

**CONSUMER CLAIMS TO SPACE IN THE
POLITICS OF CONSUMER IDENTITY**

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ABSTRACT

Physical space is an integral element of social life that impacts a wide range of consumption experiences, including shopping, eating, and exercising. However, not every consumer has access to the same kinds or amounts of spaces. Just like with the resources of money and knowledge, access to the resource of space is socially structured, being unevenly available to different consumer categories. This substantial issue, *consumer differential access to space*, has been underexplored in consumer research; in this literature, the predominant approach to study space has been to focus on how social actors work to make specific sites more meaningful, through practices that are mostly detached from the influence of social structure. In response to this oversight, the present research employs a mixed-method ethnography to study a contemporary ethos of consumption that questions the differential access to space that women encounter with some of their self-expressive consumption activities as a result of pervasive power hierarchies. This research develops a geosocial framework that sheds light on how consumers act on space as a way of interrogating the cultural subordination of their consumer identities. This framework helps unravel the interlinkage between space and power relations in the realm of consumption.

Key words: space, identity politics, gender, feminism, new cult of domesticity

“...human beings do ‘make their own geography’ as much as they ‘make their own history.’ ” (Giddens 1984, 363)

Physical space is an integral element of social life that impacts a wide range of consumption experiences, including shopping, eating, and exercising. But not every consumer has access to the same kinds or amounts of spaces. A sizeable body of research shows, for instance, that lower income people’s neighborhoods have limited retail availability of products and services; older people are frowned upon at youth-focused commercial venues; and those with stigmatized social identities hesitate to stroll or shop in some areas (Crockett and Wallendorf 2004; Kates 2002; Pittman 2017; Thornton 1996). This recurring consumption phenomenon, *consumer differential access to space*, is the focus of the present work.

Consumer research has studied space primarily from two perspectives. The most common one has been to consider retail stores and city regions as settings that firms design to guide customers’ shopping decisions, practices, and perceptions (Belk 2000; Borghini et al. 2009; Debenedetti et al. 2014; Kozinets et al. 2004; O’Guinn et al. 2015; Sherry 1998). More recent work has taken a complementary view by focusing on spaces that are beyond firms’ direct control. This research details how consumers act on domestic and public settings to express their ideologies, foster a sense of collectivity, and display personal taste (Arsel and Bean 2013; Bradford and Sherry 2015; Chatzidakis et al. 2012; Dion et al. 2014; Visconti et al. 2010). In both perspectives, social actors alter the symbolic, social, and physical properties of specific sites to make them more meaningful to themselves, others, or both.

While these approaches have advanced knowledge about the space-consumption nexus, they rarely engage with the political issue of consumer differential access to space: the socially

determined disparities in the amounts and kinds of space that people can access for their consumption activities (Giddens 1984; Smith 1992). This gap in consumer theory is at odds with the “spatial turn” in contemporary social thought that initiated around the 1980s (Foucault 1980; Lefebvre 1974; Smith 1984; Soja 1989; Urry 1985). This theoretical turn posits space as a finite, valuable resource that is unevenly available to different social categories of actors and, thus, a constant node of conflict in social life. To help close this gap, we go beyond studying the social construction of specific sites, as in previous research; instead, we focus on consumer attempts to alter socially structured patterns of access to use specific sites. We ask: Which circumstances lead people in subordinate consumer categories to experience limited access to space for their self-expressive consumption? How do they try to counter this structural condition?

The focus of these research questions on consumer differential access to space are important to further scholarship on the politics of consumption. In a research curation for the *Journal of Consumer Research*, Ger (2018) reiterates that we live in a historical moment marked by insidious forms of inequality. Attuned to that, consumer research has often considered the uneven allocation of many resources in and through the marketplace, with emphasis on money, knowledge, and skills (Commuri and Gentry 2005; Henry 2005; Üstüner and Holt 2007; Üstüner and Thompson 2012). We extend this literature in two ways: 1) by highlighting that space is also a key resource in producing cultural inequality and 2) by conceptualizing a process through which consumers respond to this inequality in a struggle to increase their access to this resource.

To set the stage for this conceptualization, we next review the literature on the social structuration of space, specifying this paper’s theoretical foundations and contribution to consumer research. A description of the research design follows, including an overview of our empirical context. We then present our results and discuss their implications.

THE SOCIAL STRUCTURATION OF SPACE

Conceptual Foundations

Lefebvre (1974), Foucault (1980), and Giddens (1984) were among the early social theorists in “the spatial turn” who focused on the political aspects of space. Foucault (1980) views space as a central force in the production of power relations and identity positions. Lefebvre (1974) sees space as the congealed product of historical conditions. Because of this congealed character, Giddens (1984) holds that one can read much of a social system’s cultural hierarchies from its spatiality, since different social categories tend to have access to distinct locales and enact differing mobility patterns. In short, these authors conceive of space not merely as where things happen, but also where power ideologies are materially transformed into relations of domination.

The intimate ties between space and power relations are inscribed in many social systems. In historicizing gendered spaces, Spain (1992) explains that in some tribes the ceremonial hut was open only to men, the dominant gender category; as a more recent variant of this situation, she notes that 19th-century women were expected to leave the dining room after meals so that men could discuss business and political affairs. In both cases, spatial rules helped (re)produce women’s cultural subordination by restricting their access to status-granting knowledge. In contemporary social systems that make gender or racial discrimination legal, dominant groups also deploy spatial rules to define where actors in subordinate social categories can go, restricting their access to pivotal services such as education and limiting their public visibility (Smith 1992; Storey 2012). In societies where discrimination is illegal, the links between space and cultural hierarchies are subtler but nonetheless present. In some US retail spaces, black shoppers are often subjected to greater scrutiny from security personnel but lesser assistance

from salespeople (Crockett et al. 2003; Pittman 2017). As these instances evince, space is more than just a site of action. It also is an *affordance of social structure* that materializes power relations and regulates people's access to experiences that are key to attaining cultural equality (Fraser 2007; Lamont 2018).

The intimate ties between power relations and space make its use and control a frequent locus of social tension (de Certeau 1984; Goffman 1997; Lefebvre 1974; Soja 1985; Urry 1985). However, consumer research has not given close consideration to this political node of social life. Struggles over space appear cursorily in some research in which space is not the theoretical focus. For instance, in work on brand communities, Thomas et al. (2013) note that runners negotiate who has priority access to running tracks. In a study of the consumption of nature, Canniford and Shankar (2012) find individuals competing for the best surfing areas. Spatial tensions also are mentioned in some studies of consumers' negotiations with organizations and municipalities about the purpose of specific sites (Bradford and Sherry 2015; Maclaran and Brown 2005; Visconti et al. 2010). However, these studies' foci are localized power games or practices of emplacement and meaning making that are mostly detached from the broader power mechanisms of social structure.

To extend consumer theory, we draw on the spatial turn to "identify and differentiate" (MacInnis 2011) a political perspective on space that is missing in this literature. This perspective highlights that people's relationships to space are embedded in historically constructed power relations. Further, it emphasizes that space is a key locus of contention when people want to open up novel possibilities for self-expression and interrogate the cultural subordination of their consumer identities. Developing this perspective brings to the fore of consumer research the underexplored geosocial character of the politics of consumer identity.

The second way we extend current conceptualizations of space is by focusing on patterns of spatial access across sites rather than on consumer actions within specific locales. As researchers point out (Thompson and Üstüner 2015, Castilhos and Dolbec 2017, Hoelscher and Chatzidakis 2018), consumer theory has rarely considered how consumers' activities and goals in different places are interrelated. Instead, it has primarily contributed in-depth studies of consumers in single sites, such as a festival, a retail store, a neighborhood, or their homes (Borghini et al. 2009; Chatzidakis et al. 2012; Dion et al. 2014; Kozinets 2002a). That emphasis generates solid accounts of consumption behavior in specific places, but it misses the connections across the multiple spaces that simultaneously constitute people's lives. When people participate in public consumption events, how can this experience shape their domestic consumption routines? When consumers build social ties with each other in servicescapes, how can this experience inform their actions in other settings? We advance consumer theory by departing from its prevailing treatment of spaces as discrete entities. Instead, we take an expanded, fluid view of people's spatial experiences, conceptualizing a system of interlinked activities that individuals enact in varied settings as part of their consumer identity projects.

With the term *consumer identity projects*, we refer to consumers' intentional configurations of market- and nonmarket-mediated resources to pursue particular identity positions (Schau 2018). The projects we consider are those carried out by culturally subordinate consumers who have the political purpose of enhancing the cultural value of these consumer identities. Our conceptualization of space as a socially structured resource that is integral to such projects is built on the enabling concepts outlined in the next section.

Enabling Concepts

In the influential book *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau (1984) conceptualizes the use of space to resist power relations as a *tactic*, an action taken by individuals in subordinate positions who want to occasionally ease their experience of the disciplinary powers of the social order. He notes that the tactical use of space often relies on consumption activities that individuals perform to transgress these powers, even if momentarily.

