"Who knit ya?" Exploring Lived Experiences of Gender Through Craft in Newfoundland and Labrador

By

Laura Flight (she/her)

A Thesis Submitted to

Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax Nova Scotia

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree of Master of Arts in Women and Gender Studies

December 2025

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Dr. Julie Hollenbach

Supervisor

Dr. Michele Byers

Second Reader

Dr. Sarah Alford

External Examiner

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Drop Stitch Thought #1

Dear Gram,

I've been thinking about you a lot as I begin my thesis work, and it felt instinctive to write to you and talk through my project as I used to when I was little. For years, I have felt a strong connection to handicraft work, specifically crochet, but an innate interest and desire to learn other crafts and skills like weaving, rug hooking, spinning, and quilting as well. From an early age, you taught me the basics of sewing, stitching in me a thread that I have deliberately woven together ever since. I'm not sure if you knew it at the time or what you thought might come of teaching me how to crochet and craft, but because of your teachings, I believe that Newfoundland craft is embedded within my soul; the fibres of my being are stitched together with yarn and thread, piecing my life to yours like a quilt through this eternal love of textiles that you gifted me so young.

I'm not sure if you knew it at the time, but you changed my life in inexplicable ways by showing me your craft. When I felt frustrated that my stitches weren't the right sizes, or that my rows were uneven making my edges wobbly, or when I couldn't sew close enough to the hemline: you would tell me that I had to have patience and practice what I was doing. When I cut my sewing pattern too small, you showed me how to solve a problem by adding a patch or sewing extra fabric to the hem and being creative with my solutions. You taught me about perseverance. When I was tired of repeating the same stitches over and over again, you would tell

me that I had to push through and finish what I started; you taught me that I could create something out of nothing and that I should be proud of my work no matter the outcome.

I’m not sure if you knew it at the time, but you knit me in the same way that you knit Mom and her sisters. You shaped who they are as women, daughters, mothers, aunts, friends, and grandmothers, and stitched their lives with intrinsically gentle thread and softly woven linen, sewn with such care and tenderness that I couldn’t help but feel drawn to learn from you in the little time we had together. You gave me your pink, steel knitting needles, showed me how to cast on my stitches, and I created the world’s wobbliest woolen square that catalyzed my creativity, and I haven’t stopped learning and creating ever since.

I’m not sure if you knew it at the time, but you were telling a story with each quilt you ragged and every scarf you stitched around our necks. Every fibre holds the memory of your care and dedication and each project, finished or not, carries traces of your life around with them; traces to which my threads have tied themselves. Because you were weaving me together with your most beautiful threads and stitching a piece of you into the quilt of my life, my very own story quilt. You probably did know it, because you just seemed to know everything there was to know and I am curious to dig deeper and learn.

CHAPTER 1

Selecting the materials: an introduction and guiding research principles

Above is a letter I wrote to my maternal grandmother, Dona Stryde, in the beginning stages of the thesis researching and writing process. As a 9-year-old, my Gram taught me how to sew and knit. From those first stitches, I made a wobbly and narrow rectangle—a soft, periwinkle garter stitch scarf for my mom's old, sugary-white teddy. From those first stitches, I learned a lifelong skill that has permeated the quilted membrane of my soul, permanently altering the fabric of my life. Being from the West Coast of the settler colonial province of Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) and having learned my craft there from other Newfoundland women, I am searching for the bases of my threads: origins that extend beyond my heritage, tracing gendered feminine experiences that urged women and folks who were assigned female at birth (hereafter referred to as AFAB) to become crafters. I have always known handicraft in the Newfoundland and Labrador tradition to be a gendered and collective practice associated with feminine roles and identities; I have always known it to be important as a cultural and social pillar to settler NL experiences and living, but without ever really knowing why that was the case. NL is filled with art made from everyday objects and lives. Just as sociologist Marylin Porter wrote in "A Conversation with Four Newfoundland Women Writers," "I can't imagine anywhere else, with this size of population, where there are so many fabulous, published writers, to say nothing of the visual artists, or the musicians, or actors. What is it about this place, what is it in the air that makes people so creative?" (Porter 40). Like the thick fog that settles in the harbours and the salt breeze that glues trees into bent over tuckamores, creativity lurks in the air and emerges from tree spores, giving way to a beautiful new form. For these reasons, I decided to dive deeper into the research on communal and collective craft work in NL.

In Newfoundland, when someone wants to know who your parents are, we ask "who knit ya?" This is an all-encompassing question that asks where you are from, why you are the way you are, and who raised you. "Who knit ya?" means that someone—or multiple people—knit you together, stitch by stitch, and that you are made of the people who influenced your existence. I was knit by my parents, my grandparents, and the wider community that I was born into on the West Coast of NL. As a cisgender queer woman and white settler, I recognize my privilege in Canada to be living on stolen land. The west coast, Ktaqmkuk, is native to the Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation, Innu, Inuit, and Beothuk people. While Nova Scotia and the other Atlantic provinces are considered under the Peace and Friendship treaties, Newfoundland is not included in official provincial or federal treaties (Government of Canada). In 2005, the Labrador Inuit Land Claim was signed ("Land Claims"), but this is specific to Labrador, not Newfoundland. As such, it is my responsibility as a researcher in this project to acknowledge the people who lived here before me and who were uprooted and displaced by my ancestors. This thesis explores gendered connections to craft in NL, but it was not intended to romanticize the histories of settlers who brought the crafting traditions of their places of origin nor those who appropriated Indigenous ways of crafting such as the traditional Mi'kmaq practice of basket weaving or seal skin work (Trépanier & Creighton-Kelly 142). In this thesis' consideration of craft as a gendered practice within the settler NL context, I draw on anti-colonial scholarship to inform my analysis of AFAB crafters and lived experiences and acknowledge the silenced histories of Indigenous peoples of the island. There are over 70 recognized treaties signed since 1701, ("About Treaties") and as treaty people I understand my place in what Eva Mackey calls "[making] treaty together" by actively decolonizing the divisions of stolen and unceded territory which calls for action on ideological and social levels (Mackey 141). By making treating together, Mackey

encourages a shift in colonial language to understand treaty as a verb rather than a noun—prompting action in decolonization rather than nonperformative words (141; Ahmed, *The Nonperformativity of Antiracism*). Calling the island home and having a place to call home is a privilege, and not one I consider lightly. I entered this work by understanding and sitting with my privilege of knowing NL as one of many sites of home as a descendent of colonial settlers. I take instruction from other scholars before me, such as Carla Taunton and Leah Decter who approached their work by writing about their decolonizing processes to actively work in alliance with Indigenous people. Intentionally writing in a decolonial, conversational style, they wrote, "Through each of our personal and professional experiences we have witnessed the potential for creative practice to function in this way, to stimulate the decolonization of the settler imagination" (Decter & Taunton 32). Where "this way" refers to the practice of decolonizing that does not "co-opt or de-centre Indigenous" thought and politics (32). As a settler, the community with whom I have crafted and the craft culture with which I engage is predominantly of settler origin. Deeply curious about the phenomenological transfigurations of craft in the lived experiences of women and AFAB people from NL, I sought to build community with crafters, strengthen our pre-existing connections both with our craft and with one another, and to honour the voices of my community. Through craft work and research, I rely not on my own voice, but on the more experienced, informed, and knowledgeable voices of this community.

Research, as Indigenous studies scholar Shawn Wilson explains, is not only the pursuit of answers to our questions but also to search for questions for the answers that we already possess (Wilson 6). This approach to research is pertinent to my exploration of community-based craft practices in NL; I have always lived with the answers of craft traditions, without knowing what questions about my communities they answered. Research is also about chasing our curiosities.

Contemporary art theorist Natalie Loveless discusses curiosity in the context of research and describes it as the connection between what exists to be known and what cannot be known. She writes, “the drive, linked to the unknown and the unknowable,” which “hovers at the intersection of knowing and not knowing…You can’t be curious about something you already know, but you need to know something about it in order to be curious” (Loveless 47). My curiosity is not necessarily about what craft means to NL women and AFAB folks but, rather, how has craft informed my understanding of myself and my community, how has craft informed the sense of self of those who took part in the research of this thesis, and how are crafts infused with stories of lived experience. Curiosity fueled the initial questions that lead me to this research: Do the lived experiences of women and AFAB people from NL manifest into textile-crafted creations? Do crafters from NL experience craft as a gendered practice? Is craft enhanced by community-based practices or gatherings? Do lived experiences become visible through crafted creations? These questions offered a starting place that prompted me to enter into conversation with others and became the central theme in the conversations I had with crafters in the focus groups that are the heart of this work. As I continued to consider craft in the lives and experiences of women and AFAB folks from NL, I was led to the following questions that this research answers: how is my own experience as a queer woman from NL informed by craft? How does this impact how I understand craft in my community? How are feminine gender associations understood through craft in NL? What does it mean for AFAB identifying people to be socialized as female with and through an understanding of craft? How does craft in NL serve as a gendered practice? How does lived experience translate into textile and crafted creations? My curiosity about how I came to know and adore the intricate repetitions of connecting threads on a needle or yarn from a hook

continued to guide this project. When a thread came to an end, I tied it to the next and continued to investigate how textile crafts tangled my fingers in a web.

In 1849, John Ruskin asked: “Must not beauty, then...be sought for in the form which we associate in our every-day life?” (Ruskin quoted in Alfoldy xvii). Ruskin’s question—a central tenet of the English Arts & Crafts Movement—in the context of the mid-nineteenth century, sought to provoke radical reconsideration of “cottage crafts” as Ruskin, himself, “applied the ideal of beauty to the crafts” that were, otherwise, cast aside as “mere trade” (Alfoldy xvii). Although Ruskin did not value the work done by women, he valued the “cottage crafts” as representations of mundane life. However, the objects which represent mundane life were tangled by contact zones where the work, skills, and objects handmade by Indigenous people were extrapolated by settlers. What was considered “beauty...in our every-day life” by Ruskin, relied on the work of women and Indigenous people, which was reduced nothing more than “cottage crafts” (Alfoldy xvii). Contrary to Ruskin’s work, I understand that in the Canadian settler context, traditional Indigenous crafts and practices were appropriated, which complicated the zones of contact at that time, blurring the lines between European settler craft work, and traditional Indigenous practice. Learning from Ruskin, I expand his sentiment in my own investigation which argues that there is beauty in everyday life, and in the everyday lives of women and AFAB crafters in NL, there is craft, and that crafts tell stories about who made them and what influenced their creation. As a researcher and a crafter, I held myself accountable to my own settler biases and privileges which, sometimes, clouded my own understanding of texts, experiences, and stories to open my own eyes to a deeper understanding of how I interact with craft as a woman from NL.

Throughout this thesis, I follow my wondering and wandering thoughts surrounding craftiness, handicraft, gender, traditional crafts and traditional roles, and Newfoundland or Newfoundland-ness as I explore how these concepts intertwine and are present and expressed in my own life and echoed through my community of AFAB identifying crafters. My curiosity has pushed me to find what motivates women and AFAB crafters to uncover the simplistic beauty of a stitch: to further prompt a self-exploration of "who knit ya?" and what these stitches mean. I discuss the histories of craft as a practice as well as its context within NL, and what it means to be a woman or AFAB crafter in or from NL. I also consider why crafting is an important aspect of feminist praxis and activism, and how these ideas, like spools of thread, tangle in a box. In the Literature Review, I clarify some foundational terminology used throughout the thesis, noting that I examine these concepts at length in the theory, methodology, and analysis chapters. When I refer to "craft" or "handicraft" I am referring to the types of textile work—such as knitting, sewing, quilting, crochet, weaving, rug hooking—that women in NL engage in both as a leisure activity and a skill for producing goods for themselves, their families, their communities, and sometimes for the market. I often use the phrase "domestic craft(s)" to signify the context of the craft(s) having been adopted into the domestic sphere where the craft adopts leisurely characteristics (Pentney; Parker; Boon et al.; Kelly). This differentiates the work that was historically done by working class women and that which middle class women did for leisure (Pentney; Parker; Kelly). I designed this project to include women and AFAB crafters because my own crafting communities include women and folks who are non-binary or gender queer, but who were AFAB and who were raised as female children. It is important to include these crafters because they were socialized as female bodies in NL and were taught to understand gender as both a concept and in the context of their own identities. Their knowledge of craft is predicated

on their socialization as female children based on deeply rooted domesticity attributed to traditional Euro-American roles.

In this thesis, I explore my own understandings and experiences of gender through community-based craft practices in NL to consider how craft is a transformative practice. To untangle my research questions, I engaged in a research-creation project with a group of women/AFAB crafters from my community in NL who all responded to an invitation to take part. As I stepped into conversation with my fellow crafters, we crafted and created in community with one another working through what Johnathan Morgan calls a "process-based approach" (Morgan). Morgan engages with "craft-praxis," something he describes as having "the power to reshape the ways we consider creativity, play, community, and even selfhood" (3). At its core, Morgan's craft-praxis is rooted in the fluidity of meaning which deconstructed attempts of linear understanding (13). Morgan explains that "[w]ithin this specific form of praxis, one seeks quality in the final product as well as one's process through self-development and the benefit of another being" (13). With that in mind, through four focus group sessions centered around collaborative crafting, I had conversations with a group of friends and family who are crafters in, or from, NL about what crafting means to them and if they believe that their lived experiences inform their craft in any way. While we talked, we were crafting —sewing, knitting, quilting, rug hooking, crocheting, etc.—to create quilt squares. I did not tell the participants how to make their square or how it should look; I only provided some prompts, or discussion questions to consider while they crafted so that they could have the freedom to create in their own unique ways. By crafting with minimal instruction but with a goal in mind, the crafters were able to be engaged in and focused on the process rather than worrying about the craft's outcome.

In the chapter on theory, I explore theoretical frameworks that shape and support my approach to creating a quilt in collaboration with other crafters, such as Jack Halberstam's "low theory" and Sonja Boon's "stitching theory." Inspired by Boon's ideas about how theory is created at the point of textile creation (Boon et al.) and Morgan's ideas on a process-based approach (Morgan), I explore how, at the intersection of theory and craft practice, craft-praxis is employed. The focus group format of this project is closely modeled after Sonja Boon and Beth Pentney's description of historical knitting projects and collectives in NL during and after the First World War: "Collective knitting projects, in this particular geo-political context, built community by bringing women together to share stories and ideas, facilitated political networks among women in far-flung rural communities, and supported local community initiatives" (Boon & Pentney 24). A major component of this thesis project was the facilitation of focus groups. The goal for these focus group crafting sessions was for me to learn about the experience of other women and AFAB crafters in and from NL to be able to discern and learn more about my own relationship with both craft and my identity as a queer, settler woman from NL. Before beginning the focus group, I prompted the participants to create a quilt square as a contribution to the research-creation portion of this thesis. The quilt square was meant as a reflection of themselves and their connection to their craft. Analyzing their creations offered me a new perspective on what textile handicraft in NL means and what it all means to me.

Construction of Thesis

The thesis is made up of seven chapters: introduction, literature review, theory, methodology, participant contributions, analysis, and the conclusion. Before each chapter is a letter to my maternal grandmother, from whom I inherited my affinity for craft. The process of

writing letters to her and including them within the thesis was, in part, inspired by Shawn Wilson's book, *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, where he pauses throughout his writing to the readers and addresses his own children, with whom he already has relationships, through a more personal writing style and, resultantly, builds relationality with the reader. Wilson implements this practice to interpose the academic structure of research and scholarly writing. Similarly, I wrote to my grandmother to bring you, the reader, into my thought process and emotions throughout each in-between phase of this thesis to disrupt the traditional and formulaic pattern of research. By this, I mean that the standard master's thesis follows a mechanical template of asking and answering research questions with the support of academic sources. While this thesis still asks and answers questions with the support of other scholars and thinkers, it also uses the letters addressed to my grandmother as a means of reflecting on my own experience and process as its own reference. This practice of writing letters mirrored my actual process of conducting craft-based research that was interrupted by working with my hands to understand the concepts and ideas that emerged through this research. By doing this, I was actively interrupting the standardized research format to let the reader into my thought process. The letters to my Gram offered a space to interrogate how I was feeling and force accountability as a researcher in a personal manor. Although my grandmother passed away when I was young, it felt comfortable to write to her as I did as a child. I have distinct memories of calling her on the phone after each row of knitting, or each doll's quilt I finished sewing to tell her what I have accomplished, and these letters, interrupting the flow of each chapter, mimic the pattern of those phone calls. These letters are titled "Drop-stitch thought" to point to the stitches that a knitter drops from their needles and picks back up in another row as knitting continues.

The second chapter of the thesis is the literature review where I offer a foundation of craft history, situating craft as a feminist practice, assessing crafting in the context of place (NL), and define key terminology. This chapter provides the context for the rest of the thesis, particularly to position the analysis chapter (chapter 6) within feminism, craft history, and a history of NL.

In Chapter 3, I expand the theoretical frameworks and ideas that are used to analyze the conversations that took place during the focus group sessions and the quilt squares that the participants crafted. Here, I define gender as a construct through the binary gender system and introduce key theoretical concepts such as Sonja Boon's stitching theory as well as Jack Halberstam's low theory. This chapter explores how theory is born through craft and what theories tangle with craft.

The fourth chapter explores the methodological approaches of this thesis and details the methods of data collection as research-creation and feminist focus groups relying on ethnography. The focus groups were designed to mimic a quilting group or knitting circle that invited participants to be in conversation while crafting their quilt squares. This chapter also discusses obtaining University Research Ethics Board clearance, the guiding research principles that ground the participant research and that were influenced by Shawn Wilson's *Research is Ceremony*, and the process of the four focus group sessions.

Chapter 5 introduces the focus group participants and displays the individual quilt squares that they created as the research-creation portion of this thesis. This chapter offers images and text descriptions of the squares and introduces each participant and how they each came to their crafts. In Chapter 6, I analyze the data from the focus groups and research-creation and apply the theories from chapter 3 to the findings. The analysis is divided into thematic

categories that include art, craft, and the gender binary; home, place, and Newfoundland and Labrador; embodiment & phenomenology; gender/identity; community; matrilineal inheritance.

Lastly, chapter 7 discusses the gaps and limitations that occurred in the participant research, as well as considers the contributions this thesis offers to the field of Women and Gender Studies as an interdisciplinary body of work about women's craft practices in NL. This chapter concludes the thesis with a final drop stitch thought where I detail the process of sewing together the thesis quilt.

Drop-stitch thought #2:

Dear Gram,

Now what? I've been reading about craft history and gendered craft, but I am curious about what that has meant in the Newfoundland context. Where did women gather? What were their conversations like? Where did this idea of Newfoundland craft come from? And I've been stitching a lot...trying out new ideas and playing around with materials and techniques to work with these thoughts. It reminds me of when I first started to sew with you. I would sit at the sewing machine and watch your hands——stiff, by then, with scleroderma——maneuvering the fabric through the machine and threading needles without even looking, conditioned to move without having to think. I would watch your even stitches, enthralled in a trance, mesmerized by the world of possibilities resting at your fingertips. Now, when I experiment with fabrics and yarn with a new-to-me sewing machine, it's as though I have a world of possibilities myself, but possibilities that seem to lead me straight back to where I began: using unfamiliar tools to work with familiar materials. I am new to this sewing machine, and I am new to the world of craft history; but the process and the writing are the same as they have always been for me. This is slightly unfamiliar territory, and I must figure it out as I go – as if I am sewing together the ground beneath me with each step I take.

CHAPTER 2

Thread and Needle: literature review and histories

In this chapter, I explore some of the foundational ideas of this project and step into conversation with the thinkers and writers whose work has informed my own. By reading and being in conversation with others who explore craft histories, research-creation, practice-based research, gendered and domestic craft, and feminist research practices I am building my own repertoire of critically engaging feminist craft research. I invite you to follow threads with me as we weave our way through a literary foundation.

The initial ideas for this project came from Sonja Boon's autoethnographic writing about quilting in Newfoundland and Labrador and theorizing her experience on the island with a sewing machine. As well as contributing to the theoretical foundation for this project, Boon, Butler, and Jefferies' *Autoethnography and Feminist Theory at the Water's Edge: Unsettled Islands* was fundamental to forming my guiding questions for this project. As suggested by Sonja Boon, at the crux of craft and thought, theory is born. The primary source of stitching theory comes from a chapter by Boon in *Autoethnography and Feminist Theory at the Water's Edge: Unsettled Islands*. This chapter, titled, "Histories: Stitching Theory," explores the creation of theory through the process of crafting, specifically stitching fabrics (Boon). The following passage from Boon's chapter about mindful engagements with craft in NL is central to the conceptualization of my work:

> But just as Newfoundland's knitters have used needles and yarn to theorize through their stitches, so too does the rhythm of the [sewing] machine give me room to ponder… I have discovered that quilting time is thinking time. Rhythm. Touch. Feel. Sound. Colour. Texture. Routine. All of these work together. My

> quilting time isn't ever just about the quilt; it is about everything that's rattling around in my brain. Like quilt blocks, ideas, too, can be pieced together, paired up, and squared off, and in that process, new patterns, new linkages, and new questions emerge. After several hours together, my fabrics, my thread, and I work not only through a quilt, but also through larger concepts. Together, we massage ideas. Together, we make theory. (Boon 93)

Here, Boon uses the sewing machine to explore the complexities of thought which, as she earlier explained, has been done by Newfoundland women and their quilts for many years. The quilting process emulates the thought process by pairing fabrics and stitching them together like ideas that come together to make sense of a whole issue. This passage encapsulates the foundational ideas that inspired this project as I worked with other NL AFAB identifying crafters to create a quilt that reflects and represents how AFAB crafters come to their practice in NL, what crafting means to each crafter, and how craft influences their understandings of gender. Building on that original idea, this thesis became an exploration of my own understanding of gender and specifically feminine identity through gendered notions of textile craft in NL. Similar to quilting, knitting is a long-standing practice in Newfoundland and Labrador that people have used for making socks, mittens, hats, and sweaters. On her website, Christine LeGrow—owner of the high-end Newfoundland knitted goods brand "Spindrift"—shares how the shared knowledge of knitting in NL marks the history of the island. LeGrow says of crafting knowledge:

> "[as it] was passed on from one person to the next, from one generation to another, so too was the art and skill of knitting: the patterns, the traditions, the techniques... Every stitch bears the indelible mark of all the craftspeople who

> came before—every movement of the knitter's needle is moved and guided by history and by place" (LeGrow).

Both Boon's chapter, "Histories: Stitching Theory," and LeGrow offer ideas of how the meaning of NL crafts and handmade textiles hold origin stories in their stitches, as well as the lives that created the crafted items. In this way, craft in NL metaphorizes the knowledge infused in the fibres and stitches to make sense of how communities work together to uphold traditions and evolve along the way.

In the contemporary context, women's socialization as young girls affect queer and non-binary or gender non-conforming people who have, most likely, been raised and socialized as girls and women. European-North American binary gender socialization is harmful to people who do not identify within the hegemonic, heteronormative binary that exists in Western colonial societies. The binary "gender system" insists on the existence of the conceptually singular male and singular female bodies and dismisses the possibility of plurality within a gender spectrum (Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*). The term "socialized" is very poignant in this linguistic context because it specifically indicates "having internalized the values and norms of a particular society or group; (of behaviour, an attitude, etc.) instilled by a process of socialization" ("Socialized" OED). Throughout this project, I return to the set of ideals and social parameters established in NL and to which current and future generations of AFAB folks are subjected. It is important to this study to consider the traditional in tandem with the non-traditional, albeit queer notions of craft and to embrace the challenges and compliments each pose to the other.

