WOOL AND NEEDLES IN MY CASKET: KNITTING AS HABIT AMONG RURAL NEWFOUNDLAND WOMEN

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Knitting as habit among rural Newfoundland women

By

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Abstract

This thesis examines the motives and meanings behind the actions of female knitters in rural Newfoundland. This is done from a Weberian standpoint.

This research will present the findings from a survey conducted in April 1999, and subsequent interviews done in June and July 1999. The population that is under investigation consists of Newfoundlanders who knit for Newfoundland Outport Nursing and Industrial Association (NONIA). This organisation is a "non-profit cottage industry." One will see the general characteristics of NONIA knitters, and what they perceive to be the motivations and meanings attached to the knitting they do.

It will be established that while the knitters in this research get paid for their knitting, monetary reward is not the main motivating factor. This research shows that the necessity of having a learned activity to pass time and to maintain a coherent self is the prime motivator, and meaning, behind knitting. For many rural Newfoundland women, knitting has developed into a habit that is intertwined into many aspects of their lives.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Newfoundland and knitting both bring about images that are romantic and nostalgic. With Newfoundland, there is often the portrayal of people living life the way it is assumed it has been lived throughout Canada's history. We assume that outport[1] Newfoundland life is simple and has not changed much over the last couple of centuries. There is the picture of the fisherman in his dory, or perhaps a schooner, bringing in his daily catch. The children are innocently playing along the rocks, as ocean waves hit the shore. The women are busy keeping the home; they are hanging out the laundry to dry, or preparing a big dinner for their families. With the hectic lifestyles that many Canadians have undertaken, particularly in urban areas, people tend to romanticise the Newfoundlanders' lives as idyllic[2]. What is overlooked is that Newfoundland is undergoing many changes. Since the cod moratorium of 1992, many Newfoundlanders have had to turn to new ways of generating income in the province through alternative activities such as tourism, information technologies, the offshore oil industry, and exploit previously underutilised species within the fishing industry.

Knitting too can evoke similar images of nostalgia. The click of knitting needles brings to mind the stereotypical image of an elderly woman sitting in a rocking chair knitting for her family.[3] This view of knitting for older women is not new; in the Roaring Twenties young women felt they were too "modern" to partake in the craft (Macdonald, 1988). Sharon Airhart, an editor of an online knitting magazine, states that "knitting . . . makes some women feel stereotyped, some men feel mothered, others just feel confused" (1999:1). People are confused over where the craft of knitting fits into the image and role of women today. This confusion is increased in a society where information technology is paramount, the idea that a person is creating something by hand is "quaint" and unusual (see Hickey, 1997).

The stereotypes about both Newfoundland and knitting reveal that they do not seem to belong in a modern information society. They are perceived to belong to a time when life, rightly or wrongly, is remembered as having been simple and pastoral.

It is with these stereotypes in mind that this research began. The research set out to show that in a changing society, such as Newfoundland, a traditional craft could, and does, play an important role in the lives of

many people. Knitting is an obvious choice to try to examine this. Despite its long history in Newfoundland, knitting is often overlooked in favour of such crafts as rug hooking. This is evident by the lack of literature about knitting. This is unfortunate as the quality of Newfoundlanders' knitting has earned a great reputation across Canada.[4]

Part of the success of Newfoundland knitting is due to the Newfoundland Outport Nursing and Industrial Association (NONIA). Since 1925 this organisation has employed outport women to knit. NONIA knitters provide an excellent population to study for this research. First, they are already organised, and therefore easy to access. Secondly, by investigating NONIA knitters, one gets the additional dimension of paid work. This leads to questions such as: how much satisfaction do the knitters get from their work? Does NONIA allow their knitters to be creative? How much autonomy do the knitters have over their work? How important is pay to their work satisfaction?

What has become evident through the research carried out for this thesis is that, while listening to the knitters describe the motivations behind their knitting and the meaning knitting has to them, concerns about "work," and even "craft," are not relevant to the knitters

themselves. They claim that they do not knit for the income, nor do they knit for the creativity a craft can bring. For the knitters themselves, the importance of knitting is its ability to pass time and give meaning to their lives. As they come to depend upon knitting to pass the time, one finds that knitting for the knitters has turned into a habit - a learned action that is repeated so often that the activity becomes ingrained into their self-identities and how they cope with daily life.

The setting

Newfoundland and Labrador is the newest province in the Canadian Confederation, having joined in 1949. It is made up of the island of Newfoundland, located in the North Atlantic, and Labrador, a northern territory of Canada's mainland. The indigenous population consisted of the Beothuks (now extinct) and the Migmah. European settlers have been mainly from western England and Ireland. This ancestry is still evident today in the family names prevalent in Newfoundland, and even the unique accents of the Newfoundlanders are reminiscent of the Irish and West Country English. In the early years of European expeditions to Newfoundland, it was considered illegal for

people to settle as the merchants in Britain wanted to protect what they asserted was their rights to the fish.

Newfoundland's mainstay industry has been the cod fishery. The Grand Banks of the North Atlantic have been world renowned for the quantity of fish they have sustained. Up until approximately the 1950's, cod was preserved by salting and drying. The fish was traded with Britain, the Caribbean, and Portugal, in exchange for various items such as cloth, pottery, molasses, and rum. Today, there is still evidence of the salt cod industry in the form of abandoned fish stages (platforms that fish were dried on), but most fish is now frozen and sold into markets in the United States.

For much of its history, Newfoundland functioned on a truck system; there was very little money in circulation. This involved fishermen and their families being indebted to the local merchants. The fishermen promised to sell their fish to the merchant in exchange for being given credit for their household and fishing supplies. More often than not, the fishermen ended up owing the merchant at the end of the fishing season. This debt was carried over to the next year. This cycle was very difficult to break.

Historically, Newfoundland families exhibited a strict sexual division of labour. Men were responsible for all activities that occurred at sea; this meant that they were the only fish harvesters.[5] Porter demonstrates that women "had the prime responsibility for feeding, cleaning, and caring for themselves, the men, and the children" (1993: 44). They raised the children, kept house, cooked, provided clothing, gardened, and most importantly salted the fish. The greater the skill of the woman to salt the fish, the more the fish was worth, and in turn the more credit was available at the merchant's store to purchase the necessary items for their family. In this social setting, women, Porter argues, were not powerless; they had almost absolute control over the domestic activities on the shore. This is contrary to the radical feminist tenet that women have historically been rendered powerless through a division of labour imposed by patriarchy's notions of reproduction responsibility (see Tong, 1998). Porter demonstrates that the separation of women's and men's spheres highlights "the interrelationship and interdependence of men's and women's economic efforts in both the household and the fishery" (1993: 51). Women had control over their sphere with their contributions being recognised as equally important to the families' survival as men's. Porter illustrates that a

strict division of labour does not necessarily equate to severe domination by men and the total oppression of women.

Cadigan (1995) substantiates this image of the women being in charge of all on shore. He shows how women very much believed that all associated with the home belonged to them; they often felt that if their male partners went into debt, the creditor could not collect by taking the family home as it belonged to the women. This resistance by women often led the governmental elite, who advocated patriarchy, to punish the husbands for their wives' actions.

Porter shows how even today a strong sense of equality persists in Newfoundland. For example, women in the Women's Institute promote the egalitarian ethic and community spirit, often associated with Newfoundland. They insure that all women are welcomed into the group, and that projects, such as bake-sales and fund-raisers, are done with the good of the community in mind. While this has often been viewed as strictly cultural activities, Porter argues this is political culture at work. The women's organisations "have turned their backs on politics as they understand it, and have built instead a 'political culture' which remains powerful in controlling the culturally meaningful parts of the environment of its members providing that the economic and wider political reality in

which it is embedded is unthreatened" (1993: 111). Women have been able to influence the economic and political activities of their communities, through their grass-roots organisations, without having to be confrontational with the state, or even capital. This egalitarian approach could explain why Mary Robinson (1998), former Irish Prime Minister and current United Nations Secretary of Human Rights, states that Newfoundland is a community with "strong and vigorous commitment to economic, social and cultural rights."

In the past decade, Newfoundlanders have experienced many changes to their lives. In 1992, a moratorium was placed on the cod fishery, due to low stocks. Many people dependent upon the fishery, harvesters or fish plant workers, were left without employment. The province has been investigating other industries to develop. These have included offshore oil, information technology, and other species to fish (e.g. crab and shrimp). At the end of the 1990's, the Canadian media reported that Newfoundland had the fastest growing economy in the country; however, many of those that live in the outports would disagree. When one listens to the popular call-in shows, one hears how those in the rural areas feel that St. John's (the capital

and largest city) is the only place benefiting from this growth.

Methodological approach

The process of knitting, and the actual knitted goods, can be understood to be a form of material culture. Schlereth explains that material culture is the "physical manifestations of culture and therefore embraces those segments of human learning and behaviour which provide a person with plans, methods, and reasons for producing and using things that can be seen and touched" (1981: 2). It is apparent throughout the history of knitting that it does express aspects of culture, demonstrated through the use of different patterns and materials in creative ways in meeting the basic human need for clothing. By examining the knitting of a culture, one can see how the people have adapted and accommodated to their environment. The fibres and dyes they use, for example, indicate the availability of different plants and animals, as well as the climate, of the region.

For the purpose of this research, however, the actual items knit in Newfoundland are not of paramount importance. The main focus here is the knitters themselves. It is with

this in mind that a social actionist approach will be employed.[6]

Schlereth describes this as the study into "human cognition and behavioural interaction as prompted by the manufacture or use of artifacts" (1981: 38). Furthermore, one is to investigate "how [the creator's] individual beliefs, values and aspirations shape his [or her] creations" (1981: 58). In order to conduct this investigation one needs to employ what Schlereth refers to as three different forms of knowledge: referential, mediated and experiential. Referential knowledge requires the researcher to see the items being created and or finished. Mediated knowledge involves hearing from the creator how they go about creating their goods. Experiential knowledge has the researcher actually being able to create the item himself or herself. These three forms of knowledge allow the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of what the producer experiences, and how his or her values shape the process of creation.

In pursuit of such an actionist approach to the research for this study, in addition to a survey, detailed semi-structured personal interviews were conducted with nineteen of NONIA's knitters in their homes during the summer of 1999.[7] The knitters are all female, and, with the

exception of one, live in rural Newfoundland. Most of the knitters are married, but only four have children under the age of eighteen living in the home. At the time of the interview none of the women were employed outside their homes, and sixteen of the nineteen knitters have not finished high school.[6]

By conducting interviews in the knitters' homes, I have had the opportunity to see the environment within which the knitters are creating, and the items that they make (referential knowledge). Semi-structured interviews allow for the knitters to be heard in their own words; they can express how they view the knitting they do (mediated knowledge). Furthermore, as a knitter myself, I am able to have a better understanding of how one knits, as well as an appreciation for what draws people to knitting (experiential knowledge). This allows for the knitters to use jargon that a non-knitter might not understand, and it provided a common ground between the knitters and me as a researcher.

This social actionist approach allows the research to focus not only on the actions of the knitters, but also their reasons for their actions. More than just the actual actions the knitters perform, one can gain an understanding of the motivations and meanings the actions have for

Newfoundland women. Campbell maintains that "motivation and meaning must be studied together - as they actually interact in real life" (1998: 88). By allowing the knitters to provide their own thoughts and interpretations on the knitting they do, one can come to understand why it is that these women knit for NONIA and why knitting is important to them.

Chapter Two: Craft, Industrial Homework, and Habit

Before any research begins, it is necessary to establish where it will fit within the literature. For this research on NONIA knitters, there are three areas specifically to be considered: craft, industrial homework, and habit. The literature on craft provides guidance as to how one might conceptualise craft. As well, this literature highlights how women and crafts have been connected over the years, and how women have turned to craft (more specifically knitting) to gain an income. From here, one needs to look at the concept of industrial homework. This is the form of work that pays piece-rates for work done in one's home. The industrial homework literature provides a macro-level perspective on the type of work practised by NONIA knitters. This macro-analysis, however, cannot grasp the micro-level concerns of action and agency that are of particular interest to this research. It is for this reason that one needs to examine the literature on motive, meaning, and habit as it pertains to a Weberian form of analysis.

Craft

One of the ways that knitting has been conceptualised is as a craft. Howard Becker in his book *Art Worlds* defines craft as "a body of knowledge and skill which can be used to produce useful objects . . . [with the] ability to perform in a useful way" (1982: 273). One judges a craft on the basis of its function, the virtuoso skill of the crafter, and the beauty of the pieces crafted. What makes crafts different from arts is that crafts have a practical function that is not a part of the understanding of art. Becker contends that both arts and crafts should be looked at as parts of social worlds, defined as "an established network of co-operative links among participants" (1982: 34-35). It is through the effort of many people, such as manufacturers, distributors and patrons, that arts and crafts continue to be made and appreciated over numerous years.

Staub shows that crafts and arts overlap when looking at folk art. Folk art is when one "grants common objects the status of 'art'" (n.d.: 28). Examples of such objects are quilts, embroidered samplers, and toys. Staub points out that crafts, which are the objects that can become folk art, are usually done within the crafter's community's

traditions of aesthetics and craft. They embody patterns of cultural experience:

> the transmission of knowledge and skill, the interactions of craftsworkers among themselves and with community members, the transformation of raw materials and the adaptive use of available resources, patterns of continuity and change in craft traditions, and the relationship between physical objects and community values, beliefs, experience and identity (n.d.: 30-31).

Crafts and folk art become physical symbols of the relationship a community has with its past. As Staub states, this is the community's historical memory.

Williams points out that quilters in Bloomington, Indiana have an ongoing debate as to whether quilting should be a reflection of traditional patterns, or whether it should be used to create works of art (such as in the form of wall hangings). This debate revolves around the utility, or the potential utility, of a quilt. Those who see quilting in a more traditional light see not only a need to use traditional patterns but also a need for more emotional attachments to be derived from quilting. Williams states, "The value inherent in utility is thus not merely practical or economical, but describes practicality and economy as they link lives and sentiments" (1991: 131).

Those on the art side of the quilting debate see that using quilting as an art form allows one to be creative, and helps quilting to evolve. One quilter in Williams' study comments:

> I like this idea that it [i.e., tradition in quilting and quilt patterns] is *emerging*, that quilts have always been an art form and now we're dissolving this idea of fine art and handicrafts and I *like* dissolving that distinction (1991: 136, emphasis in original).

This debate has become such an issue of contention within the quilting guild that smaller offshoots are divided along this line. Those on the traditional side attend the traditional forums and those on the art side attend the art forums; there is no cross over.

There is very little literature of this kind specifically on knitting. What does exist approaches the subject either from a technical approach or from a social history approach. Rutt explores knitting from its inception in the Arabic nations to its modern day practise in Great Britain (1987). Sheila McGregor also discusses knitting in Great Britain (1983). She shows how knitting has fitted into the lives of the British people, especially the poor and disadvantaged, over the centuries. Ann Macdonald provides a look at knitting's development in the

United States of America since the colonial times of the 1700's (1988). She demonstrates how women's knitting has been instrumental in many of the main historical events in American history, particularly during times of war. Shirley Scott describes the place of knitting within the Canadian context (1990). She shows how Canadians in different regions of the country have taken the craft of knitting and adapted it to their surroundings.