In line with de Certeau, we employ tactics as an enabling concept to understand how people attempt to claim access to space for their consumer activities in a way that temporarily contests power relations. Such actions are temporary and are not intended to dismantle the social order. Unlike de Certeau, though, we do not conceive of people's tactics as isolated acts of improvisation. Instead, we highlight the coherence between these acts by interpreting them as a political struggle connected to a consumer identity project. These struggles for access to space go beyond constructing a particular consumer identity for oneself by also seeking enhanced valorization of consumer attributes and activities that are strongly linked to that consumer identity (Fraser 2007). Tactics are used in a consumer identity project with an agenda: a desire to increase the cultural value of one's consumer identity.

We bring into relief the coherence in people's tactics through two theoretical moves. In the first, we categorize spaces using the concept of *spheres* or *scales* (Smith 1992; Storey 2012). A tenet in cultural geography, this concept links the physical properties and locations of certain settings to the social relations that occur there. In particular, we employ McDowell's (1999) sorting of spaces into three scales. The first is the private scale, which refers to intimate spaces where one interacts mostly with family and close friends, such as one's home and bedroom; the second is the public scale, which refers to streets, parks, and other venues of social agglomeration with strangers; the third is the semi-public scale, which includes spaces that offer

a non-private, yet safe setting for people in subordinate social categories to collectively strengthen their sense of identity. An example of semi-public spaces are the neighborhoods with gay-friendly retail establishments that offer gay people a “safe place” to dance, hug, and cruise, behaviors that might be rebuked elsewhere (Kates 2002). Another example are the churches where, during the Civil Rights Movement, African-Americans built a sense of pride in opposition to the discrimination they faced in not having access to public venues (Morris 1986). Thus, the semi-public scale includes retail and non-retail servicescapes where people gather, at least in part, to escape or resist power relations they experience as problematic in other scales.

While the first theoretical move sorts spaces into scales, the second links these different spatial scales to identity politics. In particular, we draw on work on the *politics of scale* developed by Smith (1992a; 1992b), a key figure in the “spatial turn.” He makes two points that are central to our analysis.

First, Smith stresses that spatial scales are more than geographic categories; they also are hierarchically organized concepts that tacitly structure where actors in specific social categories can go, what they can do, and what is culturally valued. This capacity of spatial scales is apparent, for example, in the often studied process that accentuated women’s cultural subordination during modernity. In Victorian times, the influential ethos known as the cult of domesticity prescribed as women’s main cultural mission the use of their heightened morals to build a domestic haven for their families (Coontz 2000; Parker 2010). In parallel, women who were often seen in public spaces without a male companion risked being demeaned as a “woman of the streets” (Ryan 1990). Through such dynamics, women gradually reduced their participation in the power-oriented public scale, a setup that restricted their access to both paid occupations and status-granting leisure activities of the time that occur outdoors, such as hunting

and rowing (Bourdieu 2001; Massey 1994; Parker 2010). The institutionalized anchoring of women to domesticity limited the circulation of femininity in the public sphere; as a result, masculinity became more visible in this spatial scale where much of the social status of individuals and social categories is determined. Fast forward to today when we see that some of this arrangement's outcomes are still spatially visible in the unbalanced number of public monuments, statues, and buildings that celebrate male figures and conventionally masculine domains, such as military feats and physically demanding sports (Fraser 1990; Ryan 1990).

In his second point, Smith (1992a) clarifies how individuals in subordinate social categories resist socially structured spatial patterns by seeking to acquire greater access to space in two ways: within and across scales. Within the lower status scales to which these actors' identities are anchored, they often claim space to improve their local status and subjective experiences, as when slum residents illegally use public property in their impoverished neighborhoods as if it is their own or factory workers use a company's space for personal enjoyment (de Certeau 1984).

Beyond within-scale dynamics, individuals in subordinate social categories also may launch themselves into higher status scales as a way of contesting power relations that demean their identities. Smith (1992a) refers to this process of moving across scales as *jumping scales*. He elaborates on this dynamic by focusing on how a highly marginalized group, homeless people, employ one of their iconic cultural expressions, their shopping carts. Practical reasons aside, homeless people use carts in response to the socio-spatial exclusion that cities usually impose on them. These objects enable them to jump from lower-status poor areas to higher-status public squares and tourist sites without having to leave their possessions behind. This scale jumping grants them the opportunity to beg for money from wealthier people and rest in safer areas. Smith's analysis concludes that visibly moving across scales is a central route through which

subordinate social categories use space to contest power mechanisms. Analogous dynamics mark events such as Gay Pride Parades, when millions of LGBTQ people occupy highly public sites to display symbols such as rainbow flags and leather clothes that represent their often suppressed, private, and subordinate gender identities (Kates and Belk 2001).

In summary, we employ three enabling concepts to further our theorizing regarding the political dimension of space in consumer research. We use *tactics* to characterize the spatial claims that actors in subordinate social categories make in politicized consumer identity projects, all the while remaining embedded in mainstream relations. We use *scales* to categorize the distinct spaces that constitute these actors' lives and the social relations that occur within them. Finally, we use *politics of scale* to highlight the impact of the social structuration of space on people's experiences and the types of spatial claims they make to oppose this structuration.

Enabled by this conceptual apparatus, we propose a model to explain how and why actors in subordinate consumer categories try to claim greater access to space for self-expressive consumption both within and across spatial scales. In doing so, we highlight the geosocial character of politicized consumer identity projects. This theoretical model is informed by the research design and empirical work described next.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND EMPIRICAL WORK

Our empirical work uses ethnography to examine the differential access to space that structures the consumption experiences of women in a particular identity position. We operationalize this work by sampling non-activist US women embedded in an ethos known as *the new cult of domesticity* (Matchar 2013). Diffused by celebrities such as Martha Stewart, stories

in major newspapers such as *The Washington Post* (Matchar 2011), and books on the *New York Times*' best-seller list (Garner 2004), this ethos is suitable for studying the nexus between space and politicized consumer identity projects because it explicitly seeks to reconceive women's relationships to space and consumption in two important ways.

First, like the Victorian cult of domesticity that preceded it, this ethos encourages women of sufficient means to embrace the home as a space where they can construct femininity through activities that have long been linked to their social category's household endeavors, such as cooking, decorating, and handcrafts (Groeneveld 2010; Wills 2007). But rather than casting these activities as obligatory in their construction of havens for their families, the new cult of domesticity frames them as volitional cultural expressions that women can and should perform in a self- rather than other-oriented mode. This ethos encourages them to do so in order to counter the ideological construction of the household as a place where women should concentrate on helping and caring for others (Coontz 2000; Hochschild 1989; Thompson 1996).

Second, unlike the Victorian cult of domesticity, the new cult of domesticity takes up the gendered, hierarchical divide between private and public scales. It problematizes the customary performance of the aforementioned activities within private spaces as contributing to an undervaluation of feminine consumer identities. Hence, the ethos calls on women to increase the public circulation of these expressions of femininity in order to increase the cultural recognition and valorization of their consumer identities. In short, the new cult of domesticity propels women to engage in identity politics by reimagining how, why, and where they perform some consumption activities that are cultural symbols of womanhood.

To provide a focused account of this ethos, we employ a grounded theory approach to study a consumption practice that has been at the forefront of the new cult of domesticity since its rise in

the 1990s: knitting (Matchar 2013; Wills 2007). Often dismissed as an archaic, dull, homey cultural expression of femininity, knitting has experienced quantitative and qualitative changes. It has grown into a favorite hobby for tens of millions of US women, who have formed thousands of in-person and online craft circles (Groeneveld 2010; Wills 2007). Attesting to this change, magazines as diverse as *The Economist* (2006) and *Parade* (Rochman 2013) ran stories on women’s renewed interest in knitting, with best-selling author Mark Penn (2007) being an early spotter of this social trend. A further signal of changes that occurred in knitting is the knitted pink hat on the cover of TIME magazine on Feb. 6, 2017; this hat became the symbol of the Women’s March against the recently inaugurated U.S. president staged by millions in over 500 US cities. While knitting is not a widely exalted practice, as Fields (2014) remarks, it is “not your grandma’s knitting” anymore either. It has attracted mostly college-educated women embedded in common middle-class jobs and social relations. They are aware of identity politics and knit for identity reasons beyond providing practical items for their families (Wills 2007).

As often occurs in grounded theory research, we did not set out to study consumers’ differential access to space; instead, we wanted to understand women’s renewed interest in traditional practices that mix consumption with production. The significance of space emerged as we became immersed in the empirical context. We noticed women intentionally using knitting to question spatial usage patterns at home and elsewhere, in a sense turning their needles into small swords to contest power mechanisms that constrain their self-expressive consumption. We thus followed the practice across multiple spaces, carrying out the three modes of ethnographic data collection: experiencing, enquiring, and examining (Wolcott 1999). Table 1 outlines this process.