The distinction between craft and art is important for this work because I use the terms craft, handicraft, or handiwork interchangeably to refer to the work of NL crafters, which differs from textile art. James Clifford provides the concept of the "art-culture system" which indicates

the Western sense of value that art possesses in direct relation to its cultural context (Clifford 215). This system offers an understanding of the authenticity of art that asserts Fine Art's cultural value and significance as opposed to craft or amateur art, which is understood to be inauthentic because it is functional or non-professional and therefore of less cultural value (216). It is important to identify that the art-culture system as referenced by Clifford has not "reached its final form" in that defining characteristics of art as "good" or "bad" are in constant movement as social ideals of art and aesthetics consistently ebb and flow through different patterns (226). Clifford notes that: "the positions and values assigned to collectible artifacts have changed and will continue to do so," (226) and the same can be said of the domestic crafts in that the values of home crafts will also continue to change over time. Tradition remains in the practice of craft, as crafter and writer Bruce Metcalf articulates that "[c]raft is defined by tradition, after all" (Metcalf 19). He further suggests that as modernism inserted a rupture between the past and the present, craft offered a "seamless continuity" as the practice continued to advance through materials and tools, those who craft return to "techniques, visual cues, meanings, and ideas" of the past (19). The value of craft is therefore enhanced by historical practices and traditions.

Sally J. Markowitz explores the differences between and defining characteristics of art and craft in her article "The Distinction between Art and Craft" and emphasizes that "the arts" and "the crafts" are similar enough to use them in an expression together—as in, arts and crafts—but different enough to warrant two different terms (Markowitz 55). A part of the issue, Markowitz suggests, is that the term "'art' has a positive evaluative connotation that 'craft' lacks. Some critics, with good reason, claim that this difference in evaluative meaning reflects our culture's elitist values: what white European men make is dignified by the label 'art,' while what everyone else makes counts only as craft" (55). I am drawn to this description because it

accurately builds the connection between craft and research-creation that initially attracted me to use research-creation for this project on craft: research-creation and craft are both often viewed as illegitimate practices according to the canonical academic standard, which is derived from Western Colonial European ideals. Markowitz describes craft as being created for a practical or utilitarian function, household use, or decoration, while art typically has “no use at all, only an aesthetic use” (57). Markowitz’s description of craft is applicable to the handicraft work I am examining through this thesis in that craft based in and out of NL typically serves a purpose within the home or even outside for hunting, fishing, or gathering (LeGrow). Crafting skills used in NL include knitting, sewing, quilting, crocheting, carving, weaving, rug hooking, embroidery, pottery, and more.

The craft paradigm is a concept that Talia Schaffer illustrates in her work *Novel Craft: Victorian Domestic Handicraft and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. She situates the craft paradigm as a set of ideals that she observes as re-occurring motifs in nineteenth-century crafts and culture (Schaffer 4). Schaffer defines the craft paradigm as “a set of beliefs about representation, production, consumption, value, and beauty that underlies a great deal of mid-Victorian creative work” (4). These beliefs were based on crafted production and were often contradictory (4). For example, Victorian women’s crafts were intended to be realistic while simultaneously “altering materials to resemble other substances,” and “salvaging worthless debris” while “establishing incalculable sentimental value” (9). Schaffer argues that, while beliefs of the representation of the craft paradigm are observed throughout nineteenth-century culture, handicraft practices and objects are especially useful in making said beliefs “visible to modern scholars” (4). What interested Schaffer during her exploration of the craft paradigm was the “ugliness” of these Victorian crafts juxtaposed with the “beautiful *objets d’art* that the aesthetes loved” (4, *emphasis*

in the original). Schaffer points to the ugliness of Victorian women's handicraft as a parallel to women's physical presentation because, at the time, there was growing popularity for "demonstrating moral and domestic qualities (rather than wit or beauty)" among crafting women whose projects were functional within the home and likened to commodities (5). The craft paradigm illuminates the beauty of domestic crafts which traveled across the Atlantic Ocean to NL during periods of settlement and were similarly executed by women needing to provide for their families and communities outside of a modern middle-class context.

Today, craft, especially craft in Atlantic Canada, is interwoven with tradition: traditional techniques, uses, or even traditional gender and familial roles involved in their creation (Morton). In her book *For Folks Sake*, Erin Morton dives deep into the origins of folk art in the Atlantic provinces. Morton's analysis of folk art explores how the "decade of development" was marked in Atlantic Canada by the late capitalist period which began in the 1950s in North America after postwar consumption shortages ended (Morton 5). After the postwar era of rationed consumerism ended, the modern technology of the 1960s and 70s rapidly increased the "cheaply manufactured consumer goods" that began to replace "many of the handmade objects" of the common household (5). Morton points out that these common, handmade objects "recalled a former ethics of scarcity" and perseverance that attracted tourism to the romanticized idea of NL's folkloric past (5). Modern technology had begun to change the need for handmade goods, which resulted in increased consumerism on the island and in the Atlantic region. Specifically, about Nova Scotia, Morton explains that "in the face of all this change, many visual artists, writers, government bureaucrats, and tourism promoters produced nostalgic renderings of Nova Scotia's past as its future charged forward" (5–6). Similarly in NL, promoters were taking advantage of the idealized and romanticized aesthetic of the hard-working *folk* of rural

communities to sell a vision of quaint rural life to visitors. By doing this, the idea of craft became a version of an NL tourist attraction.

Morton articulates the ways in which crafts, especially those that have been adopted into the domestic sphere, are appreciated but romanticize the cultural past (Morton 19). It is important for my work here to recognize this cultural romanticization because the work that settler working-class women did during this period was out of necessity for their well-being and survival —until the urban industrialization of the mid-twentieth century (Samson). In her introduction to *NeoCraft: Modernity and the Crafts,* Sandra Alfoldy writes about the idealization of craft as a pre-industrial/pre-modern form of production. Alfoldy postulates that scholars during the mid-nineteenth century argued that crafts could "overcome the isolation of modern consumers" and that industrial machinery had interfered with the idealized practice of "mechanical crafts" (Alfoldy xviii). This thesis is not intended to romanticize the craft with which women engaged, or, more broadly, the period of settlement; nor is it to suggest that their lived experiences are ones that existed in a fantastical form of reality. Throughout this project, I return to the ideas of culturally romanticized pre-industrial craft practices and their position within craft in the Newfoundlander and Labradorian tradition as I have understood them and their place and value in my own life.

Material culture is important to the discussion of craft and women's engagement with it, because this school of thought considers how people connect to material objects. More specifically in the context of this thesis, material culture positions craft as a means through which crafters understand themselves and their surroundings through their connections to crafted objects. As Historian and Material Culture scholar Bernard L. Herman posits: through "material culture and cognition, we confront a straightforward question: How do people know themselves

and the world through objects?" (Herman 73). Within this thesis, material culture offers a lens through which to examine my own relationship with craft as a woman from NL, as well as the relationships that women and AFAB people have with the education and knowledge that surrounds craft in NL. Affect is equally important to this project in tandem with material culture since the feelings which are bonded to objects and the relationships we form with said objects are rooted in affect. According to Grossberg, "everyday life is not simply in the material relationships; it is a structure of feeling, and that is where [affect is located];" affect is "about how you can move across those relationships, where you can and cannot invest… what matters and in what ways" (Grossberg quoted in Herman 73–74). These are ways of exploring how people's connections with craft and the objects they create influence the ways in which they experience the world around them. Affect as a theoretical concept is important for me to establish, although it is not the main theoretical lens I have used for this thesis, it offers an understanding of how emotions and affect are embodied (Bazinet & Vliet). Affect is found in the liminal spaces of a feeling, where something more than an emotion is experienced and, as I explore in the analysis of chapter 6, affect is often, although not always, accompanied by memory or nostalgia (Rutherford; Gruner). Danilyn Rutherford situates "affect as a felt bodily intensity, the feeling of having a feeling, a potential that emerges in the gap between movement and rest" but that affect is "something other than emotion" (2). Within this thesis, I use affect to consider how women and AFAB crafters come to their craft through emotion and material connection to push my own understanding of what my relationship with craft means as a woman from NL.

There are infinite ways for stories to be told and infinite ways to read them. Sonja Boon discusses the ways in which theory is built out of the process of crafting; she writes, "As I work

my quilt through the machine, I consider the potential of quilt making as a space for embodied thinking, processing, knowing… What stories can 400 squares tell?" (Boon 93). To apply Boon's ideas to the construction of this thesis, when craft and theory are woven together, there are endless stories that can be told at the intersection of theory-making and craft. Following Boon's craft-based theory building, I thought of being in collaboration with various NL crafters to listen to stories of craft, lived experiences, knowledge, and traditions while engaging in craft practices as a way of connecting generations of women and AFAB folks through a historically gendered practice of household craft work.

Historically, women used crafts such as sewing, knitting, crocheting, rug hooking, embroidery, and weaving in NL to produce goods and clothing for survival, fishing, hunting, and warmth. As Christine LeGrow explains, knitting in NL was "part of everyday life: to keep the fishermen dry, to keep berry-pickers warm, to keep children clothed and smiling. Through countless generations, the secret of wool was widely known: its natural warmth, durability, and sustainability" (LeGrow). Some scholars have focused on women's contributions to the fishery as "[m]ost women were skilled at spinning wool and knitting" and, as a result, were able to make most of the socks, mittens, sweaters, and even pants that the men wore on the unforgiving shorelines and out at sea. Crafts such as knitting and sewing have been integral elements of historic NL culture; however, there is more to understanding traditional crafts than learning the skill. As practices dominated by women in the home, domestic crafts inform how women who participate in the practice are understood in the broader NL context. Rozsika Parker writes that "to know the history of embroidery is to know the history of women" (Parker ix). While Parker is writing specifically about embroidery within the context of 1980s Europe, the same is true of other home-crafts: that to know the histories of knitting, crochet, or sewing (to name a few) is to

know the history of women, as femininity within a European context has been historically linked to domestic craft practices. Parker's foundational book, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine,* published in 1984, examines how expectations and standards of feminine behaviour evolved from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century in the British context, an analysis which I extend to NL as it remained a British colony until 1949, when the island entered Confederation with Canada (Tattrie & McIntosh). Parker argues that embroidery was an instrument for "educating women into the feminine ideal," —where the feminine ideal, in this context refers to the set of standards and expectations that Western patriarchy enforced upon women, —then used to prove their knowledge, but also performed as "a weapon of resistance to the constraints of femininity" (Parker ix). This highlights two especially crucial elements of gendered feminine craft that contribute to the foundation of my research: that craft was used as a mode to educate women to comply with expectations of feminine behaviour; and that some found pleasure in the domestic crafts where they could make meaning against the ways in which women have been oppressed by femininity within a patriarchal society with entrenched binary gender systems and restrictive gender roles. By keeping British Enlightenment values, early settlers retained the desire of *home* and perpetuated settler colonial modes of production in the home.

Newfoundland and Labrador women were, and still are, considered the caretakers of the home that would *produce* domestic crafts as a means of providing for their families, as well as their communities. In "Why crafts? Influences on the development of occupational therapy in Canada from 1890 to 1930," Judith Friedland describes Jessie Luther is a prominent figure to the Arts and Crafts Movement in NL who taught handicrafts to women at the Grenfell Mission in the early 1900's (Friedland 209). Luther was an occupational therapist who used handcraft has a

method of mental healing, and a trail blazer in the field who "promoted the production and sale of crafts" as she taught women how to use their textile crafts to supplement limited income (Friedland; Luther & Rompkey). As women learned textile crafts such as weaving, needlepoint, and rug hooking, they began to gather and work on their crafts together. In her book *Threads of Gold: Newfoundland & Labrador, Jubilee Guilds, Women's Institutes*, Agnes M. Richards elaborate that women began to congregate within their communities in what they called "Jubilee Guilds," which were groups that "existed to improve the conditions of rural life by helping people to use their own resources to brighten their homes, and further community interests and meet their needs" (Richards 8). The Jubilee Guilds—operated primarily by women in the community—offered support for women who handled the education of children, keeping the house, and engaging in community affairs (Richards 9–10). The guilds began as a community initiative modeled after the Women's Institutes of Canada and England, where women were able to learn and engage with others about their skills and knowledge on household chores, handcrafting, cooking, and other forms of household and community-keeping (8). The guilds were an effort of the settler colonial project that occupied Indigenous territory where British colonies settled in NL, where domestication took place through the guilds. I am reminded of Kaplan's work here where she situates settler women's domesticity as an effort of "the imperial project of civilizing" (Kaplan 582) the land which settlers overtook from Indigenous peoples, including the theft of land and disruption of sovereignty from the Inuit, Innu, Mi'kmaq, and Beothuk in what is now Newfoundland.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, there is a commonly understood central meaning for craft: a hand-made item with purpose ("Handcrafted goods"). NL crafts are often created to be functional items, such as a quilt for warmth, a pair of trigger mittens—which are mittens that

have three spaces: for the thumb, pointer finger, and one larger space for the other three fingers (*see figure 1*)—“to warm your hands while allowing the dexterity to jig for cod,” and pottery molded to feed hungry families (“Handcrafted goods”). This meaning of ‘craft’ has various names, including handicraft, handcraft, home-crafts (Parker 8), folk art, and vernacular art (“Handcrafted goods”). Consistently, Newfoundlanders and tourists enjoy NL crafts for their uniqueness and usefulness, as the curator of the Art Gallery at the Craft Council of Newfoundland and Labrador, Bruno Vinhas, says, “It’s not only in your kitchen [to be used]—it’s functional, but it’s beautiful” (“Handcrafted goods”).

Figure 1: 35-year-old trigger mitts made by Ivy Locke, my great grandmother.

Another important concept explored in the thesis is that of craft forms of activism. A discussion of craftivism pertains to this project because craftivism has been used by women and

queer people as a subversive interaction with craft that is politically and critically engaging (Kelly; Boon & Pentney). Domestic crafts have been employed by artists, activists, and activists who are artists, to express activist agendas through action and involvement in street protests as well as in artistic installations in public spaces using traditionally domestic crafts. About crafty forms of activism, Boon & Pentney offer the following:

> Craftivism is a process whereby crafters use their creative skills and energies to comment on and respond to political causes and issues of social concern...As a mode of activism, craftivism responds to the feminist revaluations of notions of ‘women's work’ (Luckman, 2013), and, more radically, makes public work that was originally designed solely for the domestic sphere (Boon & Pentney 23).

In her article “Knitting as a feminist project?” Maura Kelly posits that “yarn bombing” —a sub-genre of craftivism where public spaces are disrupted with knitted or crochet coverings or objects and spaces— “suggests that the meaning of knitting is dependent on the intention of the knitter and is context specific” (134). Kelly’s syntax is interesting as she explains that the meaning of the crafted projects—knitting in this example—and the understanding that staged yarn generates to the public eye is specific to its location and the intention of the maker. When considering works of craftivism, it is certainly important to acknowledge that each piece is curated with a motive and purpose. Whereas crafting in the home to produce household materials such as cloths and clothing subverts Kelly’s observation that knitting derives meaning from the knitter’s specific intentions for the work (134). A significant aspect of craftivism and the resurgence of domestic crafts such as knitting and sewing that has been observed by scholars and craft researchers is the act of reclaiming the domestic craft to tame, oppress, and enforce the domestic ideal (Kelly; Boon et al.; Pentney; Parker; Fry).

Drop Stitch Thought #3

Dear Gram,

Over the years I've noticed that I rely on crafts for both expression and distraction in equal measure… or maybe a respective 40/60. I find that when I am creatively inspired, I'll sometimes write, but usually I'll pick up a new textile project and start creating. Either a ball of yarn and a crochet hook or knitting needles as I work on re-learning. Sometimes even just a bag of buttons to see what it becomes. But often, it serves as a distraction: procrastination from my work (aka this thesis) or to get out of my own head and thoughts—especially when I feel anxious and uneasy. The motions, repetitions, rhythms, and textures feel familiar as it soothes my soul. My mind escapes to where I only need to focus on the routine movement of my hands and the sounds of my breathing. When my writing is blocked (particularly when writing in the academic genre), I turn to yarn. Through a creative process with crafts, like crochet or knitting, it is almost as if my jumbled thoughts begin to take on a physical form. A metamorphosis of thought transfigured through craft.

Did you ever feel that way? I wonder if quilting in your sewing room was your escape. Or knitting on the sofa while Grampie sat reading on the adjacent love seat while NTV News played in the background. Could you feel your mind begin to ease when the yarn was between your fingers?

CHAPTER 3

Stitching the fabrics: Theoretical ideas and frameworks

This chapter expands the theoretical framework on which the analysis of this study is built. I consider gender construction and gender socialization through feminist theory, stitching theory and its relation to craft studies, and bring in Halberstam's iteration of low theory. Each of these theories and concepts contributes to the conceptual framework of this thesis.

Gender construction and feminist theory

As a queer, white, cisgender woman from Newfoundland and Labrador, my earliest concepts of gender came to fruition as a girl playing with dolls and playing *house* with my older sister, where we would re-create the heteronormative, hegemonic, nuclear family structure in which we existed. My early concepts of traditional gender roles are certainly not unique; they derived from Western European ideals of femininity and masculinity that were based on a patriarchal social order. This came to bear on the labour and social roles prescribed to each gender in the home. The following chapter unpacks concepts of gender and queerness, and how I critically engage with the notion of gender from a feminist lens in this project.

French feminist philosopher and theorist Simone de Beauvoir explored ideas of gender as a social construct in the late 1940s in her book *The Second Sex,* where she wrote that "one is not born, but rather one becomes, woman" (Beauvoir 283). This refers to the social construction of gender to which British colonial and North American societies—specifically within the Canadian context of this thesis—closely adhere and impose upon individuals, specifically children, before they have a chance to understand their own sex and gender. Beauvoir goes on to explain that "no biological, psychic, or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on in

society; it is civilization as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called female" (283). Here, the *eunuch*, a Latin-derived term for a man without a penis ("Eunuch"), implies that there must be an inferior opposition to the dominant male rather than an equal counterpart. Western colonial ideals of gender rely on this binary to enforce the gender system, which frames gender as being male, and the opposing and subordinate gender, as female. Ideas of gender within the broader colonial Canadian context are integral to this thesis because, while I examine traditional notions of female roles in NL and craft practices which are historically situated in NL, I am doing so in the contemporary context of craft and gender in NL.

It is important to establish here that I believe that the male-female gender binary is a socially constructed concept that limits the experiences and identities of people who exist beyond and within said binary. Activist, writer, and public speaker Alok Vaid-Menon articulates in their book, *Beyond the Gender Binary*, that the gender binary "is a cultural belief that there are only two distinct and opposite genders: man and woman" (Vaid-Menon 5). Additionally, when I say *both* genders, this is not to enforce the gender binary, but to express the mindset through which I learned gender as a child. A feminist theoretical approach to the gender binary, as Sara Ahmed suggests in *Living a Feminist Life*, fails to be "habituated" within "the gender system" (55). She writes that "[a] gender system is...about how you perform within a wider system that matches meaning and value to persons and things" (55). As explored in Chapter 2, material culture offers a lens through which human attachment to physical spaces and objects occurs (Herman 73). I extend Herman's exploration of material culture to interact with Ahmed's writing of gender associated meaning in that a crafter's attachment to crafted objects are associated with gendered values (Herman 73; Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* 55). In framing this thesis within Gender

Studies scholarship, I conceptualize gender as diverse, complex, and I analyze gender through an intersectional feminist lens that considers gender to under understood through its' intersections with race, sexuality, class, ethnicity, and other influencing social locations (Vigoya). The gender binary enforces differentiation between male and female and fails to consider gender identity from a culturally diverse standpoint as gender non-conformity has existed in non-white cultures for centuries. For instance, two-spirit is a term established by and for Indigenous people with complex genders and sexualities that exist outside of the colonial gender system (Laing 1); and hijra people in Hindu culture which encompasses a cultural group of people with a variety of sexual and gender identities, often gay, queer, trans, and "feminine men" (Singh & Kumar 79). The intention of this study is to understand the importance of craft in the lives of women and AFAB people with an understanding of the long and complex history of gender, especially socialized femininity in the Canadian settler-colonial context.

For this thesis, I included people assigned female at birth and not just cisgendered women because, while I explored the gendered lived experiences of women in NL through craft, not all the crafters with whom I interacted identify as women even though their assigned sex is female. This is not to exclude transwomen from my exploration of gender and craft in NL; however, none of the crafters who participated in the focus group identified as trans, nor did I come across accounts from transwomen crafting in NL through my research. Notably, in this thesis I consider that craft is not just work taken up by working- and middle-class women but is important in the formation of queer community and relationships. My curiosity is about (traditional) craft in NL and is equally about how other queer and genderqueer people in my community understand craft as well.

The term AFAB, short for “assigned female at birth,” is a way of describing people whose biological sex is female and who were most likely socialized as girls and women, but who identify outside of the gender binary as either genderqueer, non-binary, transgender, gender non-conforming, gender fluid, or other identities that contrast traditional Westernized gender norms (Exton). A participant in my focus group identified as genderqueer or gender fluid. As an AFAB crafter from the West Coast of NL, they have a different experience of gender identity than cisgender women, for many reasons. For example: gender socialization as children within the binary of male and female, existing in a heteronormative and hegemonic political environment which often lacks social awareness of gender-nonconformity and understanding of and relationship to traditional craft as a feminine and domestic role. AFAB people are likely to have been socialized as women or girls, which can lead to cognitive dissonance regarding their identities and their positions in relation to traditional craft. The aim of this study was to explore craft as an instrument of feminine and gendered socialization that occurred in the lives of women and AFAB people in NL.

Based on my own experiences as a girl growing up in NL in the early 2000s, I understood domestic textile crafts as women’s home-making duties, but also as an activity for leisure. These notions are contradictory, but these are the interactions with craft that I witnessed. Rozsika Parker suggests that in Victorian England, crafting was deemed an appropriate activity for women as it took up little space, and in many ways, did not harm their bodies and forced them to take up less space, too (Parker 63). Of the feminine occupation of space, as Ahmed writes that “girls come to take up less space by what they do, and by what they do not do. Girls come to restrict themselves through restricting how they use their bodies.” (Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* 25). Practices of craft reinforce the feminine occupation of space as Parker suggests that

home crafts take up little space, and therefore an appropriate activity for girls (Parker 63). I learned the basics of sewing, knitting, crochet, and cross stitch from my mother, grandmother, and aunts at various stages of my childhood, and, in retrospect, craft was a tool that shaped my worldview and influenced my socialization in NL. This is not to say that boys around me did not learn the same crafts or skills. For instance, around the time I began to crochet, my younger brother was learning to knit from our Gram; other boys in my elementary school joined the knitting club. Often, as I have observed from attending local craft fairs and art expositions, the crafts that men adopt are ones that more traditionally align with representations of masculinity, such as carving, woodworking, drum making, stone sculpture, or working with leather or seal skin, among many others: activities that often require the use of tools and strength associated with masculine qualities. Contrary to the space that women occupied with their crafts, men's work took up more physical space and required more strength, that is, more taxing on the body than the crafts done by women. In his essays on masculinity in nineteenth century England, John Tosh explores the traditionally masculine role both within the household and in public spaces. Tosh asserts that "men have historically been dominant in the public sphere" and their leisure brings them out of the home and often into nature (Tosh 60). In NL, for instance, men often made their own fishing nets; a practical, functional craft resulting in a product for a male dominated job in the fishery (Higgins, *Lifestyle of Fishers*). The conversation of men who craft in NL is important; however, it is a different conversation than the one in which I am engaging with my community of female and AFAB crafters in this project. Many other craft scholars have contributed to the discussion of masculine identities engaging with the so-called feminine crafts, and many of them have found that men who engage in domestic crafts do so as a subversive act (Parker; Pentney; Kępa 74). Some men who interact with domestic crafts—knitting, embroidery,

crochet, or other fiber arts—do so as an art form to subvert notions of gender or to explore queerness and sexuality through their work (Pentney; Kępa). My goal here is to acknowledge the nuance of gender in craft and not to suggest that all men who knit are knitting to subvert the feminized practice of knitting, nor that women do not take up wood carving or other masculinized crafts. Gender identity and expressions are complicated, and, in the context of this project, the interactions of gender and craft are not rigid; however, this conversation focused on the impact of craft in the lived experiences of women and AFAB people.

