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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

TRUST AND BOUNDARIES IN THREE SMALL GROUP COMMUNITIES:
URBAN KNITTING GROUPS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF
SMALL GROUP EXCLUSIVITY

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

PROGRAM IN SOCIOLOGY

BY

ERIN N. TRACEY

CHICAGO, IL

AUGUST 2010

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I wish to thank my committee for their expertise and guidance. Dr. Japonica Brown-Saracino was invaluable as an advisor over nearly one and a half years of brainstorming, researching, and writing. Dr. Jon Norman provided thoughtful feedback and encouragement.

I also wish to thank those who allowed me into to their lives to observe, interact, and interview. Without such people, I could not have pursued this research.

I am most indebted to my family for their emotional (and financial) support: Tom and LuAnn Tracey, Heather Tracey, Ruth Ann Diel, Jean Brownell, and Amber Traverse. I am especially thankful for the lifelong support of my grandfather, Roger Tracey.

ABSTRACT

The existing small groups literature most often uses the small group as a way in which to study issues such as race, religion, and education rather than examining the ways in which the study of small groups provides a deeper understanding of larger social structures (Harrington and Fine 2000:314). I used participant observation in three urban knitting groups over approximately eight months and interviews with fifteen group members in total from each of the three groups to determine how entrée is achieved and boundaries are constructed in small group communities. Each group was unique in neighborhood location, the day and time of the group meetings, the location of the meeting, and average group size. The differentiation amongst the groups allows for a richer analysis of how small group communities develop devices of inclusion or exclusion. Establishing research of small groups “as a sociological topic in its own right” (Harrington and Fine 2000:312) will assist sociologists in understanding the transmission and creation of culture that happens in the space between the individual and larger society.

Introduction

The study of small groups is not “dead,” according to Harrington and Fine (2000) “but rather...has lost its place as a sociological topic in its own right [as an] area in which generic interactional processes are examined” (312). The existing small groups literature more often uses the small group as a way in which to study issues such as race, religion, and education rather than examining the ways in which the study of small groups provides a deeper understanding of the larger social structural picture (Harrington and Fine 2000:314). The macro-level social world is “composed of...micro-situations” such as those that occur in small groups (Collins 1988:242). The development of broad theories about society requires knowledge of micro-level interactions. Therefore, sociology stands to benefit from the study of small group interactions as well as from the study of larger social structural issues.

To begin to reap the benefits of the study of small group communities, researchers must first develop an understanding of small group interactions and the small group cultures produced by such interactions. I used ethnographic methods to study three urban knitting groups to understand the role of culture in small group communities. Through observation and interviews, it was apparent knitting group members relied upon a shared culture to interact with other members, build relationships, and sustain the group. This shared culture often included references particular of the individual group as well as

references to broader cultural phenomenon. For example, Local Yarn Shop¹, a popular downtown Chicago knitting shop specializing in “higher end” fibers² hosts a Friday night knitting group. My observations provide an example in which the blending of a variety of cultural references allowed members to sustain interaction. This particular evening, I was able to place myself at the table amongst a core group of regular participants. I sat between Celia³ and Melinda. Celia handed a zippered project bag to Melinda, which, when unzipped, revealed what appeared to be several hanks of Wollmeise yarn. Wollmeise is a particular favorite with several Local Yarn Shop knitters. It is a higher end yarn from Germany. It is often difficult to purchase and sells for about \$35.00 or more. In trade, Melinda handed Celia a small plastic bag with two marijuana brownies, which illustrated the value of this yarn (and higher end yarns in general) to members of the Local Yarn Shop group. Roving Knitters and Independent Café, however, never indicated Wollmeise was valued highly by a significant number of members.

The interactions between members of these knitting groups drew from commonalities members find amongst themselves by using a variety of what Fine (1987:124) refers to as “cultural items,” or the norms, behaviors, and physical items, common to the members of the group. As the above reveals, these cultural items for

¹ Names of all knitting groups are pseudonyms.

² “Higher end” fiber is a subjective term that generally refers to yarns stocked by independent yarn retailers such as Local Yarn Shop. Such retailers generally do not stock the less expensive and mass-produced yarns found at chain retailers such as Wal-Mart, Michaels, or Jo-Ann’s.

³ All names of individuals are pseudonyms.

knitting groups include a large repertoire of references to knitting and yarn, illicit activities, and popular culture to name just a few examples.

On the surface, one may assume groups that initially develop out of one main common interest would closely resemble each other in the continued development of their small group cultures as well as their norms. However, my analysis, similar to that of Fine's (1987) evaluation of Little League Baseball teams, shows that groups that appear as if they should be quite similar often vary in unexpected ways. More importantly, though, my analysis shows while small group cultures are quite different, they all rely upon proper participation in and the maintenance of a small group culture as a device of inclusion.

Knitting groups are representative of small group communities in which individuals electively choose to participate. Knitting groups, similar to many other small groups, are sites in which a small group culture is primarily created and maintained by regularly attending participants. Each of the three small groups I observed used culture in different ways by adopting cultural items from the larger culture and from small group interactions to develop a group culture. I draw heavily from the theoretical framework of Fine's (1987) analysis of small group culture and Goffman's ([1971] 2010) "anchored relationships" defined as not anonymous and possessing a history and development (202). With this framework in mind, I present an analysis of how and why small group cultures develop within knitting groups as well as how inclusion and exclusion of individual knitters develops out of these cultures. My study advances both Goffman's (1971) emphasis on the importance of anchored relationships and Fine's (1987) concept of

idiocultures in the processes of inclusion amongst small groups by demonstrating that the interactions of regulars with each other and with non-regulars produces a small group culture particular to a specific group.

Methods

In order to study small group dynamics between members of knitting groups, I relied on the ethnographic method of participant observation. In participant observation, the researcher “comes to a social situation with two purposes: (1) to engage in activities appropriate to the situation and (2) to observe the activities, people, and physical aspects of the situation” (Spradley 1980:54). For several reasons this method was most appropriate to research knitting groups as a small group community. Given the nature of knitting groups as individuals who meet together to participate in a common activity, participants more often choose to sit close together to facilitate the conversation amongst members. Additionally, as these particular groups met in restaurants, cafes, and a yarn shop, individuals were limited in the amount of space in which they are able to place themselves. This further added to individuals arranging themselves within close proximity to one another. Strictly observing and not participating would have certainly added to the researcher effect, or the extent to which my presence as a known researcher influenced the interactions amongst participants. Often the first question asked of me when introducing myself was whether or not I knitted, indicating my experience with knitting aided in legitimizing my role as a researcher. I also determined that as I was both able to observe as well as participate in patterns of interaction and the small group

culture, I developed a richer understanding of those patterns than I would have achieved through observation alone.

Overall, I visited each group a minimum of eight times. I knitted with each group, but as I observed, I also made jottings in a small notebook to assist in accurately remembering details. However, given the physical closeness in which individuals are seated, I occasionally noticed members observing or discussing my own note-taking. During these instances, I discretely put the notebook away and filled in details upon leaving the site. I left space between notes during the times when I was unable to write and filled in key information upon returning home and typed field notes shortly after each visit.

I chose to observe knitting groups in Chicago, a diverse city that allows for the formation of a multitude of sub-cultures and small group communities. There are approximately thirty active knitting groups in Chicago proper and the surrounding suburbs according to the web site for the Windy City Knitting Guild.⁴ This provided a large number of groups varying in size and meeting locations from which to choose increasing my opportunity to compare groups. Observing multiple sites with varying characteristics such as location member demographics increases the validity of my analysis of the role of culture in knitting groups.