Hickey discusses the interaction between craft and a "consuming" society (i.e. contemporary Canada). She examines how consumerism is not "based solely on acquisition but on differentiation and identity" (1997: 84). It is because of this that crafts, especially as gifts, have become a business. People purchase crafts because they themselves believe that they are not capable of creating the craft, and are looking for something unique. The purchasers judge that they are patrons, and develop a sense of "romantic nationalism." This occurs when "to an urban market, the rural craftsperson can be cast as a noble savage living in one's backyard" (1997: 92). It is this romanticism that the marketers of crafts tend to promote. This idea of romantic nationalism as it pertains to crafts helps to explain why an organisation like NONIA has survived for over seventy years.

Women and Crafts

Over the centuries, particularly during the Victorian era of the 1800's, handcrafts have been seen as appropriate activities for women. Rozsika Parker documents how embroidery has been imposed upon women as worthy of their time. It has been a vehicle through which society has defined what is feminine. Parker states:

> Music and embroidery were singled out as the ideal occupations for the lady. Pattern books for the art began to appear [as early as the sixteenth century], invariably dedicated to a great lady to confirm the art's association with social standing and to attract those who aspired to aristocratic distinction" (1984: 63).

Embroidery has been one way to establish the social status of a woman, who in turn passes it on to her daughter: "embroidery originated within the increasingly emotive mother/daughter relationship that embroidery, and the femininity it was intended to inculcate, became such a 'habit', to use Wollstonecraft's word for the power of the ideology of femininity" (1984: 130).[9] Embroidery became an activity that society considered to be acceptable for females.

Like embroidery, knitting too came to be seen as an activity acceptable for women to partake in. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Annie S. Frost advocated knitting for all women:

> The cheapness of materials required, the simplicity of the work, the scope it affords for the exercise of taste and ingenuity, and the very small amount of attention and application it requires, have placed the art within the reach of the most humble, and the power of the most stupid. And it is a universal blessing when a species of employment of this kind is within the reach of all, for no one can calculate the amount of good which results when otherwise idle women find occupation for fingers and thought in employments that if not always profitable, are at least innocent and inexpensive (1877: 73).

There has been a common belief that women need to have activities that are socially sanctioned. They must never be idle, and knitting is one activity that is available to women of any means. Knitting prevents time from being wasted and is an activity that is deemed suitable for a woman to do.

Shelagh Hollingworth also describes the place of knitting in the lives of Victorian women. She shows that women of all social status levels knit, but the items they knit and the reasons they knit are different for each class

of women. Upper class women do work that is intended to beautify their surroundings. The focus of their knitting is fancywork such as doilies or counterpanes (bedspreads). This type of needlework has been deemed "appropriate for times of rest" (1987: 4).[10] The emergent middle-class are not to do the fancywork that the upper class do; rather, in order to fill their time, women from this class partake in sewing and knitting circles to make items for the disadvantaged. Working class women, by contrast, have to *work* at knitting, usually knitting stockings, in order to bring an income into the household. They do not have the opportunity to do fancywork because they have neither the time nor the money it would need. Hollingworth observes that "this was indeed a strange state of affairs; the working class were literally slaving away to provide reasonably priced, readymade items for the upper class, who in turn used their spare time to produce handmade items for the poor" (1987: 5). Knitting is not *just* a craft that women do in their spare time, but it carries with it a societal idea of what is an appropriate use of time for women and what type of knitting is appropriate for which social class.

Knitting for income

NONIA knitters can be compared to those in other organisations and situations in different societies. Smith describes the important impact knitting has had on the inhabitants of the Shetland Islands, located off the north coast of Scotland (1991). Knitting for the Co-op and merchants has not only kept people warm, but has made the Fair Isle sweater and Shetland lace world-renowned. It is because of the beauty and craftsmanship of their knitted garments that the Shetland Islanders have been able to make money from their knitting.[11]

Keele documents a Swedish group called Bohus Stickning, established in 1939, located in a province of Sweden. This organisation closely mirrors NONIA. The Swedish province's governor's wife established it to provide work for rural women during the Depression. Keele states that the purposes of Bohus Stickning were: (1) to stimulate the interest in knitting; (2) to keep those who knit within the province employed; (3) to help market the product (1995: 11). Unlike the knitting done by NONIA, the sweaters created by Bohus Stickning became very fashionable, high priced and were considered to be a status symbol. However, due to changes in fashion, the organisation had to close its doors in 1969.

In Leonard's article about handwork in Belfast, the manner in which families fulfil their need for clothing is examined. Thirty-three per cent of the households in her study had females who knit. Of these, thirty per cent earned money by knitting or sewing outside of the home. The most common reason for doing handwork for money is due to the financial pressures on the family. Knitting is seen as "part of their [women's] 'natural' talents as good housekeepers and mothers" (1994: 193). The Irish women are therefore able to turn "conventional female skill into an income generating skill" (1994: 193).

Work and Industrial Homework

Work has been defined as:

> a system of social norms relating to the time, place, type of activity and remuneration for the performance of countless duties: norms relating to what shall be produced and norms relating to who shall be in positions of superordination and subordination (Redekop and Bender, 1988: 51).

It is seen as activities that one *must* do as opposed to wishing to do.

One form of work is industrial homework. Industrial homework is simply "the supply of work to be performed in domestic premises, usually for piecework payment" (Allen &

Wolkowizt, 1987: 1). The literature in this field establishes that industrial homeworkers are overwhelmingly female, especially those with dependants (either children, elderly or sick). The workers do not sell the product, nor select the design and materials used for the items made; this is the responsibility of the supplier.

One sees from the structure of NONIA that it is definitely in place to facilitate a notion of homework for the knitters. There is remuneration given to the knitters for each piece of knitting they do. There are guidelines and standards about what products are to be knit, and what constitutes acceptable knitting.

Both Marxism and feminism are prominent theoretical perspectives that are generally critical of homework. For Marxists, homeworkers are no better off than factory workers in a capitalist society. They succumb to the same forces of exploitation and alienation that all workers encounter. Homeworkers have been proletarianised. They do not own the means of production for their own work. This is unlike an artisan who owns the tools and supplies needed to do his or her work. Homeworkers have "become encased in the same relations of production, *vis-à-vis* capitalists, as factory workers" (Dangle, 1994: 84). Leach argues that "[t]he dilemma of capitalist control is thus to secure

surplus value while at the same time keeping it hidden. Homework provides an effective means of solving this dilemma, indeed it 'obscures and secures' even better than the factory work" (1998: 105). By keeping workers within the domestic sphere, the surplus that is exploited is not even noticed by others, because homework usually gets absorbed in the dealings and expenses of the household. Homeworkers are exploited not only, like other workers, through their surplus labour, but also through the appropriation of the use of their domestic premises.

Homeworkers are also seen as a stagnant category in Marx's reserve army of labour. They "furnish to capital an inexhaustible reservoir of disposable labour power. Its [the group of homeworkers'] conditions of life sink below the average normal level of the working-class; this makes it at once the broad basis of special branches of capitalist exploitation" (Marx quoted in Dangle, 1994: 82-83). Marx goes on to say that the workers in this category have to work exceptionally long hours, and receive little compensation for their work. It would seem through Marx's analysis that homeworkers are in an even worse predicament than the ordinary labourer. Capitalists keep them hanging by giving homeworkers some work, but do not treat them the same as factory workers. Homeworkers serve capital by

providing very cheap labour and having people ready to pick up any slack (e.g. increase in production demands or strikes), that might require more workers.

Like Marxism, feminism focuses on the exploitation that women homeworkers face. The feminists' view places the blame for this subordination not only on the owners of capital but also on the patriarchal system ingrained in Western societies. For Boris this theoretical approach:

> recognises the complexity of the fact that while some individual women consider homework their best option, homework may not be beneficial for women as a group. Such an analysis recognises that unwaged labour in the home (women's responsibility for nurturing and housekeeping) . . . reinforced the subordinate position of women as a group" (1989: 236).

For feminists, then, the debate over homework revolves around the issue of gender. It is their contention that women have long been equated with mothering and nurturing within the domestic sphere. This is the justification often reiterated as to why women choose homework rather than work in the "public" arena. Those in the feminist tradition believe that separation of home life and public life is what causes the perpetuation of women's inferiority. Homeworkers are viewed as being unaware of the

exploitation that is occurring within their homes. By choosing homework women unknowingly

> encourage the view that *all* women are only secondary earners who need not have jobs that pay better and undercuts women's struggle in the workplace for flexible hours, better pay and benefits, and more control over the work process . . . [The] combining of home and work may conflict with other rights women should have in the home: the right to rest and leisure, the right to nurture and mother with dignity, the right to keep homes free from exploitive labour, whether waged or unwaged (Boris, 1989: 249, emphasis in original).

Feminists argue further that homework's exploitive nature can be observed in the substandard working conditions that it entails. Homework provides women with low wages and very extended working days. The latter is particularly detrimental to the health of women. Unlike men who work in the public sphere, homework does not allow a woman to have a refuge to go to at the end of the day; her work is always around her. The times when women are able to perform their homework tasks often occur during the evenings and weekends, after having done unpaid domestic duties throughout the rest of the day.

Feminism and Marxism put the macro concern of gender and capitalism in the centre of all analysis pertaining to

homework. By doing so they tend to overlook the "micro-level negotiations" which Leach, for example, advocates as being important (1998). And there is little if any attention paid by these macro-level perspectives to questions of motive and meaning that homeworkers have toward their work. In the kind of empirical investigation carried out in this study, these are seen to be fundamental, and for this group of women at least implicitly call into question some of the assumptions of the Marxist and feminist macro-level perspectives.

Motive, meaning and habit

Colin Campbell advocates a return in sociology to the concepts of motive, meaning and habit as outlined by Max Weber, particularly in his work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. He feels that sociologists such as Talcott Parsons and C. Wright Mills have unwittingly led us to undervalue these aspects of Weber's work.

Campbell believes that over time the understanding of motive has gone through a transformation. He states that this transformation "passes through goals and intentions to reasons, to words and then accounts, and finally to justifications and excuses: a quite remarkable evolution of usage [of motive]" (1996a: 102). Over the years

sociologists, following Mills' lead, have come to use motive as only being applicable in a negative connotation. For example, when discussing a crime the focus is solely on motive as to how it justifies, and in some instances excuses, the criminal's actions. If one steals a loaf of bread because one's family is hungry, this becomes the motive for the action. As Campbell puts it, "motives only become an issue when an actor's conduct is 'frustrated' in some way" (1996a: 102); in this case, a criminal being caught by law authorities.

Campbell advocates a return to Weber's concept of motive:

> Weber defined motive as 'a complex of subjective meaning which seems to the actor himself or to the observer an adequate ground for the conduct in question.' To which must be added his observation that 'we understand in terms of *motive* the meaning an actor attaches (to his action) . . . in that we understand what makes him do this at precisely this moment and in these circumstances.' Hence this process of understanding essentially consists of placing the act in question in 'an intelligible and more inclusive context of meaning,' that is to say within 'an understandable sequence of motivation;' a process which can be treated as equivalent to 'an explanation of the actual course of behaviour' (1996a: 105).

From this definition, there is no restriction placed as to when and where this concept may be used. Campbell shows that Weber does not mean for motive to be restricted to justification of actions. Rather, motive and meaning are connected together; they are not two concepts that can be separated but must be studied simultaneously in order to get a full appreciation for the actions of people.

Campbell argues further that:

> All individuals are in a position to 'observe' their own motives as they experience them and it is, of course, this direct first-hand experience of the nature and role which motivates play in conduct which underlines any subsequent motive attributions that individuals may make with respect to others. The basic truth is that our understanding of the actions of others is grounded in our own experiences of agency (110-111). [12]

Campbell urges researchers to remember that every person is capable of making choices and decisions on their own. It is through our own experiences of choice-making and interpreting our own motives for different activities that we are able to understand why people do certain things.

From motive, one needs to move on to the concept of action. Campbell states that action too is a concept that sociologists have not put to use in the manner that Weber

defines. He says, "the majority of sociologists who have followed Weber in focusing on the study of action have largely ignored what one would have supposed would have been their central object of study, that is, the system of action centred around the person" (1996b, 154). Campbell believes that sociologists have limited themselves by focussing mainly on the concepts of role and status in a system of social interaction. This incorrectly eliminates the notion of will and choice from human agency. Instead, Campbell insists that "action is conduct which has occurred because it was willed as well as freely chosen, and the former is at least as crucial to the accomplishment of an act as the latter" (1996b: 156). This definition provides a distinction between what people *have* to do due to biology and to the social structures surrounding them, and the actions they *choose* to do. Campbell wants to see sociology study action:

> in a way that truly reflects that subjective reality that informs the conduct of real people and the dynamic, creative, purposeful world they actually inhabit … [while recognising] that covert intra-subjective dimension that is an inseparable aspect of most so-called overt actions" (1998: 87).

This leads to the consideration of another concept that has received little attention in sociology - habit .

Camic suggests that this is the case because during the early days of establishing sociology as its own discipline separate from psychology, it was felt by Durkheim and others that it was easier to leave habit to the study of the psychologists, instead of having disputes over the concept.[13] This is in spite of the fact that many sociologists, including Weber (and Durkheim himself), use the concept. The decision not to advocate the study of habit is seen as politically motivated in the fight to establish sociology. Currently, therefore, there is little literature that discusses habit and employs it within sociology.

Nevertheless, habit *is* a type of action; it is "a more or less self-actuating disposition or tendency to engage in a previously adopted or acquired form of action" (Camic, 1986: 1044). It is an act that one has learned at some point in one's life and has repeated the action numerous times to the point where it has become reflexive. Campbell states that habits are actions that can be very beneficial to a person; however they are very resilient to change:

> Obviously the development by the individual to certain habits (and especially skills[14]) is functional, aiding the individual to accomplish complex tasks by enabling them to be performed automatically and thus releasing processing capacity for other tasks. In this sense,

> acquiring skills and developing habits is part of any programme aimed at producing a rational, reflexive actor. However, such skills and habits, once developed, constitute crystallised patterns of behaviour, which are extremely resistant to change (1996b: 159).

Campbell further contends that because habits become automatic and resistant to change (although theoretically capable of change), they make habitual actions seem as though they are outside of "willed control." This draws attention to another shortcoming in sociology: sociologists study how social structures and other people can limit one's actions, but they do not pay any attention to the limits the individual places on himself or herself. The discipline has not paid enough attention to the intra-meanings behind actions, focusing only on the inter-meanings of actions.

Conclusion

This literature review has shown that craft is the creation of a useful object within a tradition. Women have tended to do handcrafts, in particular needlework, as these crafts promote the idea that women should remain in the home. It has also been shown that women have turned to crafts in order to gain an income.

We have seen that industrial homework establishes a macro-framework to understand work that is done out of the home. It shows how Marxists and feminists critique this form of work as making women subordinate to the demands of capitalistic and patriarchal systems. What this literature fails to do is to provide a micro understanding for the actions of homeworkers.

Such a theoretical framework is provided by Campbell, following Weber. Campbell establishes the importance of investigating people's actions within a Weberian perspective. In order to accomplish this, one needs to probe into the motives and meanings attached to the actions. By doing this one can determine the form of the action (e.g. if it is habitual or not). It is this framework that best informs the research and analysis for this thesis.