Stitching Theory

As already touched on in chapter 1, Sonja Boon suggests in "Histories: Stitching Theory," that at the crux of craft and thought, theory is born (Boon). As a project rooted in NL 's craft culture, a theory rooted in the province's unforgiving terrain and of navigating life as an islander, a crafter, and a woman with femme or feminine adjacent identity is crucial to understanding my own work as I acknowledge a settler view of place. While I stitch the words of this project together, so too are my understandings of identity as a settler woman from Newfoundland stitched in place.

Boon's chapter begins by describing the island in the middle of a blizzard; cold, miserable, and unforgiving. During the blizzard, Boon finds herself sitting at her sewing machine working together patches of a quilt. Immediately the relationship between acts of traditional craft and the province of NL is established as symbiotic—that is, symbiosis as "any intimate association of two or more different organisms, whether mutually beneficial or not" ("Symbiosis"). By this, I mean that in some ways craft in NL is reliant on the island itself as NL crafters are historically known for making hats, mittens, sweaters, socks, and even nets for

fishing and hunting in the harsh weather. The materials, such as wool yarn for knitting, are traditionally hand-spun from sheep and other animals or naturally derived fibers/plants on the island. The symbiotic cycle means that crafters make items or garments for the climate; the island provides materials, and the climate informs the garments needed.

In addition, craft in NL provides a means for women to understand and claim their citizenship (Boon 92), as there exists a cultural reliance on the work that women have produced (Morton). Boon considers the resurgence of domestic craft, noting that it extends beyond NL, as other scholars have observed through the rise of craftivism and do it yourself (DIY) culture. She urges: “What conceptual purposes might handcraft, traditionally aligned with the domestic and the feminine, serve?” (Boon 91). This highlights two crucial factors on which this project predicates: first, that handcraft serves a conceptual purpose; and second, that in the NL context, handcraft aligns with domestic and feminine qualities, perceptions, or characteristics. This question is not posed without answer in this text, as Boon offers that handcraft continues to be “a way for women to claim citizenship, to give voice to the issues that concern them and their communities most, and to contribute to what might be deemed ‘the greater good’” (91–92). As explored earlier, handcrafts such as knitting, quilting, and rug hooking have a deep history in NL for their practicality, durability, and of building community for women in outport communities through organizations, such as the Newfoundland Outport Nursing and Industrial Association [NONIA]. Outports are ports or harbours in NL other than the primary port of St. John’s and are small communities, sometimes small towns, that settled around the coastline for the fishing economy (Webb). Aside from the acts of service that handcrafted goods provide Newfoundlanders, Boon notes that crafts such as knitting “also provide an intimate, reflective—and reflexive—activity through which the women of NL have made sense of their lives, their

relationships, and their world," (92) and that sharing or preserving the tradition allows others to claim the purpose and sense of self that handcraft offers.

A crafter's reflectiveness lays out the foundation for theory to emerge from the craft itself. Referring to Ricia Chansky's thoughts about the intersection of craft and action, Boon quotes Chansky: "The needle stabs as it creates, forcing thread or yarn into the act of creation. From a violent action comes the birth of a new whole. Women are channeling their rage, frustration, guilt, and other difficult emotions into a powerfully productive activity" (Chansky quoted in Boon 92). In this 2010 chapter, Chansky highlights the ways in which Third Wave Feminists have worked to reclaim, what she calls, the "domestic arts." Chansky writes that women are "returning to domestic arts such as knitting and quilting with a sense of strength, not servitude, viewing the needle as a means of creative outlets that communicates their individual strength" (Chansky). This is an important shift in the social implications of craft to consider in the lives of female or AFAB crafters and the ways craft is employed to harness the experiences of these crafters because it contextualizes the significance of craft as personal site of action. Chansky's theorization of channeling difficult emotions into craft through the violent actions of a needle through fabric lays the groundwork for analysis that takes place in chapter 6.

Feminist issues, politics, and theory exist as much in the home as they do in public. In *Living a Feminist Life*, Sara Ahmed discusses that feminism is a way of living and of understanding the world beyond the home (Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* 1–2). As a feminist writer and crafter, Boon highlights an important connection "between social justice, emotion, and generative action. I would argue that theory emerges at the exact point where these three elements meet; that is, in the process of creation itself" (Boon 92). Boon is interested in the tradition of knitted and quilted crafts, even if the "so-called feminine arts have passed [her] by"

and if she is "awkward around the sewing machine" (93). As she attempts to sew, Boon notes the connections between the act of sewing—or crafting, or creating—and the thought, the emotion, and/or the meaning behind the act itself:

> The material bunches in funny places. Sometimes the machine won't go at all and then I curse at it and all things fabric. But just as Newfoundland's knitters have used needles and yarn to theorize through their stitches, so too does the rhythm of the machine give me room to ponder…After several hours together, my fabrics, my thread, and I work not only through a quilt, but also through larger concepts. Together, we massage ideas. Together, we make theory. (93)

Through the act of sewing a quilt, Boon is theorizing the process of crafting as it relates to her own life and processes. The collaborative, community process-based research approach used in this thesis project draws on Boon's formulation of working through the process of crafting. Boon's stitching theory emerges through textile creation, and as I worked through the process of not only writing this thesis, but also through the process of research-creation with other crafters, I too, found that theory became stitched in the quilt squares we crafted.

A focus on the process of crafting is central to stitching theory, as it is to handcraft practices themselves (Boon 93). Boon argues that the process of creating through domestic crafts is what matters the most; she writes, "[h]andcraft makes meaning through touch. The yarn, the thread, fabric, the stitches—they *are* the story, they *are* the theory" (93, *emphasis in the original*). This means that the process of handcrafting—of stitching, knitting, weaving, felting, rug hooking, among others—is the process of theory making because the result of craft holds the story of its fabrication that the hands of the crafter tell. The process of crafting is important to the process of the focus groups as well because while we—the crafters who took part, and me—

crafted our own quilt squares, we discussed our experiences with craft and what it means for us collectively and individually.

Low Theory

In their book, *The Queer Art of Failure*, Jack Halberstam explores the framework and application of low theory as an opposition to high theory. Halberstam proposes that low theory operates as a theoretical framework that offers "ways of being and knowing that stand outside of conventional understandings of success" by locating all "the in-between spaces" that rescue us from the hegemony of high culture (Halberstam 2). If high theory and culture present capitalistic notions of success as normative, then low theory suggests a non-traditional view of success as a good thing, despite the common conception of it as failure. Throughout the work, Halberstam focuses on the word "failure," suggesting that "failure allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behaviour" and that, as opposed to success, "maybe failure is easier in the long run and offers different rewards" (3). Contrary to traditional ideals of success, failure within low theory reads as a means by which to fail well, to a successful failure: a point of learning or growing.

As articulated earlier, European and settler-colonial contexts of gender situate women as inferior to men within the hegemonic gender binary. Within Halberstam's framework of low theory, I suggest that men are equivalent to high theory/success and women equate low theory/failure, implying that normative success presents to men while women fail to achieve success in comparison. The perspective offered by low theory is that women occupy a space of good failure wherein they "fail" in terms of not being male; however, they are not men, therefore they cannot fail as men and, rather, succeed by virtue of being a woman. Moreover, I apply the

same to the dichotomy of art versus craft, where art is successful, and craft is a failure in terms of who produces art versus craft and what is considered a legitimate practice (Loveless). Art, as produced by a man, is historically successful and allotted space within Western notions of high society (Loveless), while craft is not art and therefore fails as art, although it succeeds as the antithesis of art, which is what I have explored as domestic handicrafts (Schaffer). Accordingly, women in craft within the framework of low theory succeed "below the radar" of traditional models of success, as it fails to be male-dominated art, it fails well in proving its worth as a woman's trade.

As per Halberstam's iteration of low theory, they comment on art as being associated with high culture and masculinity while craft is associated with low culture and femininity. Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock offer that, the title "artist" has historically been associated with masculine occupation of the arts, while "the feminine is created to be the other," as in "*woman artist*" (Parker & Pollock xxii). My intention is not to enforce a gendered hierarchy of art and craft, but only to recognize it and consider how such a system contributes to the ways crafters might understand their position within the gendered hierarchy of art and craft that sustains cultural misogyny. Parker and Pollock state that within art, there is a hierarchy based on class and gender of the artist, and by extension, a clear division between arts and crafts (55). The hierarchical divisions between class and gender extend to racial divisions as well. Charmaine Nelson articulates the gaps that exist in art history scholarship and suggests that an intersectional approach to feminist studies highlights the factors of race within the art/craft hierarchies (Nelson 2–8). According to Halberstam, low theory positions unconventional "ways of being and knowing that stand outside of conventional understandings of success," (Halberstam 2) which offers a landing place for craft as a standard and useful practice with common results in

comparison to art. Parker and Pollock argue that art created by women was critically established as a category of "the feminine in art" to differentiate women's art from men's art so as to "affirm masculine dominance" of the artistic arena (Parker & Pollock 185). Critics, in this case, dismissed women's art as feminine, and "therefore bad rather than good and feminine" (186). In addition, low theory makes space for considerations of race within the art-craft/male-female hierarchies. As Nelson articulates, the Black Diaspora is seen throughout Western art history as the subject of the white colonial gaze, and where non-white artists are seen as lesser, or "othered" for not existing according to the "imperial center" (Nelson 9). Prior to the twentieth century, non-white people were not recognized as artists, nor was their creative work acknowledged as art (Nelson). Nelson's argument is evidence of white and male centric spaces that historically excluded artists and their work from being recognized as legitimate. Low theory leaves space where non-white, non-male people and their work is recognized as failing to be white and male, thereby succeeding at being non-white and non-male.

Drop stitch thought #4

Dear Gram,

In 2 days, I will be starting the focus groups where I will be making a quilt with 12 other people from NL. It's a little daunting and nerve wracking because I have never done anything like this before. I've never taken on a project of this magnitude, or experienced crafting in this way. I know that over the years you must have been a part of quilting groups or knitting clubs or something of the sort. I wonder how you felt there. I imagine you were right at home with any group of women with their sewing machines or their knitting needles.

I want to create a space where people can share their experiences and share their crafts. I want to make sure everyone feels comfortable to ask for help or ask questions the same way you always made me feel comfortable in expanding my own creative process.

You always had patience with me; you let me make mistakes so that I could learn how to fix them. You were gentle, inviting, encouraging, and supportive. I take that with me into this phase of my project.

I am anxious to begin, and remaining open to whatever happens, letting the threads fall where they may.

CHAPTER 4

Pattern Selection: Methods and Methodologies

My primary research methods for this project included research-creation and focus groups as a primary form of data collection. From these methodological frameworks, I stitched together an introspective and artistic approach to this work. In this chapter, I explore research-creation and focus groups as methods and how they support this project. I also explore my own approach to this work and why I chose certain practices to conduct my research and produce my writing. This chapter includes an overview of the narrative analysis which I used to explore the conversations that derived from each focus group session in the context of this research.

To begin, research-creation situates art as legitimate research in academia, where art refers to any kind of visual and material creation such as textile art, craft, sculptures, audio, video, multi-media, dance, or other physical and/or visual interpretations of scholarship. Natalie Loveless writes about research-creation in the second chapter of her book *How to Make Art at the End of the World* and describes how research-creation operates within scholarly work:

> Research-creation, in important ways, resists the illustrative frameworks in which a thesis or dissertation explains, justifies, or describes an artistic practice (and vice-versa), exploding the inherited binary between the artist-object and the theorist-subject, and offering something that, while using the tools, literacies, and skills of both artistic practice and art history, does something different to, with, and from these "homes." (Loveless 44)

I was particularly drawn to the language of resistance that Loveless uses to describe research-creation in the context of the neoliberal university because it acknowledges the ways in which traditional research methods can restrict the work that artistic and arts-based scholars produce

within the academy. Loveless further explores how research-creation contests historical modes of academic research presentation as she suggests that research-creation "challenges a historically prevalent, sticky and tricky, ideological insistence that artistic output, the 'art object,' cannot effectively communicate scholarly research" (44). Loveless's language here, words such as "explodes," "sticky," "challenges," "resists," "binary," and "justify," evoke the true reason for implementing artistic practices, processes, and outcomes as scholarly research because, at its very core, art shifts boundaries, which provokes research-creation scholars to push the boundaries of the neoliberal academy with the very work they produce. For this reason, I was drawn to research-creation as a method of not only conducting research but also giving an outlet to my own resistance as a scholar within the academic system. Loveless articulates that research-creation, within interdisciplinary praxis, urges researchers to "justify [their] research" through stories that are told through their investigations and to be mindful of the form those stories take (41). Within the academy, a research-creation approach to research suggests that academics question the most effective means of research production, offering other "persuasive" ways to author research (41).

Historically, artistic practices have often been seen by the academy as inadequate methods of research and, until more recently, universities viewed the arts as simply contributing to social and economic development in socioeconomic climates threatened by globalization (Vuyk 173). Loveless offers that art has historically been understood as being indeterminate as a method of academic inquiry. About historical conceptions of art within research, Loveless writes that, "Art, it is said, is evocative, generative, even confrontational, but too open-ended to constitute research dissemination per se; art does not make conclusive, defensible arguments and therefore cannot be, strictly speaking, research" (Loveless 44). Within the context of the

neoliberal university, art as a process, or object, "*fails*" as research because it is "too-open ended" as it does not make conclusive arguments and is consequently seen as forfeiting its function as scholarly research and a means of representing new and important knowledge (44, *emphasis in the original*). The point Loveless makes here reflects aspects of low theory as iterated by Jack Halberstam where they suggest low theory as a framework through which to observe the dichotomy of success versus failure and how there are "good" ways to fail (Halberstam). Research-creation is, as Loveless notes above, a *failure* in the academy as it "cannot function as scholarly research" and is therefore not *successful* under the traditional, canonical, and rigid standards of scholarly success within neoliberal academic institutions (44). Failure is a socially prescribed concept that informs individuals to measure failure against success, and Halberstam calls for a shift in this dichotomy to consider non-unified failure and give room for a good—or even successful—ways to fail (Halberstam). Another research-creation scholar, Sarah E. Truman, describes research-creation as both a methodological and theoretical framework which offers an approach through which to enact empirical research (Truman 95). Truman further elaborates that the term or concept "was born from the idea that we need to acknowledge research projects that occur at the nexus of arts practice, theory, and research; and from the necessity to affirm the value of interdisciplinarity in the academy" (95). In her article "Undisciplined: Research-Creation and What It May Offer (Traditional) Qualitative Research Methods," Truman outlines the "movements" through which she approaches research-creation as a method and methodology (96). These movements guided my own approach to research-creation, process- and participant-based research.

The first movement is "situated speculation," which prompts the researcher to situate themselves as they would in any other creative project and to understand their own positionality

within the context of their work and the “different time spaces” that they occupy (96). During the proposal stage of this thesis project, I was engaging in Tuman’s first movement of situated speculation as I observed my position within this project as a researcher and a cis, white woman from NL, and speculated the process of this research, setting “limitations or conditions of constraints” while hypothesizing the outcome of this project (97). Within a research-creation project, Truman suggests that acknowledging a researcher’s subjective position in accordance with the material, participants, and research topic is important (96). Truman posits that “[a] researcher’s positionality and intentionality have material affects/effects on what the research process might generate. Simultaneously, this positionality is constantly being modified by what we read and encounter in the research event” (96–97). Throughout the thesis process I was mindful of my own position within this research as a white woman of settler descent born on and having lived in Ktmaqkuk—Newfoundland. Further, I was cognizant of my position as a queer woman interacting with craft and notions of traditional gender roles within the homes and communities of NL because I am a minority as a queer woman, but also because craft is important to queer communities and culture. As I continued to research craft practices and the craft community in NL and continued to learn about research-creation and theory-building processes through craft, I began to understand the ways that this project could take shape. It was important for me and my investment in the work to remain open to the possibilities, but not to dictate the events and outcomes. As Derek McCormack suggests, “the practice of research-creation is tethered to an *ethical commitment to learning to become affected*” (McCormack quoted in Truman 97, *emphasis from Truman*) which stems from ideologies of affect theory that observes the “capacity to affect and be affected” (97). In the context of this project, the speculative motions of research-creation and planning the structure, layout, and execution of the

quilting sessions were set in place to practice what McCormack suggests an ethical commitment to being affected by the knowledge and ideas that arise from the research. My interpretation was that to learn to "become affected" meant to let go of what was already known to open the mind and body to what was being taught, to learn and to be influenced by knowledge.

Truman's next movement for research-creation is "emergence," and they urge researchers to pay close attention to what exactly emerges in research, particularly research-creation (98). A question that Truman suggests posing throughout the research process is "*what's...emerging in the research?*" (98, *emphasis in the original*) where the focus rests on any important ideas, themes, concepts, or questions that emerge in the research. As I continued my own research, and began the focus groups, I recalled Truman's question of the emerging thoughts in the material and the conversation with which I was interacting. Keeping the emergence in mind was particularly important during my own reflection time after each focus group session as I carefully read through the transcripts from each meeting and considered the themes and topics that emerged from each conversation. It was important for me to consider each element of the event—that is, each focus group session, each conversation, each person's involvement and contribution, the quilt squares themselves, the quilt as it was finished, and the time which they all occupied—as pieces that could alter or modify my own understanding of the project as the researcher.

The third movement is what Truman refers to as "affirmation," which insists that researchers hold themselves "accountable and attuned to what's arising" in their research (Truman 99). Truman explains that their understanding of affirmation is paradoxical, meaning that when one thing is affirmed, another becomes negated (99). Further, they express that "not affirming something else," might be potentially or "deliberately *refusing* something else" (99,

emphasis in the original). As I understood it, "affirmation" is to critically engage with the work that emerges from research, and specifically research-creation, but also to be intentional about the politics of citation and the attention to speculation. The final movement is "more-than-representation" which is an "opening" rather than a "closing down of meaning" in that the research project is more than the research-creation event that occurred because it is about "*generating* rather than collecting or representing research data" (99). This aspect of research-creation is crucial to my research because it highlights the exact focus of craft-praxis in which I am engaging; being fully immersed in the process of crafting in community and fellowship with my participants, interpreting what lived experiences influence their work, and discovering the process of storytelling through craft.

As I opened a space for female and AFAB crafters from NL to craft with me and create our quilt squares, I observed how feminist material culture emerged through research-creation practices. In their article, "What is a Feminist Object? Feminist Material Culture and the Making of the Activist Object," Alison Bartlett and Margaret Henderson situates feminist material culture as emerging in the 1990s from feminism and material culture and brought forward ideas of tracing crucial cultural and historical moments through activist objects, thereby encasing the moment in the visible work and efforts of feminist activists (Bartlett & Henderson). Bartlett and Henderson state that to extend material culture to feminist studies, feminist material culture presents the "political consciousness," and by extension the unconscious, of the women's movement in the 90s (157). In the context of this project, feminist material culture supports research-creation used in the focus group setting by offering a framework that views feminist objects and objects of activism as an object of change which is to be understood in its political and social climate (157–8). Within this thesis, these feminist objects are the quilt squares that the

crafters create based on their lives and experiences with gender and NL, as well as the entire quilt created from those squares. The individual squares and quilt itself are archives of feeling (Cvetkovich) that hold each of the crafter stories about their handcrafts, their geographical and emotional orientation to their crafts as people from NL living throughout Canada. Each aspect of the research-creation that the participants made with me helps to inform and unpack my own experience and understanding of how craft operates as a gendered practice in NL.

Phenomenology was critical to the conversation I had with the focus group participants of experience—my own experience and the experiences of others'—craft objects, and women and AFAB folks' lives in NL. In her book *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, Sara Ahmed offers phenomenology as an important resource for queer studies because it brings attention to the significance of subjectivity and lived experience, the intentionality of consciousness, the importance of proximity and positionality, and the ways through which actions shape people's bodies and worlds (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 2). While the condensed definition of phenomenology is the philosophy of experience (Smith, D), feminist and queer phenomenology clarify the ways which sex and gender impact a person's own understanding of the world and broadens to explore both the political and social consequences of such paradigms ("Feminist Phenomenology"). Ahmed suggests that queer phenomenology orients and shapes the understanding of the spaces people occupy and what exists in those spaces (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 3). She also suggests that a person's body and personhood is oriented through the physical, material, social, and ideological spaces in which it both does and does not exist (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*). Therefore, I considered how crafts exist in the spaces of female and AFAB crafters from NL and how we—the participants—interacted with the crafts (materials) and occupy space with them; that is, the space of the participant's homes,

communities, social and political settings, as friends and members of families, in their places of work, and even in online spaces. I wondered how their stories were told with and through craft and how they came to understand the role of craft in their lives as people from NL.

Loveless offers a remarkable elucidation of research-creation, saying that "it is to tell new stories, in new ways, in the academy. And to be told by them" (Loveless 45). Loveless's words spoke to me about the ways in which women's stories and knowledge are told and held within NL craft communities, craft projects, and crafting processes. Not only did research-creation allow me to engage with stories of gendered lived experience in NL, but it also explores how AFAB and female Newfoundlanders and Labradorians as creators, and I as a researcher, have been written by our own stories as we continue to live and expand the binaries of living and creating within these spaces of home, community, work, school, and more. I was curious to see how research-creation would offer an avenue through which the participants engaged with the guided discussion questions (see Appendix C), concepts of gender identity, craft, and NL, and how each of their experiences guided the creation of their quilt squares. How did each of their squares reflect them, their crafting, knowledge, and stories? And how did this process lend to how I understand my own position and experience as a woman from NL who participates in historically gendered crafts?