⁴ "The Windy City Knitting Guild is a membership organization which encourages and fosters knitting in the Chicago area. We currently have over 200 members." The Guild collects yearly dues for membership, holds regular meetings once per month, and hosts special events (<http://www.windycityknittingguild.com/about.htm>).

I initially contacted the organizers of five groups that met on various evenings of the week and met the criteria of gathering in different types of locations including venue type and neighborhood. Three group organizers consented to my joining their knitting group as a participant observer. The fourth group did not reply to my request. The fifth group organizer declined my request stating that as the knitting group was a source of relaxation for the members, the presence of a researcher would be disruptive. Between February and December of 2009, I observed at Local Yarn Shop's Friday night knitting group that met between approximately five o'clock in the evening until the shop closing at nine o'clock. Local Yarn Shop is a popular knitting shop located in a downtown neighborhood of Chicago. According to interviewees, the shop had hosted the group for approximately four years.

Between May and December 2009, I observed Roving Knitters, whose members met on alternating evenings Monday through Thursday at various times of the evening for approximately two hours each meeting. Meeting places included chain restaurants, a chain café, and a local café most of which were located in two North Side neighborhoods. The group membership had a large amount of turnover; however, interview data indicates the group had met for at least two years before I began observations in May 2009.

I also observed at Independent Café between May and December 2009, whose members met Tuesday evenings between approximately seven o'clock and nine o'clock. The café is a small business also located in a North Side neighborhood. Independent Café members were very likely to live within the boundaries of the neighborhood itself while Local Yarn Shop and Roving Knitters membership base drew from a wider variety of

neighborhoods. Local Yarn Shop had regular attendees who resided in North Side, West Side, downtown neighborhoods, and the neighboring state of Indiana. Roving Knitters had members from the North Side, South Side, and downtown. For similar reasons as with Roving Knitters, the best estimate is that the Independent Café group had been meeting for over two years by May 2009.

In addition to participant observation, I conducted fifteen semi-structured interviews with participants in all three groups. Interviews took place between March 2009 and January 2010. All interviewees were women as men did not attend any of the three groups with regularity. Seven women interviewees primarily participated in the Local Yarn Shop group, five women interviewees primarily participated in the Roving Knitters group, and three women interviewees primarily participated in the Independent Café group. Of the fifteen total interviewees, three women had participated in two of the groups, and one woman had participated in all three groups. I estimate that I interviewed between fifteen and twenty percent of participants of each group.

The groups were quite homogenous in terms of the characteristics of participants with most members being white, college-educated women in their twenties and thirties. Nearly all women were employed full-time and very few women had children. In fact, only one woman out of all three groups had a child and attended at least one group on a weekly basis. Other women with children attended each of the three groups, but their attendance was inconsistent. While gender, age, race or ethnicity, and class are not this study's areas of focus, it is important to note potential reasons as to why the characteristics of this sample lack in variance.

As with quilting groups (Stalp 2007), knitting groups are a gendered form of leisure. While historically, both men and women have participated in the craft of knitting (Rutt 1987), participation in knitting and knitting groups has most often been associated with women in contemporary American culture. For example pattern books, such as Debbie Stoller's *Stitch 'N Bitch* series, which first debuted in 2003, are marketed towards women as are fiction books such as *The Friday Night Knitting Club* (Jacobs 2008) which focuses on a group of women who knit together in order to get through life's adversities. Most patterns in popular books are feminine garments and accessories modeled by women. Popular patterns intended for men to wear are still often marketed towards the women who will knit them for men such as in the pattern books *Never Knit Your Man a Sweater (Unless You've Got the Ring)* (Durant 2007) or *Son of a Stitch 'N Bitch: 45 Projects to Knit and Crochet for Men* (Stoller 2007). The Craft Yarn Council of America (CYCA) reported that in 2005 the number of women who knew how to knit or crochet was up over fifty percent from ten years prior. Additionally, in 2004, the CYCA reported that participation in knitting and crocheting increased across several age groups of women. The largest increase was a jump of 150 percent for women ages twenty-five to thirty-four. Notably, this age range fits closely with a majority of the women I observed in all three groups.⁵

As stated above, the majority of the individuals in the knitting groups I observed were white. According to year 2000 United States Census information, Chicago overall

⁵ There is a considerable lack of data about men who knit; therefore, I am unable to comment on why men were infrequent visitors to any of the three groups.

has a white population of forty-two percent. More recently, the U.S. Census' American Community Survey for 2006 states Chicago is just over thirty percent white. The neighborhood in which Independent Café met is over seventy percent white. The two neighborhoods in which Roving Knitters primarily met are over seventy percent and over eighty percent white respectively. The women at Local Yarn Shop often mentioned they came to the group after work in the Downtown area and so did not necessarily live in this or the surrounding neighborhoods. Local Yarn Shop also had the most variation in race or ethnicity and age. Many of the Local Yarn Shop members visit the Friday night knitting group after work hours and travel to the area from all over the city as Chicago's downtown area draws many individuals to the area for their jobs and careers.⁶

To determine any status differences in class, I used common signifiers of socioeconomic status from field notes such as part- or full-time employment, type of employment, education level, location of residence, and mentions of either major purchases or money troubles. I also noted other markers of cultural capital including attendance of private elementary or secondary schools, attendance of elite universities, completion of advanced degrees, travel for pleasure, and the types of books, music, and films mentioned by participants. I did not ask for income information during interviews. However, I did ask about employment status and highest degree obtained. I used all of

⁶ Information about the racial and ethnic demographic characteristics of individual neighborhoods was determined using the 2000 U.S. Census tracts corresponding to each neighborhood's commonly accepted borders. Commonly accepted borders were determined using information from the neighborhood's Chamber of Commerce and maps of Chicago community areas produced by the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission using 2000 U.S. Census tracts (the NIPC was merged with the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning in 2007).

this information together to speculate as to whether there may be significant patterns of interaction associated with class status differences (Brown-Saracino 2009:182). When considering all of the above information in total, Local Yarn Shop had the most variation in class status and cultural capital amongst its members.

Literature Review

As stated above, a considerable amount of sociological work is conducted using small groups to study a variety of topics in sociology including gender (Stalp 2007), race and ethnicity (Anderson [1971] 2003; May 2001), cultural authenticity (Grazian 2003), and religion (Wuthnow 2001) to name just a few. This work presents valuable descriptions of small group processes from which we are able to base further research into small groups as the bridge between individuals in small group interaction and larger social phenomena. They do not, though, place a considerable amount of emphasis on the small group itself. Harrington and Fine (2000) state, small groups are not “studied as entities in their own right” but are rather “vehicles for examining other social phenomena” (313) such as the subfields above. More promising literature that seeks to explain small group processes appears in sociological and anthropological study of educational settings and peer groups (Adler and Adler 1995; Kyrtzis 2004). The field of social psychology also offers analyses with small group processes as the central focus (Kerr and Tindale 2004; Tindale and Kameda 2000).

The study of knitting or other similar leisure groups exists across sociology, women’s studies, anthropology, and communication. However, this literature does not expressly address the processes that lead to inclusion or exclusion within the groups

themselves. This research has focused on gendered leisure (Stalp 2007), identity (Fields 2004), community (Honig 2006), the transfer of information (Prigoda and McKenzie 2007), knitting groups as an expression of feminism (Chansky 2007; Kelly 2008), activism (Bratich and Brush 2007), race (Scheper-Hughes 2003) and civic engagement or charity knitting (Potts 2006).