Chapter Three: NONIA knitters in historical and contemporary context

To understand why people knit, and what knitting means to the knitter, it is important to contextualise knitting historically. One needs to see how knitting developed in different cultures over time in order to place the knitting done in Newfoundland in context. This approach will enable one to see what characteristics are shared by many cultures and highlight what is different about knitting in Newfoundland. This chapter also explains how NONIA as an organisation has evolved, and the "ideal type" of the NONIA knitter. This provides a backdrop for analysing in detail the motives and meanings that NONIA knitters themselves attach to their knitting.

Cross-cultural history of knitting

Knitting began in the Arabian nations between 1000 and 1200 AD. Arabs used knitting to create tent flaps and socks. The earliest examples of this craft, in the form of white cotton socks, were discovered in Egypt. The socks included a separation between toes to accommodate thong sandals, which were worn in the desert region.

From here, knitting was brought to Spain via the merchant traders of the Mediterranean. The Roman Catholic Church then diffused the knowledge throughout Europe by the fourteenth century. The knitting that was practised at that time was done for the aristocracy and the church. Silk liturgical gloves were the pride of many priests and royalty enjoyed the luxury of silk stockings. Knitted articles, since they were so new and rare, became a symbol of prestige. With the level of prestige that was attached to knitting, guilds were formed in the sixteenth century. The purpose of the guilds was to train "master knitters" in the craft. Like modern-day trade unions, the guilds were established to "protect their wage-earning power, to resist increased production, to limit the number of journeymen and apprentices, and to protect them from competition from unskilled workers" (Bush, 1994:33). The training for master knitters took six years. The first three were spent apprenticing to learn the craft; the next three were devoted to travelling to see other master knitters. Once the six years were completed, the prospective master had thirteen weeks to knit the following: a carpet (most likely a wall-hanging or tablecloth), a beret, a woollen shirt, and a pair of hose (Thomas, 1938). The guild's high standards aided in the perfection of handknitting.

It did not take long before women had dominated the craft. By the seventeenth century, women had become the main knitters in families. This is not surprising. As Wayland Barber illustrates, women often took over the textile responsibilities of a community (1994). This was due to women needing to perform tasks that were compatible to child rearing. Knitting is fairly simple and repetitive, and could therefore easily be put down and picked up again if a woman was interrupted by a child. As well, knitting does not require the use of dangerous machinery or the need to be in an unsafe environment; since children would be "under foot" much of a mother's day, one would want to ensure their safety.

The seventeenth century saw knitting as a common cottage industry, especially in Britain and Sweden. Women were the principal participants, with socks being the primary garments knit for sale. McGregor states that in Britain there were even national guidelines brought about to ensure quality and uniformity of socks: "wool must be 2-ply, men's hose must be at least 34 inches long and the feet fully 'Twelves Inches in Length from Heel to the Toe and from Four and a Half to Five Inches in Breadth'" (1983: 27). Mittens and sweaters were also knit for sale, particularly to fishermen.

Knitting became a very important source of income for many families. In 1634, Edward Lande stated that "they [the poor of Britain] could not maintain their families were it not by this industry in knitting coarse stockings" (quoted in Rutt, 1987). Time was of the essence, and women would knit whenever and wherever they could. They would knit not only at home, but also in public while waiting for the boats to come in. As well, it would not have been unusual to see a woman with a baby on her back, walking to town while knitting. It was said that a sock should be completed in a 15-kilometre walk (Dandanell and Danielsson, 1984).

Knitting was used by women as a means of passing a form of culture on from one generation to the next. The women along the coast of Britain would teach their daughters the arrangement of stitches to create patterns that were unique to their region. Not only was this important for aesthetic and cultural reasons, but also for practical ones - drowned fishermen could be identified by the patterns on their sweaters. It was important for a household to have as many people knitting as possible, as one was paid by piecework; the more garments a family could knit the more money that would come into the household.

One commonality among knitters over the years and in different cultures has been the knitting bee, a gathering of knitters. It could be done for an expressed purpose in mind, such as knitting for soldiers or church bazaars[15]. However, more often than not, it was for the social company. Knitting provided a justification to gather; as long as your hands were busy you were not wasting time. It has been noted that:

> [g]atherings of knitters in the evenings . . . may have appeared convivial and even riotous but the primary object was to save heat and light . . . and with the gift country folk have for making an enjoyable occasion out of a necessary chore, these knitting parties were doubtless an important part of the social life of a district" (McGregor, 1983: 30)

Knitting bees were not necessarily exclusive to women. In America, during the Civil War, men were invited to knitting bees to read to the knitters (Macdonald, 1988). In nineteenth century Denmark, a *bindestue* (knitting bee) had men and women knitting together while singing, telling stories and gossiping (Bush, 1994). Knitting bees would allow one a chance to see neighbours, as it was often impossible to leave the home during the day. The events also provided a means for young people to start "courting" while being properly chaperoned.

Knitting was important to courting and marriage up until the twentieth century. In the Baltic nations of Estonia and Finland, a bride's dowry was tied very closely to the quality and quantity of her knitting. The young women would need to have enough knitting accomplished to present gifts to wedding guests, in the case of Estonia, or in Finland, there would have to be enough stockings knitted to last twenty years (Bush, 1994). In nineteenth century Britain, men would carve elaborate "knitting sticks" (needle holders) as betrothal gifts for their intended brides (McGregor, 1983). This gift demonstrates the importance placed on knitting for the British families. A woman's ability to knit would not only insure that her family was kept warm, but it also provided a dependable income for the household.

In Canada, people carried on the traditions of their European ancestors. This does not mean that knitting remained static. Canadians adapted the medium with creative solutions to problems posed by various environments. In Western Canada, for example, the knitwear of the Cowichan Valley in British Columbia is an excellent example of the amalgamation of two cultures in a craft. The Salish tribe already practised a variety of textile crafts when the nineteenth century European missionaries

taught them to knit. The sweaters that developed are bulky knits that incorporate traditional native motifs, such as birds and leaves, with the knitting techniques of the missionaries. Knitting became important to tribal identity and a means for the native women to earn money for their families (Britton Barnes, 1998).

Newfoundland Knitting

In Newfoundland, knitting was traditionally seen as one of the domestic chores that had to be done[16]. Up until the 1960's, many rural Newfoundland households used to keep sheep; these animals provided fleece and food. Each spring the sheep would be sheered and the fleece prepared for spinning; most households owned their own spinning wheels. The fleece would be spun into plies of wool as needed - this has often been called "homespun." Grey was the most frequently used colour; mixing the relatively rare black fleece with the white fleece created this. Once the plies were spun, a white ply would be matched with a grey ply to create what has commonly been called "ragg" yarn.

The knitting that was done in Newfoundland was mainly of mitts, socks and caps. Mittens, which would commonly have been called cuffs, were knit with the index finger and thumb separated from the rest of the fingers. This was

done because it allowed "the most freedom to work combined with maximum warmth" (Pocius, 1979: 23). The mitts were frequently knit with a design using a dark and light shade (grey and white) in a manner called "double knitting" or "double-ball knitting." The palm of the mitten would consist of alternating colours in a "salt and pepper" pattern. The back of the mitt would commonly consist of a black pattern - diamonds or double Irish chain. Another unique mitten to Newfoundland was the thrum mitt. This is a mitten that has raw fleece worked into the knitting. By doing this, the knitter is creating a mitten that has extra warmth. Mitts were also knit to do specific fishing tasks: header's mitts and splitter's mitts for splitting the fish, and nippers for hauling in the trawl lines. Newfoundland is known around Canada for the uniqueness and beauty of the mittens knit here.

Socks, by contrast, would be done in plain grey with ribbing running along the leg. The heel would be reinforced either through double knitting or the use of nylon thread. The Newfoundland grey sock became famous during World War I. Soldiers from different countries would often approach the Newfoundland soldiers to ask for socks. The Women's Patriotic Association worked endlessly to supply soldiers with knitted socks. "[T]he grey

military sock assumed the status of icon during the Great War . . . [they] became a proud symbol of distaff work in the public service" (Duley, 1994: 31). Newfoundlanders would also knit "vamps." Vamps were socks that reach only up to the ankle and were worn over a regular sock. Their purpose was to slow the wear on the sock in rubber boots.

Socks and mitts were the main garments knit in Newfoundland. Unlike other regions in North America, the homespun was not used to weave cloth. In Newfoundland, it was more economical to purchase cloth from the local merchant. This was especially so when one considers the time that it takes to weave. The time would be better spent on salting fish, which had a greater economic return for the family. Knitting was done mainly for items that wore out quickly, and were expensive to purchase. This could help to explain why, unlike other fishing communities, there was little sweater knitting. If a sweater was knit it was made plain with grey homespun.

NONIA

In 1925, the Governor's wife, Lady Allardyce, decided that Newfoundland women's knitting skills should be used to improve the economic status and health of outport families (House, 1990). In order to improve the latter, nurses

needed to be hired. This meant that money needed to be raised for their salaries; it was for this original purpose that the knitting skills of Newfoundland women were put to use. With the elite of St. John's, Lady Allardyce founded Newfoundland Outport Nursing and Industrial Association (NONIA). She wanted to emulate the success of the knitting co-operative in the Shetland Islands. She imported patterns from the Shetlands, perhaps partly due to the fact that Newfoundland ones were very plain at the time. She retells how this came about:

> I had made enquiries as to the methods followed in organizing the knitting in the Fayre Isles and Shetland, believing that there must be equal possibilities in Britain's oldest colony . . . the Committee sanctioned the purchase of Shetland garments as samples and patterns. Keen interest was aroused, and the urgent need for some such work in Fortune Bay gave us courage to send out our first wool (quoted in Scott, 1990: 17).

Yarn was sent to women knitters. They sent back finished garments which were then sold at a retail outlet in St. John's. The money, with overhead subtracted, would be distributed to the nurses and the knitters.[17]

The quality of the work done by the knitters became a source of pride for Newfoundland. NONIA's quality was recognised by British royalty. One of the first sponsors

for NONIA was Queen Mary. It is reported that she paid £10 of her own money to show her support of the organisation (Scott, 1990). Since then, many children in the royal family have donned NONIA products. Today's Queen Elizabeth II and her sister wore fabrics woven by NONIA, and Prince Charles wore a layette knit by NONIA knitters as a baby. For further recognition of the importance of NONIA, the organisation was presented with a jewelled casket for the work that they do. They were also presented with a royal warrant to be placed on their products during the time when the current Queen Mother, Elizabeth, reigned (Scott, 1990).

The importance of NONIA was further recognised in Britain by other people of importance. London had a chapter of NONIA whose purpose was to select nurses to work in Newfoundland, as well as fundraising. The treasurer of this branch was the world-renowned nurse Florence Nightingale (House, 1990). This added to the prestige of NONIA.

The Canadian government also recognised the importance of NONIA in the life of Newfoundland. Scott tells how one naval ship was christened the HMS NONIA. NONIA's name was now going to sail to a variety of ports. This would make more people aware of the existence of not only NONIA, but

also Newfoundland. With all this recognition, Newfoundlanders were proud of NONIA.

With the exception of its no longer paying nurses, NONIA today operates much in the same manner as it did at its inception. Yarn is sent out to the knitters to be knit into garments, and then returned to the retail outlet. One difference is that NONIA now takes their wares out of province to sell at different craft shows across Canada. NONIA is out promoting Newfoundland with the high quality of its knitting.

The quality of the knitting depends on the skills of the knitters working with NONIA. Historically, NONIA knitters have been women who stay at home. What are the current NONIA knitters like? What are their general characteristics? For the purpose of generating a profile of contemporary NONIA knitters, a mailed survey was conducted as part of the research for this thesis.[18] This profile sets the context for the more detailed analysis of motives and meanings of the next two chapters

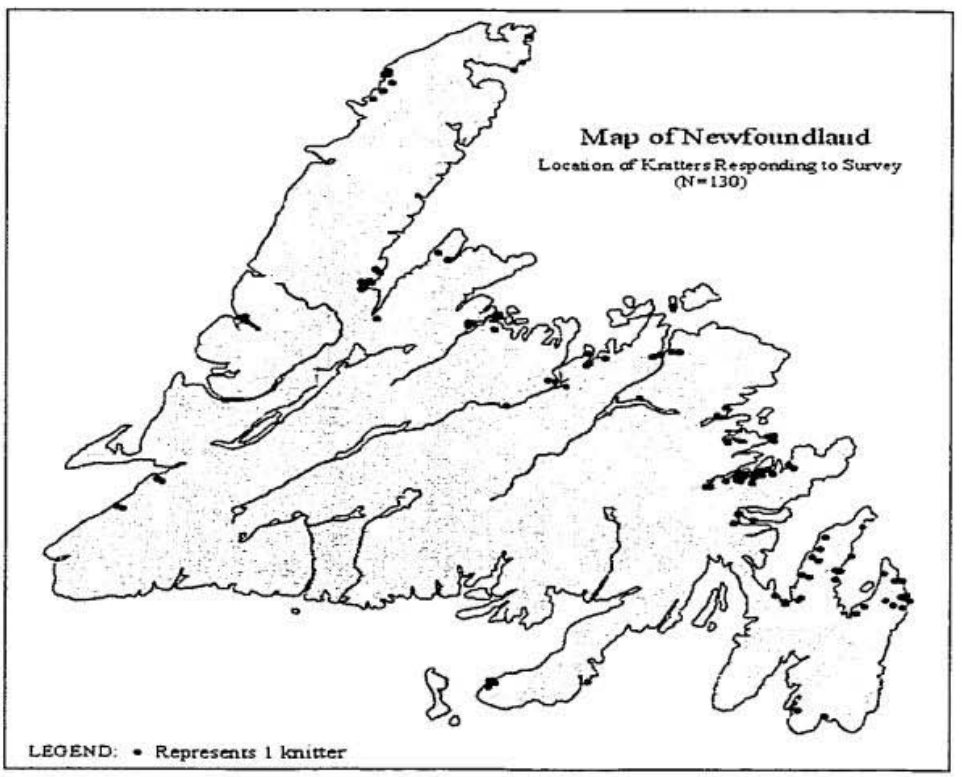
Profile of NONIA knitters

The information gathered from the survey, conducted in April 1999, provides an overview of the general characteristics of this group of knitters -- by location,

gender, marital status, age, employment and when they became involved with NONIA. The survey also provides information about when the knitters learned to knit and by whom they where taught.[19]

Location

NONIA knitters are located all along the coast of Newfoundland, but as the map below shows, there is a concentration of knitters responding to the survey located around the Musgravetown area, along the north-east coast of the island.[20]



Map 1: Location of NONIA knitters responding to survey

The knitters are scattered throughout rural Newfoundland. There are very few knitters located in the more urban areas of the province.

It is interesting to note that although the first place NONIA sent knitting to was along Fortune Bay, only three knitters responded from there (see House, 1990). Furthermore, there are few respondents from along the west coast of Newfoundland. One explanation could be that historically this was never an area in which NONIA operated. This may be because this was the territory of the Grenfell Missions, which operated hospitals and craft organisations along the west coast and Northern Peninsula of the island, and in Labrador (see Rompkey, 1992).

Gender

NONIA knitters are virtually homogeneous with respect to gender. As Table 1 demonstrates, all but one of the survey respondents are female.