Table 1: Overview of data collection

Mode	Main Methods	Main Data Sources
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<i>Experiencing</i>	Extended participant-observation Extended online observation	Local knitting shop ravelry.com
<i>Enquiring</i>	Long interviews Contextual survey	18 informants 110 respondents
<i>Examining</i>	Archival data Confirmatory observation	High-circulation media outlets Media outlets mentioned by informants Representative public events

Experiencing

Central to the new cult of domesticity is the proliferation of locally-owned fiber craft shops that were previously rare in the US marketplace (Fields 2014; Matchar 2013; Wills 2007). These shops are more than places where customers buy supplies and then leave. Instead, customers go to these shops to craft, visit with store personnel, and spend time in communal areas where they take classes and socialize with other customers (Fields 2014; Wills 2007).

Fieldwork began with participant-observation at one of these shops, which primarily sells yarn and other knitting supplies. The shop is located in a metropolitan area in the southwestern US, at the heart of a middle- and upper-middle class area populated by professionally active couples, young families, and retirees. The first author (male) visited this venue on roughly 60 occasions, varying the days and times, with visits lasting over 1 hour. The second author (female) visited it sporadically during the fieldwork phase and had been a customer prior to the project's inception. During participant-observation, the first author assumed the overt role of "buddy researcher" (Snow et al. 1986) to address ethical issues. He learned to knit to legitimize his interest in the craft with informants and reduce the intrusiveness that a non-knitter would create in the setting. On his first visits, he went with his wife to a weekly evening knitting circle to minimize potential disruptions caused by a male in a mostly female site. His visits later expanded beyond the weekly event. Across two years of concentrated and one year of sporadic fieldwork, he knitted and interacted with customers about many topics; sometimes, these

interactions became informal interviews, lasting up to 30 minutes. Reflecting his rapport with informants, he also attended private events at their homes, such as baby showers and Thanksgiving dinners. These observations and interactions were recorded as fieldnotes which serve as the primary data set because they provide documentation of behavior.

To broaden our sample beyond a single semi-public space, we employed online observation. The best online forums for this method allow observation of people directly involved in the focal phenomenon and feature a high number of interactions (Kozinets 2002b). The website *ravelry.com* meets these criteria. Founded in 2007, it has almost 8 million members and about 5,000 users logged on at any given time (accessed October 2018), providing handcrafters with discussion forums and online tools for project management as well as for mutual communication. From the forums, we gathered conversations about non-technical aspects of knitting, focusing on English language messages that included reference to US regions, craft stores, clubs and events. This dataset was useful to enrich our understanding and confirm that the themes that were emerging from our participant-observation had relevance to many other women in other locales.

Enquiring

We conducted 19 long interviews (McCracken 1988) to learn about knitters' biographies and general interests, with a focus on their activities in the private scale. This data supplemented *in situ* commentary by knitters in the shop as they talked with each other about their household activities, unprompted by the researcher. Eight interviewees were recruited through the participant-observation at the knitting shop. To add interpretive depth (Glaser and Strauss 1967), we also recruited 11 female knitters who shop at other craft stores. Of these 19 informants, half consistently visits other knitting stores and circles when they travel. We drew on their knowledge

to confirm that our observations at the focal knitting store represented other knitting shops.

Interviews lasted from 1 to 3 hours. Fifteen of them took place in informants' homes where the interviewees gave a tour of the rooms where they do their crafts and store their craft supplies. As table 2 shows, interviewees represent a range of ages, life stages, and middle class occupations. The concentration of these informants, along with the knitters observed in the shop, in the middle class is a consequence of who we encountered, not the result of prescreening. Most of the interviewees are part of a heterosexual couple and two-thirds of them have children.

Table 2: Informants interviewed

Name	Age	Ethnicity	Family status	Education/major	Main Occupation
Beth	60-69	Caucasian	Widow, no children	Bachelor/Russian	Private tutor Fraud investigator*
Carol	50-59	Caucasian	Married, no children	Bachelor/French	Paralegal*
Claire	40-49	Caucasian	Married, no children	Bachelor/Arts Education	Academic advisor
Clara	30-39	Hispanic	Engaged, no children	Master/Women's studies	Ph.D. student
Debbie	60-69	Caucasian	Remarried, 2 children	Master/History	Reading tutor High school teacher*
Emma	30-39	Caucasian	Married, 3 children	Bachelor/ Engineering	Academic advisor
Georgia	60-69	Caucasian	Divorced, 3 children, 3 grandchildren	Bachelor/ Mathematics	Entrepreneur
Julia	50-59	Caucasian	Married, no children	Master/Nursing	Entrepreneur
Katie	60-69	African- American	Married, 1 child	Bachelor/ Psychology	State park volunteer Social worker*
Kendra	60-69	Caucasian	Remarried, 3 children, 3 grandchildren	Bachelor/ Mathematics	Software developer
Laura	20-29	Caucasian	Married, 1 child	Bachelor/ Psychology	Psychological counselor
Linda	50-59	Caucasian	Remarried, 5 children, 4 grandchildren	Bachelor/Nursing	Nurse
Mary	50-59	Caucasian	Married, 2 children	Bachelor/Nursing	Nurse
Mandy	40-49	Caucasian	Married, 2 children	Master/Linguistics	Communication manager

Sarah	20-29	Caucasian	Married, no children	Master/Astrophysics	High school teacher
Sophie	40-49	Caucasian	Married, 1 child	Master/Linguistics	Probation officer
Supriti	30-39	Asian	Married, no children	Master/Biomedical engineering	Ph.D. student
Teresa	70-79	Hispanic	Married, 2 children, 2 grandchildren	Bachelor/French	Hospital volunteer Office worker*
Veronica	40-49	Caucasian	Divorced, 3 children	Some college	Retail store manager

* Primary occupation before retirement

To quantify certain features of the empirical context, we also employed a contextual survey (Singleton and Straits 2010), using our participant-observation and interview data as a guide in designing meaningful questions for respondents. Section 1 of the questionnaire focused on respondents' involvement in knitting; section 2 addressed their involvement in household tasks and opinions on some issues related to femininity and knitting; section 3 asked for demographics (see the web appendix for more details). The instrument was e-mailed to 1,120 customers who receive the local shop's newsletter. Also, it was left in the shop's main room with instructions asking customers to complete it. In both cases, respondents received a \$5 gift card for supplies at the store. In total, we obtained 110 valid responses (60% online; 40% printed) from customers with varying frequencies of visiting this retailer (30% do not visit it in a regular month). The survey thus expanded our sample to include knitters who would not be part of the data collection otherwise. The socio-economic profile of these respondents matched the middle class status of the interviewees in table 2 and the knitters in our participant-observation.

Examining

Consistent with previous research (Sandikci and Ger 2010), we assembled a dataset of visual and textual materials in order to understand the public character of the phenomenon of interest.

To ensure the significance of this dataset, we focused on materials that either: 1) appeared in high circulation newspapers, magazines, books, and websites or 2) were directly mentioned by our informants. These criteria led to much of the archive being about three public initiatives.

The first is *yarn graffiti*, a street art form in which crafters install their fiber crafts on public fixtures, including some highly symbolic ones such as the Wall Street bull. The second is *Stitch ‘N Pitch*, events at which knitters work on their projects during Major and Minor League Baseball games, often filling entire stadium sections. The third initiative is a precursor to the 2017 Women’s March known as the “Pussyhat Project.” This was a six-week endeavor in which knitters supported this massive protest by knitting and donating vibrant pink, hand-knit hats for marchers. Hats had two small triangles on the top to emulate a cat’s ears; they were called “pussyhats” as a way of reclaiming a vulgar term for female genitalia used by the incoming President in a widely viewed film clip in which he bragged about sexually assaulting women.

For each of these initiatives, we collected videos, images, and stories that circulated in professional and amateur media outlets. To confirm emerging interpretations, we complemented these mediated data in multiple ways. For *Stitch ‘N Pitch*, the first author traveled to a city that hosted a game to observe and interact with fiber crafters. For *yarn graffiti*, he visited and photographed graffiti sites in four major US cities. For the *Pussyhat Project*, the second author conducted additional fieldwork at the knitting shop and both authors followed the *Pussyhat Project*’s official webpage (www.pussyhatproject.com). Lastly, we further solidified our grasp of knitting’s public character by circling back to our informants, examining their online conversations about these initiatives and prompting some informants during our participant-observation to opine on them.

Analytical and Representational Strategy

Qualitative data analysis began with open coding and idiographic memos on participant-observation and interviews, which we iteratively compared to refine the coding system (Emerson et al. 2011). Analysis of our quantitative survey data involved calculating descriptive statistics. We then triangulated between these two data forms, looking for elements that confirmed, challenged, or expanded evolving interpretations (Lincoln and Guba 1985). After this initial analysis, additional data were collected purposively based on emergent themes (Spiggle 1994), with online observation and archival data playing a key role in shaping our understanding.

We actively sought negative cases in our dataset and performed two member checks to confirm and deepen our understanding of the context. One check involved a regular customer of the focal store; the other involved a knitter who has residences in two US states, where she frequently shops at different local stores and mingles with several knitters. As the ethnographic themes converged around the importance of space, we engaged with consumer research on this topic and with the literature on cultural geography to inform and frame the analysis.