Goffman ([1971] 2010) provides components to a framework by which to study small groups, and in particular provides vocabulary to describe the relationships of individuals to the group. Specifically, I focus on Goffman's ([1971] 2010:202) description of "anchored relationships" to discuss the importance of regulars. The importance of anchored relationships aids in understanding how idioculture develops as interactions within a small group are frequent enough for individuals to develop anchored relations. Using the concept of anchored relationships (Goffman [1971] 2010:189) I develop the importance of the "regular" in small group communities. Several other ethnographies support the importance of the role of regulars. Anderson ([1971] 2003) in *A Place on the Corner* devotes an entire chapter to the concept of regulars. Anderson ([1971] 2003:55) found that within the community at Jelly's, a bar on the South Side of Chicago, there was "a small group of men who consider themselves a distinct and identifiable category of the wider group." Similarly, Duneier's (1992) *Slim's Table: Race, Respectability, and Masculinity*, Grazian's (2003) *Blue Chicago: The Search for Authenticity in Urban Blues Clubs*, and May's (2001) *Talking at Trena's: Everyday Conversations at an African American Tavern* also discuss the importance of individuals who could be described as regulars in their observations of small groups. Munch (2005)

describes the characteristics of “regulars” who form relationship over the shared experience of watching softball. Munch (2005) reports that as relationships developed “sharing not only of intimate feelings, but also of other things, such as food, beverages, clothing, and referrals to various repair services, occurred on a regular basis” (120).

Fine’s (1987) discussion of small group culture provides the larger theoretical framework by which to study small group dynamics. Fine (1987), in a study of Little League baseball teams, introduced a specific concept of small group culture, which is termed “idioculture.” Idioculture is “a system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, and customs shared by members of an interacting group to which members can refer and that serve as the basis of further interaction” (125). In other words, idioculture, like our larger culture, is the product of meaningful interactions.

Findings and Analysis

Culture and the Small Group

To discuss knitting group culture and the interactions that lead to inclusion and exclusion of members in small groups, I begin with a broad definition of culture. Many definitions of culture exist from which to draw a broad theoretical perspective. I choose to use Fine’s (1987) definition of culture as this definition is most suitable to lead into a discussion about small group cultures. According to Fine (1987), culture is “...the sum of cultural items...Culture includes the meaningful traditions and artifacts of a group: ideas, behaviors, verbalizations, and material objects” (124). Culture is produced through action and interaction on micro-, meso-, and macro-levels. This analysis focuses on both the production and use of culture at the micro- and meso-level between individuals in small

group interactions as well as the adoption and adaptation of culture from the macro-level into small group culture.

From a broad definition of culture and its importance in small groups, I set the stage to explain the various ways in which culture is used in small groups, specifically knitting groups. I observed three knitting groups, all of which formed on the basis of the shared interest in the craft. The larger knitting culture is both global and ancient. According to Rutt (1987), variations of current knitting techniques developed independently of each other both in time and place. Examples of “sprang,” which “superficially resembles knitting,” date both to approximately the 1400 BCE in what is now modern Denmark and 1100 BCE in Peru (Rutt 1987:9). Several specimens that more closely resemble modern knitting technique are considered over 1000 years old and are Egyptian in origin (Rutt 1987:34-35). The concept of the knitting group also has an old history with one of the first known groups dating to a 1527 Parisian men’s cap knitting guild (Rutt 1987:60-61) As stated above, in the United States, the Craft Yarn Council of America reports over fifty percent of women know how to knit indicating that at least some knowledge about knitting is pervasive. The cultural items⁷ in U.S. knitting culture include the fibers and tools necessary to participate in the craft as well as, patterns, pattern designers, and jargon. The knitting groups drew from the vast content of the larger knitting culture to form a basic relationship to one another.

⁷ I use the term “cultural item” to mean any material objects, knowledge, norms, or behaviors associated with a particular group.

All three knitting groups also used local cultural items particular to the immediate environment to further develop relationships with each other. For instance, Local Yarn Shop members drew a significant amount of their cultural repertoire from the readily available scripts provided by the store itself. A considerable amount of conversation between members and between members and staff consisted of discussion of new products, favorite patterns, and store events such as themed parties. Members of Roving Knitters and Independent Café had cultural repertoires that drew from the immediate surroundings. For example, initial conversations at Independent Café usually began with choice of menu items. The group met in a small, non-chain café surrounded by other restaurants and cafes, bars and taverns, and small retail and service establishments. Independent Café was decorated in a “world traveler” aesthetic that included a variety of travel guides and clocks set to follow the times of major cities across the globe including London and Tokyo. The menu largely catered to individuals interested in vegetarian dishes. The women of the group often ordered food at the beginning of the meeting and shared their dining experience and opinion of the food with fellow members. For example,

When I arrive, Sidney is already at the café. She is eating soup and salad. I greet her and order tea for myself...Leah takes a seat across from Sidney. “That looks good,” says Leah. Sidney replies the vegetable soup is not as good as usual. “That’s good to know,” says Leah, “I like the ‘trio’ [referring to Sidney’s dinner of soup, salad, and bread], but I guess I’ll get the nachos instead.

It was also customary to share opinions about Independent Café’s food with unfamiliar newcomers. Obvious commonalities of knitting and place served as a point of entrée into group interaction which was rooted in conversation between participants.

The knitting groups rely on elements of larger culture as well as cultural items specific to the group to build an idioculture through which participants find ways to interact. Below, I discuss in more depth the knitting group's use of knitting culture, local culture, and references to larger culture such as popular culture.

Gaining Entrée and Building Small Group Culture

In order for one to gain entrée into a group, individuals must first go through a process of acceptance into the group. This process of acceptance into small groups includes the ability to participate in the group's culture in order to foster successful interactions with that group. Regular presence in a group does not justify labeling an individual a "regular," a concept that is defined in depth below. These further interactions based upon the idioculture of the small group include those which include and build relationships amongst some members and exclude others. The small groups in my research use similar cultural tools described by Fine (1987:126) such as skills (particularly the skills pertinent to the knitting world, but also other skills, such as baking), knowledge, jokes, and popular culture. Members of the Independent Café group, for example, often had discussion about books, particularly books that several members had read such as the *Harry Potter* series. Interaction based on the conversation about common interests plays an important role in sustaining a small group community.

Cultural items from the larger knitting culture were adopted by the three groups I researched in several ways. For example, there were terms or "knitting jargon" used by members of all three groups. Members commonly used the term "stash" to refer to the yarn they had accumulated. Leah, in a conversation with other members of Independent

Café, lamented over a recent yarn purchase she made because she was trying to “knit through her stash” rather than purchase more yarn. As another example, members of all three groups often discussed “gauge,” which is the number of stitches to, most often, four inches square of knitted fabric. Gauge is both an important term and concept for knitters as finished garments are likely to be ill fitting if the gauge is not consistent with that which is called for by a pattern. One Friday evening at Local Yarn Shop, Jeana focused on her project making “swatches,” or small knitted squares by which one is able to measure gauge before beginning a project. Approximately one hour after she had arrived, Jeana holds up her needles and loudly proclaims “Gauge!” Several other members respond with, “Yay! Gauge!” Both “stash” and “gauge” are found frequently in use in the larger U.S. knitting culture by way of instructional and pattern books, popular web sites such as Ravelry.com, widely read authors and bloggers such as Stephanie “The Yarn Harlot” Pearl-McPhee. These cultural items are also adopted by the group, as I observed when member interactions include references to the larger knitting culture. These items were often adopted into an individual’s repertoire either through interactions with other group members using the jargon or from references to cultural items of the larger knitting culture such as the glossaries of pattern books.