Table 1: Gender of NONIA knitters responding to survey

Gender	Number of NONIA knitters	Percentage of NONIA knitters
Female	129	99.2
Male	1	0.8
TOTAL	130	100.0

This is not unusual as the literature concerning knitting, and even other handcrafts, points out that women are the most likely to do this form of craft. Historically, NONIA has been geared toward employing women.

Marital Status

Of the NONIA knitters who responded to the survey, 60 per cent of the women are married (Table 2).

Table 2: Marital status of NONIA knitters responding to survey

Marital status	Number of NONIA knitters	Percentage of NONIA knitters
Married	78	60.0
Widow	31	23.8
Single	6	4.6
Separated	3	2.3
Divorce	1	0.8
Missing	11	8.5
TOTAL	130	100.0

Close to one quarter (23.8 per cent) of the knitters are widowed. One explanation for this can be found by looking at the age of the knitters.

Age

Almost half the NONIA knitters are over the age of sixty. Table 3 shows that 49.3 per cent of the knitters were born before 1940.

Table 3: The year NONIA knitters responding to survey were born

Year Born	Number of NONIA knitters	Percentage of NONIA knitters
Before 1930	24	18.5
1930 - 1939	40	30.8
1940 - 1949	35	26.9
1950 - 1959	10	7.7
1960 - 1969	14	10.8
1970 - 1979	2	1.5
Missing	5	3.8
TOTAL	130	100.0

Age could be a factor in the motivation behind why one decides to knit for NONIA. Many of the women in this group are beyond the age when one is actively employed in the labour force outside the home, so working in the home might be one of the few options open to them. Furthermore, at this point in the life cycle concerns with one's health often become paramount. Working at home could help obviate limits placed on one because of age and poor health.

Employment

Very few NONIA knitters have employment outside their homes. Table 4 shows that 84.6 per cent of the knitters do not have work outside their home.

Table 4: NONIA knitters responding to survey employed outside the home

Employed outside the home	Number of NONIA knitters	Percentage of NONIA knitters
Yes	20	15.4
No	110	84.6
TOTAL	130	100.0

This could be explained by a variety of factors. As we have seen above, many of the knitters are beyond the age when one is active in the formal work force. This could also be influenced by the fact that the knitters are located primarily in rural Newfoundland where unemployment is very high. Further, as the feminist researchers on industrial homework point out, there is a stereotype that women are meant to remain in the domestic sphere (see Boris, 1989). Porter also shows that this is a "traditional" idea in Newfoundland, where women have been very much the "skippers of the shore crew" (1993). These factors could have led the knitters to knit for NONIA.

Year started with NONIA

Despite their age, table 5 shows that close to half (43.1 per cent) of the knitters have been working for NONIA for less than ten years.

Table 5: Year the knitters responding to survey started to knit for NONIA

Year started with NONIA	Number of NONIA knitters	Percentage of NONIA knitters
Before 1950	8	6.2
1950 - 1959	9	6.9
1960 - 1969	13	10.0
1970 - 1979	13	10.0
1980 - 1989	15	11.5
1990 - 1990	56	43.1
Unknown	6	4.6
Missing	10	7.7
TOTAL	130	100.0

Due to the older age of the knitters, this result may seem surprising. Because of the age of the knitters, it might be expected that they would have been working for NONIA for a longer period of time, especially given the longevity of NONIA itself. NONIA has been in existence since 1925. Furthermore, when NONIA is featured in current mass media publications such as *Canadian Living* and *The Herald* the knitters who have been with NONIA for a long period of time are the ones who are discussed in the articles. However, conversely, many of the current NONIA knitters might have been too busy raising a family or working outside the home until recently to have been able to have the time to be involved with NONIA. At this later point in their lives, they may be looking for activities that can fill their time, that they are physically able to do, that they already know how to do and that they enjoy doing.

Learning to knit

The NONIA knitters all learned to knit at a young age. Table 6 shows that by the age of twenty, almost all of the knitters knew how to ply their craft.

Table 6: Age when knitters responding to survey learned to knit

Age when learned to knit (years)	**Number of NONIA knitters**	**Percentage of NONIA knitters**
Under 10	57	43.8
10 - 19	64	49.2
20 and over	4	3.1
Unknown	2	1.5
Missing	3	2.3
TOTAL	130	99.9

Knitting is an activity that the knitters have known how to do for most of their lives.

As this is a craft done almost exclusively by females, it is not surprising that most knitters learn to knit from their mothers. Table 7 shows that three quarters (75.4 per cent) of NONIA knitters learned from their mothers.

Table 7: Relationship of person who taught NONIA knitters responding to survey how to knit

Relationship of teacher to NONIA knitter	Number of NONIA knitters	Percentage of NONIA knitters
Mother	98	75.4
Other female relative	19	14.6
Self	5	3.8
Other	3	2.3
Missing	5	3.8
TOTAL	130	99.9

These data concur with the literature on handcrafts that state that knitting is a female dominated craft. It is a craft that is passed on from one generation of women to the next. This is like the women of Europe that passed along the knitting patterns and designs to their daughters as it was seen as the responsibility of the women to clothe their families (see Bush, 1997 and McGregor, 1983).

Enjoyment of knitting

As can be seen in Table 8, *all* the survey respondents stated that they enjoy knitting.

Table 8: Enjoyment of knitting for survey respondents

Enjoys knitting	Number of NONIA knitters	Percentage of NONIA knitters
Yes	130	100.0
No	0	0.0
TOTAL	130	100.0

They like the work they are doing. There is no coercion or pressure for these knitters to knit. They choose to knit themselves, they are not fulfilling some expectation placed on them by others.

Ideal Type of the NONIA knitter

Based on the findings of the survey, we can describe what Max Weber called an "ideal type" of the NONIA knitter. She is a married rural Newfoundland woman in her sixties, who is not employed outside her home. Although she learned to knit as a child from her mother, she only started working with NONIA during the past ten years. Knitting is an activity that she enjoys.

Conclusion

Historically, knitting had real economic and sustenance value. Today, however, knitting is no longer the common chore it once was in Newfoundland. After Confederation in 1949, many Newfoundlanders got rid of the spinning wheels and sheep that once were plentiful. Pocius explains that at this time the people believed that doing things by hand was a sign of being poor and "backward." A contemporary knitter "can now decide, however, what object she will make, when it will be made, and how it will be

made, a choice her mother and grandmother rarely had" (1979: 66).

As an organisation, NONIA has an established hierarchy with a constitution. The prime mandate listed in the NONIA constitution is to provide employment for those in rural Newfoundland. As we have seen, NONIA turns to craftwork, particularly knitting, in order to create employment in the outports. From this, one would assume the knitters are engaged in a form of work.

Although the survey data are useful for describing the social characteristics of NONIA knitters and for developing on ideal type, they give only a superficial impression of the lives of the knitters, of their motives for knitting, and of the meanings that the knitters attach to knitting. For this more in-depth understanding, personal interviews were conducted with nineteen NONIA knitters.[21] These will be reported on in the next two chapters.

The question that has to be answered, now that a foundation in the development of knitting and the ideal type of a NONIA knitter are understood, is why are many women in Newfoundland choosing to knit today? Why have some Newfoundland women chosen to participate in a folkway that some would claim to be backward?

Chapter Four: Motives for knitting

The concept of human agency suggests that there are always motivations as to why certain activities are learned, and why they are continually practised - knitting is one such activity. The women interviewed learned how to knit and then continued to do so because it satisfies some needs that they have.

Learning to knit: "My mother could do anything." (Mrs. Murphy)

Most knitters learn to knit as children. In the survey of NONIA knitters, 74.6 per cent of the respondents learned to knit by the age of twelve. Among the knitters interviewed, all but one had learned to knit by the age of eighteen. While knitting is an activity that is learned at a young age, those interviewed did not feel that it was something they had to do. Mrs. Budgell[22] explains, "It was never forced. It was something you wanted to do." Mrs. Winsor concurs with this statement when she says, "Nobody forced you to knit. It was something you just picked up."

When asked if they learned to knit because they were girls, most believe that being female is not by itself the reason. More than one knitter justifies this belief by

pointing out that their sisters did not learn to knit. Mrs. Tucker states that she was the only daughter out of three girls in her family that learned to knit. Mrs. Winsor provides a similar example:

> None of my sisters know how to knit. Wait, my sister in Carbonear knows how to knit but she don't know how to knit very much. She knows how to knit a little bit. But the rest of my sisters don't. My sister-in-laws knits. But the rest of the sisters, I have seven sisters, and out of the seven only one knows how to knit.

All the knitters interviewed support the view that knitting is something they choose to do, and is not a duty thrust upon them, whether by necessity or because they are females. The choice to knit is of their own volition.

Given that knitting is an activity that some Newfoundland women choose to do, the question is why do they choose to knit? The motivations that they most often refer to are: means for passing time, provision of a challenge, increase mental focussing and relaxation, and to achieve a sense of accomplishment.

Passing time: "I find I can't sit and do nothing with my hands." (Mrs. Budgell)

There is an old adage that "idle hands are the work of the devil." This means that, in order to be seen as a good productive member of society, one must be busy, or at least appear to be busy. Until recently this was not a problem for women in Newfoundland. Porter describes Newfoundland women before Confederation as being "skippers of the shore crew" (1993). Women were solely responsible for the activities that happened on shore, while men took care of the work out at sea. This meant that women did everything from salting fish and small-scale farming, to preparing the daily meals and child rearing. Included in this work as well was the creation of textiles. Women would spin wool, knit, quilt, and hook mats as part of their household duties.

Over the past fifty years, many of these duties have eroded away; there is no longer a large-scale salt-fish industry; produce is available at the local grocery store; and clothing, bedding and carpeting can be bought more cheaply than it would cost to make them. This decrease in domestic work, combined with the facts that outport Newfoundland experiences high levels of unemployment and geographic isolation, contributes to the diminishing of

activities required of, or available to women living in the outports. There is time that needs to be filled. The women in this research have turned to knitting to pass time.

Many of the women think of knitting, right from the time they first learned to knit, as a way of passing time. Mrs. Murphy, a sixty-eight year old woman, describes how she had little to do when she was young. She says, "When we were kids there wasn't much of anything to play with - okay, sliding in the snow, playing ball, hopscotch, whatever. So like in the nights there wasn't much to do but knittin'." Mrs. Whelan agrees: "There wasn't too much to take up your time after school." At a young age, these women learned that knitting was an acceptable way for them to pass time.

For some women, like Mrs. Ryan, knitting is used to fill time when they are unable to do other activities. She says:

> When I was pregnant, well we only had the one child. We had one son and while I was pregnant with him there was lots of things I couldn't do that I liked doin'. So, it was at that time that I learned to relax while I was knittin'. While I was sitting watching TV or whatever, and I realised I really enjoyed it. It was relaxing.

Mrs. Ryan illustrates that knitting not only passes time when she is physically unable to do other activities, but it also allows her to relax during an anxious time in her life.

Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Murphy provide examples of how knitting is particularly useful for passing time in later life. Mrs. Brown believes that the only thing that is keeping her alive is her pacemaker, so her health limits her choice of activities. She says, "I'm seventy-five and he's [her husband] eighty-one - not much you can do at our age." Knitting is a sedentary pursuit, so it does not require much exertion, and is therefore suited to her health. Mrs. Brown has even involved her husband in knitting. Like his wife, Mr. Brown's health prevents him from doing many activities. Together they share many hours knitting sweaters where Mr. Brown does the plain part of a sweater and Mrs. Brown works on the patterned sections. Together they use knitting as a shared activity to pass the time during their older years.

Mrs. Murphy agrees with this. She is a senior citizen who lives alone. She finds that there are many hours in the day that need to be passed:

> I got nothing else to do. I'm here all by myself. I can sit here and knit and I got a lot done, a lot

> done. I look up and three or four hours have gone by. I didn't even realise. I'm here by myself, like on long winter nights. I don't go anywhere, except cards twice a week.

Knitting is an activity that can fill hours where loneliness might set in. It can allow one to concentrate on the creation of a garment and forget, even if only temporarily, that one is lonely. Passing time means making oneself unconscious of time by keeping a threatening, disagreeable consciousness of it at bay. It is as if time is a background feature of experience that threatens to come to the forefront in an unpleasant way under some circumstances, such as when one is alone.

Some of the women find themselves in situations where it is not their own health preventing them from doing different activities, rather, they are forced to stay at home to care for an ill family member. Mrs. Walsh describes how she has to remain in her house with her incapacitated husband, and because of his condition they do not receive any visitors. For Mrs. Walsh, knitting breaks up the long days she spends caring for her husband.

Mrs. Hickey, a widow, went through a similar experience; her husband was ill for twelve years. Knitting

became a means for her to pass the hours, and ward off boredom and depression:

> I finds it relaxing. And you don't get bored, you don't get depressed. Now if I haven't any knitting to do now I sits here and I gets bored and really depressed 'cause you have lots of time to think and worry and different things. When you're knitting, or even weaving, you don't get time to think of that kind of stuff.

Knitting is an activity that allows the knitter to fill time that might otherwise be invaded by thoughts of worry and grief. It provides a welcome escape from the anxieties of caring for an ill person. Again, knitting is a defence against feared forms of consciousness.

Many of the knitters see knitting as a way to ensure that while they are passing time they are not wasting any time. Mrs. Parsons explains how knitting fills in the time between her daily chores: "I can knit, and get up and prepare meals. And while it's cooking I can go back to knitting and I can get up again. It's like something you can take part of all the time." By doing this, Mrs. Parsons is not allowing a moment to go by where she is not doing something. Since knitting is repetitive, simple and portable, it is an optimum choice to fill these spaces of time. One can put one's knitting aside and go on to do

something else, before coming back to it when there is time to spare.

Mrs. Whelan uses knitting as a means to ensure that there is never a moment of time where she is not doing something. She even goes so far as to knit in the middle of the night: "If I wake up at night at two or three o'clock, I'll get up and knit a bit." There is the feeling that if one is awake the time must be passed purposefully. Knitting provides an activity that can be picked up at any time one wishes. In the case of Mrs. Whelan, knitting can even be done in the middle of the night.

Mrs. O'Neill, once a fish plant worker, explains that many of those in her situation do not understand why she chooses to knit to pass her time:

> A lot of people don't know why I do it. I do it all the time, right. I say to people, 'What do you do all day long?' They says, 'I watch TV.' I wouldn't be able to sit down. If I sit for a minute I got knittin' in my hand. [Do you think they are wasting time?] I think they do. They don't think it but I do. I says to people, 'What do you do if you don't knit?' I would just crack up if I didn't knit.

In this quote, Mrs. O'Neill illustrates that she uses knitting as a practical means of passing her days. She feels her time is better spent knitting than just sitting

watching television. Even if she watches television when she knits, she has something to show for her time. It is quite apparent that many knitters require a way of passing time that gives them something for their effort -- something that they can show for the time they have passed.

Knitting presents a challenge: "I enjoy different patterns. I like the challenge of a new pattern." (Mrs. Tucker)

When one is doing something, whether it is for work or leisure, it is important that the activity is engaging. If it is not enjoyable one can easily become bored and unmotivated to continue with the activity. This is the case with knitting.

