger feminist project without articulated intention, this strips knitters of their agency in a decidedly unfeminist way. Participants largely rejected any political meaning behind their crafting. For this group at least the personal was not political.

Rather, the primary reason for most members' decision to join the group was social isolation and the group functioned in much the same way as a therapeutic self-help group. The members engaged in therapeutic group consumption where the purchasing and use of certain brands and products allowed continued access to the therapy provided by the group.

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