The idioculture of each group also relies heavily on shared knowledge not related to knitting culture. Group members often use references to popular culture as it is likely that several other participants will understand the reference. Popular culture, in my observations of knitting groups, was an expansive cultural repertoire of knowledge about sitcoms, audio books, celebrity gossip, and films. High culture was occasionally

referenced. In my field notes, I recorded conversations about opera, art exhibits, and ballet recitals within moments of conversation about *The Office* and *Star Wars*. Neither popular nor high culture, however, are not monolithic concepts and one's knowledge of either cultural category varies with gender, age, education, etc. This likely added to the variability of the use of items from either category in these knitting groups. Just as newcomers are expected to embrace the group's adoption of elements of knitting culture, so too will they need to pick up on many of the popular culture references in order to survive as a group member. Local Yarn Shop has a membership of regulars who are educated and participate in popular culture as well as high culture. These regulars draw from a large pool of knowledge in order to interact with each other. For example, Melinda, a college-educated, white woman in her early thirties, sat down at the table one Friday evening wearing a tee-shirt referencing both the popular culture world of video games and high culture world of famous art work.

Melinda sits down across from Darlene...Darlene notices Melinda's shirt and laughs. "I like your shirt," she says. Melinda's shirt has a Super Mario Brothers' pipe as in the video game. Underneath the pipe it says, "This is not a pipe," a reference to the *The Treachery of Images*.⁸

Conversations that drew from both popular and high culture were more likely to occur at Local Yarn Shop or Independent Café than with Roving Knitters. Local Yarn Shop and Independent Café had more members with advanced degrees, more members who talked

⁸ *The Treachery of Images* is a Rene Magritte oil painting of the image of a tobacco pipe under which the French translation of "This is not a pipe" appears. As the web site for the Los Angeles County Museum of Contemporary Art states, "This simple phrase emphasizes the central contradiction of representation: the fact that the painting does not contain a pipe, but merely the image of one." (<http://www.lacma.org/art/magritteindex.aspx>).

about travel for pleasure, and overall had more indicators of collectively possessing a broader range of cultural capital than Roving Knitters.

As another example, one evening at Local Yarn Shop, the discussion quickly moves to Wollmeise, a particular very expensive yarn that people try to buy on-line when new lots are posted to the web site from which individuals purchase Wollmeise. It is notoriously difficult to purchase. The demand is such that those who are able to purchase are able to sell what they do not want for more than the retail price. Knitters wait by the computer for updates. As the yarn is sold from Europe, these updates often appear at off hours in the United States. Celia described her first attempts at purchasing the yarn.

Celia says that as this was the first time she had tried to purchase Wollmeise after hearing about it at Local Yarn Shop, and she did not realize she had to click certain options. Donna asks about this yarn. "So people buy it up and then jack up the prices?" A few people confirm this is true. Donna jokes, "I seem to remember hearing of something like this before. Anyone remember Beanie Babies?"

Interactions such as those above easily went back and forth between discussion of knitting culture (in this case, a higher end yarn references) and popular culture. As stated above, it is likely much of the interaction at Local Yarn shop's knitting group was influenced by the immediate access to the cultural items of the yarn shop. The group itself meets in the basement of the shop. However, every participant, upon entering the shop, was greeted by staff members and viewed at least part of the main showroom floor full of vibrantly colored yarns on their way to the basement stairs. Two larger rectangular tables occupied the main area of the basement with chairs crowded around them. Immediately surrounding the table were sale yarns and pattern books as well as spinning

wheels, roving,⁹ and tops.¹⁰ It is particularly worth noting the “high end” knitting culture of the yarn shop itself, which is likely to have contributed to an emphasis on cultural items such as high end yarns at Local Yarn Shop. While high end knitting culture was often referenced with Independent Café and Roving Knitters, the references were often more brief and less frequent than with the Local Yarn Shop group. The elements of larger cultures from which the groups drew to form relationships were most often introduced by members I refer to as “regulars.”

Small Group Culture and “Regulars”

Regulars within all three groups are at the heart of the action and interaction that becomes the basis of small group culture. Therefore, the regulars act in accordance with the idioculture of a particular group while also actively building upon that culture. These group members use the culture of the small group and meanings associated with place that result in inclusion and exclusion. It did not require more than a few visits with each group to recognize one pattern consistent in all three groups. Each week, group activity generally focused around a group of regulars. With few exceptions, regulars identified in my earliest observations of all three groups had been weekly attendees for several months if not a year or longer. Throughout the months I observed these groups, new individuals came to be recognized as regulars as others dropped out of the group. Overall, though, the

⁹ “A long strand of...fiber that is a long rope of ready to spin fiber.” (<http://www.spindleandwheel.com/content/view/25/49/>).

¹⁰ “A strand of longer fibers that have been straightened, made parallel and separated from the shorter fibers by combing.” (<http://www.llamapaedia.com/wool/glossary.html>). Both Roving and tops are fibers used in the process of spinning yarn.

individuals who made up the core group of regulars remained stable during the time I observed the groups.

In my observations and interviews, I found that the regulars of each of the three groups both saw themselves as distinct in their role in the group (occasionally referring to themselves as “regulars”) and shared in activities beyond the primary purpose of the gathering. Aside from knitting together, members, generally regulars, in all three groups also shared books, magazines, recipes, food, and beverages as well trading yarn and knitting patterns. Regulars, at least for the brief amount of time they met together at a knitting group, developed anchored relationships that mimicked friendship. In some cases as described below, regulars occasionally developed what I would characterize as full-time friendships.

These regulars, then, become the most active participants in creating, maintaining, and transmitting the group idioculture through interaction amongst themselves and with other members. The group idioculture becomes particularly important when non-members come into contact with the group. According to Fine (1987), “Knowledge and acceptance of a group’s idioculture is a necessary and sufficient condition for distinguishing members of a group from nonmembers” (128). Acceptance of an idioculture and the ability to participate in it, however, does not mean that one has gained entrée into the core group of regulars. Acceptance into the group is a reciprocal process in which the non-member must participate or accept the small group culture as much as the group, particularly regulars, must accept that individual as a member. The more aspects of the particular small group culture with which one successfully engages, the more a

non-regular may potentially be included in group interactions. Therefore, the more an individual is able to accept the small group culture and be accepted by the small group culture, the more likely they are to become a regular.

The peak of inclusion is transcendence beyond interactions during scheduled knitting group meetings when members extend their relationships to telephone calls, on-line networking, and spending time together in-person engaged in other activities which further anchors their ties to one another. Regulars, those most involved with the group, reported “friending” each other on social networking sites Facebook and Ravelry.com, going to bars, co-hosting parties, taking trips to knitting related events, and even having other regulars watch their young children to name just a few interactions that took place outside the regular meetings. This involvement with other members outside of the scheduled meeting times provides a further basis for both anchored relationships amongst regulars and the development of idioculture as these members bring their experiences to the group.