Alongside research-creation, feminist focus groups served as my primary method of data collection as I worked with a group of participants. Fundamentally, focus groups are group discussions facilitated by a researcher that focuses on a particular subject (Tonkiss quoted in Munday 233). Within feminist research, many scholars have found that focus groups are "particularly appropriate" for research concerning women and have named it a feminist method because of:

> the potential for focus groups to listen to many different women's voices to reflect female diversity, the creation of shared naturalistic, unthreatening social spaces generative of open conversation and the 'strong sense of validation that participants often feel when being listened to and when listening to other women's stories.' (Kook et al. quoted in Harrison & Ogden 637)

Additionally, focus groups dismantle the "'exploitative power relations between researcher and researched' that are normative in patriarchal research contexts" where a researcher is in a position of authority in relation to the participants of a study (Wilkinson quoted in Harrison & Ogden 637). Rather than enforce the power hierarchies between researcher and participants, the feminist focus groups promote equity among researchers and participants to allow participants autonomy over their experiences and knowledge. Although this is a feminist research practice, there is always an inherent power differential between researcher and researched. In their work Harrison and Ogden explore the use of feminist focus groups for their research which used 'knit' "n" 'natter' as the content of their focus groups where their participants would knit and talk (633). They suggest that focus groups could potentially "replicate the knitting circle scenario with a degree of authenticity" in that knitting circles are typically groups of people—most often, although not exclusively, women—who gather in kitchens, living rooms, community spaces, or even public places such as a park or a craft shop to simply knit and talk (637). In their study, Harrison and Ogden use the term 'knit' "n" 'natter' to mean 'knitting and talking' which helps to stitch together the foundation of the feminist focus groups. I took instruction from this example in planning and implementing the focus group sessions for the research for this thesis.

The main source of data collection came from a focus group of 12 participants who are female or AFAB crafters from NL who came together and reflected on questions/prompts I

posed the group about gender, living in NL, and craft while engaging in domestic and textile craft practices. Originally, I envisioned creating a quilt with my community of crafters to symbolize the ways that stories of lived experience are told through textiles. However, to understand the crafters' lived experiences as women and AFAB folks from NL and to know how their experiences inform their craft, and vice versa, I needed to be in conversation with them in more ways than the construction of a quilt could afford, which gave way to the virtual quilting group/knitting circle style sessions. The purpose of interacting with my participants through feminist focus groups was to have an informal yet organized space where they could feel safe to respond and engage with the discussion questions that I prepared and provided ahead of time (see Appendix C) which led to deepening my own understanding of craft as a gendered practice. These questions or prompts included: How and where did you learn your craft? What does crafting mean to you? How does your gendered experience and your own identity influence your understanding of craft and its place in NL? How do you understand femininity/your gender in relation to your craft? Does your craft influence your lived experiences? And does your lived experience influence your craft? How do community connections or community building impact or influence your craft?

The crafters who participated in the quilting sessions consisted of 11 of my family members and friends, some of whom engage in the same circles and communities where I grew up, and one other crafter from Labrador who I was lucky enough to build community with through this process [I detail the participant recruitment process later in this chapter under Focus Groups/REB]. The only limitations for participant requirements were that participants be crafters from NL and that they identified as female or AFAB—including AFAB non-binary, gender queer, and gender non-conforming. As stated earlier in the discussion of gender in the literature

review, while I considered the possibility of expanding my participant-based research to include persons of any gender identity, I found that the conversations of men, AMAB (assigned male at birth), and other trans and masculine identities in craft was a different conversation than the discussion I was exploring through this project. This thesis is not to suggest that NL craft, or craft in any context, is exclusionary to men or AMAB folks, because many crafting traditions involved and included men in those spaces. However, handicraft practices such as needlepoint, sewing, and knitting were domesticated by and for women in Western contexts. As Harrison and Ogden put it, "[k]nitting is not exclusive to women, but Parker (1996) has examined the long history of women's homosocial needlework practices, noting that in Victorian Britain textiles-based hand-crafting was common to women of all social classes: a means of subsistence for working-class women and 'correct drawing-room behaviour' for middle-class ladies" (Harrison & Ogden 634).

To follow the knit "n" natter format of feminist focus groups as iterated by Harrison and Ogden, I envisioned the group of crafters engaging in craft work together for several reasons. First, to mimic traditional knitting circles, quilting groups, or where women would gather in craft guilds—typically in churches, multi-purpose spaces, community or town halls, in living rooms or kitchens—to work on their projects in the company of friends. The second being that focus groups offer a space in which to engage craft-praxis in a process-based approach to research where we could explore the process of crafting, alongside being in discussion, to understand how lived experience of gender influences craft in NL, as well as how women's stories infuse their handiwork to be considered as a reflection of my own experience. Lastly, to imitate free-form crafting in that womanhood and the gender-non-conforming experiences of AFAB folks mirror free-form/pattern non-conforming ways of being within the confines of a Western, androcentric

society. The 12 focus group participants were selected from a larger group of female/AFAB identifying crafters from my community in NL who expressed interest in the project. Consisting of some of my friends and family, I acknowledge that there were gaps in the representations of racialized perspectives. Although the participant intake form (see Appendix B) invited participants to racially identify themselves, no one chose to. I offered this option in the form in case there were racial aspects to a participant's craft that influenced their engagement with craft or the objects they created.

Ethnography is not a central method in this project, but it was imperative to this research considering that I engaged in discussions and process-based craft-praxis with a group of NL crafters. While this project is ethnographic and contemporary ideas of feminist ethnography are present in this work, it is important to acknowledge the harmful colonial characteristics and historical uses of ethnography as a form of colonizing cultural knowledges and alienating marginalized groups under the guise of research (Clair 3–4). Robin Clair explains ethnography in research as a practice that "defined cultures, named people, and told them who they are and what they might become" (3). In a colonial context—specifically as Clair identifies through the four waves of colonialism—this idea of ethnographic research constructs a divide between the researcher and the researched, or the "knower and the known," as Othering the research subject as a studied *Object* (4; Sanger 29).

In this project, ethnography and auto-ethnography are implemented as feminist methodological frameworks. It is important that I acknowledge the colonial history of ethnography and contest the traditional uses of ethnography by engaging with my participants through autoethnography and encouraging open dialog rather than treating them as research objects. I took instruction from Sonja Boon, Lesley Buttler, and Daze Jefferies's

"Autoethnography and Feminist Theory at the Water's Edge: Unsettled Islands," iterations of autoethnography as a research methodology which draws on autobiographical experiences and theoretical inquiry to interrogate "broader social processes" (Boon et al. 7). Moreover, Pamela Chapman Sanger writes about the logistics of feminist ethnography in her chapter "Living and Writing Feminist Ethnographies: Threads in a Quilt Stitched from the Heart," where she suggests that no scholar or project should "claim to have the final articulation of 'feminist ethnography' because there is no one thing that establishes feminist ethnography; it only attempts to deconstruct traditional forms of ethnography and learn to utilize them as feminist practices (Sanger 29). Sanger articulates that feminist ethnographic scholarship takes care to emphasize the "centrality of women's experience" but also to "enact feminist politics in the research process" (29). Central to feminist politics in research is the necessity of identifying our own positionality and biases as researchers and taking care not to exploit the participants with whom we engage (29–30). Sanger's discussion on feminist politics within ethnographic research mirrors Clair's ideas of Othering research subjects, as Sanger posits: "One way in which feminists' attempt to counter the objectification of the Other is through the use of dialogic methods" (30). Dialogic methods are communicative and conversational approaches rather than "observational and empirical methods" (30). In the feminist focus groups, I implemented dialogic methods to engage with each participant purposefully and intentionally in conversation to listen to, and understand, their story without observing them as researched subjects.

Lastly, paired with the methodological approaches and research methods laid out in this chapter, I read the collected stories and conversations through narrative analysis. Narrative analysis used in qualitative research understands "how research participants construct [stories] and narrative[s] from their own personal experience" (Limpaecher). As a thesis rooted in the

stories and experiences from my community of crafters in NL, narrative analysis offers a structure through which I explored the conversations I had with the crafters who took part in the focus groups, and their written reflections. During the focus groups, I opened the space to discussion about experiences with gender, crafts, and living in NL where I prompted the participants with various questions and topics (see Appendix C). After each session, I reflected on the conversation and topics that arose in the discussion. At the end of the focus group period, I asked the participants to send me their quilt square along with a written reflection about their square and what it meant to them. These reflections were important to the narrative analysis process as they were documents written by each of the crafters, in their own words, about their own lives and experiences. It was important for me, as a researcher, not to impose my own opinions or biases on the materials, therefore having each of them write something intentionally, aside from but based on the earlier conversations, was beneficial to the reflection and analysis process. At the same time, I worked to honour each participant's own voice and identity by bringing in extended quotes into the thesis throughout the discussion and analysis.

Guiding Research Principles

When laying the foundation for this project, it was important to include some of the guiding research principles that have informed my research. Opaskwayak Cree scholar Shawn Wilson discusses how his research principles have shaped his understanding of relational accountability within his work as well as with the communities with whom he works. Some of the research principles that he highlights are ones that I have carried over to my own research practices. They include: "a deep listening and hearing with more than the ears;" "a reflective non-judgmental consideration of what is being seen and heard;" "an awareness and connection

between logic of mind and the feelings of the heart;" and "listening and observing the self as well as in relationship to others" (Wilson 59). These guiding research principles are important; as such I take instruction and ground my research in feminist-aligned understandings and approaches to knowledge, reminded that I am actively engaged in conversations with other people and their experiences. To break these down, "a deep listening and hearing with more than the ears," (59) especially when listening to others' experiences and stories is significant because listening attentively requires more than just hearing their words. Listening involves learning to read a person's body language. Entering the space of learning with a "reflective non-judgmental consideration" (59) of what I see and hear was important to me as a researcher because, not only did I want to open a welcoming and safe space for folks to share about their own experiences, but I also wanted to keep an open mind to direction the participants might take, or how they would respond to certain questions or prompts. The third principle, having "an awareness and connection between logic of mind and the feelings of the heart," (59) is complex because, as a researcher in guided conversation with participants, it is important to be aware of both logic and feeling, but to be mindful of the connection between the mind and heart so as not to let one rule over the other, rather lead in equal measure with logic and feeling. Lastly, to "[listen] and [observe] the self as well as in relationship to others" (59) was crucial in my research because I was participating in equal measure by guiding discussion but also sharing my experiences to build relational accountability with each participant and to observe my own contributions to discussions.

In addition to the previous list of research principles, I have compiled some of my own guiding values: to keep an open heart and open mind to the perspectives and opinions of my community and those with whom I engage; to always attempt to create a warm, safe, and inviting

space that welcomes conversation; and to hear the stories for what they are and not for what I want them to be. While being in conversation with women and AFAB folks from the NL crafting community, it was important to hold space for their voices and their stories. In Western culture, when a woman's opinion differs from mainstream thought and is publicly voiced, it is an indication "of her stupidity," as Mary Beard wrote in *Women & Power* (Beard 33). "These attitudes, assumptions and prejudices," Beard says of women's supposed public incompetency, "are hard-wired into us: not into our brains…but into our culture, our language, and millennia of our history" (33). Taking note from Beard, I was careful to accurately convey the voices, words, and stories of the crafters with whom I was in conversation and giving each of them space to be heard because the voices of women, AFAB, and queer people are frequently and publicly silenced or dismissed.

Focus groups/UREB

In the coming pages I discuss at length my approach to this research, the REB process, the participant recruitment process, and the structure of the focus group sessions.

As the main source of information collection was through a focus group involving participants, this project required clearance from the Mount Saint Vincent University Research Ethics Board (UREB). The UREB is meant to ensure that all human participants involved in a study associated with the institution are not being subjected to harm or malpractice. This process began at the start of January 2024, the initial application was submitted at the end of January, and clearance was granted in mid-April. Two rounds of feedback and revisions occurred in February and March. Once UREB clearance to engage with participants was obtained (MSVU

REB File #2023–205), I began the participant invitation process. I posted a call for crafters to participate on my personal Facebook and on Instagram accounts (see Appendix A) which included a link to the Participant Intake Form on Microsoft Forms (see Appendix B). By sharing the recruitment material on my personal social media, I knew that the posts would mostly reach individuals known to me because my intention was to form a group of crafters who were connected to me in varying ways which was important for the purpose of building a focus group of my own community. These posts were visible to my friends and followers who could then share to their friends and followers; it was shared by 3 people on Instagram and between 15–18 people on Facebook. The attached form was for participants to express their interest in participating by answering some questions about who they are, their identity, connection to NL, their interest in and experience with crafts, and why they wanted to participate. Within four days an overwhelming total of 28 people had expressed interest, unfortunately the time constraints on this project allotted for no more than 12 participants as more than 12 would provide more data than can be included in a thesis project of this size. Initially, I was hesitant that 12 crafters in my community would be willing to participate; I was prepared to move forward with a smaller group of crafters than I had planned on, but was pleasantly surprised with the number of crafters, many of whom were strangers, that reached out even after the spots where filled. I selected participants by consulting the information they provided in their participant intake forms (see Appendix B) and considered their range of crafts and their connections to my community. Inherently, this resulted in a gap of racial diversity in the group as the participants were some of my friends and family who craft, who are mostly white. This limitation is discussed at length in chapter 7.

As this project is predicated on community-based practices and community building, the final list of participants was selected to include those with whom I have already established

community, and one with whom I hoped to build community. A large factor that influenced which crafters were selected as participants was the diversity of textile crafts that they each brought to the project. This was important to consider because craft in NL is used in a myriad of ways, and I wanted the finished quilt to reflect the diverse and unique techniques, skills, and functions of textiles craft on the island. While the quilt reflects many different types and aspects of NL crafts, it does not include crafts of other materials such as wood, metal, glass, clay, or leather. Everyone that expressed interest was a Newfoundlander and Labradorian, or had family from NL, and identified as a woman or a female born person. Diversity of race and sexuality was also considered as there were at least 3 people who are Indigenous—either by status or self-identified—and others who are queer. I did not discriminate based on race, sexuality, gender identity, or all-around crafting knowledge. Instead, I carefully assembled a group of participants based on my own community that considered and included some of the diverse identities that constitute NL which includes Indigenous people, gender non-conforming people, queer people, and cisgender and settler people—me included. My intention was not to exclude cisgender men or people assigned male at birth (AMAB) from my assessment of craft as a gendered activity in NL. Rather, the focus became refined to the ways that people in NL who are assigned female at birth have historically been socialized as female with a particular relationship to handicrafts and how textiles craft has been a primary vehicle for that gendered socialization. I recognize here that Indigenous girls are included here with AFAB people from NL and the violence of residential schools in NL socialized them into settler practices and feminine roles through sewing education in home economics (Smith, M). Additionally, there is an important conversation that includes men in craft; however, while a critical consideration of masculinity and craft within the NL

context is an important and needed discussion, this consideration falls outside the scope of my thesis' study.

After confirming the list of participants, an email was sent to all 12 crafters to welcome them to this project and to provide them with the appropriate consent forms to sign. A second email was sent which included the scheduled virtual focus group meeting dates and times (one session a week, four weeks, totaling 4 sessions), a list of discussion questions (see Appendix C) and Sonja Boon's four-page chapter on stitching theory to offer them some context and insight into the project at this stage. This reading was included because it has been incredibly influential for this project as I strongly align with Boon's writing style, her methodologies, and feminist epistemologies. Additionally, this was a suitable chapter to share with the group because it is clear, concise, and Boon's writing is accessible for a group of people who, for the most part, engage in spaces outside of the academic sphere. By May 6, 2024, the focus groups were ready to begin.

I met with the focus group participants online for one hour, one night a week, for four consecutive weeks, totaling four hours. I asked the participants to create a quilt square using any kind of crafting methods. The quilt squares were inspired by discussion in the sessions or reflected an aspect of their connection to craft as female and AFAB crafters from NL. The goal was for the quilt squares to tell a story of the crafters' lived experiences to address the questions that guided this study: how is my own experience as an AFAB person from NL informed by craft? And how does this impact how I understand craft in my community? How are feminine gender associations understood through craft in NL? What does it mean for AFAB identifying people to be socialized as female with and through an understanding of craft? How does craft in

NL serve as a gendered practice? How does lived experience translate into textile and crafted creations?

In preparation for the first virtual focus group session, I highlighted questions from the list of guiding questions (see Appendix C) to focus on during that hour. I spent time sitting with my materials, the questions, and my own crafts to consider what my own square would become through this process. It was hard to decide before beginning but I knew that I wanted to include the remaining yarn from the first ball of yarn that my Gram gave me when I was young. Usually, when I have the materials before the idea, I can hold the materials and visualize the end result. Sometimes I find inspiration from other people's work, latch onto aspects of something I have seen before and imitate or apply those ideas in a new way. Admittedly, it took sitting through the first session to come to a decision about my square.

During the first session, I took a few minutes to introduce the project, make sure that the instructions were clear to the crafters, and worked to create a comfortable space for sharing, listening, and learning. After everyone had the opportunity to introduce themselves and their crafts, we spent the remaining 30 minutes discussing topics including: what craft meant to them and how they understood craft in NL. After the session, and throughout the following week, I spent time reflecting on the first discussion to pinpoint the important questions to ask in the second session. I wanted to maintain an organic flow, so, tried to only ask questions and leave room for the participants' honest answers.

Each of the sessions and the weeks in between continued this way: after the session ended that evening, I would download the generated transcript and spend the following days editing, reflecting, and working on my own square. Crafting, specifically crocheting, was an important part of my reflection time because while my hands work the yarn into stitches, my

mind is at ease, and I can think with clarity. I kept a journal on the sessions and conversations. I would take the journal to the park and sit by the water to think through the conversation I just had with the participants, and to consider the important questions to ask in the following session. After each session, I found myself asking new questions and being guided in a slightly different direction. It was important to maintain a steady and comfortable flow from one session to the next to create an open atmosphere for the participants to share about their lived experiences.

Drop-stitch thought #5:

Dear Gram,

The focus group sessions end tomorrow night. Overall, the sessions went well. The only expectations that I held onto—although I tried not to hold onto many—were that the participants discuss some ideas of gender and craft in Newfoundland with me and that we continue to create quilt squares together. And that's what has been happening. I only wish that you could have been a part of it.

Mom gave me some squares that you started but never got to finish to include in the quilt. One of them is a four-square rag quilt block that was left unfinished in your sewing closet years ago. Mom has some of the others that were meant to be sewn into a quilt, and I have wondered whose home the quilt would have adorned, or which chair or bed it would rest on. The other is a teapot that you stitched with chicken scratches—I guess that's what the X-shaped stitches are called when it isn't cross-stitching—that's stitched in black thread on a piece of white and blue gingham fabric. It seems like this one is much older. I like to imagine that perhaps this little square was meant to be a project, probably framed, as most of your cross-stitch designs were, and that there was supposed to be a teacup or a bouquet of flowers on another, similar, piece of gingham—a duet of portraits. I hope it's alright with you that I'm using these squares here, in this way.

Having your unfinished squares and scraps of fabric is as if you've left pieces of yourself behind like a puzzle for me to find and solve. All the while making sense of who you were and what crafting offered you every

single day that you took a breath. It's who you were and what you did. You had 4 children and 14 grandchildren; you made us all gifts, quilts, sweaters, scarves, mittens and hats...so many hats. My yellow hat, a staple, my trademark; "you're my girl in the yellow hat," you'd say.

Seeing all these pieces of fabric, unfinished quilts, and balls of yarn feels like I get to learn more about you as a crafter in a time where I am so immersed in how craft serves women and AFAB people from Newfoundland and Labrador, and what kind of memory craft holds. While we have been talking through these ideas, you have been brought up quite a lot, a new puzzle piece every time. Even though we have not become strangers, you and I, I do feel as if we are becoming re-acquainted through this beautifully maddening experience. You died 14 years ago, and I'm 25 years old now, which means that I have now lived longer without you than I existed with you here. Even though I am still the girl in the yellow hat, it's a new yellow hat, the one you made for me is too small. I have grown and had to learn so much without you. But this process has allowed me to get to know you and understand your craft in new and exciting ways. I can only hope that somehow you have been able to get to know me, too. Able to see who I am and how the threads you wove into my very essence have become the blanket around my shoulders.

A cocoon, a refuge, a reminder.

CHAPTER 5

The Squares and Participants

In this chapter, I introduce each of the 12 participants—a group of crafters and artists—who took part in this study and present each of their quilt squares. This includes myself as I contributed to the research-creation along with the other participants, and my late grandmother as there are two quilt squares that she made that I was able to include in the quilt. Each participant sent a reflection about their quilt square to explain how the square was made and why it is symbolic to them. Drawing from these reflections, I include a brief description of the squares, and their meanings accompanied by a photograph of the quilt square. When quoting from the focus group discussions directly, I created a citation system to indicate which of the four sessions the quotation came from, and which page of the transcript document. For example: (S2 p.10) refers to the second session and page 10 of the transcript. Refer to the table on page 69 for details about the focus group participants.

Name and pronouns	Home	Connection to me	Craft(s)
Jackie (she/her)	Labrador & West Coast NL	None	Quilting, sewing, needle point, beading
Roma (she/her)	West Coast NL	Mother	Sewing, quilting, crochet, knitting, needle point
Heather (she/her)	West Coast NL	Sister	Sewing, crochet
Sonia (she/her)	West Coast NL	Friend	Rug hooking, sewing
Hannah (she/her)	West Coast NL & Nova Scotia	Sister	Crochet, sewing
Natalie (she/her)	West Coast NL	Friend	Sewing
Adela (she/her)	East Coast NL & Quebec	Aunt	Sewing, quilting, knitting, needle point
Haylee (they/she)	West Coast NL	Friend	Knitting, sewing
Annette (she/her)	East Coast NL	Aunt	Knitting, crochet, sewing, quilting, needle point
Lori (she/her)	Nova Scotia & West Coast NL	Friend	Sewing, needle point
Shirley (she/her)	Central NL	Grandmother [paternal]	Knitting, needle point
Wendy (she/her)	West Coast NL	Friend	Sewing
Additional contributors			
Laura [researcher] (she/her)	West Coast NL & Nova Scotia	me	Crochet, knitting, sewing, needle point
Dona [Gram] (she/her)	East Coast NL	Grandmother [maternal]	Sewing, quilting, crochet, knitting, needle point

Figure 2: the participants

Jackie (she/her) is a woman in her 60s from Labrador and currently living on the West Coast of Newfoundland. Jackie has extensive knowledge of working with seal skin, caribou hide, making moccasins and mittens, quilting, embroidery, and beading. She did not make and send a square but joined some of the focus group sessions and contributed to discussions.

Roma (she/her) is a woman in her 50s from the West Coast of NL. Roma learned crafts including knitting, sewing, quilting, appliqué, crochet, cross stitch, and embroidery primarily from her mother, and some from her grandmother. She shared that her connection to craft is so closely related to her relationship with her mother, to the extent that "if you wanted to have a relationship with mom, you had to be by the sewing machine," (S4 p.19). The quilt square that Roma made (*see figure 3*) uses scraps of fabric left over from clothing, bedding, and other various projects that she made for her family over the years. The style of quilting is called a "crazy quilt," which Roma described as a patchwork technique "made with, generally and traditionally, old garments and things" (S4 p.29).

Figure 3: Roma's quilt square: quilted, 9½ x 9½ inches.

Heather (she/her) is a woman in her late teens/early adulthood from the West Coast of NL. Heather learned sewing, crocheting, and cross stitching as a child, though she currently engages in rug hooking most frequently. She decided to replicate the same style of rag quilt that Gram used to make for her quilt square (*see figure 4*) because she felt it was an opportunity to engage in the crafts that she was not able to learn from Gram after she passed. She even used the scraps from some of Gram's quilts and other leftover sewing projects which enriched her square with sentiment, memories, and inherited materials from her original inspiration to craft.

Figure 4: Heather's quilt square: rag quilt, 9½ x 9½ inches.