Although some men knit, we focus our interpretation on the typical gender category among knitters, leaving gender comparisons for future research. Based on grounded theory's tenets (Corbin and Strauss 2014), we also choose not to offer an all-inclusive ethnography of knitters' experiences. This choice is consistent, for example, with Scott et al.'s (2017) select focus on the physical pain experienced by Tough Mudders rather than on other prevalent aspects of that activity. Likewise, we avoid a lengthy description of the camaraderie that typifies knitters' mutual social ties, as this would only reiterate the results from previous research on consumption communities (Muñiz Jr. and O'Guinn 2001). Instead, we focus on aspects that are both relevant and amenable to theory building about consumer struggles to obtain greater access to space for

self-expression. The data points we present in our analysis are neither the result of a random process nor cherry-picking. They have been chosen for their clarity in representing experiences that typify the experiences of many informants.

We turn now to theorizing this nexus, dividing our results into two sections. The first section historicizes knitting to explain how it has been reframed into a locus of consumer identity politics for women aligned with the new cult of domesticity. The second section analyzes the tactics these women enact to claim more space for their consumption in the private, semi-public, and public scales as a way of pursuing this identity project.

REFRAMING A CONSUMER IDENTITY

A Brief History of Knitting

In early modernity, women mostly knitted functional garments and blankets for their families. However, this practice lost much of its appeal with industrialization. As textile products became much cheaper for consumers, US families began to buy rather than make these items, and more women began to knit as a means of relaxing and expressing creativity (Gelber 1999).

Knitting for leisure gained normative force with the Victorian cult of domesticity mentioned earlier. This 19th century ethos cast knitting as a proper pastime for middle class women because it was viewed as representing the era's prevailing ideals of womanhood: homemaking, patience, and delicacy (Parker 2010). On the one hand, this led knitting to grow into an icon of middle class womanhood, holding a central place in the repertoires of families and schools as they socialized girls into femininity. On the other hand, the increasingly optional character of knitting in a Protestant society oriented toward utilitarian work led it to acquire the connotation of frivolity (Gelber 1999; Parker 2010).

The link between femininity, domesticity, and knitting remained strong well into the 20th century, making it a prime target for second-wave feminists of the 1960s and '70s. In a seminal book for this movement, *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir (1949, 634) writes disparagingly about women who knit or crochet: "...with needle or hook, woman sadly weaves the very nothingness of her days." This reproach of domestic practices was intended to propel women into the public world of paid work, particularly in male-dominated professions. While this rhetoric worked for many women, it backfired culturally. By insisting that paid work out of the home, with its masculine connotations, was more valuable than many of women's core domestic practices of the time, it reinforced the low cultural status of femininity and many of its key manifestations, thus considerably constraining women's self-expression (Scott 2005).

A core issue taken up by the new cult of domesticity is the persistence of this constraint on women's self-expression, despite the progress they have made in the domain of paid work since second-wave feminism. As evinced by a body of academic research and popular press books (Bryan-Wilson et al. 2010; Fields 2014; Groeneveld 2010; Kelly 2015; Matchar 2013; Wills 2007), the diffusion of this ethos has sensitized many women to the unfortunate resilience of some patriarchy-induced cultural disparities. In response, they have reframed the personal implications of their involvement with some undervalued symbols of feminine domesticity. We next explain two mechanisms that have reconfigured marketplace resources in ways that allowed women to reframe the personal meanings of their consumer identities as knitters, as well as its implications for their leisure enjoyment and identity politics. We conceptualize these two mechanisms as *incitement discourses* and *aesthetic repositioning*.

Reconfiguration of Marketplace Resources

Incitement Discourses. We use the term incitement discourse to refer to texts and narratives that seek to resignify existing activities and identity positions. Mass media have been a prime source of this type of discourse for knitters embedded in the new cult of domesticity. Books, blogs, and magazines have assisted many women in reimagining what their involvement with knitting can symbolize to them about womanhood.

A central actor in this process is Stephanie Pearl-McPhee, a doula who uses the label “Yarn Harlot” to brand her book series and a heavily visited blog (Wills 2007). In these materials that co-opt a demeaning term for women, Pearl-McPhee includes technical instructions and personal stories on knitting, while summoning women to engage and take pride in their crafts: “Buy the best [yarn] you can afford. The stuff you make is your legacy, and your time is really worth it” (Pearl-McPhee 2006, 50). Another author of incitement discourse is Debbie Stoller, a Ph.D. in Psychology of Women from Yale who started BUST, a feminist magazine that infuses claims of empowerment and skillfulness into traditional crafts. Also playfully deploying a derogatory term for women, Stoller launched the *Stitch ‘N Bitch* book series and website, where she interweaves craft designs with feminist assertions such as, “By loudly reclaiming old-fashioned skills, women are rebelling against a culture that seems to reward only the sleek, the mass-produced, the male” (Stoller 2003, 10). Her publications also criticize second-wave feminists who derided women’s domesticity: “All those people who looked down on knitting... housework... were not being feminist at all. In fact, they were being anti-feminist, since they seemed to think that only those things that men did, or had done, were worthwhile” (Stoller 2003, 7).

These incitement discourses do not promote knitting as functional or nostalgic or as a way to make gifts that will please others. Instead, they mix technical instructions for fiber crafts with statements that incite women to reconceive this feminized practice as a progressive act to

destabilize insidious power hierarchies. Our informants often refer to these discourses when pondering the cultural status of feminized activities in general and knitting in particular, as in this *in situ* interaction with Karen (50-59, judge), a regular customer at the focal knitting shop who started knitting after reducing her work hours:

Researcher: Karen, you were saying something about the Yarn Harlot.

Karen: Yes. Whether people are conscious of it or not, they tend not to value the activities that women do: housework, soap operas, crafts, knitting. This is something the Yarn Harlot blog discusses when she tells stories of what she has heard from other people on knitting. So, I think, again, knitting is seen as just this mindless way for a little old lady to pass the time... Let's see, what's something about making that typically draws men? Like homebrewing. I don't think people discount the value of homebrewing as much as they discount knitting. But it's the same as knitting: you spend more on the materials, and more of your time if you're a brewer than if you would just go out and buy beer from a store.

These women's reframing of their consumer identities as knitters by drawing from incitement discourses does not attempt to change what they can do, as when females try to prove themselves by doing physical sports that counter their socialization into femininity (Thompson and Üstüner 2015). Rather, this reframing aims to assert women's cultural significance through something they have long done. Knitters' biographies often add a deeper meaning to this resignification; many have learned how to knit from a close female relative who, to some extent, undervalued her feminized craft skills, as Laura (50-59, small business owner) confided during a store visit: "My mother made things out of very cheap yarn. They were made with love and good technique, but they didn't look great. But I wear them. It's a way of honoring her. She's never valued her skills the way she should have, so I do that." Rather than rejecting knitting because of its archaic

connotations (Üstüner and Holt 2007), our informants embrace it precisely because of its deep association with women's cultural history.

In this process of reframing the consumer identity of being a knitter, incitement discourses are vital to help women reimagine the possibilities of this aspect of their femininities. In addition to this discursive reconfiguration, a second reconfiguration of resources is knitters' exposure to aesthetic changes in materials that make the opening of a new identity position as a knitter palpable and visible for them.

Aesthetic Repositioning. Until the 1990s, craft books and magazines emphasized knitting techniques, giving scant attention to colors or fibers. The patterns that these publications offered looked fairly traditional, such as lace shawls, argyle cardigans, and fair-isle sweaters. Aligned with these conditions, national chain craft stores, the only places where most women could find knitting supplies, primarily sold yarns made of synthetic fibers in basic color schemes. While such patterns and stores still serve the needs of more practically-minded and price sensitive knitters, for women immersed in the new cult of domesticity, the availability of very different material resources has helped open a new consumer identity position for knitters.

The local shops that are at the core of knitting's revival often claim to be "knitting boutiques." There, knitters find a wide range of new objects, including fine natural fibers such as silk, merino, and alpaca, available in many textures, tantalizing variegated colors, and prices often exceeding \$25 per skein (for comparison, at national chain stores, synthetic yarn skeins usually cost about \$6, or less if on sale). Knitters at local boutiques also can indulge in specialized needles made from materials as diverse as bamboo and aluminum, with some sets priced at over \$200. Like other knitters, Mandy (40-49, public relations) and Mary (50-59, nurse)

separately highlight these changes in their interviews:

Mandy: Suddenly, there were knitting stores everywhere, and [fashion] designers getting into knitting, creating cool patterns... So, you have all of these boutique shops with high-end yarns, needles, bags, and pattern books. I don't think that really existed before.

Mary: Knitting is much more artistic now, I'd dare say. Even a project with repetition will have a lot of decisions about fabric, yarn weight, needles, color... You can easily make one-of-a-kind things... Knitting is not about ugly, bulky sweaters, unless you want it to be.

These changes in knitting's material objects are another case of the trend toward aestheticization and refinement that has shaped many markets in late modernity (Featherstone 2007). Whereas these changes instill in consumers a desire for sensory development (Maciel and Wallendorf 2017), for knitters they also play a resignifying role. These aesthetic changes reposition a visually outdated, disparaged practice as being closer to a prestigious social field, namely high fashion, and ingrained cultural standards that put a premium on beauty, particularly regarding women (Slater 1997). Coupled with the incitement discourses outlined earlier, this aesthetic repositioning equips these women to question their hobby's dull connotation, as with Mary's view that knitting has become more artistic.