Regulars solidify their relationships to each other as a group even more when they continue their interaction outside of the group. The conversational interaction of these three knitting groups often enters the territory of personal lives including family and work. Regulars of all three groups spent time with each other outside of the knitting group setting. However, neighborhood-based groups Roving Knitters and Independent Café integrated more of their personal lives observed conversations than Local Yarn Shop members. Roving Knitters organizers, Opal and Ramona, both college-educated white women in their twenties, spent time with each other as well as other regulars. They

were even familiar with each other's partners who were occasionally invited to participate in events such as a themed cocktail party to which both members and friends not associated with the group were invited. This time spent interacting outside of the knitting group setting provided further basis for interaction when in the knitting group setting. Local Yarn Shop members also interacted with each other outside of Local Yarn Shop itself. According to Holly, a college-educated, multi-racial twenty-something,

There's a group of us that goes out after for drinks, um, so the store closes at nine, and then we go, like go to a bar to, to get drinks afterwards, and that didn't really start until right after they moved to the new store. So, I feel like, and because of that, we weren't really, we didn't really, um, interact that much outside of knitting until we started doing that. And so the group of us that are friendly, and, like, go to karaoke together, um, go to each other's, well, there was one woman that got married, and we went to her wedding. A bunch of us were at her wedding. Um, and we really didn't have that close bond until we started going out. And so I think because we started going out, we started going to knit night more.

In the case with Holly and other regulars of Local Yarn Shop, this additional interaction reinforced the anchored relationships on Friday knit nights.

A similar phenomena of using shared space outside of the meeting place as a way to reinforce inclusion is also observed as Independent Café regulars also spent time together outside of the group. As many of these regulars lived within the same neighborhood, they were able to take walks with one another, shared car trips with each other to knitting related festivals, and even babysit each other's children. Sonia, a college-educated, multi-racial woman in her forties, described how these regulars spent time together outside of the group.

I think there are six of us who, it all started with taking walks. Taking walks, we take walks. And actually it started with Leah and Isabel...They started taking [walks], and then, I was able to join them, and then other people joined them,

which is how Hazel, do you remember Hazel? The pretty blonde? Yeah, she bought a house, she and her husband bought a house, and we meet, Leah and I meet. And so we would meet some times on a Sunday.

This time spent outside of the knitting group setting reinforces one's place in the group as a regular. This time allows members to further develop their own culture of regulars which often makes its way back to the group as a whole on regular knitting group nights as inside jokes or shared stories. However, while these experiences serve as tools of inclusion for those who are able to participate, the inside jokes or stories revisited with the group may exclude those who did not participate.

At Local Yarn Shop, I observed the ascendance of one newcomer who successfully maneuvered through the group's culture to ultimately contribute to it herself. Jemma, a college-educated, African American woman in her late twenties, joined the group as a beginner nearly the same time I began observations. She quickly rose to the ranks of "regular" as she eagerly embraced the Local Yarn Shop Friday night knitting group idioculture. Jemma took on complicated projects for a beginner, including the popular Ishbel scarf and sock knitting. Jemma quickly became familiar with the shop's staff, products, and the most popular yarns amongst other regulars. She also successfully engaged with the group's references to popular culture during her frequent attendance. During one Friday evening, Jemma arrived after many of the other participants. The only open seat near the regulars was a corner seat to which she said, "Nobody puts Jemma in the corner." This line is a reference to the popular 1987 movie *Dirty Dancing* in which the lead male character says to the father of, Baby, the lead female character, "Nobody puts Baby in the corner." Several members laughed, and this line became a running joke

as Jemma frequently found herself in the position of taking a corner seat at Local Yarn Shop. Jemma successfully adopted the idioculture of the group including the Local Yarn Shop's local knitting culture as well as successfully adapted popular culture references to solidify her place as a regular within the group.

Knitting Groups, Small Group Culture, and Inclusion

As stated previously, participation in knitting culture is the easiest way by which one is able to initially access the other individuals in a knitting group. This is not surprising given the central basis for the formation of the group is to knit along with a community of others who share one's hobby or interest. However, as I also stated above, each of the three groups I observed incorporated different aspects of the larger knitting culture into their idioculture. Local Yarn Shop drew heavily from readily available bases for interaction provided by the immediate place, a yarn shop. This idioculture borrow more directly from the higher end yarns and popular pattern designs immediately available in the shop. For example, during nearly a year of observation, I noticed a "viral" pattern within the group, meaning a pattern which caught on quickly as popular and which many members of Local Yarn Shop completed. When asking Joy, a college-educated, white woman in her late twenties, when she first felt a part of the Local Yarn Shop community, she responded, "It was knitting my Ishbel [a popular lace scarf pattern] that did it. Once you knit an Ishbel, they start circling around you chanting, 'One of us, one of us.'" Nearly every person identified as a regular had knit at least one Ishbel scarf. The Ishbel has been knit and worn by several other regulars and is a lace pattern that

illustrates both one's legitimacy as a skilled knitter and desire to participate in the idioculture of Local Yarn Shop.

Roving Knitters and Independent Café, in comparison to Local Yarn Shop, attracted proportionately more novice knitters, and their small group cultures embrace a broader spectrum of larger knitting culture to include the use of lower end yarns as an acceptable practice. This acceptance of novice knitters into Roving Knitters and Independent Café proved to provide newcomers to the group with a larger amount of cultural items from which to draw to connect with the group's idioculture. Whereas Local Yarn Shops attracted a majority of women who already had knowledge of the larger knitting culture and were willing to embrace it, Roving Knitters and Independent Café attracted everyone from the very experienced to those on their first projects. Bridget, a white woman in her late twenties and a newcomer to the group, sat down next to me at an Independent Café meeting and was able to participate in the conversation as she was familiar with the places about which the group was discussing. My notes from that day specify:

Adrienne [long-time regular] asks Bridget, "Are you from the neighborhood?" "Yes, I am." With that cue, Adrienne and Leah start a conversation about the restaurants in the neighborhood. Adrienne says, "I like to go to [the Thai restaurant] with [my son] in the summer, but they leave everything open in the winter. It's too cold." The conversation continues, but Adrienne and Leah direct their comments the group in general more so than to each other. Adrienne asks to no one in particular, "There's a bakery I like a few streets over. What is the name of that bakery?" Bridget answers, "Is it [name of bakery]?" "Yeah, that's it. I like to go there sometimes." Bridget responds, "I like that place too."

While Bridget initially began bonding with the group through her knitting project, a beginner's hat, she was able to participate even more in the discussion of a shared place. Bridget came to the group with the appropriate knowledge of the local culture that suited Independent Café.

Roving Knitters drew from a broad range of small group cultural items by which participants could easily interact with each other. Roving Knitters had attendance rates that varied from four to fifteen individuals. More popular location in terms of attendance was a three floor café on the North Side. Interviewees noted this place was more appealing than others because it was spacious, chairs and tables were more easily arranged to suit the group, the food and beverages were inexpensive, and individuals preferred to have control over their own food or beverage orders rather than relying on wait staff. While the sit-down, family-friendly restaurant was well attended averaging about eight to ten individuals, my observations and interviews indicated this type of location was less popular. According to members, this restaurant was more expensive than other meeting places, the music was too loud to effectively engage in conversation with many others, the seating was cramped, and paying the bill was a hassle (the restaurant provided one bill to which each person contributed according to their individual order).

The organizers, Opal and Ramona, were actively involved in interacting with newcomers as well as regulars and facilitating conversation amongst everyone regardless of place. For example, Opal actively walked around the table at the family restaurant when the music was loud. Ramona remarked in an interview that Opal did this this in an

attempt to welcome everyone to Roving Knitters. When the organizers noticed new people had joined the group, they would ask everyone to introduce themselves and the project they were knitting. For example,

Once Hannah finished eating, Ramona says it is “time for introductions” noting that there are several new faces to the group. Ramona starts by introducing herself and her project. Before Opal introduces herself and adds we should share an interesting fact about ourselves...The woman on my right, a new knitter as well as new to the group, introduces herself as such. The new knitter, Bette, is working on a simple hat and asks advice about her project. Several regular members respond. Hannah, sitting on the other side of Bette, takes time to show her how to use double pointed needles with the mitten she is knitting for her roommate.

