The Pussy Hat: An Intersection Between Needlework, Feminism, and Identity

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Introduction

On January 21, 2017, over one million individuals participated in the Women’s March on Washington. Media coverage noted the “sea of bright pink” pussyhats with top corners resembling cat ears. An extensive campaign promoted distribution of simple patterns to knit, crochet, or sew and finished handmade hats were also available for sale. The making and wearing of pussyhats presents an interesting evolution in feminism termed “craftism.” In relation to needlework, Lewis (2012) stated, “perhaps it was a bit rash for women to turn their back on craft…” (para. 6). The purpose of this study was to employ Identity Theory and content analysis to explore the making and wearing of pussyhats as “a weapon of resistance for women” (Parker, 1984, Introduction).

Theoretical Framework:

Identity links individual behavior and the larger social structure, aiding in predicting behavior. Kleine, Kleine, and Kernan (1993) found identity salience depended on three enabling factors: esteem, social connections, and media connections. In conjunction with the Women’s March on Washington, the Pussyhat Project was a nationwide effort to create pink hats and reclaim the derogatory term “pussy” (Reuters, 2017January 14). Utilizing handicraft to work through crisis is a coping strategy. In a study of those who had experienced profound loss (Pöllänen, 2006). This research sought to answer the question: “Is there evidence of a feminist craftism identity in the making and wearing of pussyhats?”

Methodology:

A Google search of the terms “pussyhat” and “pussy hat” between November 8, 2016 and March 15, 2017, encompassing the March 8th International Women’s Day/ A Day without a Woman was limited to mainstream news articles and editorial reporting. The two lists were cross-checked to remove duplicates. If there was question as to whether or not an article fit the criteria, the researchers discussed until agreement was reached. This resulted in a total of 30 articles and editorials to analyze. Using a constant comparison method, full content was transcribed and analyzed for recurring terms with the number of instances recorded and ranked. Unrelated terms were removed upon agreement between the researchers along with those with less than 10 occurrences, resulting in a total of 121 terms in the sample to be analyzed.

Results:

Number of Occurrences

![Graph showing number of occurrences]

Conclusion:

While this preliminary study is limited, results indicate the presence of an identity where needle arts and feminism intersect. Future research will utilize qualitative software analysis to address the full extent of media coverage and richer context in which these words appear. This study supports Lewis (2012), Parker (1984), and Pöllänen (2006). Making and wearing the pussyhat demonstrates an ever-evolving concept of feminism, which holistically encompasses the wide range of expressions and activities available to contemporary women.