Moreover, this aesthetic repositioning sharpens knitters' abilities to more critically view the continued undervaluation of their hobby and consumer identities. Supriti (30-39, graduate student), a fast-paced woman of Indian descent working in the male-dominated field of biomedical engineering, reflects:

You know *Vogue*, **the** fashion magazine. Well, *Vogue* has had *Vogue Knitting* for a number of years, and many designers now use hand-knit pieces in their collections... But many people still see knitting as this crappy thing. This boils down to gender in my view. It's the

same thing with arts and crafts. Why is painting an art and knitting or quilting a craft? One is done by men and the other by women. It's not because of their aesthetic value.

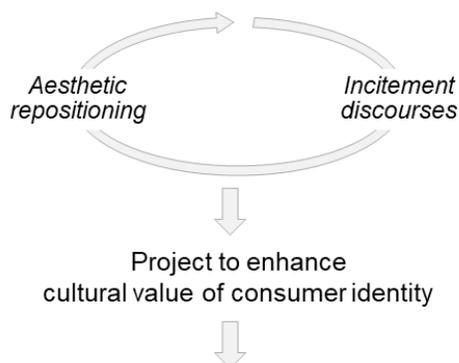
Knitting's aesthetic changes and occasional inclusion in the high-fashion world counterargue the received view that this activity is demeaned due to its intrinsic attributes. These changes induce women to discern knitting's low status as a symbolic prism refracting power hierarchies that favor that which is masculine, aggressive, and public over the feminine, caring, and domestic.

In sum, incitement discourses and aesthetic repositioning are two mechanisms that form the basis for knitters to reframe their understanding of their hobby by connecting it to a politicized consumer identity project. To be clear, this political layer of signification has not replaced other reasons that pull women to this craft. Just as in Victorian times, contemporary women still knit to relax and feel creative, as Veronica (40-49, store manager) notes, "To see something coming out of your hands is pretty exciting, [while] it also soothes you." They continue to knit to express care for others, as when they make gifts for family, friends, and others, a point made by Katie (60-69, social worker), who often knits hats for people going through chemotherapy: "Knitting is the material expression of love; a hand-knit piece has all those good feelings built in it." But in parallel to these attractions, this added political layer has alerted many knitters to the persistence and consequences of power hierarchies that undervalue consumption that expresses femininity. This reframing creates a fertile ground for these women to construct a project that aims to convince others of the cultural value of their hobby and invigorated consumer identities. The process that initiates this consumer identity project, with incitement discourses and aesthetic repositioning as generative mechanisms, is depicted in the top half of figure 1.

Figure 1: The use of space in politicized consumer identity projects

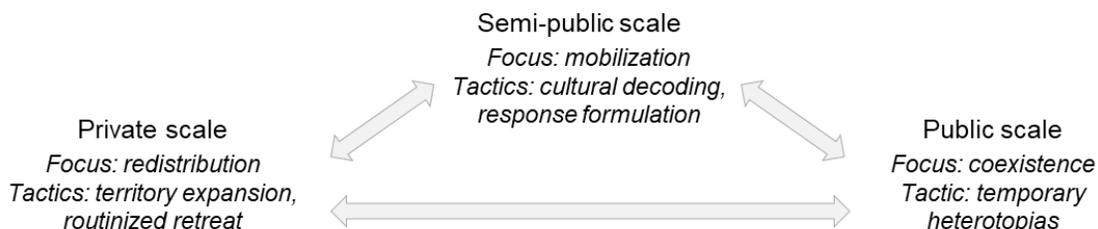
Reframing Consumer Identity

Marketplace resource reconfiguration through:



Claiming Space in the Politics of Consumer Identity

Ideological and material transfers between scales:



The resultant consumer identity project is socially structured in that it reflects the paradoxical mix of privilege and disadvantage with which US middle-class women, such as our informants, live. On the one hand, their social class has directly benefitted from the professional opportunities brought by second-wave feminism; they have enough money to spend on somewhat costly leisure activities. On the other hand, they experience cultural disadvantage due to their gender: attributes and activities aligned with femininity continue to have less social currency than those associated with masculinity (Connell 2000; Skeggs 2004). From this intersectional position, these women neither hold themselves to high standards of gender activism nor aim to overthrow the social order. In fact, they cherish being the primary caretakers of their children, and more than a few have taken some time to prioritize this responsibility over

their careers. None of them think that men and women must be alike, only that the activities associated with each gender should be equally valued.

The broader gender ideology buttressing this identity project and the new cult of domesticity has been termed “everyday” and “choice” feminism. These terms refer to a recent vision of femininity that pursues gender equality through multiple routes and situations, while typically choosing to do so by fusing politics with consumption and popular culture (Heywood 2006; Wood 2006). People who employ this ideology want gender equality even though they may hesitate to overtly claim to be “feminists,” a controversial label that many associate with radicalism (Catterall et al. 2000; Kelly 2015). They prefer the term “women’s empowerment.”

As with other versions of contemporary feminism (Heywood and Drake 1997), women aligned with the new cult of domesticity may lack the grand ambitions of earlier feminist waves. They do not seek legislative or broad policy changes. At the same time, their identity projects focus on a facet of gender inequality that prior waves of feminism have largely overlooked: the belittling of feminine identities and their conventional expressions through consumption. For these women, the central paradox is how to reconcile this insidious, often-internalized belittling with a desire to express themselves and be respected through what is broadly construed as women’s culture (Gledhill 1997). In our empirical context, knitting is the element of this culture that women employ to navigate their paradoxical position in the consumption realm. Their identity project is revisionist, not revolutionary. Their actions aim to alleviate and interrogate their experiences of cultural disadvantage and open up novel meanings for their consumer identities within their everyday lives.

Having outlined the formation and scope of their revisionist project, the next section explicates how and why these women use knitting to pursue this project as they tactically act on

their differential access to space for consumption in the private, semi-public, and public scales. As we will show, their claims to space reflect the close ties between this affordance of social structure and the power relations that shape their consumer experiences.

CLAIMS TO SPACE IN THE POLITICS OF CONSUMER IDENTITY

This section focuses on the next actions that occur in the claims to space of these politicized consumer identity projects. These actions are depicted in the bottom half of figure 1, which represents how knitters articulate their consumer identity projects so as to gain greater access to space and convince others to value women's culture. This articulation happens simultaneously in three geographical scales: the private, semi-public, and public scale. Within these three scales, knitters enact a set of tactics with three complementary spatial foci: *redistribution*, *mobilization* and *coexistence*. The analysis presented in this section begins with the semi-public scale because of its central position in knitters' identity projects; within this scale, they repurpose servicescapes into contingent sites of *mobilization* for their political tactics in the private and public scales. The analysis then moves to the private scale, to show how knitters negotiate the *redistribution* of domestic spaces as part of their engagement in identity politics. Lastly, the analysis concentrates on how these women use selected public spaces to build *coexistence* with other culturally valued activities, as they struggle to enhance the cultural value of their consumer identities. In analyzing their tactics, we identify two major links that connect knitters' identity projects across these three spatial scales: ideological and material empowerment (bottom of figure 1). The relevance of these two types of empowerment is not accidental; it is a reverberation of the incitement discourses (ideological) and aesthetic repositioning (material) mechanisms analyzed earlier.

Semi-public Scale: Repurposing Servicescapes into Contingent Sites of Mobilization

As knitters reimagine what being a knitter can signify, they have formed thousands of craft circles that meet in various semi-public servicescapes, such as libraries, coffee shops, shopping malls, and yarn stores (Wills 2007). In the digital world, they use the website ravelry.com extensively to connect with millions of like-minded hand crafters. This section uses the observational data from these spaces to demonstrate the political impact of knitters' use of the semi-public scale on their consumer identity project. In particular, we explain how these women contingently repurpose servicescapes into sites of mobilization that are ideologically interlinked with their tactics in the private and public scales.

Although most knitting circles do not follow an openly feminist agenda, the interactions that occur there often include identity politics, supporting McDowell's (1999) conceptualization of the semi-public scale's distinct role for subordinate social categories. Knitters enact two tactics in this scale: 1) *cultural decoding*, which is a process of deconstructing the power mechanisms that undervalue their consumer identities and 2) *response formulation*, which is a process of imagining ways to handle manifestations of these mechanisms. These two tactics are shown in figure 1 under "Semi-public scale." This fieldnote excerpt about a conversation observed among knitters at the knitting shop introduces these two tactics, which often co-occur:

In today's visit, six women were knitting by the front window, around the colonial-style table that has craft magazines and some needles on it. A younger knitter (20-29) told other customers while reading one of these magazines, "This [knitting design] is so lovely, but my husband suggested I shouldn't start new projects until I'm done with my other ones. He thinks I've got too many projects and my stash [supply of yarns] is taking too much space [smile]." Adele (60-69) quickly interjected, "You should say what I told my husband once.