More formal introductions aided the newcomers in orienting themselves to the group and to the type of knitting culture in which members of the group participated by introducing their projects. Roving Knitters tolerated a much more broad range of the larger knitting culture including the use of less expensive yarns and spend much less time than Local Yarn Shop in discussion of knitting in general. Roving Knitters drew far more from accessible popular culture and discussion of work and family life to build relationships amongst members.

Roving Knitters adopted a more aggressive agenda of inclusion in order to maintain the group. Opal described the philosophy behind the organizers’ approach to welcoming people to the group.

We decided we wanted to meet every week, and first Monday, second Tuesday, third Wednesday, fourth Thursday is very easy to remember, and, did I have classes at the time? I'm trying to remember, but, we knew that if we met every Monday, someone was going to have class or couldn't find a babysitter, or have something every Monday. So that's why we decided to put it on different days, or make sure it stays on different days, so, you know, if you had class Monday and Wednesday, you could always come on Tuesday or something like that.

Opal and Ramona both participate in welcoming newcomers. At several meetings, Ramona noted when there were newcomers and asked everyone in the group to introduce themselves and their project. Opal made additional effort to talk to individuals as they joined the group and stated, "...I think that's something I would want somebody to do, like, especially if I was a new person, like, you know, you come in, and we always say 'hi' to you...If nobody else talks to you for the next hour, it kind of makes you feel bad, and you think maybe I won't come back. So I do make it a point." Newcomers as well as more established members of each group must demonstrate acceptance and participation in the knitting group's existing culture. However, regulars must also make a reciprocal effort to accept other participants.

Knitting Groups, Small Group Culture, and Exclusion

It is important to emphasize that small group inclusion and exclusion is generally not a completely conscious effort. More often than not, regulars are not necessarily conscious of their role in inclusion and exclusion. It is the nature of small group communities that not everyone will feel included when there is a failure in forming the required anchored relationships. Faye, a college-educated, white woman in her late twenties, for example, first attended Roving Knitters before the role of organizer changed hands, but decided to try out Independent Café where she found a better fit. About Roving Knitters, Faye stated,

Um, people [at the Independent Café group] just seem more, like, outgoing, even though I've said that like thirty times. Just that they are like, "What are you working on? Ooh can I touch it? Ooh, can I touch that?" You know, that really means a lot, you know. Where [Roving Knitters] was more like "My cat's doing this again." It's like, well, I don't know you or have seen your cat. Like, I guess

people who come more often or come before, like, know your cat. It's just, like, a different vibe.

I determined by the dates given in the interviews that Faye attended Roving Knitters before Opal and Ramona replaced the previous organizer. When asked further about her experience, Faye stated the Roving Knitters group at that time did not meet very often and met in locations near which there was little convenient public transportation. She also stated the existing group made little effort to get to know newcomers, which is a characteristic she enjoyed most about the Independent Café group.

Martha, a college-educated white woman in her forties, who now primarily visited Local Yarn Shop, used to visit Independent Café. Martha did not feel entirely connected to the culture of Independent Café. “I started going to groups about March 2008. And I never felt like I entirely fit in at [Independent Café]. I always felt like I was visiting. The people there, their lives are, their lives are all kind of clustered around the North shore area, and, and because I was coming in from outside. I, um, I don't know. They seem so much more insular.” At least one interviewee from all three groups cited similar feelings of not feeling culturally connected to other groups with which they had experiences. However, a quote from Sidney reveals that regular members are not necessarily conscious of their role in including newcomers, at least until they have to reflect back upon their interactions. When I asked Sidney, an Independent Café regular, how she felt about the treatment of newcomers, she said,

I hope we're welcoming. Um, sometimes I worry that we're not. Um, I think, um, I don't know. I know that me personally that I have a hard time, like, you know, um, talking to people, to strangers, and, um, I am not always so great at that, and sometimes it's just easier to talk to whoever is, you know, closest to me or

physically at the table or, you know, or if Elaine's there or somebody I just know better I want to talk about things with. Um, you know, and I think, I don't know, it's that sometimes the group kind of feels that way. We're kind of set with our people that we're closer to, and maybe we're not as welcoming as we could be. But really, um, I like to think, um, I like to think most of the time we do okay, you know? I hope so, [laughs] but, you know.

As stated above, most behaviors that exclude members are not a conscious effort. Indeed, members may not be aware their behavior excludes other individuals.

The small group culture created within the Local Yarn Shop, for example, was directly influenced by the material aspect of the yarn shop. The physical properties of the Local Yarn Shop, which stocked mostly higher end yarns, notions, and tools, provided a basis for norms, namely that of the consumption of higher end yarns. That had the potential to create inclusion for those able and willing to participate and exclusion for those less able or less willing to participate in this group's idioculture that is specifically associated with the consumption of high end yarns. This consumption revealed differences amongst the values as well as potential differences in cultural capital by which regulars based a portion of their relationships to other members. During one Friday evening, Celia, a college-educated, African American woman in her thirties, and a more recent addition to the group of regulars, complained about gifting higher end Wollmeise yarn to a neighbor who then used it in a project with Red Heart yarn. Red Heart is representative of the lines of inexpensive, "big box," acrylic yarns that were in use that same evening by the excluded women.

Celia addresses the table saying, "I gave my neighbor a skein of Wollmeise to be nice, and do you know what she did? She stranded it with black Red Heart and knitted it together!" My head is down, but I hear some gasps and "oh no's." "She knitted it together with what!?!?" Darlene exclaims as she looks over her glasses.

“Red Heart!” says Celia, “I’m about to ask for it back! I should give her a bottle of this Bitch wine.” [the store owner had purchased bottles of wine called “Bitch” as a joke for tonight, which is a themed party.] Celia laughs hard as do several others at the table...Celia laughs as if the story is comical.

Earlier that day I had interviewed Daisy, a college-educated, African American woman in her mid-twenties, and she had commented on what she referred to as “snobbery” at Local Yarn Shop. Daisy specifically mentioned the expense of Wollmeise and her inability to use it in projects due to both price and wool allergies among those for whom she knitted. Wollmeise is a cultural reference specific to the Local Yarn Shop group in this sampling of groups as neither Roving Knitters nor Independent café referenced the yarn. Collecting skeins of Wollmeise became as popular as the Ishbel scarf pattern amongst regulars at Local Yarn Shop.

Daisy told me about her initial entrance into the group at Local Yarn Shop in which she described feeling “welcomed.”

You have to go through a quote un-quote initiation as the new kid who hasn't been to [Local Yarn Shop]. And I just found out about the store is about four years old, and the core group that is down there has been there from the beginning. And I got to go through all the yarn snobs who were like, "Oh, well you're knitting with that?" type of situation, but after I explained myself, even though I didn't have to, I just didn't want to go through all the looks and snickers and all this other stuff, I feel like I've been welcomed.

However, as stated above, Daisy noted snobbery amongst members who used “higher end yarn” that she found upsetting. The several stories she shared with me during our interview reveal tension between members those who value high end products and those who do not. For example,

I felt upset another time when there was another woman who was saying, "I am so glad I am not allergic to wool, and I can knit with it, and yadda, yadda, yadda."