Sonya (she/her) is a woman in her 50s from the West Coast of NL. Sonya has been rug hooking for 17+ years after learning through a workshop offered at the School of Fine Arts at Memorial University of Newfoundland. She also has experience with sewing and is known amongst her family and friends as "the go-to seamstress" for any mending, hemming, or other sewing requests. The square that Sonya made (*see figure 5*) used traditional techniques and materials—wool yarn which she said is traditionally used in NL, as opposed to wool fabrics which are used to rug hook in Nova Scotia and PEI—Sonya created something that was meaningful to her. She said that the style reminded her of the geometric patterns of a traditional NL quilt.

Figure 5: Sonya's quilt square: 100% wool rug hooked on burlap, 9 x 9 inches.

Hannah (she/her) is a woman in her 20s from the West Coast of NL currently living in Nova Scotia. Since learning as a child, she has experience with knitting, sewing, cross stitching, and macrame, but mostly crochets now. For Hannah, her home province inspires some of her craft-work and creative process because NL is her home, it is where her family is from, and where she was taught by other important women in her life. Having made her quilt square from recycled and leftover yarn from a scarf her mother made and from blankets she has made for her mother and grandmother (*see figure 6*), Hannah wrote that it is a representation of some of the women that she "loves and respects the most."

Figure 6: Hannah's quilt square: crochet, 11 x 11 inches.

Natalie (she/her) is a woman in her 20s from the West Coast of NL. Natalie had only taken up textile crafts in the last year but has substantial experience in the arts as a painter and illustrator. Sharing about her socialization through art as a child, Natalie explained that she was constantly surrounded by craft supplies and art and encouraged to explore her own creativity. She learned many crafting skills from her parents and grandparents but has taken up sewing and textile crafts on her own. Natalie's square (see *figure 7*) is quilted with appliqué techniques and made from recycled materials to depict a wetland scene nostalgic of the West Coast of NL.

Figure 7: Natalie's quilt square: quilted/appliqué, 9 x 9 inches.

Adela (she/her) is a woman in her 60s from the East Coast of NL but has spent most of her adult life in Quebec, where she currently lives. Her extensive knowledge of crafting includes knitting, and cross-stitching, but she focuses mainly on sewing, quilting, and doll-making. She was taught to sew and knit as a young girl from her mother and grandmother. Adela's quilt square (see *figure 8*) features the iconic row houses of downtown St. John's in their bright colours which, as Adela said inspires her creativity since moving away from NL.

Figure 8: Adela's quilt square: quilted, 9½ x 9½ inches.

Haylee (she/they) is a queer, genderqueer person in their 20s from the West Coast of NL. They learned to knit through their high school art class. Haylee shared that knitting has become part of their role as a friend and family member, in that they are often asked to knit hats, scarves, or other similar projects for people in their community. Knitting has also become an avenue through which Haylee can share their love for others through creating something special for them. Haylee's quilt square (see *figure 9*) used hand-spun and -dyed wool from the Gros Morne area. They chose this wool because it stitches Newfoundlander and Labradorian heritage into the quilt and demonstrates a cognitive effort to be mindful and aware of the materials used in this project. In their written reflection, Haylee explained that the orange colour reminded them of cooked lobster shells, connecting the land, sea, and fishing to their quilt square.

Figure 9: Haylee's quilt square: knit with locally hand-dyed wool, 8½ x 8½ inches.

Annette (she/her) is a woman in her 60s from the East Coast of NL and Labrador. Her substantial knowledge of handicraft includes sewing, knitting, crocheting, cross-stitching and some quilting. Having learned to knit and sew from a very young age, Annette described her ability to knit as muscle memory because she has become so familiar with the feeling of yarn and needles in her hands that the rhythmic patterns of knitting require little thought. The pansy pattern as seen in her quilt square (see *figure 10*) mirrors the pattern that Annette remembers her mother stitching into a quilt.

Figure 10: Annette's quilt square: crochet, 8¾ x 8¾ inches.

Lori (she/her) is a woman in her 50s from Nova Scotia, currently living on the West Coast of NL. With an educational background in painting and art, she has experience with sewing and has taken up rug hooking as an adult. Lori learned to sew from her mother when she was younger, and in her adult life, took up rug hooking which she expressed was a way to connect with her late grandmother who was from NL. The quilt square that she made (see *figure 11*) was very process-based, as she mentioned in the last session, that she was hand stitching onto the yellow and blue fabrics to engage with the physical act of stitching while actively listening and contributing to the discussions during each session.

Figure 11: Lori's quilt square: hand stitched, 8½ x 9 inches.

Shirley (she/her) is a woman in her 80s from Central NL. She has a lifetime of experience with knitting and sewing and has most recently been engaging with knitting and applique quilting. Shirley knits dishcloths—in NL, they are affectionately known as "pot cloths"—and donates them to the food bank, and the ladies' group at her church, or gives them to her friends, children, and grandchildren whenever anyone visits. The quilt square she made is one of these dishcloths (see *figure 12*), and with it, she sent an extra cloth intended for washing dishes, exemplifying the community building that takes place through craft.

Figure 12: Shirley's quilt square: a knit "pot cloth," 9 x 9 inches.

Wendy (she/her) is a woman in her 50s from the West Coast of NL. Wendy engages in sewing, often using those skills to upholster furniture or other forms of furnishing the home. She expressed how crafting not only connects her family but is an important aspect of having community in NL, which is what is represented in her square (see *figure 13*). Wendy's square is divided into four quadrants representing her son, her father, her mother, and herself all made of materials from past projects. These quadrants are symbolic of the ways that her crafting abilities have stitched her family closer together through acts of service and the giving of crafted gifts.

Figure 13: Wendy's square: quilted, 9½ x 9½ inches.

My Gram, Dona, has already been introduced in various ways. She was my grandmother, and mother to Roma, Annette, and Adela. My Gram passed 14 years ago but had a significant influence—including crafting—on all of her children and grandchildren, and just about anyone who knew her. She was extremely skilled at crocheting, knitting, sewing, quilting, and cross-stitching.

I am fortunate to have two quilt squares to incorporate into this project from my Gram. One is a tea pot hand-stitched on a piece of blue and white gingham fabric (see *figure 14*), and the other is a piece of an unfinished rag quilt (see *figure 15*). These are squares that my mother had in her possession since my grandmother's passing and having something that she quilted and hand stitched so many years ago is very special for this project because, not only is she present through those she has taught and influenced, but she is visibly present through her own creations. Taking a closer look at the fabrics of the rag quilt square (*see figure 15*), the upper right quadrant is the same fabric as some used in the bottom corners and middle section of Heather's square (see *figure 4*). These squares are physical and figurative representations of matrilineal inheritance as there are visual connections between Heather's square and our grandmother's, while figuratively they represent the lives touched by her craft and willingness to teach.

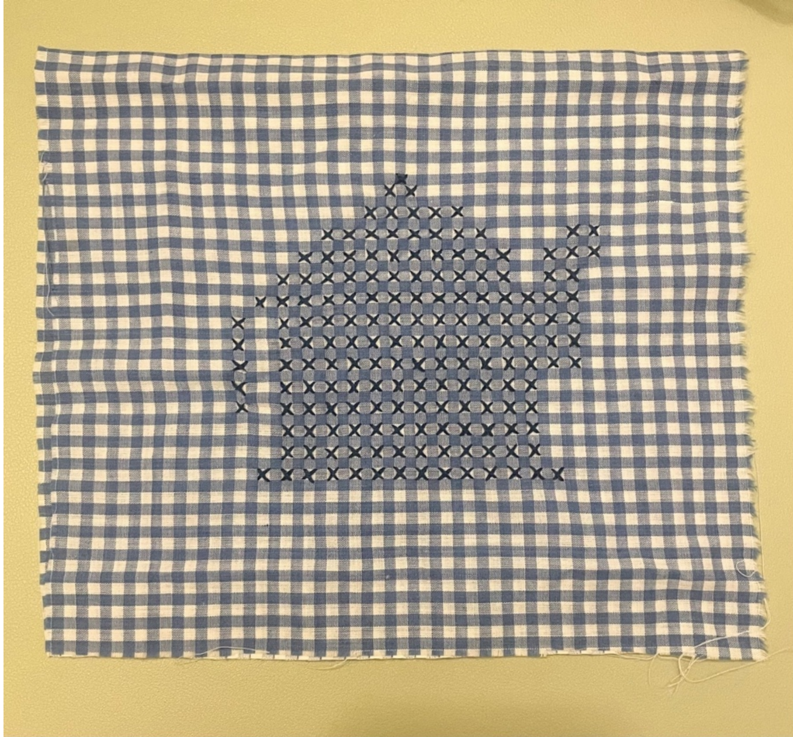

Figure 14: Gram's square: chicken scratch on gingham, 7 x 7 inches.

Figure 15: Gram's square: rag quilt, 8¾ x 8¾ inches.

I, Laura (she/her), am a queer, white settler woman in my 20s, born and raised on unceded and ancestral Mi'kmaq and Beothuk territory of the West Coast of Ktaqmkuk (Newfoundland). My own socialization as a woman and understanding of gender through craft was influenced by settler gender systems and domestic craft practices. I have experience with crochet, knitting, cross stitching, embroidery, sewing, and a small amount of quilting. The quilt square that I crocheted (see *figure 16*) depicts the coastlines of NL which exist as a liminal space where liquid meets solid (Boon et al., 6). The water represents my Gram, the sand is my mom, and I am the grass. The coastline is symbolic of the absorption that takes place as the water moves through the sand and nourishes the grass: a matrilineal coastline.

Figure 16: Laura's quilt square: crochet, 9½ x 9½ inches.

During the focus group sessions, I crocheted two different squares (see *figures 17 & 18*), that engaged with the process-based approach of crafting while being in conversation.

Figure 17: Laura's square #2: process-based crochet.

Figure 18: Laura's square #3: process-based crochet.

All these squares were sewn together into a quilt to complete the research-creation process. Each square represents the different ways that the crafters in my community use craft practices in their daily lives and how craft impacts their lived experiences. By displaying the squares in this chapter, I can demonstrate the process of examining each square and understanding its nuances, textures, and patterns more closely. Introducing each participant with their completed square illustrates a fuller image of who they are and how they came to this work as crafters and as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

There are gaps that occurred within the group of participants which could have affected the outcome of this work. Because this thesis involves working with my own community of friends and family in NL, there was limited racial diversity amongst that group. There are also gaps in the ages of participants; ages ranged from 18 to 27, and 54 to 87 but there were no middle-aged crafters which potentially altered the perspectives and experiences of the group as a whole. Rather than patching up these gaps in the quilt, it is important to acknowledge their presence and allow them to exist with the rest of the quilt; like the empty space of a granny square makes the rest of the crochet complete.

CHAPTER 6

Assembling the Project: an analysis

In this chapter I conduct a feminist, narrative analysis of intersections of craft and gender drawing on the discussions that took place in the focus group sessions, the crafted quilt squares and reflections written by the participants. The information presented in this chapter is broken into six subcategories that structure the analysis of gender and gender construction through material processes located in the specific geographies, cultures, societies, and economies of Newfoundland. These subcategories emerged from the guided discussions during the focus groups, as direct answers to discussion questions or extractions from the free flow of conversation. These categories are Art, Craft, and the Gender Binary; Home, Place, and Newfoundland and Labrador; Embodiment and Phenomenology; Gender/Identity; Community; and Matrilineal Inheritance.

As elaborated on in Chapter 4, the analysis that takes place here draws on narrative analytic forms and is conducted through multiple theoretical lenses: queer feminist theory, low theory, and stitching theory. These lenses are layered, one on top of the other, much like the layers of a quilt—typically made of a front, a back, and a binding—to complete the whole perspective.

When the focus group sessions ended, I spent time with the transcripts to identify the important pieces of conversation and highlighted the reflections on gendered interactions with craft and place in the construction of the participants' identities. Here, I return to the original questions that guided the focus of this thesis: how is my own experience as a queer woman from NL informed by craft? And how does this impact how I understand craft in my community? How

are feminine gender associations understood through craft in NL? What does it mean for AFAB identifying people to be socialized as female with and through an understanding of craft? How does craft in NL serve as a gendered practice? How does lived experience translate into textile and crafted creations?

Art, Craft, and the Gender Binary

Considering the differences, similarities, and liminal spaces that occur between art and craft and their associations with the gender binary are significant to this research because it complicates my own understanding of what it means to be a crafter and a woman from Newfoundland. To consider within the context of low theory and stitching theory, the following pages analyze how the participants viewed themselves in relation to art and/or craft, and I suggest that some have moved past a feminine understanding of domestic craft because it was presented to them within a binary framework.

The divisions that occur within the hierarchy/binary of art and craft reflect the divisions of labour that are associated with gender in Western patriarchal contexts. I was socialized to understand social and gender divisions of labour as clear partitions within domestic labour, professional work, and social duties. In my community, I witnessed labour divided based on systemic notions of feminine labour and masculine labour. As a result, I understood craft that occurred specifically in the home or other domestic spaces as being women's work. In considering how women and AFAB people in NL understood themselves through craft despite or even because of the gendered associations of labour that are coupled with craft, I was reminded of Mary Beth Mills' chapter, "Gendered Divisions of Labour." In this chapter, Mills suggests

that masculine labour is equated with public productions of "economic wealth" and self-reliant well-being, while feminine labour is positioned as inferior and is relegated to the private sector, leisure, or the home (Mills 286). She suggests that the value that is socially and commonly associated with "gender difference" varies in the ways that men and women, as conservatively seen within the gender binary, understand their roles and the work with which they respectively engage (285). This means that dynamics within hierarchies of value, either associated with the person, their role, or—in the case of handicraft—the objects they create, are to be considered in relation to hierarchies of gender (285–286).

At the beginning of the first focus group session, I asked the participants if they considered themselves crafters or artists. Many agreed that they considered themselves crafters, although some said that they have stronger backgrounds as artists, while others felt indifferent. Focus group participant Hannah felt strongly against being known as a crafter. She said, "If someone were to say, 'Oh, you're crafting,' I'd be offended because when I think of craft I think of cotton balls, cotton-swabs, and construction paper…I'd be really upset, like no, this is an art." Participant Haylee explained that they had never considered themselves as being either an artist or a crafter because they had only learned the skill withing the last five years. Participant Wendy shared that, for a long time, she has considered herself a crafter, but in her written reflection, she wrote that "[her] sewing is for practical purposes, not creating art." These perspectives led to a discussion of what constitutes art and how we define craft both in general and in the context of NL.

I borrow Halberstam's ideas about low theory to build on the association between femininity and craft, acknowledging that art is often associated with masculinity. Something that I found interesting was that, although most of the group identified as women, not all of them

identified as crafters, which is often linked to women's work (Boon; Pentney; Morton). Femininity is not synonymous with *womanhood*; however, through low theory, womanhood could also be hegemonically associated with domestic craft in NL as craft is considered women's work as noted in Chapter 2.

Discussing the similarities and differences between art and craft during the initial focus group session was important to build an understanding of the participants' perceptions of craft and how they understood it in their own lives. Participant Shirley expressed that, in her own life, crafting was a pastime, something to occupy her hands, but that she knit dish cloths so that she could donate them and give back to her community at the same time. For Heather domestic craft was something that connects her to her late grandmother as she wrote in her reflection, "this project…gave me the opportunity to learn something new and embrace my grandmother's craft." Roma brought up an interesting point about the meditative qualities of domestic craft: when knitting, she said, "you've got the steady rhythm of the stitches, and it is self-care without intentionally practicing self-care." The participants demonstrated that they were coming to their crafts from very different perspectives which offered fascinating and diverse results in the finished quilt squares.

One participant, Lori, an art therapist, identified as an artist based on her experience as a painter and her knowledge of art history. Lori said that for her, "craft is creating something that's more practical, something [that] you can use." She went on to say that defining what art is and what is craft would involve "the history of the technique [since] it started as a craft as a practical necessity" (S2 p.12). The positioning of craft techniques that Lori described reminded me of descriptions of craft within the early contexts of craft history where Jean le Rond d'Alembert first mentioned "craft" in Diderot's Encyclopedia published in 1751. In this text, d'Alembert was

the first to recognize craft alongside the arts and other trades and offers that craft is the mastery of a skill which catalyzed crafts as a recognized trade (Alfoldy xv; d'Alembert). The "it" to which Lori was referring is a piece of art that lies in the crossover, or liminal space, of art and craft. Although art and craft are arbitrary categories, James Clifford suggests that the art-culture system classifies objects to assess their value in the material world where notions of art versus craft and what is named "'beautiful' or 'interesting'" is subject to rapid changes (Clifford 223–224). I was reminded, at this point, of Sonja Boon's ideas of the NL coastline being a liminal space between water and land where the shore acts as a "liminal space between the solid and the liquid—the land and the sea—as a space of encounter" (Boon 6). Although the participants had their own perspectives on what constitutes art and domestic craft, I considered how they came to these opinions. Art and craft are arbitrary categories of things created by hand (Clifford), just as the gender binary offers arbitrary categories of gender identity. I extend the discussion of what constitutes art and craft to consider what constitutes domestic craft as a gendered practice: how does the gendered association influence the crafted object? I argue that where domestic craft and art overlap to create a murky liminal space of handcrafted objects valued as art, the distinctions between what is masculine art and feminine art are also blurred.

My understandings of liminality within domestic craft were expanded when participant Sonya mentioned that there are some quilts that are intended for display and not practical use, as well as rug hooking pieces that are hung on walls, making the comparison that walls are a space where "we typically would expect the art [to be]." (S1 p.14). As opposed to the inelastic and distinct lines that separate domestic craft or textiles/art and women/men that have arisen in my research, Sonya's comment offers a new elasticity to my conceptualizations of art and craft. As aforementioned, I am not drawing equivalencies; rather, acknowledging the ways in which the

patriarchy prescribed and suggested that domestic craft was one of the few acceptable activities and forms of productivity for women. Quilting and rug hooking are categorized as craft, which is associated with the feminine; however, what does it mean when something that is considered craft becomes displayed as art? Quilts or rug hooking pieces that are hung on the wall blur the lines between craft and art, thereby complicating feminine and masculine associations with craft and art. While quilts and rug hooking pieces serve a practical purpose, the discussions in the focus group suggest that some people often hold craft and art in different regards. I assert that to value a crafted object as art is to redefine the role of gender within domestic craft as a practice, skill, and creative process. Alice Walker's *Everyday Use* depicted this very idea when she wrote about a daughter asking her mother for the old quilts made by her grandmother which are suddenly pricelessly sentimental to the granddaughter who visits home and wants to make art of the farm tools of her ancestors. Walker writes, "'Well,' I said, stumped. 'What would you do with them?' 'Hang them,' she said. As if that was the only thing you could do with quilts." (Walker). I argue that art is created to demand attention whereas domestic craft is often devalued as the practicality of the item overshadows the aesthetic value (Clifford; Markowitz; Metcalf). In Sonya's example, craft, which is the feminine, gains attention and admiration when it transcends its purpose and becomes something akin to art, something inherently male. This is supported by ideas of women's domestic craft work being devalued as it gains more legitimacy and attention when it enters the realm of masculine work rather than creating space for each to exist on the same plane as equal creations (Carr).

Craft is understood in so many ways—as hobby or pastime, as a means of providing essential garments, as art-form, as commodity, as women's work (Carr) —but craft also has cultural, social, and personal affects the lives of female and AFAB crafters as they are socialized,

through craft, as a gendered practice. Throughout this work, I have considered several terms or names for the same idea of what *craft* in this context means: handcrafts, handicrafts, textile crafts, NL craft, and domestic craft. Domestic, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, has several meanings. The first is “existing, occurring, or produced in the home or within a household” and the second is “relating to or characteristic of home life, family life, or cohabitation” (“Domestic”). In addition, Talia Schaffer examines domestic handicraft and its position as Victorian women’s practice in her book, *Novel Craft.* Schaffer articulates that domestic handicraft became keenly associated with “middle-class women’s homebound status,” Schaffer 6). I took these definition into consideration along with the ways that Roma and other participants discussed the role of domestic craft in the lives of working- and middle-class women within the home, I have come to understand *domestic craft* as the types of crafts that were adopted to take place in the physical space of the home; an example of this would include the act of making a quilt or knitting dishcloths in the physical home (“Domestic;” Schaffer 6). A quilt, for example, is made to be used on a bed in the home, or dishcloths for washing the dishes in the home. Some of the participants thought that the use of “craft” to describe the work that they create was insulting because, to them, their creations are considered art. This makes explicit the unconscious bias and cultural hierarchy of art and craft that the participants have taken on and perpetuates the culturally constructed gendered associations of art as masculine and domestic handicraft as feminine. What does this mean, then, to feel insulted or inferior when one's work is associated with the feminine? Domestic craft is inherently devalued just as womanhood is inherently devalued in the patriarchal world that these participants are living in. Handicraft connotes a sense of inferiority to some participants and perhaps this is due to the feminine associations and the discredited labour of women crafting in NL. It is evident that, among the

focus group participants, domestic handicrafted items were commonly understood as commodities, and therefore of lesser value than art because of the inherent social and cultural value assigned to those items, as suggested in Clifford's example of the art-culture system. There is evidence of crafted objects, such as quilts, which are displayed in galleries as pieces of art, for instance an installation displayed at Memorial University of Newfoundland's Queen Elizabeth II Library in 2018. The Kristen Power, of the MUN Gazette, wrote the following:

> The exhibit is a project of the Cabot Quilters' Guild; the guild invited quilters to submit quilt blocks, which were then made into quilts. More than 250 quilt blocks share the stories of Newfoundlanders who fought in the First World War. The material they depict ranges from the personal to the political. (Power)

However, public displays of quilts occur within rural and outport communities, which are called "quilt shows." These are events where quilters submit their quilts to display at a community center or local church (*Annual Quilt Show*). People from the community come to view and admire the quilts and the makers. These are both examples of quilts—including other quilted items and needlepoint crafts—being displayed in NL as art objects, considering their complexities in the space between practical items and works of art.

The ways in which handicraft is taken up as a feminine practice (Parker 5), a professionalized masculine practice, or how it exists in a liminal space somewhere in the middle, were common themes of conversation threaded through all four focus group sessions. As women and AFAB crafters from NL, many participants noticed that there is a significant gendered association to handcraft as feminine work in the province. Although my goal is not to restrict craft in a contemporary context to a gendered category, recognizing the history of classifying handicraft as maligned women's domestic work and not a legitimate form of creativity or genius

situates the perspectives held by the participants, which still holds traditional values of gendered work. As participant Sonya pointed out, the making of nets, boats, and wood working have been, and often still are, trade and crafts taken up by men whereas the domestic crafts involved in the making of clothing, rugs, blankets, or hats and mittens were done by women (S2 p.6). Participant Haylee said, “I think it’s more common for people to consider themselves an artist as a male, versus a crafter.” (S2 p.8). Adding to this conversation, participant Annette noted that “it’s not that many generations ago that the men went to work and the women stayed home…during the war, the women were encouraged to bring their knitting to church so that they could knit hats and stuff for the soldiers…and the men’s knitting would consist of knitting their [fishing] nets. So, it’s going to that several generations before that mentality ever goes away; that it’s a female dominated craft.” (S4 p.15). Given the hierarchical binary of art and craft, Rozsika Parker argued that “art made with thread and art made with paint are intrinsically unequal: that the former is artistically less significant,” and its insignificance is due to the maker (5). Using embroidery in the domestic sphere as an example, she states that women made it for love, while painting was predominantly produced in the public sphere by men for money (5). Additionally, the location where the crafts took place is significant. For instance, crafts associated with the masculine take place outside of the house—in the yard, on a boat, and so on—and the crafts associated with the feminine often take place in the home, as previously mentioned through participant Sonya’s example of male and female crafts.