He asked, ‘Are you crazy?! Why did you buy more yarn for a fourth sweater? Why don’t you finish the other three first?’ I looked right into his eyes and told him, ‘Actually, those projects are the reason why I don’t go crazy, and the yarn is beautiful.’” After a group laugh and a short lull, Michelle (50-59) added more solemnly, “I was reading the other day that the number of golfers in the US is almost equivalent to the number of fiber crafters, but golf has all these pro stores and competitions, and knitting doesn’t. There’s no knitting race. And I bet that the money golfers put into their hobby is a lot more than what we do most of the time.”

Within such servicescapes, knitters find entertainment and camaraderie, as is common in retail spaces that play the role of third places (Oldenburg 1989). The significance of knitters’ use of these places lies in two different aspects. First, in tracing the history of third places, Oldenburg (1989) notes that access to such places has been skewed toward males, whose identities are more anchored in the public scale and less associated with the performance of ongoing domestic tasks. By contrast, women’s consumer identities have been more strongly linked to the home and the servicescapes of department and grocery stores, where they tend to focus on shopping, often for others, rather than on meaningfully interacting with other customers (Giard et al. 1998; Miller 1998). Second, knitters’ participation in this scale has a political aspect that differs from what customarily happens in third places (Debenedetti et al. 2014; Rosenbaum 2006). In a recurrent type of interaction in knitter gatherings, when a woman slips into an internalized sense of subordination (e.g., by uncritically accepting her husband’s disciplinary suggestion), other women instantly equip her with arguments to uphold her identity investments as a knitter. These counterarguments go from restating the psychological benefits of their hobbies to comparing knitting to male-dominated areas of self-expression that hold higher cultural status, like golf. In our dataset, it is usually older women who play this mentorship role about domestic relations and

cultural hierarchies. In such interactions, knitters enact the tactic we refer to as cultural decoding by helping one another understand and question power mechanisms such as internalized feelings that constrain their self-expression. Further, they devise responses to mundane articulations of these mechanisms, which often come from well-meaning friends and family members, thereby enacting the tactic we refer to as response formulation.

An internalized power mechanism that is focal in these two tactics is middle-class women's socially constructed other-orientation (Chodorow 2000; Hochschild 1989). As in the online conversation below, this orientation is a recurrent object of discussion because it confines the various motives of women's involvement in knitting to one of altruism, thus constraining their self-expression through an activity that they have embraced as one that can be self-oriented:

GoldPhoenix: I think a huge part of this attitude [people assuming knitting is altruistically done to provide for others] is because most knitters are *women*, and women aren't supposed to be nice to themselves. Particularly traditional, old-fashioned types who do dreadfully female things like *knit*. (end sarcasm)

Lollybean: I've only been knitting a few months, but I've already got this. I was nearly finished with my first real project (socks for me!), and someone I've known for a long time saw me knitting and asked who those were for. I said they were for me. She was shocked.

Joyfulheart: Yeah, I get that too. "Oh, who are you knitting THAT for?" And the look of astonishment when I announce that it's "all about me." Thanks to this thread I'm going to work on coming up with a greater variety of answers. Because I'm really really really tired of the ridiculous idea that those who knit, knit only for others.

Cultural decoding and response formulation often occur in relatively long discussions that mix witty and solemn statements, as shown above. In addition, cultural decoding often happens in

shorter, emergent interactions that happen in a wide range of situations. A typical form of such interaction is banter, which knitters use to downplay their social category's expected other-orientation, as in this fortuitous encounter between two knitters observed at the shop:

It was about 2 pm on a Friday afternoon at [the knitting store], when a female customer, about 60 years old, arrived and spotted her friend, about 45 years old, looking for some yarn on a shelf. The arriving customer stopped abruptly, put her hands on her waist, and said loudly: "Hey, you! Shopping for yarn at this time! Who is taking care of the house? What kind of woman are you?" Both laughed.

The recurrence of wit in knitters' long and short interactions to deconstruct power mechanisms is meaningful. It echoes the emphasis in the ideology of everyday feminism on fusing fun with politics. Also, as Freud notes (1916/1993), humor is a common way to discharge tensions created by one's temporary distance from social norms and expectations, in this case those that prescribe women's prioritization of housework over personal interests (Bianchi 2011).

Deconstructing women's expected other-orientation is so central in knitters' consumer identity projects that they created forums on ravelry.com titled "Selfish knitters & crocheters" and "They don't believe you knit for yourself." There, they tell of experiences when people assumed their craft projects were for others, sharing their responses to these expectations about women's leisure: "I've got this [comments that I should be knitting for others] from time to time... My response, if I'm feeling snarky [is] 'I've hundreds of hours vested in making this—I don't know many people who are worthy of such an effort'" (dmagali). Interwoven in these conversations is an assertion of an enhanced valuation of one's identity as a knitter and, more broadly, as a consumer who does not perform this feminine activity only to help or please others.

Feminism has often pursued a scale-based agenda, seeking to turn women's domestic issues

into public ones. Second-wave feminists problematized women's attachment to domesticity and their resulting isolation, promoting their voluntary association in consciousness-raising groups out of the home to turn the personal into the political. Knitters' enactments of the new cult of domesticity also bring the political into the personal by construing the desire to gather as empowering rather than pathological. However, in contrast to '60s-era consciousness-raising groups, they also embrace many traditional facets of femininity such as casual chatting, emotional support, and interest in feminized cultural expressions.

In short, knitters have greatly expanded their access to the semi-public scale. In some spaces such as yarn shops, their presence is presumed. But enabling identity politics is not the main purpose of yarn shops, and it is clearly not the goal of the many libraries, coffee shops, and shopping malls where knitters also regularly meet. The same is true of *ravelry.com*, whose stated mission is simply to be "a place for knitters, crocheters, designers, spinners, weavers and dyers to keep track of their yarn, tools, project and pattern information, and look to others for ideas and inspiration." Instead, knitters act on these spaces tactically for "unofficial purposes" (de Certeau 1984). By pairing cultural decoding with response formulation, they contingently repurpose them into mobilization sites for identity politics, offering and obtaining ideological support for their struggles in the private and public scales.

Offering a more detailed analysis of what happens in the private scale is the next section's focus. To fully untangle the meaning of knitters' tactics in this scale, the section starts with an overview of the social structuration of the home as a gendered space and then moves on to explain why and how these women act on such structuration as part of their identity projects.

Private Scale: Redistributing Domestic Spaces

Notwithstanding the many changes in gender relations since the Victorian cult of domesticity, the home continues to be reconstructed as a central place for the expression of feminine identities. In the 1950s, mass media and advertisers extensively cast women as the scientific managers of the home, encouraging them to find fulfilment in family-oriented consumption and housework (Coontz 2000; Friedan 1963). In the 1980s, as part of the backlash against second-wave feminism, conservative institutions framed women's allegedly unique nurturing skills as vital for recreating harmonious homes to offset the fierce workplace competition of that period, particularly within the middle and upper middle class (Faludi 1991).

On the one hand, this institutionalized gendering of the home has granted women heightened moral authority and technical expertise in this space (Hochschild 1989; Spain 1992); but on the other hand, it has constrained their relationship to it in a way that they often resent. Across social classes and family compositions, women continue to perform a greater share of domestic duties than do their male partners. As research consistently shows, they continue to retain primary responsibility for household tasks such as cleaning, food provisioning, and family ritual organization (Bianchi et al. 2000; Bianchi 2011; Fischer and Arnold 1990; Miller 1998; Moision et al. 2004; Thompson 1996; Wallendorf and Arnould 1991). This structuration of the private scale often is a stressor for women and a reason for their reduced access to regular leisure activities (Fraser 2002; Radway 1984). Thus, although the home has been constructed as "women's place," the ways that women relate to this space often leads them to experience it ambivalently. The home is a castle, where they enjoy a culturally prescribed moral authority and technical expertise, but also a prison, where they have tenuous command over their own routines because they are expected to prioritize the needs of others (Fraser 2002; Hochschild 1989).

This structural condition is not different for our informants. According to our survey, on

average they perform 75% of the cooking, 73% of grocery shopping, 68% of the cleaning, and 63% of childcare in their households, in addition to their other responsibilities that typically include paid work outside the home. Relatedly, 65% state they would like to receive more help from other household members in these tasks. Their experiences lead many to articulate, often with gender undertones, that their leisure is a privilege, as Emma (30-39, academic counselor) does in this interview when discussing her regular involvement in knitting and beading:

It's a privilege to get to do optional things, just because you love them.... Most people in this world don't get to do that, and often times they can't. So, I do recognize my hobby as a privilege.... [But] as a woman, a wife, and a working mother, I have to *fight* for it. It's different for men, I guess. They seem to disconnect more easily from housework... I guess they just take for granted that we'll take care of the house when they go out.