She was just on and on and on and on, and "I hate knitting with cotton because it's so itchy," and all that. I was just thinking in the back of my head, you know what? At least cotton is a renewable resource. It grows like weeds. You can harvest it year after year in abundance. Why do you think it's the "fabric of our lives?" Now you throw a little extra fabric softener on it wash it, block it out. It will be super soft. And I wanted to call her out and say, "Well if cotton is so bad, then why are you wearing a cotton undershirt under the wool sweater you just knitted three weeks ago?"...It's that kind of attitude that annoys me because the world does not revolve around Malabrigo and Wollmeise, you know? It's nice that you can afford to buy it and knit with it. I'm happy for you. But there are folks who are just as happy knitting with a big pound of acrylic yarn, and it's just as pretty.

Daisy's contradictory statement indicates the Local Yarn Shop group's tendency to gravitate towards the use of higher end yarns does have the potential to exclude some members from participating.

Holly, a Local Yarn Shop regular, discussed another potential manner in which individuals are excluded from participation. She stated,

I didn't know what to expect [with my first visit to Local Yarn Shop], and it was, there were a couple of people who really went out of their way to, like, talk to me. Um, and I don't know that that happens as much in the new space because it is more open, and it's harder, or it's easier for one of the people who's not part of the group already, it seems like it's easier to get pushed off to the side, and just kind of shut out from conversations, um, because you're not, like, elbow to elbow with somebody, so you kind of don't wanna butt in almost.

The above instance did not necessarily mean regulars of Local Yarn Shop engaged in conscious exclusion; however, my observations and interviews indicate members were at least aware of their exclusionary behavior. When asked about group dynamics Holly stated,

Um, it's bad because I'm gonna sound, like, really catty, but if, uh, just, like, people that don't seem, like, this one woman. Um, she doesn't seem to have very many friends at [Local Yarn Shop], or just in general just kind of comes and just says things that aren't really relevant to the conversation, and. I feel like a terrible person 'cause we kind of make fun of her, but, like, that's what the negative aspect

is. I'm the negative aspect there [laughs]. Um, yeah, like, we have nicknames for the people that are loud and obnoxious there, and [individuals] we don't like[.]

Melinda stated in an interview she finds it “annoying” when attendees are knitting or crocheting with “big box store yarn,” which refers to inexpensive acrylics sold at stores such as Wal-Mart or chain craft stores such as JoAnn’s. Holly confirmed there is what Martha referred to as a “schism” between attendees. “[I]t seems that there's been more, like, bonding along the lines of like what craft you do and the type of fiber you use. Like, I feel like, there's kind of, yarn snob versus, like, people who knit with acrylic.”

Melinda and Holly both stated that they dislike when an individual steers conversation in a direction with which they are unhappy. Goffman ([1971] 2010) addressed this issue in terms of a violation of a “conversational preserve.” This is not only the “control” individuals have over their entrance into conversation but also “...the right of a set of individuals once engaged in talk to have their circle protected from entrance and overhearing by others” (40). When asked how they handle such a situation, Melinda said,

Well, there's every once in a while there's a few people that come that kind of annoy me. Um, they haven't come in a while, but every so often someone will come who annoys the shit out of me [laughs]. And I try to be cordial, but I can only go so far with that... Um, they turn the conversation to topics I'm not really interested in. Or, um, knitting with big box store yarn or crocheting with big box store yarn. Or like, acting judgmental. Those are just some of the things that kind of turn me off.

I asked Melinda what type of response this behavior receives, and she answered in terms of an individual and a group response. “Like, for me, I can handle it to a point, and then I'll usually say something. I think as a group, though, most of us are generally too polite

to say anything, so we would rather remove ourselves, like, go upstairs...or try to start our own side conversations instead of being rude to somebody or starting a fight or whatever.”

I observed several instances in which these regulars (as they often call themselves as well) ignored attempts at interaction from others at Local Yarn Shop or left the basement all together. An example from my notes illustrates an evening in which Local Yarn Shop regulars repeatedly ignored attempts of another participant to interact with them:

Kate asks if anyone is hungry. Holly says she is. “What were you thinking? Please say Indian.” Kate, “Oh, that sounds good.” Jemma, “I would like to get some Indian.” Kate says they probably have the menu for the nearby Indian place upstairs. She and Jemma get up and walk upstairs to get the menu. Melinda mentions she wants to go get pizza. I ask her if the pizza place takes cards because I don't have any cash on me. She says they do. “You should just come with me” Melinda tells me. “Okay, sure,” I say. Kate and Jemma come part of the way down the winding staircase. Kate has the menu in hand and peeks through the railing and asks Holly what she wants. As they are debating the order, Myra says she has never had Indian food, but she would try it and would like to chip in for the order they are planning to get. Kate gives an uncomfortable laugh and does not respond to Myra. Jemma says she's just going to get Jimmy Johns to Kate and also does not respond to Myra. Kate says, “Yeah, I think I'll get Jimmy Johns too.” Holly, “Come on guys. I really want Indian food,” and makes a pouting face and crosses her arms.

I left with the group who decided to purchase dinner. Myra followed; however, no one acknowledged her attempts at conversation. When we split up as a group to go to our restaurant of choice, I joined Melinda and Annette at the pizza shop.

Melinda, Annette, and I get our pizza and start to head out. We get to the crosswalk, and Myra is still not with us. I feel badly leaving someone behind, but it's clear that Melinda and Annette want me to come with them as they have continued to talk to me as we walk outside. Melinda lowers her voice, and says to me, “You know how you asked me how I handle someone in the group I don't

like?" [This was not the question in the interview, but I nod because I want to know what Melinda has to say.] "Well, that's just it. Collectively, we don't know [what to do]. But I can tell you who we don't like. She's one [referring to Myra by nodding toward the pizza shop]. And the woman who comes and knits afghans for soldiers with only Red Heart yarn [Martha]. And Regina. She's always wants to try to put together car pools." [Regina has been mentioned in interviews with other knitters as a source of frustration.]

Myra rejoined the group downstairs with her order but did not walk back to the shop with any other group members. This event along with Melinda's and Holly's statements about those who use acrylic yarns, of which Myra is one, indicated regulars have the ability to become conscious of exclusion. The above is also an example of how regulars control their conversational preserve by not responding to Myra's attempts to include herself in group interaction.

Sonia of Independent Café mentioned there remained some "old group" closeness that was bothersome that it created a barrier between older and newer members. She stated,

It's, it's the new group. We're just much more inclusive. We want people to come. Now, there are still some of the older one, like Sidney...she will save a seat for Elaine. It makes me, it makes us crazy, because I'm there, I got there, and I'm sorry that Elaine isn't, but the whole preface is to meet with everyone, not one person. And so they're a part of the old. I'm a part of the new. So, they'll just sit there and really just talk to one another, and it really just drives me crazy because this is a community, not you and the rest of us.

My observations and interviews do not necessarily show any one of the three groups is less inclusive than the others. However, my interviews with members of Local Yarn Shop revealed there was a bit more consciousness about the effect their behavior had in terms of inclusion or exclusion. In comparison, the regulars of Roving Knitters, if not completely conscious of the effects of their individual behavior, were aware of their

efforts to welcome newcomers and involve as many individuals as possible in the group's interactions over the course of the evening. Independent Café, though, appeared to have a large variation amongst regulars in terms of their awareness of inclusion or exclusion of other members. The above analysis supports the idea that knitting groups varied significantly in their development of idioculture. Moreover, variances in idiocultures such as the adoption of elements of larger culture, cultural items produced through member interactions (specifically the interactions of regulars), and the norms of welcoming newcomers contributed to varying degrees of inclusivity.