The women are very particular about the type of knitting they do. Many knitters conceptualise knitting into two main categories: plain and patterned. Plain knitting requires the knitter to create fabric that is smooth and done in a solid colour. Patterned knitting, on the other hand, includes doing colour-work (e.g., fair-isle sweaters or double-ball mitts) or cables and textured stitches (e.g., Aran or fisherman knits). The patterned knitting requires skill, patience and concentration. This is the type of knitting that most of the women in this study do.

To many of the knitters plain knitting is boring. Mrs. Budgell captures this when she says:

> I like to knit with different patterns. I hate to knit something plain. It bores me. I like a variety of patterns . . . I find if there's a pattern I want to get back at it. But if it's mundane, I don't care if I get back at it.

Mrs. Budgell shows that by having a pattern in her knitting there is a motivation for her to work at the sweater. Mrs. Power agrees with this. She says, "Plain is boring. I like having a pattern. It's just to see if I can finish - a challenge."

Mrs. O'Neill concurs with the idea that patterned knitting provides a variety of challenges, which prevent her from getting bored. She says, "I don't think I'll get bored [of knitting]. You don't get bored 'cause it's so different. You get different wool, different patterns." Even though Mrs. O'Neill says she knits for eight hours a day her knitting never becomes boring because there are so many variations. Patterned knitting offers her a stimulating activity that does not become monotonous and mundane. It provides a challenging and versatile way of passing time, and offers a relief from boredom that might set in due to the isolation of outport life.

Doing patterned knitting is not only about creating a finished garment, but it is also about an important process. It is a process that provides many challenges to the mind, and a sense of accomplishment when challenges are overcome and the garment is complete. With patterned knitting the women are often presented with something that is new to them. Mrs. Ryan illustrates this aspect when she says:

> Every time you do a new pattern, especially if you get something different from what you did before, it just feels good to do something different. [Is that important?] Yes, it is. If you take pride in what you're doing, you're going to do it to the best of your ability. And when it's done, you get a sense of pride and it looks good.

The knitting becomes like a puzzle where one has to make sure that all the pieces, in this case stitches, are in the right place to create the desired finish. Mrs. Sheppard states that part of the reason she knits is for this "puzzle" element. She says, "I like new patterns 'cause you never know how it really turns out."

Mrs. Parsons also sees each new knitting pattern as a challenge to pursue. She describes what it is like for her when she gets a new garment to knit:

> When you look at a pattern and you've picked your colours, how's that going to look? You know, sometimes I'll neglect everything else just to see how that pattern looks. You know, what form's it goin' to take, how it's going to be . . . It's something that you worked at and you're completely satisfied; it's self-assuring.

The knitter becomes so engaged in the pattern she is knitting that it can be consuming to the point where other daily activities are put aside until she sees how the garment will eventually look. This challenge becomes important when one is in the home for extended periods of time, or has limited opportunities available to work on something stimulating. Patterned knitting becomes a mechanism to challenge one's mind and one's skill in the face of isolation, whether it is geographical, social or due to age.

The other important aspect of patterned knitting is that it takes more time than plain knitting to cover the same amount of space. It helps to fill or pass more time. Once again, one can see how the knitters are deliberately knitting to pass their time. Patterned knitting is an intentional choice the knitters make to fill their time; they require more than just the motions of knitting. Knitting is used to manage time as a part of an effort to

manage their "selves." For the knitters, knitting is part of a strategy for maintaining mental cohesion in the face of experiences (e.g. isolation and age) that might threaten it.

Mental focussing and relaxation: "You're more relaxed. Your mind gets a chance to refresh." (Mrs. Winsor)

Another reason why these women knit is that it allows them to relax and take their mind off of the worries, anxieties, and tribulations of everyday life.

The ability to relax is vital to many of the knitters. Mrs. Parsons says, "I find it [knitting] relaxing, very relaxing. I've been having problems with my arm. The doctor last week says I have to stop for four or five days, *but I can't*" (italics indicate a whisper). Even though her doctor directed her not to knit, Mrs. Parsons cannot give it up. She realises that this may not be the best choice, but for her knitting is so ingrained into how she relaxes throughout her day that it is nearly impossible for her to stop, even for a brief period of time.

Knitting is also a reprieve from the household's activities and chores that have to be performed. Mrs. Murphy finds that this is very much the case for her. She says, "Well, I tells you what, I finds this [knitting] a

hobby. If I'm cleaning up, washing dishes, cleaning up whatever, when I'm washing clothes and I'm stopped, I have knitting in my hand; this relaxes me." Mrs. Murphy knits for more than relaxation; it provides her with an activity that offers her mental focussing; "it [knitting] makes you think. It gets your brain occupied." For Mrs. Murphy, knitting is a mechanism for breaking up the monotony of her daily chores. It provides her with an activity that takes away any tension she might be experiencing, and offers her the opportunity to use mental energy and concentration apart from her routine of household chores.

Mrs. Budgell also relies on knitting for relaxation. Knitting allows her time to rest from the demands placed on her as mother and housekeeper. She says, "I do it [knitting] for a break; therapy for me." One sees that knitting is a means of preventing one from becoming overwhelmed with what is happening around oneself. Mrs. Budgell, like Mrs. Murphy, sees knitting as important in providing an outlet for mental energy. "I think it keeps you more alert. It makes you concentrate. With my mother I know that's why, it's kept her so alert over the years." Mrs. Budgell believes that knitting is a way to maintain mental alertness by exercising her mind.

Mrs. Brown also sees knitting as mental exercise for alertness. She comments, "It [knitting] keeps your mind going. I'd be cracked if I wasn't knitting." This is important to her because at her age (seventy-five) she feels there is little else she can do. Knitting helps to fill the time that cannot be filled any other way due to limitations placed on Mrs. Brown because of her age. More than just filling in the time, knitting also allows Mrs. Brown to expend mental energy. It gives her something to focus on.

The knitting is a repetitive activity, a *habit*, that is used to help create a coherent sense of self in the face of threatening and tense experiences such as boredom, age, illness and isolation. It is repeatedly used to release the tension the women face daily, and helps prevent the self from fragmenting or "cracking up."

Accomplishment and Pride: "It's something that you worked at and you're completely satisfied; it's self-assuring." (Mrs. Parsons)

As has been shown, the process of knitting is fundamental to the way these women manage time and their selves. The process, however, is not the only aspect of knitting that appeals to the women. The finished garment

itself is important. There is a sense of pride that comes from a finished piece of knitting.

Mrs. Parsons, in preparation for her interview, had gathered a variety of the knitted goods she had done for her family. She had sweaters (of different techniques), socks, mitts, caps, and afghans displayed on her couch. For Mrs. Parsons, this display showed her knitting talent. She says, "It's [knitting] something that you worked at, and you're completely satisfied. It's self-assuring." Knitting for Mrs. Parsons is an activity that allows her to feel good about herself, and the finished garment is the physical manifestation of her talent.[23]

Knitting becomes a public display of the women's talent and effort. Mrs. Power sees her knitting as a source of pride. It is something that makes her unique among her social acquaintances. She describes times when she and her husband attend formal social functions where she wears things she has knit: "I knit the small tops to wear with dress pants. People come up and ask if I knit it. I can say *yes*" (emphasis in tone of voice). The knit top becomes proof of how she spends her time productively. By wearing her tops she is showing that she does not just sit around the house doing nothing. Knitting gives Mrs. Power a sense of pride and self-assurance as she receives

social sanction, in the form of compliments, for the manner in which she uses her time. In this setting, Mrs. Power is no longer "just a bored housewife," as she describes herself, but a woman able to create and produce something of value in the eyes of her peers. It gives her a special social identity in the community.

Mrs. O'Neill also expresses this feeling of pride that she gets from her knitting: "I like to make big things that you can see what I'm doing. It's a lot of work to see. When I get it done I feel that proud when it's done. I can't wait to send it off [to NONIA]." The pride from her accomplishment in turn guides the type of knitting she prefers to do. By doing the larger items, such as adult sweaters, she is able to manifest her talents and gain a sense of self-satisfaction that she probably does not receive in other aspects of her life.

Mrs. Budgell believes that it is important to have the finished garment in mind when knitting:

> You always have the finished product on your mind. If you don't there's no point in going on, to me. I'm not the type. If there's only a little mistake going [in the knitting], I have to take it all back . . . It's got to be done right or not be done.

While the process of knitting is important in itself as an activity, there is also the underlying acknowledgement for Mrs. Budgell that she is creating a garment that must be kept in mind while knitting. This helps her focus on what she wants to accomplish.

There is a link between the process of knitting and the end garment. While the process is important to the knitters, there is also a sense that one must strive for perfection in the end. The perfection of the finished knitting guides the actual process of knitting. Mrs. Murphy expresses this when she says, "If I don't get it right, I'll try and try 'til I do get it right." When the garment is completed to perfection or near perfection, the knitters enjoy a strong sense of pride and achievement.

Conclusion

The motivations for, and ways in which the women in this study use, feel and think about their knitting operate on a variety of levels. Primarily, knitting fills needs at the temporal level, whether it is to pass time or tackle a challenging pattern. On the physical level, knitting provides an activity that occupies one's hands. As well, there are tangible objects created when one knits. Finally, knitting operates on a mental plane. It provides

the knitter with relaxation, a means to expend mental energy, a sense of pride and accomplishment, and a coherent sense of self.

With the reasons for why the women knit now being understood, one needs to examine what are the personal consequences of their actions and the personal and social meanings that knitting comes to have for them. What impact does knitting have on their lives and identities? Does knitting have an impact on their relationships with their families? These are the next questions to be explored.

Chapter Five: The Meaning of Knitting for the Knitters

The prime motivation behind women's knitting is to pass time in a way that is self-fulfilling; however, what does knitting mean to the women? This chapter will show that knitting for these Newfoundland women means not only security against empty time, but also provides a link between generations of women, and becomes part of their identity as females and, indeed, a part of the identity of outport life.

Security against empty time

Mrs. Parsons describes how she takes her knitting when she goes to meetings or even driving in the car:

> If I go out to a meeting I sometimes take my knitting with me. [What type of meetings?] Any meetings: church meetings, recreation meetings, I'm involved in recreation. If I figure it's going to be a lengthy meeting and I have something that needs to get done, I'll takes it with me. If I'm going in the car I always have something to take in the car with me. I don't drive so I knit. I take it to pass the time. When you're driving there isn't much to look at. When you go through the community I might look at the flowers.

For Mrs. Parsons there is a compulsion that she has to have her knitting to make sure that she does not waste *any* time. Knitting prevents the possibility of her time being wasted during long discussions at meetings, which may not be fruitful. Further than this, she needs to take knitting with her in the car to ensure that every moment of time is filled. Instead of being a passive passenger, Mrs. Parsons is active with her knitting.

This preoccupation with making sure that time is not wasted at meetings or driving is a common thread among the knitters. Mrs. Budgell says, "I go to a church group here and if I feel like knitting I take it. [Do people say anything?] Yeah, sometimes, but I say I'm not doing anything else." Mrs. Budgell needs to be sure that her time is fully occupied. There are times during a meeting when she does not contribute to the discussions; therefore, by knitting, Mrs. Budgell believes she is passing the time to its utmost capacity when she is not actively participating in the meeting. Even when her time is designated for another purpose, Mrs. Budgell uses knitting to ensure the time is filled to its capacity. Knitting ensures that she is an active agent during a social activity where she might otherwise be perceived at some

moments to be passive *vis-à-vis* others (e.g. when listening to other people talking).

Mrs. Penney is another person who needs to take knitting with her when she goes to meetings. She says, "I can't imagine myself doing nothing. It's [knitting is] so relaxing. I don't go to a meeting if I don't got me knitting." Not only does Mrs. Penney take knitting to a meeting, but she will not go to a meeting if she does not have some knitting to do. This is not only a case of wanting to be sure that time is not wasted, but it alleviates any tension that might arise at a meeting. Knitting becomes Mrs. Penney's prevention mechanism against herself becoming overwhelmed; as she says, knitting relaxes her.

Knitting in the car while being driven is prevalent among the knitters. Mrs. Tucker has a five to ten minute drive to get to the grocery store. She says about her trips to the grocery store: "I take it [knitting] when I go grocery shopping. My husband drives and I knits. Sometimes I tell him to turn around and go back because I forgot something [knitting]. He knows what it is [her knitting]." Mrs. Tucker cannot drive the short distance to the shop without having knitting to occupy her time, even to the point of making her husband return home if her

knitting is forgotten. Being a passenger means that you are not doing anything, so the time needs to be filled -- knitting does that.

There is also a need for knitting to be taken on holidays in case there is time not being used. Mrs. Parsons says, "I was in Halifax for ten days, and I took a bag of knitting." She had to be sure that even during a time that she was sightseeing and visiting family there was knitting there to fill any unused time.

Mrs. Murphy goes further than this. She talks about her preparations for a trip to Ontario where she will be visiting with her daughter:

> See them two boxes there? That's full of wool. So now I'm going up to Ontario and I'm going to take them with me. What I'm going to do is put them in the mail . . . This lot I'm doin' here is thirty-six skeins of wool . . . What I'm doin' is I take some out to take with me because I'll get there before they do.

This demonstrates the amount of planning and foresight that Mrs. Murphy exhibits to ensure that she has yarn to knit with in Ontario. She wants to be sure that she will not be sitting idle during times when her daughter has to go to work, or when her grandchildren have to go to school. By mailing wool, and taking some on the aeroplane with her, Mrs. Murphy is guarding herself against having time that

needs filling or passing, time during which she would not know what to do with herself.

While the women depend upon knitting to pass their time, they are also constantly searching for new patterns. Since knitting provides the women with challenges, they are always on the lookout for something new to knit. This search permeates virtually every aspect of their lives - from being in church to being on vacation. Mrs. Parsons provides an example of this:

> It [knitting] was something that I set my sights on, that I want to do. If I saw a strange pattern I had to try it. I've gone to church, now when my boys were in cadets, I remember there was a beautiful pattern of a sweater on the lady in front of me. And I got out a bulletin and a pen from my purse and I wrote the pattern down in church! I wanted to do that pattern bad.

This anecdote shows how the knitters are always looking for new patterns. They are even willing to violate norms, in this case writing in church, in order to get something new to challenge them.

Mrs. Budgell tells of a similar incident. She recounts an event that happened to her while on summer holidays:

> I find myself, if we're travelling, we were in Ottawa for two weeks, I watch what people have on. We were down at the market, the outdoor market, and this man passed me with a sweater on. I found myself watching him. My son said, "What are you looking at him for?" I found myself looking at his sweater!

In this account, one can see how the search for new patterns permeates other activities. Mrs. Budgell's attention is easily diverted from her surroundings to the point where it is noticeable to those around her. The preoccupation with knitting and, more specifically noticing challenging new patterns, can invade times when the knitters are involved in other pursuits. Knitting is so important to the women that they are constantly on the lookout for new challenges.

Knitting is seen by some as an activity that will be a safeguard against time that needs to be filled when older. As discussed earlier, the older knitters knit because it is a sedentary activity that they are able to do. Some of the younger knitters believe that by knowing how to knit they have an activity they can do for the rest of their lives. Mrs. O'Neill says this when asked if children should learn to knit:

> I think at some point in their lives they're going to want to knit, when they get older. If they get

> something wrong with them and they can't do anything else, unless there's something wrong with their hands. That's what I'm afraid of, that's all I'm afraid of. I checks every day; I would rather break my leg before I break my arm.