Ideas of gendered labour divisions are interesting within the context of women’s handicraft in NL. Many women, particularly in outport communities, contributed to the community through their craft work and their efforts were dismissed as leisure because, as Schaffer notes: women’s domestic crafts were normalized for decades as leisurely occupations

(Schaffer 7–8). However, the opposite can also be true. As focus group participant Haylee shared that their grandfather was a fisher who was adept at net making and knot tying. With this knowledge and skill set, he could learn to braid his daughters' hair and hand-sew for mending clothing, blankets, and quilts (S2 p.6). Here, I observe that, although NL textile craft is typically associated with women's work in NL, men sometimes learn to apply their trades skills—as in, knot tying, net making, boat building, and more—to domestic duties. In the focus group discussions with the participants, I noticed that praise was given to men who learned to apply their skills to textile craft, or who specifically and intentionally took up textile craft as a practice, while an interest in textile craft was expected of women and was therefore rendered less admirable. Scholars argue that this was because of gender essentialism, which is the characterization of gender as masculine and feminine to be associated with certain activities and traits (Aday et al.; Mills; Talwar). Haylee shared a similar observation as she witnessed a male relative show an interest in learning to knit and being praised and admired for this interest. At the same time, Haylee's desire to knit was perceived as less substantial because of the inherent association of knitting with feminine domestic roles. Keeping with this example, the hierarchy of value between perceptions of masculine and feminine labour indicates that, although the craft [knitting] results in similar items, the act of a man knitting is perceived as socially more impressive given the feminine associations with knitting. Audrey Aday, Holly Engstrom, and Toni Schmader expand on this in their article "Gender Essentialism Leads to Biased Learning Opportunities That Shape Women's Career Interests." They explain that in the workforce, a man occupying a role which is socially associated with masculine labour—professions in STEM, for example—will receive social praise for taking on that job while a woman in the same position is not equally recognized (Aday et al.).

A generational difference in the way that male children and adolescents and AMAB (assigned male at birth) youths take up domestic craft came up in the focus group discussions. Sisters Roma, Annette, and Adela all talked about how they were expected to learn to sew their own clothes at a young age when growing up in the 1960s and 70s, while their brother was taught the basic skills but never expected to sew his clothes (S4 p.18). Their brother maintained the basics of sewing to mend, or to sew on a button, but never with the same intention as his sisters to sew full garments. Thirty years later, in the 1990s–2000s, Adela's sons were all taught how to knit and sew with somewhat different results. Adela said that her sons have been able to repair and replace seats in their boats or reupholster furniture with the skills that were passed down to them (S3 p.7). While they have taken their crafting skills to a new level (in comparison to Roma's, Annette's, and Adela's brother), there is an inherent conception of difference between how these sons craft versus how girls and young women are expected to craft, all coming from the same socio-political space. The difference between boys and AMAB children learning and applying these skills from the ways that girls and AFAB children have been socialized through craft in NL is that the expectation for what is produced is entirely different. I observed that a common belief in NL is that women who knit should be able to knit a sweater; men who knit should be able to knit a fishing net. Similarly, women who sew should be able to sew a dress; men who sew should be able to fix a seat cover. What I noticed was that some participants acknowledged that the social system in which they were raised enforced behaviours and roles based on the binary gender structure, but that when it came to their own practices, they did not feel that their crafting had anything to do with their gender, or the genders of their children or siblings as exemplified above. The intention and expectation behind these creations is what drives the understanding of how craft operates as a tool for education and an expression of

our abilities. Women's work was understood through craft (Parker ix), and these ideologies still exist in NL as some might believe that the difference is not of gendered experience, but one of expectation.

Crafting used to be a large part of homemaking for women in outport NL. Historically, women's knitting and quilting practices served the needs of their communities (Boon & Pentney 24). Focus group participant, Lori, suggested that the evenings were a time when women could sit, rest, and work on their craft, likely in the company of other women. (S2 p.8) Roma added that, in those times, crafting would have been "an acceptable way for women to socialize because you weren't allowed to sit and put your feet up, you had to be productive and busy always" (S2 p.8). Women were expected to follow capitalist logic insofar as their work could never be finished; there was always something more to *do* (Schaffer 3–6). Handicrafts were seen as an acceptable activity for women so as not to be idle, and to not occupy time with labour associated with masculinity (Schaffer).

Schaffer's discussion of Victorian domestic handicraft notices that, particularly in the greater British context, from childhood, women were disciplined to keep their hands busy, and handcrafts, especially knitting and embroidery, were excellent tools for appearing industrious and productive without labouring (Schaffer 8). While my mother and generations before her primarily relied on crafting as a practical necessity, it is fascinating to reflect on the reasons why and how I can now use crafting practices as a self-care tool. I craft because I have been taught by women in my life who crafted out of necessities. Part of the reason I do not craft out of necessity is because of the rising costs of materials making handicraft an unrealistic means of producing affordable garments in the current economic climate. However, part of the reason I have this luxury is also attributed to the slow disintegration of gender roles in NL since my mother's

generation, and prior. A cultural shift in ideas of labour and gender now affords me the opportunity to use craft in a subversive way: as a form of self-care, not as a form of gendered labour.

Home, Place, and Newfoundland and Labrador

Examining the influence of the island itself was essential to forming my understanding how craft influences the lives of women and AFAB people in and from Newfoundland and Labrador. As someone who lived on the West Coast for over two decades, my connections to the land and to my family on the island are connected to my craft. Influenced by my surroundings and environment, the time that I spent in those places impacted my perception of the world and the work that I created. The island offers a unique space where craft has flourished and continues to develop; however, it is important to acknowledge the effects of colonization on Indigenous handmaking material culture as the historical traditions embedded in craft cannot be dissociated from Indigenous histories, community, and ontological realities on the island. I interrogate how my privilege as a settler in NL is situated in relation to my experience as a crafter. I consider the ways my ancestors were taught to make their clothes—suitable for harsh island weather. This home, this island, was home to the Inuit, Innu, Beothuk, and Mi'kmaq before it was home to my ancestors, and I consider their influence on the land and the crafts that Indigenous people of NL had over settler women.

While the crafters in this group are from NL, some have lived away from their home province for many years and have experienced craft outside of NL. Even though participant Adela had not lived in NL for over three decades, she remarked in her written reflection that the

bright colours in her quilt square (*see figure 8*) were inspired by the colourful houses that are characteristic of St. John's. In the 1970s Settler NL became known for its naturally colourful landscape and brightly coloured houses in the downtown area affectionately known as Jellybean Row (Williams). Others say that the colourful houses on the shorelines were painted by settler fishers to make the houses visible against the fog, mist, and grey skies of eastern NL ("The Jelly Bean Palette"). In the last session, Adela said that in everything she makes, she feels that "Newfoundland comes through in a certain way" especially through her use of colourful fabrics (S4 p.4). "So, to me," she continued, "all the colours in my quilts—cause they're always bright quilts—and in my house are bright walls, or its ocean coloured. I think that [NL] has a big influence on me in everything I do." (S4 p.4). Adela wrote in her reflection, "I am always inspired by the colours and nature of Newfoundland, my original environment. The sea in particular is often a reference in the works that I create." I am reminded of Boon's descriptions of working through feelings by stitching together fabrics in a quilt as Adela reminisces about her memories of home as she quilts (S4 p.4). I notice here that, as material culture suggests (Herman; Bartlett & Henderson, lived experiences exist through the memories of crafted creations as a person's environment and experiences influence the visual components of their creation, as well as the process through which it is crafted.

Newfoundland and Labrador presents a unique geographical and cultural space for handicraft to thrive. Participant Roma suggested that, although crafts in NL are unique in comparison to other provinces or other British and North American contexts, perhaps crafts in Atlantic Canada take on similar forms as in NL. Participant Adela found that craft "is more prevalent in Newfoundland than it is in other places" (S1 p.17). Erin Morton discusses folk art as a unique form of craft in Atlantic Canada, specifically within Nova Scotia, that transforms a

material crafted object into a piece worthy of fine art collection and presentation (Morton 4). This is fascinating to consider in relation to the art/masculine and craft/feminine dichotomy (aforementioned in the discussion of Art, Craft and the Gender Binary) as the two entities begin to amalgamate because it complicates the relationship between gendered associated values and items created by hand. In accordance with Halberstam's iteration of low theory, craft succeeds when it is masked as something that is socially deemed more valuable. In Morton's case, craft succeeds when it is considered under the title of folk art, thereby reiterating the idea of the 'masculine' succeeding over the 'feminine.' While not all crafts are considered folk art, much of what has developed as craft in Atlantic Canada, and NL in particular, was perceived by the focus group participants as being folk art, which is highly valuable in contrast to crafting commodities.

Home is a complex space, and I argue here that home is not a singular space but one which is conceptualized of emotional, psychological, and physical needs. The memory of home, and especially a place where gender is taught, is noticeable in Annette's square which mirrors the very first pattern she remembered seeing her mother crochet into a quilt (*see figure 10*). The pansy pattern is associated with early memories of craft as Annette wrote that she saw the quilt on her parent's bed for a very long time. The square sets off a chain reaction of memory: of her childhood home where the quilt existed, the home is where crafting took place but is also where women were the primary care takers, and her mother created the quilt and taught her to craft as girls were taught to imitate their mothers (Parker 130). Moreover, the childhood home hosts a multitude of memories, especially memories which remind a person of the core values and ideals that were instrumental in early development. However, the act of crocheting this quilt square and the process of using yarn crafts as a space for thinking and remembering are ways in which meaning and memories are stitched into the objects we create. Boon's stitching theory emerges

here where craft acts as a site for meaning making through the process of stitching (Boon). The process of crocheting the stitches in Annette's quilt square theoretically connects her early memories of craft with socialized feminine ideals rooted in the heteronormative nuclear family structure. Stitching and handicraft offer a site where the crafts passed down from mother to daughter are instruments to make meaning out of fragmented memories and values inherited from generation to generation (Parker).

Not only is the idea of home a place or a location, but home is a feeling and sometimes a thing or a person. I recall a documentary about understanding home as a queer person, called "My Prairie Home" where Rae Spoon chronicled their experiences as an AFAB non-binary person in rural Alberta. When describing what *home* means to them, they pointed to the memory of a blue glow through a glacier at the top of a mountain in Alberta, specifically, the feeling that this memory elicited. I think of this feeling of home, of a calm memory and, if I were to remove all aspects of home that exist for me in places and people, I visualize what kind of feeling offers a sense of home. And to me, that is the place where the ocean meets the land. Home is not then a singular space or a house with walls and a roof; home can be found in memory or in a feeling. At the same time, the idea of home and having a home to return to is a privilege in a political and economic climate which dispossesses and displaces people from their homes and traditional lands. Some have the privilege of financial access to home, while others' homes have been taken from them by colonial and capitalist occupation, and for some, home is found within the domestic space (Kaplan 582).

For participant Roma, her sense of home in NL came from her parents. Roma shared, "[domestic craft is] a connection to our mother because she passed away almost 14 years ago, and so every time I do something craft related, I feel connection to her. And that's just the way it

is because she taught me everything I know how to do" (S2 p.15). The connection that Roma felt with her mother reminded me of Rozsika Parker's analysis of mother/daughter relationships (Parker 128). She asserts that mothers taught their daughters to domestic craft, which historically reproduced ideologies of femininity in "bourgeois families through the mother/daughter relationships" (Parker 128). Parker draws on examples of early eighteenth-century embroidery that displays daughters as "diminutive versions of the mother" to illustrate the mirroring of mother to daughter (Parker 130). The connections between mother, daughter, and needlework that Parker examines are curious to consider as mothers are likely to experience their daughters as a continuation of themselves. Meanwhile, a daughter's education of embroidery—or the general handicraft, by extension—is an absorption that "took place in the context of her deep, unconscious primary bond with her mother" in a domestic space (130). I extend Roma's sentiment that craft connects her to her mother, eliciting a feeling of home, to examine the connections between motherhood, socialized femininity, and use of handicraft as an instrument to teach a feminine gendered role among settler white, middle-class women. By this, I mean that her connection to craft is not only about her parents, specifically her mother, but about the effects of craft as a method through which ideals of femininity were instilled in her young mind and carried with her into adulthood. An individual's understanding of home, how they remember home and what they know as home indicates how they might orient themselves in relation to what they create and how their creations are influenced by their surroundings and upbringings.

Embodiment & Phenomenology

Phenomenology considers how each person—each participant in this thesis—came to what they made. Through a phenomenological lens, I wondered how each of them was oriented

in this space of crafting in community and how their bodies were oriented to their particular work or craft. I wondered about the ways that their experiences or how they learned their skills or crafts influenced what they created in the focus group space. Participant Annette shared about her experience as a knitter and why she considers herself a crafter rather than an artist. She said, "there is a difference in art and craft in the way you see it." (S1 p.19). I am intrigued by this, and what I understand from Annette's words is that her phenomenological position within craft is directed through her vision and how she visually interprets what she creates. She was not taught to knit or sew as an artistic practice, but rather as a mode of production. Therefore, her position as a crafter is not informed from an artistic perspective, but from learning a practical skill. Meanwhile another participant, Heather, shared that she is cautious about how she approaches the sewing machine, or her crochet, because, she says, "I know how good people in my family are and how good [my grandmother] was with it." (S3 p.10). In her reflection on her quilt square she wrote, "I have a difficult time starting projects as my mind is often flooded with thoughts of comparison," which suggests to me that she came to this space feeling uncertain about her craft. Heather could not learn a lot about textile craft from her grandmother before she passed, and although she has continued to learn from her mother, she feels inexperienced compared to other crafters. However, Heather's experience led her to re-create the same rag-style quilt that her grandmother used to sew, answering the question of how she came to create in this space and how material connections inform her interactions with craft.

In Chapter 2, I explored some of Bernard L. Herman's thoughts on material culture and the ways that human beings react cognitively to material connections. Herman suggested there was a historical connection to how people understand objects and places (Herman 73). He states that "all history is embodied, and that embodiment occupies a fluid position between subjective

knowledge and collective sense" (73); a liminal space where I suggest that Halberstam's low theory is a primary resident (Halberstam 2). As Herman suggests that material objects root human beings to certain places and moments in history, I propose that crafts and the objects created by crafters who participated in my project function in the same way. Phenomenology, as defined by Sara Ahmed, emphasizes consciousness of lived experiences and practices, considers proximity, and "the role of repeated and habitual actions" that shape bodies and paradigms (*Queer Phenomenology* 2). Phenomenology and embodiment are useful frameworks for thinking about crafting because of how people align themselves in relation to the crafted objects as the ones who created them. I argue that, as attachments to handcrafted objects form, so does the embodied attachment to the sentimentality of craft form.

Creating something new from old materials occurred as a significant aspect of considering phenomenological considerations of craft, and it also came up in focus group conversation. Participants talked about using clothing from their parents, grandparents, or even baby clothes to make something that captured the memories of that person. In her reflection, Roma described the materials used in her crazy-quilt style square: "I used pieces of fabric left over from garments that I made for my children. I even used a piece of fabric from the pressing cloth that hung over my mother's iron for many, many years. Each piece of fabric in the square I crafted holds specific memories for me." Further down, she wrote that "[quilts of recycled fabric are] a lovely way to relive memories of time spent together and of people who are no longer with us." Similarly, Natalie's reflection described the recycled materials used to make her square: "The square itself is a patchwork of old clothing, many pieces coming from my grandparents, adding a touch of family history to the square." Hannah, too, unraveled, and re-used yarn from an old scarf that her mother had made for her years ago, as well as left over yarn from blankets

she had made for both her parents and grandparents. Recycling materials, especially ones of sentimental value, connects the craft to people, places, and objects that are important to a person at certain points in time. These types of craft—that is, the crazy quilt, upcycling old garments or objects from loved ones for example—transform the crafted object into an archive, but specifically what Anne Cvetkovich names in her book, *An Archive of Feeling: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*, an affective archive or an archive of feeling (244). Cvetkovich notes the archive of feeling simultaneously incorporates the material and immaterial objects that would not otherwise have been considered archivable (243). Affect offers significance to an archive within queer studies as affect is coupled with "nostalgia, personal memory, fantasy, and trauma" that nuance and complicate the traditional notions of archives (243). Crafted objects become affective archives because of their associations with memories, traumas, and nostalgia, and as a result, the crafted objects archive a person's connection and feelings that are attached to an object in a way that would not have otherwise been captured.

The embodiment of craft takes on a physical meaning and a figurative interpretation. Drawing from Shatema Threadcraft's chapter, "Embodiment," and Koskinen et al.'s "Interaction and Embodiment in Craft Teaching," the embodiment of craft interrogates the body's role as sociopolitical meaning of craft is internalized and (Threadcraft; Koskinen et al. 61). I have noticed that while I crochet, I often do not have to pay attention to what I am doing until I need to count stitches or closely follow a pattern. Annette said at one point that crafting, particularly knitting, for her, "becomes muscle memory," and Lori agreed, saying that it becomes muscle memory because of its repetitive motions (S4 p.8). Of course, when an action or activity is practiced, it becomes more easily, and more fluid; for example, learning to ride a bicycle very quickly becomes muscle memory as you feel the pedals beneath you, learn the rhythm and

balance of the wheels on the ground, and gain control of the forward motions. A similar process takes place as you learn a craft such as crochet, for example: becoming familiar with the crochet hook and yarn in your hands, learning to maneuver the yarn around the hook, and feeling the rhythm of the stitches coming together and keeping the proper tension. Craft is embodied in that a crafter's body remembers the motions of craft as a durational embodied practice of motions that have been learned and refined through repetition. Ahmed questions "how do bodies 'matter' in what objects do?" (*Queer Phenomenology* 51). I suggest that, in the context of craft being an embodied practice that builds muscle memory, bodies matter because the crafted object would not exist if not for the body whose labour created it. More than questioning *whose* body interacted with crafts and labour, I am considering *how* they moved through the spaces intersecting structures of race, gender, and class, to engage in this labour. Phenomenology suggests that the embodied practice of craft extends beyond muscle memory, but that a person's interaction with material practice is informed by their ideological positioning in a greater geo-political context. Further, the figurative interpretation of embodiment indicates the labour of stitching that reinforces the motions of historical and mechanical craft as generations of settler women were taught to craft as a gendered mode of production. As a result, craft embodies constructed notions of gender and instructs feminine gender roles as they are associated with the act of crafting as a means of production. To me, the repetitive embodied motions of craft do not signify the repetitive labour that NL women produced, but instead, signifies the body's ability to store memories. Embodied motions of craft signify how I have come to my craft and serve as a memory of how others before me came to theirs.

As I considered what craft means for women and AFAB crafters from NL to understand my own position as a crafter, I explored the difference between the intention of learning to craft

and the intention of what a crafter creates. This framing of intention was mentioned in the first session by Lori when Adela shared some of her art dolls with the group. Lori highlighted the intention of making something as intricate as the art dolls in comparison with the intention of creating something more practical, such as a simple quilt (S1 p.18). Perhaps the intention behind the art doll is to give the doll as a gift, or for display, to practice and master a craft/skill. Whereas the intention of making a quilt is often for practical and functional use, for warmth on a sofa, a chair, or a bed. Of course, quilts can be quite intricate and detailed and sometimes are made for displays as pieces of art, where the intention of the quilt is then similar to that of the art dolls. In another session, Roma pointed out that a crafter's lived experience might have an influence over what they create depending on the intention of the craft or object itself. This meant that there are some crafts with which an individual might engage that might be more significant, or more personal, therefore harboring room for intentional creation. There is a connection between a person's intention with a craft, and their socialization as a gendered body to have gendered intentions for what they create. As I have observed within the focus group, some people are crafting with the intention to create a specific image or object, which reflects the gendered association of purpose or meaning attached to a handmade item (Parker; Schaffer). Whereas the intention for some was to create something while intentionally engaging with the act of crafting, subverting the association of purpose, but rather to be mindful of the connotations of feminine craft.

Turning again to Adela's art dolls, I pose that there is a semiotic relationship between craft and femininity—as elaborated earlier by Parker and Schaffer—and then a semiotic relationship between femininity and dolls. As women and AFAB people are socialized to understand their gender identities and roles through crafts, so too are they taught to understand

the intentions of crafting certain items. In this context, *intention* refers to the meaning that is made through the creation of crafted objects and the purpose—either symbolic or material—that a crafted item holds. It is important to note that while my participants were AFAB individuals, and while some of the crafters in my life are AFAB, their non-binary or genderqueer identities challenge this semiotic relationship by queering the social construct of gender. This adds another intricate layer to their socialization as AFAB people. Sara Ahmed writes of gender as being "an effect of how bodies take up objects, which [involve] how they occupy space by being occupied in one way or another" (*Queer Phenomenology* 59). Although notions of gender and socialized performances of gender through craft are passed down, or inherited, from one generation to the next, these notions are interrupted by queer identities. In addition to craft being a practice where an object is made through acts of creation, craft also exists as a metaphorical space in the context of this thesis. Genderqueer individuals who engage with craft as a practice then queer the craft space. By queering the occupation of craft space, understandings of gender are queered, therefore the relationships between gender and craft are less divisive. It is interesting to consider that perhaps craft could offer a place of dwelling where genderqueer and non-binary crafters could establish their own intentions for crafting that have not been imposed through the gender binary. This is something that I have observed as a queer person through online social spaces, such as Instagram and Tik Tok.

Natalie's quilt square (*see figure 7*) afforded me a new perspective on how intentions can influence craft. I had been thinking of intention as the meaning applied to an object by the maker, or the intention of the crafter to make a certain object. However, the content of Natalie's quilt square, paired with the meaning she clarified in her reflection, illuminated the phenomenological intention that the act of crafting, as well as the crafted object, embodies.

Again, I consider how the crafter has come to the craft and what they create. As per Natalie's written reflection about her square, the wetland scene is reminiscent of the marshy ecosystems of the West Coast NL where she grew up. As a participant in this study, Natalie's intention of this crafted square was to create it as a piece of research-creation within this thesis; however, the intention that I notice is indicated by the techniques and visual components of the square which liken Natalie's quilt square to a framed piece of art. When I consider Natalie's square, I interpret a desire to craft a square that is visually aesthetic with its visual depiction of natural scenery, the dimension, and layered design that re-inscribe craft as good failure within Halberstam's context of low theory. In her article "Knitting as a feminist project?" Maura Kelly examines knitting as a feminist practice with the possibility of engaging with critical feminist politics through the craft. Although Kelly suggests that "the meaning of knitting is dependent on the intention of the knitter and is context specific" (134), I extend this to other forms of craft and the intersections of intention and experience that occur, in that the intention of a person's craft is also about their orientation in relation to their craft. In thinking about embodiment, I am able to consider how a person's connection to a crafted object relies on their relationship to the metaphorical space that they occupy (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 6), the intention of handicraft is embodied by the crafter, and as seen in Natalie's quilt square (*see figure 7*), her intention of the square is embodied by her orientation to craft and the physical space around her. I pause and consider what it means that Natalie's intention as the crafter was to make the quilt square for this project, but that the intention of the crafted object differs from the crafter's intention. Does the square fail as craft because of its visual resemblances to a picture? And does it offer more legitimacy as a craft than a dish cloth that was made for the same purpose within this project? I stipulate that there is no greater or lesser value offered to one quilt square over another Therefore, if art is

associated with the masculine, this comparison—Natalie's wetland scene and Shirley's dish cloth—can serve as a microcosm for the ways in which masculinity is deemed more valuable than femininity within a patriarchal hierarchy.