What were the options of knitting group members who felt excluded? These participants had either the option to forego space and not return to the group or make a claim to space. To paraphrase McFeat (1974:31), participants either find a place within the group, or they do not. A few interviewees revealed they had visited other groups with which they did not find a good fit and did not feel included. These interviewees chose to look for another knitting group in which they felt more comfortable. For example, Faye and Martha each had feelings of exclusion in relationship to the groups they visited and both chose to find another group. Below I describe instances in which participants reacted to feelings of exclusion by claiming space.

Sonia described her first experiences with Independent Café during which time the regular members were a significantly different group of individuals.

Actually, no one really talked to me that much. I was insecure. And I'm not sure why I came back. I think it was my insecurity that made me come back. I thought, okay, maybe it's because they don't know me. I'm just going to go back. Maybe there's something wrong with me, but I will go back and try it this week. And they didn't really talk to me then. And I think it's because they were shy. I'm hoping it's

because they were shy. So, and other people had that exact same experience. But the first few [meetings], it was hard, it was really hard.

I asked Sonia why she returned to the group and did not try to find another knitting group. She replied Independent Café was convenient, and, within a short period of time, the group dynamics changed as more and more new members (now regulars) joined the group and older members dropped out. Sonia recalled the shift in membership.

So, they didn't mean to not acknowledge people. They just didn't. And they've gotten a lot, see with the new people, it's sorta different. So, the new people made all the difference. See, they had only been meeting here a month and a half. Before that, they had been meeting at [previous restaurant]. So, they'd changed locations, and people started to find them here. And some people didn't like the change in venue, and some people moved out of state.

Sonia persevered in her attendance until the group eventually shifted so that she and other newer members eventually had a significant enough presence and interaction with each other to be called regulars and be accepted into the group. Sonia's persistence in claiming space within the group eventually led to her inclusion as she befriended newer members.

In the above example of Sonia's perceived exclusion from Independent Café, Sonia herself noted that she did not think this was a conscious effort to exclude newcomers. Local Yarn Shop members, however, were aware of what Martha referred to as a "schism." During our interview, she described the reaction of members who faced perceived themselves as being excluded at Local Yarn Shop.

And it seemed to, it may have happened, I had a period in December where I had to be out of town teaching two Fridays in a row, and when I came back, there was like this schism. But the weird thing is that like Annette and Margie [regulars] and the other people don't seem to be aware of it. It's just that there's a group that sits, have you been there lately? [In December last] Okay, so you know there's that little area where they have the spinning wheels and the weaving things? And there's like a little area next to it where the couch is. And there's, like, a whole

little separate circle where there's a couch and a few chairs. And, before that I went away, I would come down there, and I would go sit on that couch to eat, so that I wouldn't run the risk of getting food on anybody else's work. And then once I'd wash up, I'd join everybody at the table. And then when I came back after a few weeks, Myra and Daisy and a couple of others were sitting over in that area, and they have been ever since...

I noted this behavior in December, and Martha then confirmed these women were gathering in another area of the basement because they felt shunned by the “yarn snobs.” Now that this behavior was confirmed, I found this situation even more intriguing because I knew two of these excluded women, Myra and Regina, traveled in from the next state to participate in this group. By car, the trip is approximately forty-five minutes. Melinda had pointedly told me that Martha, Myra, and Regina were amongst the women they (meaning the regulars) did not like. Holly also noted divisions amongst the group in terms of the types of fiber they used and age. With the exception of Daisy, these women who were often not included in the group were at a different life stage than most of the other group participants. These women also primarily crocheted rather than knitted and used “big box” store yarns. The use of inexpensive yarn, fewer purchases at the shop, and a general lack of interest in the high end knitting culture of Local Yarn Shop were an indication in the difference in status between these women and the other group members, particularly the regulars.

This re-orientation of the participation of these women from the larger group to their own small group within a small group was not an overnight process. I first observed various levels of passive exclusion and outright exclusion from the group of regulars. For example, I noticed first that the women who crochet, Martha, Myra and Daisy, often

chose to sit near each other at the main table. In fact, Daisy emphasized the importance of sitting at the table when interviewed. Daisy described her entrance to the group in terms of having to explain both that she crochets rather than knits and that she uses mostly non-animal fiber yarns.

And so just having to go through the "Well, she's the crocheter at knit night" thing hasn't been a big thing, but it's also been going on for four or five months. And so when I first picked up my knitting needles after Stitches,¹¹ someone made a comment, "oh, hell hasn't frozen over. You're knitting." Yes, I'm knitting. And that was the whole explaining myself thing, the fact that I think I deserve to be down there, have a spot at the table, and I deserve to be here, and I'm gonna be here. And, you know, I'm not gonna let your snobbery push me away.

What Daisy and Myra perceive as “snobbery” is more likely a response by regulars of the Local Yarn Shop group to a set of behaviors that were incompatible with the group’s idioculture and a mismatch in status and cultural capital between members.

Conclusion

In my description and analysis of three knitting groups in Chicago, I found patterns of inclusion that dealt specifically with small group culture, or idioculture. In particular the aspects of idioculture that included the aspects of regulars and meanings of place played an important role in developing devices of inclusion. These patterns of inclusion were most often dictated by the regulars, those who had anchored relationships with other regular group members. The interaction of regulars with each other and with non-regulars transmitted the norms and behaviors one must follow as well as develop

¹¹ “Stitches” are fiber arts festival held regionally. Several members of all three knitting groups have attended Stitches Midwest at least once.

shared meanings of place in order to be included. However, devices of inclusion and exclusion are rarely used at a completely conscious level.

Moreover, I also found that idiocultures of what appear to be relatively similar groups developed differently from one another as Fine (1987) proposed they would. The groups I observed developed independent small group cultures adopted or adapted cultural items from popular culture, high culture, and knitting culture as well as developing cultural items through group interaction. Inclusion occurred most easily when regulars and newcomers successfully participated in the small group culture of the particular knitting group. However, whenever there is inclusion of some, there is the exclusion of others.

Secondly, overt exclusion was a rare occurrence. Over approximately eleven months, I observed one instance of what may be considered a conscious effort of exclusion. This may only be considered such because regulars directly confirmed their dislike of particular individuals and transgressions against their established idioculture. However, I propose what was termed “snobbery” by both regulars and excluded participants were not performed for the sake of snobbery itself. The snobbery, rather, were the interpretations of responses of regulars towards other participants who did not suit the established idioculture. Members, though, often became aware their behavior excluded some. Those confronted with exclusion have two response options: give up space in the group or make a claim to space.

Third, I speculate the ability for some individuals to participate in a knitting group’s idioculture to the point of acceptance as a regular is in part due to social status

differences attributed to one's cultural capital. Regulars used their capital in various ways to shape the small group culture, which created overall tension at Local Yarn Shop. Further analysis may reveal that cultural capital and class differences played a large role in the ability for some knitters to successfully negotiate group dynamics while others could not. The process of negotiating status does occur within the context of small group cultures, and is worth proper exploration. As Collins (1981) argues, "Sociological concepts can be made fully empirical only by grounding them in a sample of the typical micro-events that make them up" (988). By establishing an understanding of the processes of culture formation, inclusion/exclusion, and the development of cultural capital and status difference within the settings of small groups, we can better understand the "central organization principles" of larger social institutions (Harrington and Fine 2006:319).

In terms of small group communities and inclusion (or exclusion) there are still many variables that may be explored, such as the transmission of cultural capital between individuals and society through small group processes. For example, we can better understand the larger social phenomenon of class status as "...small groups are domains in which status processes and social identity are made concrete and individuals are allocated to social positions" (Harrington and Fine 2000:314).

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