Knitters do most of their knitting at home, making projects for themselves and their loved ones often while they attend to other domestic tasks, as when they knit while doing laundry. At first glance, one might view their behavior as merely reproducing the Victorian cult of domesticity, or perhaps the juggling lifestyle (Thompson 1996). However, our fieldwork reveals that this view of knitters who are aligned with the new cult of domesticity does not fit the data. Instead, their homes are prime sites for the articulation of their identity politics through what Emma alludes to as a “fight.” There, they translate their reframed understanding of knitting and the ideological empowerment they get at servicescapes into tactics seeking to revise the patterns of access to domestic space that, to them, reflect their subordinate position within household power relations. They experience these patterns as limiting the expression and cultural value of their gendered consumer identities. They use two main tactics to oppose this social structuration of domestic spaces: *territory expansion* and *routinized retreat* (see figure 1 under “Private scale”).

We use the term territory to refer to spatial niches in which individuals control their level of social accessibility (Goffman 1997). As Goffman (1997) observes, those in privileged positions are regarded as being more entitled to have territories where they can have privacy. Conversely, people in subordinate positions are less entitled to territories; they have to be available to others, particularly those with greater power, and perform tasks in sequences and frequencies that are externally determined.

As a starting point for unpacking knitters' tactic of domestic territory expansion, hear Katie's (60-69, social worker) story about using her hobby to build an arena of social inaccessibility at home. Katie lives with her college-age son and Bob, her husband for more than 20 years:

When we were moving, I told Bob I wanted a room for my crafts, *my* knitting nook. He always had a room for his golf gear and gun collection. So, we redesigned the upper floor to have the nook. It's *my* space. Sometimes, I don't even do any craft there. I may go there just to dream on my next project, fondle yarn, or read something, a book, a magazine. When I'm there, they [husband and son] forget about me for a while.

Almost 100 years ago, Virginia Woolf (1929/1995) asserted a woman's need for a room of her own, in her case to pursue literary interests uninterrupted by family demands. As a variant of this assertion, knitters use leisure to claim domestic areas where they can experience a higher degree of inaccessibility from these demands. While these areas may be small, many knitters celebrate their attainment in discussions with their craft circles. On ravelry.com, these celebrations are the sole purpose of the lively thread "Flash your stash storage," where knitters post messages about their craft spaces, as when MaggyFD shared a photo of her new craft room while referring to Woolf's age-old struggle: "I got so much inspiration (and information) from this thread when we moved a few months ago, and I got 'a room of my own'... I wanted to come back and share [it]."

Through such interactions, knitters stitch another ideological connection between the private and semi-public scales as they inspire others to enact similar spatial claims at home.

Knitters' overt claims about their "nooks" contrast with female romance readers' practice of hiding their books from kin and finding non-disruptive times to read as leisure (Radway 1984). Knitters' claims also differ from working mothers' practice of waking up before everyone else in the household to pursue their interests, without upsetting other family members' routines (Fournier 1998; Thompson 1996). Whereas romance readers and working mothers strive to comply with the demands legitimated by the Victorian cult of domesticity and its latter inflections, knitters opt to adjust the unwavering other-orientation that these constructions mandate in the private scale. They overtly try to avoid having their feminine identities confined to the roles of maid and mother, using their leisure to revise their socially patterned relationship to domestic spaces in order to be able to *not* respond to others' needs.

Sometimes, creating physical segregation in a separate room is impractical for knitters because of the layout of their homes or their financial priorities. In such situations, knitters use props to erect symbolic barriers around themselves, as with Claire (40-49, academic advisor), who lives in a two-bedroom house with her husband and a cat:

I love being at home with my husband, but I sometimes need something intellectually challenging to do! I then put in earplugs while I knit in the living room to have time for myself... It says to my husband, "Don't interrupt me... to ask like, where things are or if we should buy more milk... Let me be in *my zone* [hands moving toward chest] now."

Though the challenges to expand leisure territories are higher for knitters with young children, they are also present for those without children at home, like Claire. Being in her "zone," an experience of cognitive absorption and disconnection from the social world (Csikszentmihalyi

1996), involves suspending interruptions by her husband. Moreover, it involves suspending women's common feeling that work around the home is never really done (Henderson 1990; McGinnis et al. 2003). Thus, knitters' leisure territories entail a dual suspension of women's socially constructed other-orientation and domestic accessibility: these spatial niches let these women forget and be forgotten while they access the opportunity to lose track of time, a lapse mostly available to those in privileged positions (Zerubavel 1981).

Most knitters report that their domestic partners support their leisure: on a survey question scaled from 0 to 10 (10 = very supportive), their average rating for their husbands' supportiveness of their hobby is 8. While this result suggests a high acceptance of these women's regular involvement in leisure, our methodological triangulation with interviews reveals that this support usually had to be somehow earned through what Emma earlier described as a "fight." This struggle is particularly salient when, in addition to using their territories at times, knitters use leisure as a means to routinely retreat from domesticity, the second tactic listed under "Private scale" in figure 1.

Routinized retreat may involve going to their domestic leisure territories, but it more often consists of leaving the household to go to the servicescapes described earlier, as with weekly attendance at a knitting circle. Consider Sophie (40-49, parole officer), who participates in the weekly meetings of a craft circle in a shop located 30 minutes from her house. To gain this spatial mobility, she had multiple negotiation rounds with her career-driven husband until they settled on the conditions for her regular withdrawal from the private scale:

I told him [husband], "I take care of you, [their six-year-old daughter], the house, but no one takes care of me [hands on her chest]." So, once a week when I come here [craft circle meeting], it's this "Ahhh." I really relax [eyes closed, sighing with a smile]. He feeds Emily,

helps her with homework, and realizes what I do on a day-to-day basis. I'm like, "It's not easy, right?" If you do everything all the time, then he doesn't realize how hard it is, and you become resentful... I told my husband, "I don't want to become resentful. I understand your hours, but I need to have a breather." He traveled three weeks in a row in August. When he got home, I was very stressed... He said, "I know that it's very tiring. I'm sorry you didn't get to go to your craft group." And it's good for my husband to bond with [their daughter]. He understood the need for the breather, but at first, I would come home and there would be dishes in the sink. I was mad at him! I'd spend an hour cleaning. So, we talked about that, like "I expect you to clean. If I go out, then start the dishwasher and make sure the house looks the way I left it. It's a respect thing." So, now he's okay with that.

Regularly retreating from home is contentious not only because it bluntly puts other household members in charge of domestic duties for a time, but also because of what it means. This form of retreat plainly asserts that the household is one's property instead of one's prison. Like Sophie, Laura (20-29, psychological counselor) also had to negotiate her routinized retreat with her husband, a biking enthusiast:

My husband used to go biking every weekend, and I stayed at home with our son. Or I'd go with him and watch [their son] while he biked. I was not working [out of the home] by then, but still, I didn't think it was fair. Now we take turns. Every other Saturday I have the priority to have some "girl time" at [knitting shop]... Of course, I had to *ask* for it. He didn't like it at first, you know, he loves biking, but he eventually understood, or so I think.

Couples often underestimate the skills involved in one another's responsibilities, with childcare and housework being particularly susceptible to this underestimation; these are unpaid tasks that often are performed away from the attention field of other family members (Hochschild 1989).

Like other informants, Sophie and Laura use their leisure to counter this tendency. By routinely withdrawing from the private scale to knit, they systematize a way to increase their partners' exposure to these tasks, if only temporarily. As Sophie's story suggests, some partners may initially skirt doing all the work, but the routinized nature of knitters' retreat gives them a chance to change this resistance. They use their routinized retreat to both assert their consumer identities and build more respect for the feminine, as this tactic often leads them to see that their partners then better appraise the effort needed to perform some feminized domestic tasks well.

Men living with female romantic partners tend to view their domestic leisure from the counterpoint it offers to paid work (Moisio et al. 2013). While paid jobs involve unwanted tasks, deadlines, and some alienation from the output of one's labor, leisure relies on high degrees of spontaneity and autonomy (Gelber 1999). For most knitters who are in committed relationships with men, leisure also acquires meaning from its contrast with their unpaid, greater responsibility for childcare and housework. Sarah (20-29, teacher) and Emma (30-39, academic advisor) highlight this socially structured meaning-making schema in separate interviews:

Sarah: Housework *has* to be. It exists without my choosing. Knitting is a choice... I usually think of housework as an annoying obstacle to getting into what I really like doing, like knitting or reading or going out.

Emma: When our kids were little, for the first year and half of each of their lives I stayed home.... I loved doing that, but sometimes I felt like, "I just can't give 100% of my attention to this. I cannot sit here at the park and just watch you..." They have a plastic slide, and they like to put a hose on it, and they like me to watch them. With knitting, I can sit out there and go, "Oh, uh-huh. That's nice. I like that. Why don't you try doing that the other way, now." And I can do a few rows while they try to figure that out... Knitting gives me a sort of

intellectual engagement that parenting often doesn't.

Only one interviewee significantly departs from this mental schema. Julia (50-59, entrepreneur) is a lesbian who lives with a long-term partner in a large estate, where they run a small business that dyes cotton for local craft stores. We interpret this negative case as the result of two factors. First, Julia reports an egalitarian division of housework, in which she and her partner are interested in doing different tasks (e.g., Julia likes to dust and vacuum; her partner likes to cook). As members of the same gender, these women's relationship with the private scale includes a disposition to do housework that is higher than what men usually acquire through their socialization. Second, both women are involved in the world of women's crafts, personally and professionally; they are on the same side of knitters' identity politics.