Gender/Identity

As a thesis that explores experiences of gender, it was important that I examine how handicraft practices interact with people's identities and gender expressions. A significant portion of craft that is seen as traditional practice in Newfoundland and Labrador comes from women who came to this land, who learned from their mothers and the Indigenous people who lived on this land before them and claimed practices such as weaving, pottery, and certain types of needlework and beading as their own. With this work, I consider that women's craft in NL is not something to be romanticized for the arduous work they did, and I acknowledge that the identities and histories of Indigenous people on the island were erased in the process. As research conducted to explore my understanding and experience of gender through craft in NL through conversations with other AFAB crafters from Newfoundland, it was important that I give space to everyone to share about their identities, experiences, and histories.

A person's identity is multifaceted, defines who they are, and informs their world view and experiences. Identity in a larger social context is "the 'fact' of being who or what a person is" (Ehlers 346). On one hand, gender identity was not something that most of the focus group participants consciously encountered through craft. They recognized that handicraft in NL is traditionally taken up by women, but felt that, since it is not an activity exclusive to women, gender does not influence how they interact with craft. Annette said that "it's just what I do," and

did not feel a particular connection to her identity as a woman or a Newfoundlander because craft did not seem to be a particularly special skill because she thought “that everybody did it”—*it* being crafting in NL (S4 p.5–6). However, Roma also said, “I totally know that my identity has been influenced by craft because for as long as I can remember I have been exposed to it” (S2 p.15) meaning that her identity has been shaped by craft because she has practiced craft for such a long time. More than just doing it, craft was perceived as something that most people did because it was common for working- and middle-class settler women to take part in craft practices as a form of gendered labour division (Talwar 16).

On the other hand, Haylee shared in reflection about their quilt square that they noticed their gender identity was a fundamental aspect of their quilt square but only came to this realization through the process of knitting their quilt square. As a genderqueer/genderfluid person, Haylee does not identify within the confines of the gender binary and feels that they exist somewhere in an interludial space of womanhood as an expression of femininity and being non-binary: a fluid liminality of existence. They shared that through the process of making their quilt square, the act of knitting paired with intentional thought about gender identity and expression, caused them to realize that their craft connected them to their identity as a woman more than as a genderfluid person. More specifically, they felt connected to their heritage as a descendant of fishers, the child of a lobster fisher. While they were kitting the square, the orange variegations in the yarn developed into what resembled land in the ocean; before even reading the description, I thought that the shape was reminiscent of an island and was intrigued that it occurred organically. The Atlantic Ocean surrounding the island is home to fishers of NL. Haylee wrote, “most of my connection to NL is through fishing; as a fisherman’s daughter, who grew up with the yard smelling like bait... The spring brings hard work as lobster season starts. The sea is my

backyard." While the shape of the orange yarn resembles an island in the ocean, the colour is also suggestive of bright scarlet shells of cooked lobster. Haylee shared that the process of knitting their quilt square reminded them of their heritage of fishers, and they felt they could connect more to their identity as a descendent of lobster fishers and as a person who lives in a traditional, rural fishing community through the act of knitting (S4 p.16). They also said that craft connects to their gender identity, but not as a genderqueer person. "I do find," they said, "that crafting almost brings me closer to said gender when referring to being a woman" (S3 p.19). How compelling that some participants who are cisgendered female crafters do not consider gender as an influential aspect of their craft, but someone who is genderqueer found a deeper connection to a sense of femininity as part of their identity. Haylee's experience illuminates the symbolic value of craft as an embodied practice in that they experience craft as embodied in a hegemonic, settler way even though they experience the world as a genderqueer person. Therefore, the dynamic presented here is twofold because, in one way, craft for women and AFAB people in NL is rooted in women's roles on the island and their work. Sonja Boon remarks on the deeply rooted history that knitting has among women in NL, specifically that women would knit as contributions to political and economic events both locally and globally—such as the NL fisheries and during WWII, to name just a few (Boon 92). By knitting a square that coincidentally resembled an island in the ocean, Haylee felt connected to the history of women's knitting in NL that long predates their experience as a crafter.

The experience that Haylee described above highlights an answer to the question "how do crafts influence our understanding of lived experience?" Haylee realized a profound connection to their femininity that they had never felt before because through the practice of their craft they felt connected to the traditions of knitting as a woman's role in fishing

communities. They understood their experience more fully by actively engaging in traditional knitting practice. Beyond its gendered context, craft infuses a crafter's identity as some crafters expressed that they felt a piece of who they are lives in their creations. In this way, I note that textile and domestic craft are a place to express and explore identity and a sense of self. Scholars Sinikka Pöllänen and Marja Weissmann-Hanski explore the connections between textile crafts and a person's identity in their article "Hand-made well-being: Textile crafts as a source of eudaimonic well-being." they express that craft making is a means of "self-expression" with a means of reflecting on lived experiences and self-understanding (349). The connections that Haylee made between her crafting and her identity as a queer AFAB person from NL were discovered through a sense of connection to their heritage as a Newfoundlander, born of fishers, and a connection to the traditional use of and feminine roll of knitting. For Adela who used to have her own boutique where she sold various specialty craft items, including her own stained-glass work, she said that, quite literally, "your name is attached to it," marking what she created and sold as an extension of her creativity (S4 p.23). Adela said that her creations capture a piece of her identity. As her hands—her body—made the object, a part of who she is exists within the creation. Pöllänen and Weissmann-Hanski explain that crafting and crafted objects "carry the symbolism of the maker and relationships with other people," (349). The participants were exploring these ideas through their thoughtful attention to their crafting practices and their experiences as crafters having their sense of self entrenched in their crafts. Meanwhile, participant Lori said that all the pieces she rug hooks have some sort of story or meaning behind them that exists in the finished product (S4 p.22). Roma agreed with Lori's point and added that what she makes reflects who she is, even if it is not a conscious choice (S4 p. 23). As an

extension of a crafter's identity, craft is a means through which aspects of gender, sexuality, and race, are considered and displayed through the crafted objects.

Others, such as Natalie, suggested that craft is a means through which she can express herself and certain aspects of her identity, specifically by illustrating political issues, experiences, or emotions that she encounters and feels passionately about. She said: "art is just a way of expressing myself...a lot of what I do with crafting is that it reflects myself and who I am, not only as a woman but as a person" (S3 p.8). Susan Jones engages with other craft scholars to consider textile crafts as an avenue for thought. She writes that "[thinking] with knitting therefore offers a dynamic way of approaching the exploration of meaning-making" (84). In her article Jones is considering how meaning is made and shared through handicraft practices and objects. Participant Natalie touches on an important aspect of meaning-making here as she expresses herself through her art and craft-based work. As well as offering a creative outlet, craft has become a part of who Natalie is and it shapes her perspectives on life and even herself. Within material culture, scholars suggest that a person's interaction with an object is informed by their connection with the object and the meaning that has already been embedded within it (Herman; Gruner). Bernard L. Herman suggests that this apex, the point of interaction and connection, is where affect is located and a person's understanding of their relationship to the object is made known (73). The act of making a material object by hand elicits a connection to that object, and by imbuing one's own sense of self into the object, the crafter builds affective attachment to their creation. Natalie's sentiment of using craft to express her identity locates affect, the feeling of knowing and understanding herself, embedded within the act of crafting and the object she creates.

Community

Craft builds community as crafters share what they make with others. As a project rooted in community involvement, community-based practices are important because, historically, women's work was intrinsically linked to community building (Richard 5). Since the participants were members of my community, the contributions of craft within communities are significant to consider—in both the broader, more general community, and an acute, close-knit community. To many of the crafters in this group, a significant aspect of creating something is to give it to someone else. It is common in NL for people to build a close community by sharing their goods—something handmade, left-over food, extra clothing or ingredients, etc.—with others. During the war and while men were off working on boats or fishing—that is, up until around the 1980's when women occupied forty percent of the fishery—women would rely on each other for support, friendship, and sometime share a pair of mitten or socks if someone else was not able to make their own (Whalen & Schmidt). Shirley, for instance, knits dishcloths—or, as Newfoundlanders often call them, "pot cloths"—and she makes them for something to do, to keep her hands busy. She only needs to keep a few for herself, so she donates them to the food bank and the ladies' group at her church, or gives them to her friends, children, and grandchildren whenever anyone visits. The quilt square she made is one of these dishcloths (*see figure 12*), and with it, she sent two extra cloths for me to use in the kitchen. Sometimes, giving offers a purpose to craft, rather than just making for the sake of making. In her reflection, Shirley writes that now, knitting "is mostly in [her] spare time" when she is "just sitting and watching TV." More than just something to do in her spare time, crafting allows her to connect with others by giving or donating her dishcloths, and from personal experience, socks and slippers as well. She witnessed craft as women's work as a young girl when her mother would knit hats, scarves,

mittens, and socks to donate to organizations such as Oxfam and UNICEF (*see figure 1*), which has been, in part, the inspiration for Shirley to donate her dishcloths. This is not to suggest a hierarchy between making for community and making for the sake of making; rather, to illustrate the ways making can build community and offer a community driven sense of accomplishment to their work.

Based on my own experience and the focus group discussion, it is quite common for older women in NL to give what they make because it builds a stronger community by sharing talents, services, and items made by hand. I have noticed that, for some of these women, sharing their projects and creations with others offers a sense of purpose to their work. In "Feminism as Practice: Craft, Labor, and Art Therapy," Savneet Talwar suggests that craft builds community as a mode of hospitality (18). Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are commonly known for their hospitality, especially domestic hospitality ("People & Culture")—that is, domestic being feminine labour in the home. Hospitality in NL is about inviting someone into the home and offering them food and drink, a place to sleep if needed, or showing kindness. NL hospitality is predicated on resilience and the need for community to survive during harsh winters, through the cod moratorium, and other seasonal and agricultural challenges that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have historically faced (Hall et al.; Higgins *Economic Impacts*). Islanders relied on each other to provide and make do often with limited resources (Higgins *Economic Impacts*). The sentiment stuck, and often women will offer their services as kindness when someone else is in need or might not be able to do it themselves. This is one of the ways that Newfoundlanders build community and show each other kindness, and often that includes women knitting or sewing for their families, friends, or others in their neighborhoods, towns, or communities. The

act of giving enforces hospitality and builds community. Therefore, by extension, craft is a form of hospitality and community building.

Craft often facilitates the socializing, building, and nurturing of a community. In a collection of essays titled "Leisure Communities: Rethinking Mutuality, Collective Identity and Belonging in the New Century," Troy D. Glover and Erin K. Sharpe define community as capturing a sentiment and an interest that bonds people together (Glover & Sharpe). As I have been uncovering in this thesis, my identity as a woman from NL and my experience with hand crafts run parallel as they each influence the other. My identity influences how I understand craft, and my experience with craft influences my understanding of my identity, and my community has a significant impact on these experiences. Participant Sonya described craft as a social activity where, in the past and present, groups of crafters—primarily women—would come together to work on their knitting, quilting, sewing, mending, etc. (S2 p.7). Roma later mentioned the ways that craft could build community by relying on others to learn a particular craft, or if help was needed on a project in any situation. "But that's the way it was done," Roma said about having to call her sister for help when trying to knit a sock, "You had to find somebody in your community" (S2 p.18). Furthermore, a person's identity influences their role in a community, as Pöllänen and Weissmann-Hanski posit, leisure activities "provide social connection...and contribute to the person's cultural identity, as well as that of their community" (361). They also explore the potential for craft engagement to enhance a person's experience and understanding of themself as a community member, essentially promoting an embodied understanding of individual belonging (362). Multiple participants shared that they are known in their own communities as being the "go-to" person for mending clothes, hemming pants, or making specialty gifts. Roma, Sonya, and Annette all said that they are known to others as "the

crafty people" who can help others with their projects and their learning, or to mend and hem clothing for their friends. In these ways, craft shapes a part of a crafter's identity, an aspect of how they are perceived and recognized within their communities. Community relies on the "shared attribute" of being in commonality with other people in a shared space (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 122). Ahmed's queer phenomenology suggests that individuals connect not by proximity, but by relational attachment and understanding of community (3; 122). Therefore, craft facilitated the relational attachment that women had, and so it was a common interest in crafting that built community, not location or geographical proximity they had with one another. In Roma's, Sonya's, and Annette's case, craft connects them with others in their communities because they have a skill that they can share with others—crafters or non-crafters alike. Beth Ann Pentney suggests knitting is particularly important in women's community building, particularly for communities where "knitting has functioned not as a beloved pastime but as a means of income or as a supplement to a family's clothing needs" (Pentney).

Matrilineal Inheritance

Within this thesis, I considered matrilineal inheritance as framed by Mariah Gruner in her article "Materiality, Affect, and the Archive: The Possibility of Feminist Nostalgia in Contemporary Handkerchief Embroidery." Gruner positions matrilineal inheritance within the context of textile craft as creating matrilineal lines of knowledge transmission and "tightly governed norms of feminine behaviour" within the socio-political context of western matriarchy (Gruner). I extend the concept of matrilineal inheritance into more figurative, metaphorical, and incorporate ways of existing in relation to my ancestors. Gruner offers that matrilineal inheritance of craft can exist as "the possibility of engaging with a feminine inheritance without

adhering to essentialized understandings of womanhood or strict notions of the temporality of passing down" (Gruner). I considered matrilineal inheritance as a possible theme before the first week of the focus group sessions. While I prepared to open a dialogue with other crafters in these sessions, I was working with my own sewing machine, wrestling with the bobbin casing. I thought of my mother and grandmother: how seamlessly they could pop the bobbin into place, slide pieces of the machine around, and set up the beginnings of a sewing project with ease. It appeared as though my grandmother's knowledge of a sewing machine was inherited, never learned. While I wrestled with this unfamiliar piece of equipment, Sonja Boon's words about meaning-making through quilting came to mind:

> My quilting time isn't ever just about the quilt; it is about everything that's rattling around in my brain. Like quilt blocks, ideas, too, can be pieced together, paired up, and squared off, and in that process, new patterns, new linkages, and new questions emerge. After several hours together, my fabrics, my thread, and I work not only through a quilt, but also through larger concepts. (Boon 93)

By working with the sewing machine, thinking through concepts of craft being passed down intergenerationally, and most often by women in NL, became easier, even if the machine still would not cooperate. Specifically, the inheritance of craft through the maternal line indicates the inheritance of knowledge, instincts, and abilities that are felt more intrinsically than they are taught.

Matrilineal inheritance in the context of craft and material culture takes more than one form: the inheritance of physical or material objects, and the inheritance of knowledge. Helen Holme's article, "Material Affinities: 'Doing' Family through the Practices of Passing On," articulates that passing on, or inheriting, recognizes the significance of materiality in maintaining

familial relationships (Holmes 174). This highlights the importance of passing down not only physical objects, but also knowledge and practices, such as craft, through kin. In one of the focus group discussions, Heather brought up an interesting point about her experience with learning to sew and crochet as the youngest child whose siblings had already been learning to craft. She explained that now, as a young adult, she is cautious about making something—for example crocheting a scarf or sewing a blanket—for fear of not having enough experience to make it well. Heather was 5 years old when our Gram passed away, and she said, "I haven't done as much craft as I want to because I'm very careful and picky with how I crochet or knit because Gram did it. But I didn't really get to learn much from her" (S3 p.10). Later, she elaborated that, because other women or other crafters in her life were so experienced, namely her grandmother, she worried that not being able to learn from her limited her potential as a crafter. Even though she inherited a supply of Gram's fabric and quilting squares, she said that she has been "putting off [using them] until [she's] better" (S3 p.10). There are two aspects of matrilineal inheritance at play here: materials and supplies were physically inherited from her maternal grandmother, relating to the affinities of passing on in material culture; and the intellectual matrilineal inheritance of knowledge, specifically crafting knowledge in this context. I consider here Jonas Frykman's exploration of material inheritance after the loss of a loved one in his chapter "Done by Inheritance: A Phenomenological approach to Affect and Material Culture." Frykman writes the following:

> Objects can often release very deep conflicts, the repercussions of which are deeply felt in the inheritors' lives. Things bequeathed are given an 'affective value', in that the inheritors find themselves in a liminal state and thus become

> open to a wide array of influences that are often difficult to name and grasp" (152).

Although Frykman is drawing on the inheritance of an estate, the same is true of cognitive and metaphysical inheritance of non-visible collections of knowledge, emotion, trauma, and memories. Heather's knowledge of craft is rooted in the memory of her grandmother and also shapes how she views her own position within the crafting community from a phenomenological standpoint. Heather used the fabric scraps to make her quilt square (*see figure 4*) and recreated the same style of quilt that her grandmother made most often, the rag quilt, which, as she said in her reflection, "gave [her] the opportunity to learn something new and to embrace [her] grandmother's craft." This re-creation emulates how matrilineal inheritance manifests because, although Heather felt that she did not have the same expertise as her grandmother, she was still able to use the fabrics passed on to her and imitate what she witnessed her grandmother make as a child. The rag quilt embodies Heather's memory of Gram, the woman who influenced her understanding of craft and how Heather perceives her own abilities and therefore stands to represent her inherited knowledge. Considering that certain objects exist as "family reminders" (Holmes 175), the rag quilts that inspired Heather's quilt square were passed on and exist in the kinship she shares with her grandmother.

Roma shared that her connection to craft is so closely related to her relationship with her mother, to the extent that "if you wanted to have a relationship with mom, you had to be by the sewing machine" (S4 p.19). Even now when she turns on her sewing machine, she often "instantly feel[s] closer to [her] mother" (S4 p.10). She added that it became difficult to hear the hum of the machine after her mother's passing: "I distinctly remember the first time I turned on my sewing machine after she passed away. It was very difficult, just the sound of the sewing

machine" (S4 p.11). Following material culture, people—and specifically crafters, in this thesis—form attachments to not just the objects themselves, but to the sensory associations with the practice (Gruner). Although Gruner writes of the impact and history of touch, the same can be applied to other senses—such as auditory—as well: "felt histories that persist in materials, resisting the notion that a medium or technique might be made anew or fully detached from its context. Touch can be a site of ambivalent interaction, creating places where material histories and bodies interact and spark messy feelings and unpredictable senses of connection" (Gruner). In Roma's case, the noise her sewing machine produces becomes associated with Roma's late mother. The sewing machine's hum became a reminder of her mother and the work she did in the home and for others in her community. In *Queer Phenomenology,* Ahmed considers the interconnected contact between multiple objects and examines the dwelling spaces where an object comes to embody its histories and cultures (148). Roma's connection to her sewing machine is compelling to me; she is conditioned to think of and feel the presence of her mother at the sound of a sewing machine. I argue that Roma's relationship with craft is such a strong force and is tied to her relationship with her mother in such a way that she inherited her mother's living memory through the crafting tools and objects that exist in her home. As I have witnessed Roma's experience with craft be infused with the memory of her mother, I have intertwined my own understanding of crafting as a woman from NL with the embodied existence of those who have influenced me and from whom I inherited my sense of self.

Matrilineal inheritance was an anchor in creating my own quilt square (*see figure 16*) because after my grandmother passed, my mother continued teaching me to craft. Differing from how she and her sisters were expected to sew their own clothing, I was only expected to learn the skills. More than just learning from either my mother or grandmother, I was absorbing their

motions, the visions, the innate attachment to fabrics, yarns, materials, and crafting. In this way, inheritance does not pertain to the physical objects but instead suggests "the possibility of engaging with a feminine inheritance" without adhering to the temporality of passing down items as the inheritance is embodied through shared knowledge (Gruner). I learned to craft just as my mother and my grandmother did; however, unlike them, I was not *expected* to stick with crafting. Since my grandmother's and mother's generation, gender roles have become less rigid, and the gender system has expanded beyond the constructs of male and female. In turn, gender roles and associations have been deconstructed, stretched, and reworked. While gender roles are still extremely pervasive in NL, the fact that I have a *choice* to craft is indicative of a change in conceptualizations of gender, and a shift in global capitalism that exploits cheap labour to mass produce goods (Carroll). This is reiterated by Gruner as she acknowledges the tangled dichotomy of embodied selfhood and inherited identity. Examining the work of other participants in her research, Gruner posits that a person's agency complicates "the fundamental ensnarement of selfhood with past understandings of identity, with material realities, and with the full, complex, and inarticulable inheritance of gender as it has been performed" (Gruner). By observing my mother, grandmothers, aunts, and other female role models in my young life, I inherited ideals of gender performance, which was largely influenced by an engagement with craft. Because I witnessed women sewing frequently, I was socialized to subconsciously understand sewing as women's work and their role in the home. Ahmed establishes that people inherit *what* is available to be in contact *with* (148). Here I offer that inheritance is possible through the objects with which a person comes into contact and how that contact occurs. The ideals of gender performance which I inherited were available to me through contact with examples of performed femininity through members of my family and community.

There is more to a stitch than needles and thread. Through this chapter I aimed to answer how gender tangles with craft in the lives of women and AFAB people in Newfoundland and Labrador. How is my own experience as a woman from NL informed by craft? And how does this impact how I understand craft in my community? How are feminine gender associations understood through craft in NL? What does it mean for AFAB identifying people to be socialized as female with and through an understanding of craft? How does craft in NL serve as a gendered practice? How does lived experience translate into textile and crafted creations? Each question begs a nuanced answer stemming from several points of analysis: Art, Craft, and the Gender Binary; Home, Place, and Newfoundland and Labrador; Embodiment and Phenomenology; Gender/Identity; Community; and Matrilineal Inheritance. Each of the crafters have layered experiences, and their stitches are equally complex.

CHAPTER 7

Darning in the ends: conclusions

In this concluding chapter I provide an overview of the research, discuss the limitations and gaps of this study, the contributions to the field of Women and Gender Studies as well as to scholarship of craft from Newfoundland and Labrador. Lastly, I offer final reflections through Drop Stitch thought #6 and share the completed quilt with each of the quilt squares from the focus group participants.

Overview

This thesis explored the experiences and connections that members of my community, and myself, experience between gender and craft in the context of Newfoundland and Labrador. The island offers a unique perspective and experience as craft takes a distinctive form on the island different from anywhere else in Canada. Craft in NL is common and, at least in older generations, expected as a gendered practice. As I considered the intersections and histories between gender, sexuality, class, and race within craft in NL, I reflected on the way I and my AFAB community understood ourselves and our craft as specifically situated within the specific content of NL. This thesis sought to assess how textile craft makes space in my life and the lives of AFAB people in my community as a socially gendered practice. As someone who grew up in NL, I was surrounded by a family of crafters. As a young girl I learned to sew, cross stitch, knit and crochet from my mother and my grandmother. I was intrinsically familiar with fabrics and threads. There is a common saying in NL to ask who a person’s parents are; “Who knit ya?” I knew with perfect clarity that I was knit by crafters who took their time to teach me their crafts

along the way. There were more questions that begged more answers to search beyond me and explore how handicraft has been understood by women and AFAB people from NL. The curiosities that guided this research were as follows: how is my own experience as a queer woman from NL informed by craft? And how does this impact how I understand craft in my community? How are feminine gender associations understood through craft in NL? What does it mean for AFAB identifying people to be socialized as female with and through an understanding of craft? How does craft in NL serve as a gendered practice? How does lived experience translate into textile and crafted creations? This thesis addressed these questions by conducting narrative analysis of focus group discussions through lenses of feminist theory, stitching theory, and low theory.