Knitting is so ingrained into how the women deal with the temporal experiences of managing their selves that they cannot envision any other activities that would replace it. They are dependent upon knitting to the extent that they are in fear of losing the use of their hands and fingers.

Like Mrs. O'Neill, Mrs. Walsh depends upon knitting to fill her time. Mrs. Walsh says, "I don't like reading because I'm not using my fingers. If I gets crippled in my fingers it's just as well I die. I just can't sit down without my pair of needles." Mrs. Walsh cannot conceptualise her life without knitting. She goes so far as to say she would rather die than lose the use of her fingers.[24] This illustrates the depths to which the knitters have not only committed themselves to relying upon knitting as a means to pass time, but also the extent to which the self has become identified with an activity to the point of not being able to survive without the bodily ability to knit. For the women, knitting is *vital* to the preservation and maintenance of self.

Knitting is also incorporated into how *other* people perceive how these women pass the time. Two of the older knitters, Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Hickey, tell of how their children have said that they will be placing yarn and knitting needles in their caskets. Mrs. Hickey reports that her children have said, "Mom, we'll have to put some wool and knittin' needles down in the box with you 'cause you always got it in your hands." Mrs. Brown's daughter informs Mrs. Brown that she will have to put "wool and needles in the casket" when Mrs. Brown dies. The offer to put yarn and needles into the women's caskets is a statement as to how the bodies will finally and conclusively be shown socially. They are identity markers of important aspects of the knitters' selves. This identification made by the children illustrates how much a part of the knitters' everyday lives knitting is. Knitting is so strongly associated with how the women pass their time that their children cannot imagine their mothers being able to be without it – even in an afterlife.

Knitting as a link between generations

As an activity, knitting can become a connector between women of different generations. With every stitch that is knit a physical link with a mother, or mother-in-

law, or daughter is created. This becomes an action that can be passed on from one person to the next, and a way of establishing traditions.

Throughout Mrs. Budgell's interview, she talks fondly of her mother. Knitting is an activity that quickly brings to mind the many hours Mrs. Budgell's mother knit. She describes how, through her mother's knitting, she now has ingrained ideas about what is appropriate behaviour for Sundays:

> I grew up in a home where you weren't allowed to knit on Sunday. I still can't. I knit on every other day. [Was that because knitting was seen as work?] I think so. My mother would never knit on Sunday. On Saturday night her knitting was put aside until Monday morning. I saw her Sunday night after twelve o'clock get up and knit mitts for Dad that they had to have that day. She would not do knitting on Sunday. You know that was passed on to me. There is no real religious reason why; it was just tradition. I never take my knitting out on Sunday. I still put it aside even though I don't see it as work. I don't do it. The boys would think it very strange if they saw me knit on Sundays. It's just tradition it is.

Even though Mrs. Budgell does not conceptualise knitting as work, like her mother did, she is compelled by the teachings of her mother not to knit on Sundays. As she describes it, not knitting on Sundays is a "tradition" that

her mother has instilled in her, and even forty years later Mrs. Budgell is unable to break this tradition. In this instance, *not* knitting actually becomes the connection between mother and knitter.

Mothers-in-law are also remembered when discussing knitting. Mrs. Ryan talks about the time she learned to knit just after getting married:

> She [her mother-in-law] only had the one son, so when I came to live here, after just having the one child, and having another woman coming in to live, there was a lot of tension; well not a lot but a difference of opinions. She did things one way and I would do things another. So I guess her being able to teach me something, it probably made her feel good as well.

Knitting became a common ground for Mrs. Ryan and her mother-in-law. It was an activity that they could share without the tensions of jointly running a household. By teaching knitting, the mother-in-law demonstrated that she was able to share a talent she had that Mrs. Ryan did not have. It allowed the mother-in-law to maintain a sense of self-worth in her own household in spite of the new member. Knitting provided a mechanism to alleviate some of the strains put on them in this living arrangement.

Mrs. Morgan describes how her own daughter associates knitting with memories of Mrs. Morgan:

> My daughter, we only got the one daughter and she's in Ontario, and she knits. And she says when hockey games are on, and she's knitting, it reminds her of when she was a child, because the hockey games were always on at our house. And I was always knitting. And she said, "Saturday nights I can see you in the rocking chair knitting and Dad watching the hockey game."

In this instance, knitting at a particular time is a connection between the mother and daughter. As the daughter knits she remembers her parents doing the same activity. It connects the generations over time and space. The knitting is not only being done years later in time, but also in a different geographical location. Knitting transcends time and space to provide a link between generations.

Knitting as a part of the identity as a female

When the women in this study identify themselves, it is in terms of whether they are housewives, mothers, or occasionally as retired fish plant workers. They would not identify themselves as knitters in the first instance. This being said, however, it becomes apparent that knitting is intrinsic to their concept of what it is to be a woman, a mother and a wife in rural Newfoundland. Greenwood and

Tye (1993) point out that this is not unusual. They state that traditions and folkways are means for socialising people into what are considered to be gender-appropriate activities and expectations. Knitting, as an activity predominantly associated with women, is no exception.

While the women claim that being female was not the motivation for why they knit, it is apparent that being female does determine who gets exposed to knitting and to whom the craft gets passed on. Mrs. Budgell illustrates this well. She describes how, although she knows a man who knits, she never thought about teaching her own sons to knit:

> If I had girls I would have taught them to knit. I should have taught the boys to knit. [Did the boys ever seem interested in knitting?] The youngest one, yes. Many times he would sit by me knitting and he'd say, "Mom, I'd love to learn to knit." And silly-like I'd probably say, "Ach, you don't want to knit." Now I know a person in particular, a man whose mother taught them to knit. He knits his own socks. It was just silly of me not to think of it, but I just never did. [Why is that?] I don't know. I probably thought they had no need for it. [Do you think knitting is for girls?] I think for me it was. The boys were always off doing something else. I don't think there's anything wrong with a man learning to knit. I know a man that knits, several men that knit.

> They don't as much but they can do it. At one time you depended on your mother or wife to knit.

We see here that Mrs. Budgell intuitively perceives boys as "always off doing something else;" they are spending their time at other activities. By discussing this, Mrs. Budgell sees that she has had this gender stereotype of how boys and girls should spend their time.

While the women claim that their being female has had no bearing on their decision to become knitters, it is apparent that they view knitting as appropriate to (if not expected of) women. Women should knit. Mrs. Morgan reflects this viewpoint when she describes a neighbour. In a sarcastic tone she says:

> Now I had a friend up the road, and she had eleven children, and she didn't knit a stitch. I said, "Well, how can you manage with their mitts and socks for the winter?" She said, "The way I looks at it, if I don't know how to do it I haven't got to do it." And you know neighbours and that around used to knit mitts and socks for her youngsters. So I could see her point.

Mrs. Morgan believes that as a mother her friend is not meeting the expectations the community has of a mother. The other women in the community feel compelled to be sure that the children have what they need, hand-knit socks and

mitts. The mother has not used her time to supply her children with the items sanctioned by her peers.

This idea that women *have* to do knitting is reiterated when the knitters talk about what can be described as the "elusive male knitter." Many of the women talk about a man in their community that knows how to knit and do other textile work. Like Mrs. Morgan, they tell of men that can knit their own socks. They would often qualify the male knitters like Mrs. Penney does: "I know there's one fellow here; he does all kinds of crochet work. My dear, *just like a woman*" (emphasis added). There is the idea that knitting is not an activity that men are expected to do. When they do, however, their work is compared to an arbitrary standard of how well a woman can do the work. This is very telling in that it makes one aware how ingrained knitting is as a validation of female identity.

Knitting as a part of outport life

Knitting is an activity that is seen as appropriate to the way of life in outport Newfoundland. Mrs. Tucker recounts a recent visit she had with her sister in southern Ontario. While she was there, Mrs. Tucker did some textiles (quilting and knitting) for her sister. She did this because her sister does not do anything like quilting

and knitting. When asked why Mrs. Tucker responds, "It's not very often they do's that stuff up there. They're too busy." She feels that knitting is more suited to the lifestyle of rural Newfoundland, as there is more time to commit to knitting and the like. This points out an interesting cyclical relationship; on the one hand we have the abundance of time that needs to be passed brought about because of living in the outports, and on the other we have the need for time in order to be able to knit.

Pocius (1979) discusses how, after Confederation, many Newfoundland women stopped doing many textile crafts, as they believed that by doing crafts they would be seen as "backwards." Store-bought items were seen as more desirable because you do not have to make them yourself. This attitude toward knitting continues to some degree today. Mrs. Budgell reports: "I get women who say, "I don't even want to knit" 'cause they say it's from the Bay. You know I came from the Bay and so what? I love to do it." There is the perception that one would be less sophisticated, less urban, if one knit. Women should have other things to do with their time and there would be no need to knit. People can now easily drive to a nearby town that has a department store to buy all they need; they do not have to knit to supply clothing for their families.

Conclusion

The meaning of knitting for these women does not centre on the objects they make *per se*. Knitting takes on much more personal and social meanings. First of all, knitting means that there is security against having empty time in one's life. One has an activity to do when there is nothing else to do. Knitting has such high importance that it permeates throughout the knitters' lives. Knitting is often paramount in their thoughts, even when they are engaged in other activities. It is so important to them to have knitting to do that they are always on the look out for new patterns and items to knit. Because of knitting's importance, it becomes entangled in the self-identities of the knitters, their relationships with family, and their understanding of what activities are part of outport Newfoundland life.

Chapter Six: NONIA's Role

As we have seen, knitting has come to play a vital role in the lives of these Newfoundland women. Knitting is one of their only activities to pass time and preserve a coherent sense of self; in a sense they have become dependent upon it to do so. This means that the women need a constant supply of knitting to be sure that they have something available to do when they need to pass time. It can become a costly endeavour to continually supply oneself with wool. In 1999, the cost to knit a large adult's sweater out of homespun wool is approximately $40 plus taxes. For people of limited financial resources and fixed incomes, this cost can be prohibitive. This is where NONIA comes in.

NONIA today promotes itself as a non-profit cottage industry. There is an organisation in place to manage it, including a volunteer board of directors, treasurer, secretary, business manager, staff and the knitters.[25] Much as it has done since its inception, NONIA sends yarn and patterns out to the knitters. The knitters in turn knit the specified garment and mail them back to NONIA. NONIA pays the knitters on a piece-rate scale, and sells the knitted goods at their retail outlet in St. John's and at

craft shows across Canada. While it is not a charity, as NONIA's business manager points out, neither is it driven profit motives; it is guided by its directive to provide employment to the people of rural Newfoundland.

Why do the women knit for NONIA? If they were to try to cover the cost of their own production and market their products themselves as independent commodity producers, it is doubtful that they would be able to cover the costs of their own production. In Marxist terms, there would be a kind of "negative surplus" and, eventually, they might have to give up their favourite pastime.

This is where NONIA comes in. Historically, NONIA saw itself as helping outport women both be industrious and contribute to the household income. Today, it is succeeding in the first of these aims but the strictly economic contribution is minimal.

Instead, NONIA's role has come to be to provide the means whereby these women can continue to enjoy knitting. By providing high quality raw materials and designs, and by marketing the output of their efforts, NONIA in effect solves the negative surplus problem for the knitters. At the same time, NONIA provides the organisational means by which high quality knitted goods are produced and marketed,

which is a source of pride for Newfoundland that has become part of its culture and identity.

Not for the money

When one asks the women directly why they knit for NONIA, many start their answers by stating that it is not for the money. Mrs. Hynes says quite emphatically, "I don't knit for money." This is quite understandable when one looks at the small amount of pay the knitters receive for their work. The knitters reported earning anywhere from $3.00 for a pair of gloves to $40.00 for an extra-large adult sweater. The former item could take up to 15 hours to complete, and the latter could take up to 60 hours. Mrs. Power states, "For what you get it's slave labour. You get 10 cents a ball maybe, when you look at the hours you put in, especially those Arans[26]"

For the survey question, "What percentage of your household income does your NONIA earnings account for?" there are responses such as "negligible," "next to nil," "very little," and "pocket money." Unlike the assertions made within the literature that homework is not being done for "pin money" (Allen & Wolkowizt, 1987), NONIA knitters do *not* view their knitting as vital to the economic survival of their households. Many discuss how the money

they earn from NONIA is used for such things as Christmas gifts and to give to grandchildren. The money is not an essential part of the household budget.

The women realise that they will never be compensated for the amount of time and work they invest. On her survey, Mrs. Foley says,

> I knit for NONIA for pastime. I like knitting but I found I was knitting a lot of things that I didn't need, just to knit, before I started with NONIA. The only thing about getting paid for knitting or any other hobby, you never will get paid enough for the time you put in it. But if you enjoy what you are doing that don't matter.

It is difficult to keep track of the hours one puts into a sweater. This is mainly because the garments are not worked on steadily. Many women will knit while watching television, or in between household chores. Because the pay is on a piecework basis, the women do not keep logs of the hours they work.[27] Assuming that an adult sweater takes a total of 40 hours (a minimum) to complete, the knitters would only be receiving about $1.00 per hour. Mrs. Brown puts it bluntly when she says, "There's no way youse gets paid for the hours you knit."

If the knitters do not work for NONIA for the money they are paid, the question is: why do they work for an organisation if it is not for the monetary rewards?

No cost to the knitter

For the knitters, one of the main advantages of NONIA is that the knitter incurs no cost for the materials needed. NONIA supplies the knitters with the wool and the patterns, and reimburses postage costs. There is no outlay of extra money for the knitters, except for their needles.[28] Mrs. Murphy says this about why she is involved with NONIA: "I had a chance to do something, a little extra money and no cost to me. They sent the wool, I knit, sent it back. They pay me my postage and I haven't got to plan a thing."

Mrs. Power also is involved with NONIA because there is no outlay of money on her part for materials. She says, "The reason I started knitting for NONIA was that I was running out of things to do. There are only so many pot cloths you can do. And just to knit to knit, the wool is too expensive to do." In essence, NONIA acts as a kind of patron for the women's knitting. It provides the means necessary for the women to knit.

Not only does NONIA supply women with knitting materials at no cost, but it also offers them the

opportunity to knit with high quality materials. A 43-year-old woman states, "I enjoy knitting for NONIA because of the excellent and interesting patterns provided and the best quality materials used. I could never afford these high quality yarns in my own work (except on sale). The high quality of their product attracts me." It is important to the knitters to have good quality yarns that they enjoy working with.

Mrs. Hickey provides further comments about the availability of wool from NONIA:

> They supplies you with the wool. There is times, like when my husband was sick for 12 years, and I didn't have much money to buy the wool I likes to have. So they sent me the wool and patterns and different types of wool and things. That's why I enjoy knitting for NONIA. They were sending me wool all the time.

By working for NONIA, the knitters have access to knitting materials when their own personal financial situation is not favourable. This helps them through tough times; it provides a chance to do an activity that allows the knitter to relax and mentally escape the problems surrounding them.