Over four weeks I conducted four focus group sessions with a group of 12 crafters from my own community of friends and family who crafted in or from NL. We met once a week in a virtual quilting group/knitting circle style meeting and we all crafted together and talked about my research questions. Through these conversations I learned about the stories and conceptions of gender and femininity associated with domestic craft practices in my community, which provided insight into my own inheritance of and negotiation of gender. It was interesting to see that conversations veered away from explicitly exploring the impact of feminine gendered practices on craft practices, but that traces of traditionally gendered roles were evident in the answers of the participants. There were also curious findings about community involvement in craft that explored the benefits of sharing community with others through craft. Moreover, that craft in NL has historically relied on the presence of community, and how gender as a social construct is tied to social and communal practices of gender socialization, such as craft. I analyzed these discussions to explore the phenomenological embodiment of craft in the lives of

women and AFAB people from NL and displayed the ways in which craft holds memories of lived experiences. I found that the crafted creations of women and AFAB people from NL contain more than stitches, they carry forward memories of home, of family, and of love but also, they contain the feelings of particular moments in time, of struggle, and each crafted item archives a piece of one's life.

Limitations

Although there were advantages of conducting a study predicated on members of my own community involving friends and family who craft in or from NL, there were limitations to the data that could be collected and interpreted from this kind of study. As most of the participants were primarily white, cisgender women, there was limited diversity amongst the group. I gathered some information about the participants' identities prior to beginning the focus group sessions as each interested crafter completed a participant intake questionnaire (see Appendix B). This questionnaire asked for basic information about the person's name, contact information, gender identity, and crafting experience. I also gave the opportunity for crafters to self-disclose any other identity markers, such as race, sexuality, and disability. A few people disclosed intersections of queerness and race as other identity markers; however, there was little to no discussion about how these factors influence their experiences of gender in NL. This limited the opportunities to consider critical race studies in conversation with the participants and therefore had to be conducted through textual research and analysis. In the future, I would do things differently by positioning critical conversations of race within the scope of the participant conversations. I would also hold a safe space for challenging or uncomfortable conversations when and where necessary as these conversations encourage people to shift their understandings

of sexuality, race, and gender identities. Beyond the scope of this research is a fulsome exploration of the impact of colonialism on gendered material practices and settler domestic practices. A next step for research in this area is the consideration of the ways in which racialized bodies come to craft and how tradition considers these experiences. The limitations to the sample of participants impacted the overall outcome as well. The group of participants was limited to 12 participants to accommodate the timeline of this study. Additionally, the study was limited by time and restricted to only four focus group sessions. The opportunity to hold more focus group sessions would have offered more time for data collection through conversations with the participants.

Contributions

This thesis contributes to the field of Women and Gender Studies as multidisciplinary study that involves aspects of feminist studies, craft studies, and Atlantic Canadian studies. The scholarship about personal experience and understanding of craft as a socially gendered practice in NL is limited, and this study examines intersections of craft and gender and the ways in which each influence the other in my own life and as reflected through my community of crafters. This research brought about a conversation about how my own gender identity as a woman is instructed through material practices (such as craft) in NL connected me with my community to understand our experiences and socialization as AFAB people taught to craft in NL. This thesis contributes to scholarship on gender dynamics within craft practices that are specific to NL and that consider personal experience, knowledge, the lived realities of the crafters in my community in NL. This research also considers how feminine gendered labour roles are understood through my community and how these roles influence craft work. I present research that contributes to

scholarship on the importance of community craft practices in NL, and that considers how women and AFAB people on the island come to their crafts and how they understand their positions in relation to their work as crafters and as islanders, as well as in relation to each other. More specifically, this research centers my own knowledge and experiences and those of my community to better understand how I have known and understood craft in my own life as a white, queer, cisgender woman from NL. While this thesis was limited to a discussion of women and AFAB people who craft in NL, there exists a need for more discussion about other gendered craft practices, and conversations of men, AMAB, and masculine bodies and identities in relation to craft. Gender is complex and there are myriad conversations that are needed of gender and queerness, race, and craft in more contexts that women/AFAB and traditional craft in NL.

This is a unique study as well because, rather than drawing from interviews and conversations with participants, my goal was to incorporate a physical component of research-creation that existed outside of words on a page, producing an altogether different form of documentation (Springgay, *Feltness* 12). The importance of research-creation in this thesis was to engage with the participants through craft practices and in more ways than discussion. Together, we made a quilt that exists as an archive of feelings (Cvetkovich 7) that encapsulates what it means to me and my community to craft as women and AFAB folks from NL. As a result, this thesis contributes to research-creation as an examination and social practice of community-based and socially engaged creation within the context of me and my community (Springgay, *Feltness* 12).

Drop Stitch Thought #6

Dear Gram,

I've spent countless hours sitting at my desk, thinking about any of this could go wrong. When I was doubting myself, I heard you reciting: "Whatever thy hands findeth to do, do it with all thy might."

I started out expecting a critical discussion of gender, the effects of the gender binary over the socialization of women and AFAB folks, and theoretical considerations of craft as manifestations of lived experiences. Instead, I was met with heartfelt discussions of the joys of crafting, reminiscing of loved ones who shared their passion for handicrafts, considerations of mindful craft practices and vulnerable conversations about the healing and self-care that craft offers. We laughed about how our mothers, grandmothers, and aunts would make the kitschiest crafts, the tackiest home decor, and the most ridiculous Javex-jug knitting bags (which I still can't picture); and we bonded over the challenges that crafts have seen us through. The expectations I had were not exactly met, but my expectations were challenged as my eyes were opened to answers I had never questioned before, all the while making new discoveries about my own understandings of gendered craft. I wasn't necessarily surprised that gender wasn't as prominent as a factor in considerations of craft to the other participants as it was to me, but I was surprised by the slight dismissal of gender as an influence over craft. I think that some of the members of the group understood that

gender——specifically femininity within the gender binary——was no longer relevant to how they understood their connection to craft; meanwhile I was perplexed by the very same issue. I wasn't dissatisfied with this reaction, but it challenged me to understand their perspectives instead of informing my own.

I've thought about how being queer informs my connection to and understanding of craft. This isn't something we ever had the chance to talk about, you and I, but it's something I think about and something that sat in the back of my mind while hearing from everyone else in the focus group. In a separate conversation that I had with Haylee, one of the participants, they were telling me about how crafting offers a secret backdoor entry into queerness. And that really struck me. I asked them what they meant by that, and they explained that for a lot of queer people, building community can be hard because we often feel isolated in social situations. But crafting offers a common interest, for starters, but it is so innately queer: making whatever you want exactly how you want it with your own hands. Sure, there are rules you can follow, but a lot of the time, you have to experiment to see what works and what doesn't. Kind of like free form crochet or sewing without a pattern. And we shared in the delight that this was a common experience, kind of a shared sense of being. I had never thought of craft being something tied to my identity more than the fact that I learned from you and mom. It was an experience that I had on my own, but one that I found out I could share with my queer community.

When I received the quilt squares, I felt a surprising connection to them. Each square, although I had not seen them before, felt familiar, deeply and intrinsically known. It occurred to me that I have not just observed each square as a text, but I have felt it as a poem: every square is a poem that exists on its own, carrying memories that tell a story. But when stitched together, each square tells a new story of comfort, of existence, of learning, and growth. Poetry is familiar to me as a mother is familiar to their child, which is why, upon receiving them, I felt as though the quilt squares and I had already been acquainted.

After sitting with the squares and learning how they fit together, sewing the quilt together took a lot more patience than I thought it would. Once I had received all the quilt squares from the participants, I laid them all out and sized them up. Noticing that Sonya's rug hooking measured 9.5x9.5 inches, it could not be cut to fit the size of another square without cutting the wool and risk unraveling the edges of her piece. Meaning that all the other squares had to be extended or cut to be uniform with Sonya's rug hooking. To do this, all the other quilt squares——most measuring between 8.5x8.5 to 9.5x9.5——needed the edges extended with either extra fabric or yarn. On the quilt squares made from yarn, I crocheted around each one with a neutral and light weight yarn to measure 10x10 inches to accommodate a seam allowance. I remember mom showing me how to measure that half an inch of room on the fabric between the seam and the edge. To do this, I sewed strips of scrap fabric onto each of the 4 sides of the fabric squares and then cut the access so that

the finished square measured 10x10 inches, leaving a 0.5-inch seam allowance and a 9.5x9.5-inch square.

Working with different fabrics and thicknesses through the sewing machine was frustrating at times. I found the materials getting snagged on the presser foot and the treads. But I also felt waves of grief while sewing the edges on the blue gingham square you made. I had not expected this because I crochet and sew often enough that I did not expect to feel anything at all, really. Trimming the blue gingham away to even out the edges felt like I was cutting up the only piece of you I had left in this world. Rationally, I know that's not true because I have kept everything you have ever made for me; but in that moment, I was having trouble with the fabrics and the machine, and you weren't here for me to call for help. Through my tears that night I realized it was grief that crept up on me like a ghost. Grief that flooded my veins and burned behind my eye sockets. Grief that I hadn't felt in so long, but it draped around my shoulders and reminded me you might be there…somewhere.

Eventually, I got the hang of working with so many unpredictable fabrics. With all of the squares uniform in size, I laid them out in the order they would be sewn. Then I cut apart an old white bed sheet into 2-inch-wide strips that would space each square apart. Seam by seam the squares became rows, and soon the rows transformed into a square, but this time bigger——a mega square. The relief I felt was indescribable. Covered in pin-pokes and loose threads, I brought the mega square home to

Newfoundland where mom helped me sew the back on and finish a nice, neat edge. We laid the mega square out on the floor to size up the rest of the bedsheet, and I was immediately transported…

> I'm 9 years old and Mom spreads fabric out on the kitchen floor and pins the tissue paper pattern down. "Make sure you cut on this line," she says, guiding my hands holding the giant pair of sewing scissors. One snip at a time I cut out what will become a pair of pajama shorts. Mom watches me carefully while she stirs a pot on the stove.

Using Mom's sewing machine, I stitched on the back of the quilt and the front side of the edge. I finished it off by hand stitching the backside of the edge to the back of the quilt, then tacking both sides together with pieces of yellow yarn. Before I knew it, it was finished.

I haven't lost any parts of you. Even when I have to cut away some of your fabric, I am left with more pieces. I have pieces of you in everything you made, I have a childhood of memories; and now you also live on in this quilt with me. Because a stitch is never just a stitch, it is everything I have learned, what I am feeling, and how I understand myself in that exact moment. These stitches are more than just stitches: they are my life.

Figure 19: The Thesis Quilt

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Appendices

Appendix A

Recruitment Script

Text in the post read:

Seeking participants to join a study on craft, community and gender in Newfoundland and Labrador. Eligible participants should be 18 years or older, be from or have learned their craft in Newfoundland and Labrador or from other Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and be women or gender-queer/non-binary/gender non-conforming AFAB folks. For those who may already have a pre-existing relationship with the researcher (Laura Flight), please do not feel pressured to participate if you are not comfortable with the parameters of this project. There are absolutely no consequences or hard feelings if you are unable or uncomfortable.

The study will consist of 4 virtual one-hour long focus groups, evenly spaced within one month (totaling 4 hours). Participants should confidently be able to craft a quilt square of approximately 9x9 inches within this amount of time.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please fill out the Participant Intake Questionnaire linked below.

The link will take the reader to a Microsoft form where they can see the information form, intake questionnaire, and access the researcher's email address.

Appendix B

Participant Intake Questionnaire

Please fill out the following information

- Name and pronouns:
- Email address:
- Age:
- Gender identity:
- Any other identity markers that you wish to share:
- Are you from NL?

    If yes: which part of NL are you from?

    If no: where are you from?
- Do you consider yourself a crafter?
- What craft(s) do you engage with most frequently?
- How long have you been doing your craft(s)?
- Where did you learn your craft(s)?
- Why would you like to be a part of this study?

The researcher, Laura Flight, will contact you about the status of your interest as a participant in this study.

Thank you for showing interest!

Appendix C

Guiding questions for focus groups

1. How did you learn your craft or crafts?

2. Do you consider yourself a regular crafter?

3. What does it mean for you to be a crafter in or from Newfoundland and Labrador?

4. How do you understand Newfoundland and Labrador-ness through craft?

5. Do you feel a connection between your gender identity and craft?

6. Does craft offer an outlet for expression of gender identity?

7. Do you feel connected to others through your craft?

8. Does your lived experience influence your craft?

9. Does craft influence lived experience?

10. How does community connections or community building impact or influence your craft?

11. Do you feel that the objects you create tell a story or stories about who you are or where you come from? How so?

12. For those who identify as female: How has craft influenced your experience as a woman?

13. For those who do not identify as female: How has craft influenced your experience with gender and understanding your own identity? Has craft offered you connection to your roots as a Newfoundlander outside of gender?

14. What have you noticed about traditional gender roles within domesticated craft?

15. Why were you taught your craft(s)?

16. What does or did this form of education [that is: an education of learning traditional domestic skill sets as a woman or female born person] mean for you in relation to your newfoundland-ness? What does it mean for your gender identity?

17. Do the lived experiences of women and AFAB people from Newfoundland and Labrador manifest into textile-crafted creations? And if so, how?

18. Do crafters from Newfoundland and Labrador experience craft as a gendered practice on the island?

19. Is craft enhanced by community-based practices or gatherings? And if so, how?

20. Do crafters tell their stories of lived experiences through their creations.

Appendix D

Informed Consent Form

Dear Friends and Family,

You are invited to participate in this study involving women and AFAB (assigned female at birth) crafters from Newfoundland and Labrador, with the objective of this study being to explore the effects and importance of craft traditions on the intersections of gender, identity, and lived experiences within Newfoundland and Labrador. You will be asked about your gender identity and experience with craft and gender in Newfoundland and Labrador. Please note that although you have a pre-existing relationship with the researcher (Laura) you are not obligated to participate in this study; there are no consequences should you choose not to participate. This is a voluntary study.

Purpose of this research

Craft practices in Newfoundland and Labrador are deeply rooted in traditional gender roles and are historically connected to the expression of female identity on the island. This study seeks to understand the ways that women and AFAB crafters on the island have come to learn their craft and how they resonate with it as a traditional form of gendered expression. I am curious about how lived experience is told and translated through craft and how it builds community among NL crafters.

What will I have to do?

Participation in this study involves taking part in 4 one-hour long focus groups, evenly spaced within one month through Microsoft Teams to discuss experiences of gender identity, Newfoundland identity, and talking about crafting and craft traditions. While we discuss these things, we will be engaging with craft as well. Using whatever craft or mediums you wish, you will be asked to make a quilt block that reflects any or all of the following: your connection to craft in NL, identity, gender, and lived experience as a woman or AFAB person in or from NL. At the end of the focus groups, you will send the finished quilt block to me (Laura Flight) along with a short description of what you created and why you chose your craft/materials/patterns. You should confidently be able to produce a quilt square within 4 sessions (4 hours). You will each be contributing one 9x9 inch quilt block to a small quilt that I (Laura) will assemble once the focus groups have ended. Your quit square can be made using any crafts/skills/styles you want to use. Photographs of the quilt will be sent to you once it is completed, as well as included in the thesis document.

The quilt squares will be sent to Laura Flight at the following address:

By consenting to participate you are also giving up ownership of your quilt square to be a part of this study.

What are the potential risks for participants?

You will be asked to engage in conversation surrounding gender identity and lived experiences concerning gender and living in NL, so you may at times feel uncomfortable or hesitant sharing your personal beliefs, opinions, and experiences. If at some point a question causes you any discomfort, please do not feel obligated to answer it.

What will be done with my information?

The virtual focus group meetings will be video recorded and transcribed for analytical purposes. The transcriptions will be downloaded and stored on an external hard drive and OneDrive for a minimum of 5 years and the video recording will be deleted. Only the primary researcher (Laura Flight) and faculty supervisor (Dr. Julie Hollenbach) will have access to these files. Any signed forms or hard copies of data will only be collected by the primary researcher (Laura Flight) and will be appropriately disposed of at the end of the study.

Any data collected during the course of this study will be transcribed and analyzed further. Should you agree to participate in the study you will also be consenting to the use of your quotes for analysis and will be given the opportunity to review any chapters or sections of the thesis containing your direct quotes so as not to misuse your information. This will be sent to you via email and will not use any additional security measures. If you wish for your identity to be kept anonymous in the written thesis, please select the following:

- o check this box (circle) if you want your identity to be confidential with the use of a pseudonym in the written thesis.

What type of compensation is available for participation?

There will be a cost for sending the squares, but you will be reimbursed for all mailing costs.

You are invited to use your own materials or supplies, ideally materials you have on hand rather than purchasing new.

- o check this box (circle) if you would like to receive a parcel of crafting supplies (fabrics, yarn, needles, etc.)

How can I withdraw from this study?

During the study, your participation may be discontinued at any time without penalty. As stated previously, you may also choose not to answer particular questions that may cause you any discomfort. Participation of the study can be ceased by contacting the primary researcher (Laura Flight) via email at laura.flight@msvu.ca. At the end of the study, you will be asked if you allow your data to be included for analysis. If you say "no" then your data will be removed from the transcribed meetings.

How can I get more information?

Further enquiries, such as information regarding the results of this study, can be directed to the email addresses of researchers listed above.

The Mount Saint Vincent University Research Ethics Board has reviewed this research. If you have any questions or concerns about ethical matters or would like to discuss your rights as a research participant, you may contact us and the Research Ethics Coordinator at brenda.gagne@msvu.ca or 902-457-6350.

Considering Craft in Community: Exploring the Lived Experiences Behind Gendered Craft Practices in Newfoundland and Labrador

- o I understand what this study is about, appreciate the risks and benefits, and that by consenting I agree to take part in this research study and do not waive any rights to legal recourse in the event of research-related harm.
- o I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can end my participation at any time without penalty.
- o I have had adequate time to think about the research study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

By signing below, I consent to participate in this study and will allow my data to be collected. I consent to having been fully informed of the purpose of the study and my role therein. I understand the above information and agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature:

____

Appendix E

Alternate Consent Form

Dear parent/guardian,

A crafter under your care is invited to participate in this study involving women and AFAB (assigned female at birth) crafters from Newfoundland and Labrador, with the objective of this study being to explore the effects and importance of craft traditions on the intersections of gender, identity, and lived experiences within Newfoundland and Labrador. The participant will be asked about your gender identity and experience with craft and gender in Newfoundland and Labrador. Please note that although they have a pre-existing relationship with the researcher (Laura) they are not obligated to participate in this study; there are no consequences should they choose not to participate. This is a voluntary study.

Purpose of this research

Craft practices in Newfoundland and Labrador are deeply rooted in traditional gender roles and are historically connected to the expression of female identity on the island. This study seeks to understand the ways that women and AFAB crafters on the island have come to learn their craft and how they resonate with it as a traditional form of gendered expression. I am curious about how lived experience is told and translated through craft and how it builds community among NL crafters.

What will I have to do?

Participation in this study involves taking part in 4 one-hour long focus groups, evenly spaced within one month, through Microsoft Teams to discuss experiences of gender identity, Newfoundland identity, and talking about crafting and craft traditions. While we discuss these things, we will be engaging with craft as well. Using whatever craft or mediums the participant wishes, they will be asked to make a quilt block that reflects any or all of the following: their connection to craft in NL, identity, gender, and lived experience as a woman or AFAB person in or from NL. At the end of the focus groups, they will send the finished quilt block to me (Laura Flight) along with a short description of what they created and why they chose certain craft/materials/patterns. The participant should confidently be able to produce a quilt square within 4 sessions (4 hours). Everyone will be contributing one 9x9 inch quilt block to a small quilt that I (Laura) will assemble once the focus groups have ended. The quit square can be made using any crafts/skills/styles the participant wants to use. Photographs of the quilt will be sent to them once it is completed, as well as included in the thesis document.

The quilt squares will be sent to Laura Flight at the following address:

By consenting for the undersigned to participate you are also giving up ownership of their quilt square to be a part of this study.

What are the potential risks for participants?

The participant will be asked to engage in conversation surrounding gender identity and lived experiences concerning gender and living in NL, so they may at times feel uncomfortable or hesitant sharing their personal beliefs, opinions, and experiences. If at some point a question causes them any discomfort, please do not feel obligated to answer it.

What will be done with my information?

The virtual focus group meetings will be video recorded and transcribed for analytical purposes. The transcriptions will be downloaded and stored on an external hard drive and OneDrive for a minimum of 5 years and the video will be deleted. Only the primary researcher (Laura Flight) and faculty supervisor (Dr. Julie Hollenbach) will have access to these files. Any signed forms or hard copies of data will only be collected by the primary researcher (Laura Flight) and will be appropriately disposed of at the end of the study.

Any data collected during the course of this study will be transcribed and analyzed further. Should you agree to the undersigned's participation in the study you will also be consenting to the use of their quotes for analysis and will be given the opportunity to review any chapters or sections of the thesis containing their direct quotes so as not to misuse their information. This will be sent to them via email and will not use any additional security measures. If you wish for the participant's identity to be kept confidential in the written thesis, please select the following:

check this box if you want the participant's identity to be anonymous with the use of a pseudonym in the written thesis.

What type of compensation is available for participation?

There will be a cost for sending the squares, but the participant will be reimbursed for all mailing costs.

They are invited to use their own materials or supplies, ideally materials they have on hand rather than purchasing new.

check this box if the participant would like to receive a parcel of crafting supplies (fabrics, yarn, needles, etc.)

How can I withdraw from this study?

During the study, participation may be discontinued at any time without penalty. As stated previously, the participant may also choose not to answer particular questions that may cause them any discomfort. Participation in the study can be ceased by contacting the primary researcher (Laura Flight) via email at laura.flight@msvu.ca. At the end of the study, they will be

asked if they allow their data to be included for analysis. If they say “no” then their data will be removed from the transcribed meetings.

How can I get more information?

Further enquiries, such as information regarding the results of this study, can be directed to the email addresses of researchers listed above.

The Mount Saint Vincent University Research Ethics Board has reviewed this research. If there are any questions or concerns about ethical matters, or would like to discuss the rights of a research participant, you may contact us and the Research Ethics Coordinator at brenda.gagne@msvu.ca or 902-457-6350.

Considering Craft in Community: Exploring the Lived Experiences Behind Gendered Craft Practices in Newfoundland and Labrador

- I understand what this study is about, appreciate the risks and benefits, and that by consenting I agree for _________________(participant’s name) to take part in this research study and do not waive any rights to legal recourse in the event of research-related harm.
- I understand that __________________’s (participant’s name) participation is voluntary and that they can end their participation at any time without penalty.
- I have had adequate time to think about the research study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

By signing below, I consent on behalf of _________________(participant’s name) to participate in this study and will allow their data to be collected. I consent to having been fully informed of the purpose of the study and their role therein. I understand the above information and agree for ____________________ (participant’s name) to participate in this study.

Parent/guardian’s signature:
____