Many of the knitters (16 out of the 19 interviewed) stated that they would continue to knit for NONIA even without being paid, as long as the materials and postage were provided. For the knitters, NONIA provides an

inexpensive means of allowing them to practise knitting. When answering a question about if she would continue to knit for NONIA without pay, Mrs. Murphy responds:

> Yeah, I probably would, I think I would. I got nothing else to do. I'm here all by myself. I can sit here and knit and I got a lot done, a lot done. I look up and three or four hours have gone by. I didn't even realise. I'm here by myself, like on long winter nights. I don't go anywhere except cards twice a week.

No one to knit for

Some of the women knitters point out that there is little demand for their knitting within their own household. This is particularly the case for women with teen-aged children at home.[29] Mrs. Power says about her family, "We don't wear any [knitting]. The kids never did. I don't wear any myself. I did one for my husband for curling and he only curls once a year." With no one to knit for, NONIA provides a means by which knitters can practise their craft without the feeling of wasting time or money.

Along this same vein, Mrs. Budgell gives her reason for knitting with NONIA:

> The reason I do it [knitting] for NONIA is 'cause my sons can't wear anything knit; they're not comfortable

> with much knit, like anything wool they itch. Now I can knit somethings like caps and mitts, but sweaters bother them. They'd rather wear sweatshirts . . . And the way my husband works he doesn't work outdoors much so he don't need. I don't knit for need. So that's why I knit for NONIA because I don't have anyone else to knit for. It's not a thing for the money.

Unlike women of her mother's generation, there is no one in Mrs. Budgell's immediate surroundings that requires her to knit. Mrs. Budgell's mother's duties included knitting for her family as part of her regular chores: "My father and brothers worked in the woods. My mom would knit everything they wore: socks and sweaters, everything. It was nothing for her to sit down after supper and knit a pair of mitts for the next day." This contrasts greatly with Mrs. Budgell's own immediate family. Her children are more apt to steer toward modern clothing trends and her husband is employed in a managerial job. NONIA offers Mrs. Budgell the opportunity to knit for a purpose, which is lacking within her family situation.

Absence of time pressures

Many of the knitters reported that they feel pressure neither to knit nor to maintain a strict timetable to their work. They note that NONIA does not impose deadlines on

them, which can be tied to the fact that NONIA is a not-for-profit organisation. Because NONIA is not out to make a profit, there is not the same pressures that there would be with a private business. While there is a Board of Directors overseeing NONIA's business, there are no owners or investors that have monetary concerns to contend with. The knitters report that the only situation where a deadline is placed on them occurs when there is a special order sent to them. Even then, there is no sense of strict urgency; the phrasing on the request from NONIA is to get the garment done "as soon as possible." In such a case the knitters will set aside the current garment that they are working on to do the special order. None of the knitters stated that they have felt any pressure to knit.

This casual attitude toward deadlines by NONIA is one of the reasons why the women knit for the organisation. Mrs. Budgell says,

> I don't want to be tied to a thing that I've got to be done by this time. I don't like that. I knit for NONIA but I do it on my time, when I feel like it. I don't want to say when it's got to be done by this time, then I got to rush. It's got to be on my time.

This shows that it is vital to have control over the time that is put into the work being done. By knitting for

NONIA the knitters can determine the amount of time they wish to put in and when they want to do their knitting.

This last point is important to the knitters. Many reported that they knit while doing other activities, primarily while watching television. However, more significant to the knitters' decisions about when to knit are the seasons of the year. In terms of how much they knit, Mrs. Brown, Mrs. Budgell, and Mrs. Sheppard all report that in the summer they do not knit nearly as much as they do in the winter. In the summer they find it is too hot to knit with wool. As well, the summer is the time when people go on vacations, out to their campers, have visitors, or generally spend more time outside the house. Mrs. Whelan, when asked if NONIA ever pressures her to knit, says:

> No, they don't rush you at that. You knits on your own time. When you're all ready now you sends it in and they send you more wool. [Is this a good way of working?] Yes, 'cause if there was pressure, like the summer now, well I've had two or three lots of visitors, so there was no way I could knit.

The knitters report that they do not have any problems with NONIA in regards to deadlines, or slack times in the summer. This casual attitude toward deadlines allows the

knitters to structure their time according to what they feel is important to them without fear of repercussions.

Those who have medical concerns, either for themselves or for their immediate families, appreciate NONIA's lack of deadlines. One 52 year-old woman from Central Newfoundland writes, "NONIA is a good group to knit for. You can ask for goods that there is no rush on so you can take your time. Which for me is great because there are times I may have to go weeks without knitting because of pain or hospitalization." This allows for the opportunity to accommodate to demands that illness places on a person, while also offering the chance to continue to knit.

Conclusion

Unlike the homeworkers reviewed in the literature in Chapter Two, NONIA knitters claim that the money they earn is not their primary reason for doing homework. The money they earn is seen as extra money, or pocket money, not to be included in the regular household budget. The women are also not choosing to knit for NONIA as an alternative to "pink collar" jobs. For many in the outports of Newfoundland, jobs, not just this kind of job, are very few. Their role as mother does not have a large impact on their decision to knit for NONIA. Out of the 19

interviewed, there were only 5 women who had children at home.

The reasons the respondents give for knitting with NONIA include: no cost to the knitters to knit, high quality of materials and designs, no one else to knit for, and the lack of time pressures. NONIA provides an opportunity for knitters to feel the work that they are doing is purposeful. It provides the chance to do an activity that is enjoyable and relaxing, while at the same time eliminating any large personal monetary investments and the wasting of time. The most important need NONIA fills is that by providing knitting the women are sure to have something purposeful to do to pass time.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

This study has examined the motives and meanings NONIA knitters attach to knitting as a form of social action.

The contemporary women's motivations to knit are not, for the most part, extrinsic in nature. Unlike women in previous generations, the women in the study do not *have* to knit. Their knitting has no real economic value to their households. It is cheaper to purchase textiles at a department store than it is to make then. As well, current fashion trends in their own family circles do not lean toward the inclusion of handknit garments. There is no necessity for the women to knit in order to clothe their families.

With this economic motivation being virtually non-existent, we find that the women's motivation is more *intrinsic* in nature. The women practise knitting in order to deal with time and to maintain a coherent sense of self. Knitting is an activity they do to pass time. Whether it is because of their age, their family situation, or the remoteness of where they live, the women in this study are motivated to knit as a way to pass their time productively and enjoyably. By knitting, they create tangible objects

that are manifestations of how their time is spent productively.

The management of time is an important element of the women being able to manage their selves. Knitting is one strategy for keeping their selves anxiety-free and preventing them from "cracking up." The self becomes managed by the habit the women have chosen to practise, in this case knitting, to cope with the pressures they experience by being females, and, particularly in this study, older rural women. The cultivation of a habitual activity (one that is repetitive, automatic, and resilient to change) puts the problems the women face daily into relief.

As Campbell contends, one should not simply look at the motivation for any action without going further to understand the meaning of the action. For NONIA knitters, knitting carries a variety of meanings. They attach social meaning to their knitting. It constitutes a link between generations, it is a part of their understanding of what it means to be a woman, and it is a part of their understanding of what constitutes life in outport Newfoundland. More importantly, however, knitting means that they have security against empty time. As long as they have knitting, the women are assured that they have an

activity to do whenever they feel that they have time to pass. The women take their knitting with them wherever they go, whether it is for a short drive in the car, a local meeting, or on vacation. Knitting is so ingrained into their sense of self and how they deal with everyday life that they need to have it with them as much as possible.

NONIA's role in the lives of the women is more like that of a patron, as opposed to being an employer. The women do not knit for NONIA for the money they earn. The rate of pay is low. What NONIA does is to support the women's knitting by supplying them with wool and patterns, and by marketing the finished knitted goods. NONIA provides the women with a solution for how to support their knitting activities. They do not have to go out to purchase yarn in order to "knit for the sake of knitting." NONIA gives the women a purpose to their knitting.

We have also seen that the women's knitting takes on a certain form of action - habit. Habitual action is that which is learned, repeated over time, is often done while doing other activities, and is virtually automatic (see Camic, 1986; Connerton, 1989; and Campbell, 1996b). Habit need not be perceived as a negative attribute. As Campbell has pointed out (although he does not elaborate on this)

habit and skill can be connected. NONIA knitters have honed a habit into a useful skill. The knitting they do is of the highest quality. It is because of their high skill level that NONIA enjoys its distinguished reputation today. The women have shown how resourceful they are; they have taken an action that is considered within their culture as appropriate for women to do, and used it to deal with a real dilemma in their lives - passing time in the face of possible threats to their self-worth. Their skill at knitting gives them recognition in their communities.

This research has shown that the Weberian framework advocated by Campbell, and complemented by the behaviourist, or social actionist, approach as put forward by Schlereth, have been appropriate for addressing the micro-level concerns central to this investigation. They have allowed for an appreciation of what motivates the knitters and the meanings they attach to their knitting. To have used a macro-level approach, such as those put forward by Marxists and feminists in the industrial homework literature, would have been inappropriate for the purposes of this research. The macro-level focus on large-scale social structures would make it difficult to study the micro-level actions of NONIA knitters. Furthermore, particularly within Marxism, there is little attention to

non-profit organisations such as NONIA. The expectations of both the "employer" and the "employee" become different from what would be found in a business out to secure a profit. In this study, we have seen that capitalist notions, such as time management and quotas, are not very relevant. The prime directive of NONIA is to provide employment to outport Newfoundlanders, not to generate a profit. This means that the mind-set of those involved in the organisation is informal and flexible.

Further Research

As an academic thesis the research reported on here could also provide the starting point for a variety of different studies.

A comparative study could be conducted with other handknitting organisations. This could be, for example, the Cowichan Natives in British Columbia, or the Inverallan Hand-knitters in Scotland. The latter organisation employs about two thousand people to knit sweaters out of their homes.

A study could be done that investigates the difference and similarities between rural and urban knitters. This could bring an understanding of how the same action can be

motivated differently and have different meaning depending upon where one lives.

One could also investigate the difference between NONIA's handknitters and machine knitters. One could use a Newfoundland business such as Stitches from Salmonier, which market only machine knit sweaters. This study could highlight the difference between a non-profit organisation using industrial homework, and a profit-driven business doing the same.

A study of other "traditional" crafts would be beneficial. This could highlight why people are practising such activities and what the crafts mean to them during the current information age. Are other people using crafts as a means for dealing with time? Research could be conducted as to how crafts are transmitted from one generation to the next. One could see how such concepts as gender are perpetuated through tradition and folkways, as stated by Greenhill and Tye (1993).

Most importantly, there needs to be more research done on the concepts of habit and skill. As we have seen, there is very little sociological literature on these concepts (see Camic, 1986). Habits need not be thought of as only signs of bad character; rather they can develop into skills and productive actions for dealing with everyday life, and

the management of self. These concepts are important to grasp in order to gain a full understanding of what constitutes action. If these micro-level concerns are not investigated thoroughly, sociologists will fail to understand the complex nature of human social action (Campbell, 1998).

Practical Recommendations

For the reasons discussed above, people should not look to NONIA as a major means of rural economic development. The organisation is not set up to be profitable. This means there are no real incentives to increase the output of NONIA. The knitters do not see what they are doing as work for pay. The money they earn for their knitting is not much; it is not necessary to the survival of their households.

It would be difficult for NONIA to pay their knitters more. The nature of handknitting is labour intensive, and if NONIA increased the amount they pay the knitters the price of the knitted goods would have to be raised to the point where they might not be able to sell them. As has been pointed out, for the women in this study knitting is a way to pass time; it is not a job.

Instead, people should see NONIA, and handknitting, as a means to instigate more *socially* oriented programmes, whereby the talents and skills of the knitters could be recognised. One problem that the NONIA knitters face is that they operate in virtual social exclusion of one another. Mrs. Power, when asked if she would like to join a knitting circle or guild, replied keenly, "Yes, I would love to do that. It would get me out of the house." Knitting guilds could be established in communities where women (and potentially men) of all ages could meet. This would promote leisure and social activities in the outports at minimal cost, while providing a more social milieu for the women to pass the time in a mutually supportive way.

There could also be the institution of a programme, similar to Ontario's Knitting the Generations Together, where senior citizens go into local schools to share their knowledge with students. This is a means of not only passing along a craft, but also of developing social ties among different generations of people in the communities. Since the passing of time can be particularly problematic for older women, this would give them an opportunity to do something socially constructive outside their homes.

Knitting functions as a solution to the everyday trials that face many rural women, and particularly older

ones, in Newfoundland. In a money and information technology-driven society, the women have shown that striving for financial gain is not the way they cope with threatening experiences of isolation, boredom, age, and illness. The women are ingenious in how they have taken the simple and habitual act of knitting to protect themselves from "cracking up." What NONIA does is to provide the women with the opportunity to knit in order to pass time and maintain their self-worth, not a solution for rural economic development. One should not be so focussed on the economics of rural life that one is oblivious of the more personal needs that people are trying to fulfil. It is obvious that, for the women in this study, knitting is a habit; it is a socially recognised activity that gives meaning to their lives.

Appendix A: Methods

The research for this study has been done through three main methods: literature review, a self-administered survey, and semi-structured interviews. The literature review was done to provide a foundation for the research. It brought to light the important concepts that needed to be considered in order to conduct the research. The survey was done in order that general characteristics could be ascertained about NONIA knitters. It also provided the source from which volunteers for the interviews were identified. The interviews were essential as they allowed for the social action approach to be taken at the micro-level. They allowed for the different forms of knowledge (referential, mediated, and experiential) that Schlereth advocates to be used. More importantly, the interviews allowed for the gathering of detailed information on the micro-concerns of motive, meaning and habit.

Survey

The purpose of the survey has been mainly to establish a profile of the whole population being studied. Since the whole population of NONIA knitters (249 in all) could be surveyed, sampling was not an issue. Basic demographic

data, including such characteristics as year of birth and residency, have been gathered to be used primarily for descriptive purposes, rather than for model building or probability analysis. The survey is three pages in length and consists of both closed-ended and open-ended questions (see Appendix B). The survey was accompanied with a cover letter (on Memorial University of Newfoundland, Sociology Department letterhead) explaining the purpose of the research, the ethical concerns of confidentiality, the right to refuse to answer any questions and to ensure respondents that their participation was purely voluntary (see Appendix C). In hopes of increasing the response rate, a self-addressed stamped envelope was provided.

The surveys were mailed out in April 1999. Because of NONIA's regulation against the release of their list of knitters they insisted on doing the mailing themselves. The surveys were all numbered in pencil in the top right-hand corner in order that a follow-up contact could be made. Again, NONIA required that they do the follow-up, six weeks later. This is not the ideal situation for doing survey research, but it is the only way permission from NONIA could be obtained. The questionnaires were returned directly to the researcher at Memorial University of

Newfoundland in an attempt to minimise any effect this compromise might have.

There were 249 questionnaires mailed out to the knitters; this was the entire population of women who were knitting for NONIA at the time. Of these, 130 were returned, for a response rate of 52.2 per cent. This was higher than expected, as much of the literature on survey research suggests one should expect approximately 40 per cent of surveys to be returned (see Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1992). It was out of these responses that the sample for the interviews was obtained.

Interviews

On the surveys, thirty-six respondents indicated that they were willing to be interviewed. Of these, nineteen interviews came about. There were twenty-four interviews scheduled, however three were not at home at the appointed times, one cancelled due to a funeral and another was cancelled due to a power failure. The other twelve respondents were not interviewed for a variety of reasons: they did not provide a telephone number, there was no answer when telephoned, or their completed questionnaire did not arrive until after the interviews were conducted.

This sample of interviewees seems to be reasonably representative of the population of NONIA knitters.[30] First, they are all female. Second, as Table 9 shows, they have a similar age structure.

Table 9: Years survey respondents and interview sample were born in

Year born in	Percentage of survey respondents	Percentage of sample interviewees
Before 1930	18.5	10.5
1930 - 1939	30.8	42.1
1940 - 1949	26.9	31.6
1950 - 1959	7.7	5.3
1960 - 1969	10.8	10.5
1970 - 1979	1.5	0.0
Missing	3.8	0.0
TOTAL	100.0	100.0

In both instances, about a half (49.3 per cent and 52.6 per cent) of the people were born before 1940.

Table 10 shows that the majority of the women in each category were married, although there is a higher percentage of married women who agreed to be interviewed and a lower percentage of those widowed.

Table 10: Marital status of survey respondents and interview sample

Marital Status	Percentage of survey respondents	Percentage of sample interviewees
Married	60.0	78.9
Widowed	23.8	15.8
Divorced or separated	3.1	0.0
Single	4.6	5.3
Missing	8.5	0.0
TOTAL	100.0	100.0

Although there is a difference in the percentages between the categories, the overall distribution is similar. With the exclusion of the missing data, the distribution trend is married, widowed, single, and divorced or separated.

With respect to when people started with NONIA, Table 11 shows that the population and sample are similar.

Table 11: Year survey respondents and interview sample started with NONIA

Year started with NONIA	Percentage of survey respondents	Percentage of sample interviewees
Before 1950	6.2	0.0
1950 - 1959	6.9	5.3
1960 - 1969	10.0	15.8
1970 - 1979	10.0	5.3
1980 - 1989	15.5	26.3
1990 - 1999	43.1	42.1
Unknown	4.6	0.0
Missing	7.7	5.3
TOTAL	100.0	100.1

In both the survey and the interview samples over forty per cent (43.1 per cent and 42.1 per cent respectively) did not start knitting for NONIA until 1990 or later.

The interviews were carried out in each of the knitters' own homes across Newfoundland during June and July 1999. Each interview lasted between forty-five minutes and an hour and a half, and the interviews were tape-recorded. At the beginning of the interview the participants were made aware of confidentiality, the right to refuse to answer any questions, and were offered the opportunity not to have the interview taped (only two interviews were not taped at the participants' requests). Each participant signed a consent form (see Appendix D). The questions asked covered a variety of areas: history of the participants' knitting, their current participation in knitting, their thoughts on NONIA, and their own and their spouse's work history (see Appendix E). These questions were all designed to gain an understanding of the motivation and meaning that the women attached to their knitting. Each of the knitters was then asked if she had any knitting she wished to show. This allowed for the interviewer to gain referential knowledge about the type of knitting that each participant was doing. After each

interview, field notes were taken and the interviews were later transcribed.

Conclusion

Literature review, surveys and interviews provided the best methods to facilitate this research. If any one of these were done on its own, a complete picture could not be drawn. Each method is complementary to the other: the literature provided the theoretical framework on which to base the questions; the survey provided both the profile of NONIA knitters and the source of the sample for the interviews; and the interviews allowed for an in-depth analysis of the motives and meanings the women attach to their knitting. Because of the isolated location, and the solitary nature of the knitting, methods such as participant observation would not have been appropriate. The mailed survey was the best way to reach the knitters, and the interviews were the solution to gaining personal access to some of the participants.

Appendix B: Survey

General Survey of NONIA Knitters

Compiled for L. Lynda Harling's MA Thesis

1	How old were you when you learned to knit?	
2	Who taught you to knit?	
3	Do you like to knit?	☐ Yes ☐ No
4	What is your favourite item to knit?	
5	In what year did you start to knit for NONIA?	
6	How did you get involved with NONIA?	
7	What articles do you primarily knit for NONIA?	
8	What articles do you like to knit the best for NONIA?	
9	Do you like the patterns NONIA supplies?	☐Yes ☐No
10	Do you like the yarn NONIA supplies?	☐Yes ☐No
11	Do you knit for money besides with NONIA?	☐Yes ☐No
12	Do you do any other handicrafts? If yes, please specify.	☐Yes ☐No
13	Do you do any other handicrafts for money?	☐Yes ☐No
14	How many hours per week do you knit for NONIA?	

15	How many hours per week do you knit, but not for NONIA?		
16	Where do you do most of you knitting?		
17	When do you do most of your knitting?		
18	Are you employed outside the home?	☐Yes	☐No
19	How many hours per week are you employed outside the home?		
20	Do you knit for your family?	☐Yes	☐No
21	Have you every taught anyone to knit?	☐Yes	☐No
22	Do you knit for charity? If yes, please specify.	☐Yes	☐No
23	Do you know any other NONIA knitters?	☐Yes	☐No
24	How often do you communicate with other NONIA knitters?		
25	Do any of your friends knit for NONIA?	☐Yes	☐No
26	Does anyone else in your community knit for NONIA?	☐Yes	☐No
27	Does anyone in your family knit for NONIA? If yes, please specify their relationship to you.	☐Yes	☐No
28	Is the administration at NONIA receptive to suggestions?	☐Yes	☐No
29	In what year were you born?		

30	Where were you born?	
31	Where do you live now?	
32	What is your sex?	
33	What is your marital status?	
34	How many people live in your household?	
35	How many children do you have?	
36	How many children under the age of 19 are living with you?	
37	What percentage of your household's annual income is provided by wages from NONIA?	

Other comments that might be of interest to me in my study of NONIA knitters?

Would you be willing to be interviewed?
If yes, please put your name, telephone number, and address:

Thank you very much for your time.

Lynda Harling

Appendix C: Cover letter

Dear Knitter:

I am a graduate student at Memorial University of Newfoundland. I am conducting a survey of NONIA knitters for my Master of Arts, Sociology, degree. The purpose of this survey is to learn about the people, like yourself, who knit for NONIA and the type of work that you do.

Enclosed please find a copy of my questionnaire. This is a voluntary activity, so you may decide not to take part. It will, however, only take a short amount of time to complete, so I hope you will fill it out and return it to me in the self-addressed stamped envelope. The information you provide will contribute greatly to my research.

With respect to confidentiality, I promise you confidentiality under the academic ethics standards of Memorial University of Newfoundland. Your name will not be revealed or associated with your response, nor will anyone other than myself and my advisors, Dr. Douglas House and Dr. Judith Adler, be allowed to see you response. While NONIA may be interested in my study, they will not be given any information which in any way identifies you as an individual. If there is any question you do not wish to answer, please feel free to omit it. Please note the number in the right hand corner. This number allows me to temporarily identify you. By referring to this number I will know that you have responded to the questionnaire, and therefore you will not contacted with a follow-up reminder.

I am a knitter myself and am combining my favourite pastime with my educational pursuits. Please be assured that this survey is not being conducted for any government agency. When my thesis is written, it will be available to be read by yourself or any interested party, keeping in mind that the participants in the study will not be named in the work. I hope that it will contribute toward better understanding of and further development of the knitting industry in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I appreciate your willingness to help me in my educational efforts. At the end of the survey there is a request for knitters to be interviewed in person. If you would be willing to take part in this portion of my research, please fill in your name, address and telephone number. This too is also on a volunteer basis. I will contact those interested knitters by telephone in mid-June to arrange convenient interview times. I look forward to receiving your reply.

Yours truly,

L. Lynda Harling
MA Student, Sociology
Memorial University of Newfoundland

Appendix D: Consent form

I,_____, have been assured confidentiality under the academic ethics standards of Memorial University of Newfoundland. My name will not be revealed or associated with my responses nor will anyone outside L. Lynda Harling and her advisors, Dr. Douglas House and Dr. Judith Adler, be allowed to see my responses. While NONIA may be interested in L. Lynda Harling's research, they will not be given any information that in any way identifies me as an individual.

I understand that the research objective is to understand the meaning NONIA knitters attach to the work that they perform. I understand that at any time I do not wish to answer a question I can decline to do so. I understand that the responses I will give will be taped and transcribed. Upon completion of the research, the tapes will be destroyed and the transcripts will remain in the sole possession of L. Lynda Harling.

(Date)

Appendix E: Interview Guideline

Section A

- What do you remember about the first time you tried knitting?
- Who taught you to knit?
- Why did you learn to knit?
- What did you work on the first time you knit?
- How did it turn out?
- When did you know that knitting was something that you would continue to do?

Section B

- Why have you continued to knit?
- What do you enjoy about knitting?
- Have you always enjoyed knitting?
- Is there anything you do not enjoy about knitting?

Section C

- What things do you knit?
- What things do you like to knit?
- Why do you like to knit these things?
- Do you knit things that you don't enjoy doing?
- Why don't you like knitting these things?
- Where do you get your patterns from?

Section D

- Who do you knit for?
- Do people appreciate the items you knit?
- Has anyone knitted for you?
- What did you think of these items and why?
- What does your family think of your knitting?
- What do they like you to knit for them?

Section E

- When and where do you knit?
- Where do you get your knitting supplies?
- What is your favourite yarn? Why?
- Do you knit more or less now than you have at other times in your life?
- When in you life have you knitted the most? least?
- Do you ever knit outside your home? Why/ why not? If yes, where?
- Does anyone else in your family knit? If yes, do you knit together?

- Do you share opinions and advice about knitting? Please describe.

Section F

- Why do you knit for money?
- Do you enjoy the knitting that you do for money?
- If you weren't paid, would you still knit?
- Do you ever feel pressured to knit? Explain.
- Does NONIA ever pressure you to knit?
- Is NONIA receptive to anything you have to say?
- What do you use the money you earn from knitting for?

Section G

- Would you continue to knit if you moved to a bigger town or city (e.g., St. John's)?
- Would you continue to knit if you moved to another province (e.g., Ontario)?

Section H

- Do you get a sense of accomplishment when you knit?
- Is a sense of accomplishment important?
- Do you find that knitting is relaxing, or do you find that you get very involved when you knit?
- Does knitting take your mind off of other things?
- Do you like to be creative with you knitting? Explain.
- Do you ever make your own patterns?
- Do you ever modify pattern that you are working on?
- Are you particular when you choose colours, fibres and patterns? Explain.
- Do you find that creativity makes knitting more rewarding?

Section I

- Do you think that time spent making something makes it more valuable? How? Why?
- What advantages are there to something that is handknit opposed to machine made?
- Do you feel that you have improved any of your own skills through knitting? Explain.
- Is there anything in your life that offers you the benefits that knitting does?
- Should more people be knitting?
- Do you do any other kinds of craftwork?
- Do you examine other people's work when you enter craft shops?

- Is it better to know more than one craft or to focus on just one?
- Are there crafts that you find or would think that are harder than knitting?
- Do you think that people would benefit more from learning a traditional craft or by learning basic computer skills? Explain.

Section J

- Have you ever taught someone to knit? Why / why not?
- Was it a good experience? Explain.
- Is knitting something that can bring people together?
- Should a parent teach their children / grandchildren to knit? Why / why not?

Section K

- Have you always worked out of your home? Why / why not?
- What does your husband work at?
- What schooling do you have?

End Notes

[1] The official name of the province is *Newfoundland and Labrador*. During this research, there were no respondents from Labrador. Therefore, since the research for this thesis was conducted only on the island part of the province, only the word "Newfoundland" will be used. Outports are the villages and towns of rural Newfoundland.

[2] See Overton (1996) for an illustration of how the tourist industry in Newfoundland perpetuates this sentimentality.

[3] This image is perpetuated in contemporary advertisements. For a calcium-enriched orange juice advertisement geared at menopausal and post-menopausal women the caption reads, "Avoid bingo, knitting and earlybird specials. Drink calcium." This implies that only inactive old people knit.

[4] Shirley Scott, a Canadian knitting historian, describes Newfoundland as the "folk knitting capital of Canada" because of the ingenuity and longevity of the knitters in the province.

[5] Silk (1995) retells how this was still the case when she started to fish in 1979.

[6] Schlereth uses the term "behaviouristic" instead of social actionist. This idea of the behavouristic approach in this instance is not to be confused with how it is used in Watsonian psychology. Here, it is to be understood more as "action" as opposed to "behaviour," as used by Max Weber.

[7] For a more comprehensive explanation of the methods used for this research, including sampling and interview guidelines, please refer to the Appendices.

[8] For a discussion of the representativeness of this sample to the NONIA population refer to Appendix A.

[9] In this case, habit appears to be used more in the vein of being a social habit, or tradition ("shared and acknowledged social practices; usually ones which have endured over several generations" (Campbell, 1996b: 162) as opposed to the individualistic practices discussed earlier.

[10] This is an interesting quandary; the women are doing needle*work* during times of rest.
[11] To see the Shetland Islanders' Co-op today, go to http://www.zetnet.co.uk/ska/

[12] Campbell does not provide a discussion on what is meant by "agency." As Abercrombie *et. al.* (1994) point out, this is one concept involved in "an important debate" (9) within sociology.

[13] Camic points out that "the idea of habit remained, in Durkheim's mind, too closely associated with psychology to merit inclusion in his sundry pronouncements about what the discipline of sociology sets out to study; to make the concept a part of sociology could only risk the whole cause of suggesting that the new field was not such an autonomous one after all" (1981: 1056).

[14] It is interesting to note that Campbell does not provide a definition for the concept "skill."

[15] For a Canadian example of this, see the literary works of L. M. Montgomery.

[16] See Pocius (1979) for a more in-depth analysis on the textile traditions of Newfoundland.

[17] In 1935 the Newfoundland government took control over all nurses in the province.

[18] See Appendices.

[19] The information presented here is based on the 130 respondents to the mail survey. See Appendix A for further details.

[20] While there may be knitters in Labrador, there were no surveys returned from there. Since NONIA did not supply a list of the addresses of their knitters it is not possible to verify if they have anyone knitting in Labrador.

[21] See Appendices A and E.

[22] The names of the knitters interviewed have been changed to protect their identity. The names used are common Newfoundland names selected at random.

[23] This subjective experience is very different from the Marxist notion of alienation through objectified commodities, even though Mrs. Parsons is, in a sense, an outworker for an outside agency, NONIA.

[24] One is more likely to expect a statement like this from a concert pianist without any other satisfaction in life, than from a woman who is not employed outside the home.

[25] In April 1999 there were 249 knitters employed by NONIA.

[26] Arans are intricate sweaters, originally from Ireland, which are knit all in one colour and employ the use of cables and textured stitches.

[27] Mrs. Ryan has kept a journal of all the garments she knit over her years with NONIA; however, she has not kept a log of her hours.

[28] This does not include the utilities that are already included in the knitters' household expenses, which in Marxist theory is seen as part of the hidden surplus appropriated by employers. In this instance, this interpretation would have to be more along the lines of reducing the negative surplus to the producers themselves.

[29] Out of 19 interviews, 4 knitters had minor children in the households.

[30] This assumes, in turn, that the characteristics of the 52.2 per cent of the survey respondents are indeed representative of the whole population of NONIA knitters. While there was no way that this could be checked, the high response rate from a survey of the whole population is encouraging in this regard.

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