Expanding territories and routinizing retreats from household are not ways to revolutionize domestic life. Rather than a counterculture based on total opposition to mainstream values, knitters seek to revise existing institutions (Hall and Jefferson 1976). Their project aims to assert the cultural value of their consumer identities and expand the possibilities for their self-expression. In the private scale, where these identities are culturally anchored, this involves within-scale tactics to directly adjust some asymmetries in their access to self-oriented spaces and thus improve their subjective experiences.

As explained next, this project also includes across-scale tactics (Smith 1992) with a complementary focus: to launch these identities into the public eye. We first analyze why and how knitters enact these tactics in light of their identity position in social structure; we then specify how these tactics ideologically and materially empower knitters' tactics in the private and semi-public scales.

Public Scale: Creating Spatial Coexistence

Knitters have devised multiple ways to emplace their historically domestic consumer identities into public spaces. This has been so common that on ravelry.com, they created the thread “What is the oddest place?” to brag about crafting in unusual public settings, including NASCAR races and criminal justice courts. Beyond these individual cases of public emplacement, knitters have devised programmatic ways to enhance the public visibility of their consumer identities. *World Wide Knit in Public Day* (<http://www.wkipday.com/>) is a set of annual events where women knit together in public places on a day in June. *Knit-out & Crochet* is an initiative in which fibercrafters regularly gather to socialize and share techniques always in “a high-traffic area” to bring “knitting, crocheting and yarn crafts to the public's attention” (Craft Yarn Council 2015). Moreover, it is common for knitters to take their craft projects to many local cultural events, such as theater and cinema festivals.

Knitters do not enact these performances merely as a way to fill out little stretches of time, nor are the places where many of these performances occur chosen at random. Rather, these performances constitute ways of jumping scales; they involve using symbolic public spaces to counter the historical containment of some feminized activities in the private scale while asserting new meanings for their identities as knitters. We conceptualize these tactics to jump scales as *temporary heterotopias*, drawing on Foucault’s definition of heterotopias as spaces that juxtapose seemingly incompatible elements in ways that both represent and invert the social order (Foucault and Miskowiec 1986).

A representative case of such heterotopias is the program called *yarn graffiti*. This initiative involves producing large-scale knitted pieces to cover public fixtures, such as city bridges and statues (Hamilton 2013; Wollan 2011), as well as smaller pieces to cover lamp posts, tree trunks,

and local statues. Knitters engage in this form of graffiti both individually and collectively. Regardless of the number of participants and installation sizes, they always execute this tactic with colorful handcrafted pieces in high-circulation places, as shown in photos 1 and 2.

Photo 1: Street fixtures bombed with yarn



Photo 2: Statue bombed with knitted scarf



In contrast to standard types of graffiti such as spray paint tagging, yarn graffiti is a claim to space that does not damage public fixtures because the installations are provisional, nor does it spread hostile messages that may disengage passersby or spark their scorn (Visconti et al. 2010). This tactic resonates with middle class knitters because it allows them to pursue their revisionist form of identity politics while retaining the socially constructed ethics of care that are expected of their social category (Chodorow 1978). In an exemplary data point, Mandy (40-49, public relations) demonstrates this resonance when speaking about the appeal of participating in yarn graffiti amidst her other responsibilities, which include being the primary caretaker of two children and the newly hired communication manager at a regional firm: “Yarn graffiti is a type of warming, but not global warming (chuckles). Society is depressing sometimes, with so much

misery and violence. So, I feel it brings people together and spreads some happiness around.”

Knitters do not use this form of heterotopia to gain individual prestige. They usually leave their graffiti unsigned or tagged as a craft circle’s deed, installing it at night, out of people’s sight. In this sense, yarn graffiti differs from regular graffiti, which is a way for many street artists to seek status by signing their creations with pseudonyms that their peers can identify. Also in this sense, yarn graffiti differs from gay parades, where participants come out in broad daylight to show their sexual identities to large audiences (Kates and Belk 2001). In contrast to their domestic confrontations, knitters’ public tactics hesitate between assertiveness and anonymity, a common approach for actors in subordinate social categories who want to oppose social conventions without attracting personal sanctions (de Certeau 1984; J. Scott 1985).

Rather than seeking greater individual prestige or immediate improvements in their daily experiences, knitters use this heterotopia to pursue a more collective, long-term goal. On the one hand, they uphold the link between women and fiber crafts, gently wrapping public objects and symbols in ways that juxtapose the warmth, homeyness, and femininity of knitted yarn with the coldness, austerity, and masculinity of public fixtures (Visconti et al. 2010). In Beth’s (60-60, private tutor) words, “it’s like cuddling these objects.” But on the other hand, by constructing knitting as street art, these women open up novel meanings for their consumer identities. They distance these identities from their historical connotations of dullness and domesticity, linking them instead to the creative and political freedom that art expresses in society (Becker 1982).

Similar ways to construct spatial coexistence with unexpected elements mark the initiative called *Stitch ‘N Pitch*. In it, knitters attend a Major or Minor League baseball game as regular spectators, singing traditional songs, sipping beverages, and chatting with friends. In parallel, they work on their knitting projects. Knitters do so as a way of juxtaposing an iconic expression

of femininity, their hobby, with an iconic expression of masculinity, baseball. However, while knitters can perform yarn graffiti individually and still attain visibility to their consumer identities because of the surprise the fixtures cause, a single knitter would disappear in the stadium crowd. To overcome this constraint, knitters resort to organized group action. They sit together in areas designated for Stitch ‘N Pitch participants by the home team, with some groups wearing matching customized T-shirts made for the game. Also, they often decorate these designated areas with colorful knitted yarn that can be seen from different stadium sections.

The cultural standing of baseball and knitting is unequal. Knitting neither attracts mass media attention nor has a proper place to be done in public, much less a colossal venue such as a stadium. Yet, knitters do not hold protest banners or proselytize other spectators to fight gender inequality in consumer culture. Instead, as with yarn graffiti, they construct Stitch ‘N Pitch in ways that avoid direct confrontation and personal sanctions. In it, knitters enact prototypically feminine deportment when they attend games, with arms close to their bodies, eyes often downcast, and legs with reduced mobility, dividing a space constrained by craft supplies (Parker 2010; Young 1980). Further, they endorse the link between women and fiber crafts, calling attention to themselves by gathering in groups in often ornate sections.

Nonetheless, this tactic fits with knitters’ consumer identity project to the extent that it obliquely destabilizes some stereotypes associated with their consumer identities. By knitting at the game, these women temporarily distance their identities from the meaning of domestic drudgery, inserting them into the outdoor atmosphere of excitement that mediated sports events usually generate. Moreover, through their visible multi-tasking, they subtly hint at a degree of drudgery not in knitting, but in a legitimate cultural expression of masculinity, watching sports.

All these temporary heterotopias in the public scale are ideologically and materially

empowered by activities in the semi-public scale, where knitters organize these tactics. For Stitch ‘N Pitch, knitters extensively use servicescapes to discuss how they will decorate their seating section; many yarn shops support these events by selling game tickets while provisioning knitters with supplies and tools at discount prices for creating the decorations. Similarly, for yarn graffiti, knitters repurpose servicescapes into contingent sites of mobilization to decide what to do, where, and how to provision materials for this initiative. Ravelry.com plays a distinctive role in this process, allowing knitters to connect with people from different locales. When knitters use this servicescape to organize graffiti installations, for example, materials often flow from distant cities, as this online conversation excerpt demonstrates:

Vdrinkcoffee: The facade of the Iowa [public building] ...will be covered with 2200 knit or crocheted square panels... If you want to join, please send in a 12” x 12” panel...It will stay there for a couple of weeks in May...

Sammy: I am from the DC area... I will be sending you some squares.

The material and ideological support for knitters’ tactics across the public and semi-public scales was also exposed in the Pussyhat Project, when over 100 knitting shops officially joined this initiative as “Allies.” Knitters could go to these sites to knit, drop off the hats they had made, and donate money for supplies for volunteer crafters. Further, many shops gave price discounts on pink yarn, even though it was in such a high demand that many shops ran out of stock. The following fieldnotes describe our firsthand observation of this activity at the focal knitting shop:

The knitting shop was a hive of busy bees knitting pink pussyhats today, busier than I think I’ve ever seen it. Their stock of straight needles in the size that the Pussyhat pattern calls for was quite low, but Kathy (store owner) showed me how to knit the one I’m making in the round so I can close it off with a three needle bind-off rather than having to sew the sides

together. There were about 8 women knitting feverishly, with lots of pink hats already finished lying on the big table. Linda (customer) was standing by the table since there were no empty seats, helping knitters who had questions. The online pattern calls for a particular brand and pink shade of worsted weight wool, but says any worsted weight skein in any shade of pink will do. All of the shop's few available skeins of worsted weight pink yarn were on the table; some were being used by the knitters actively working on hats, and the others were open stock for sale. A few of the active knitters voiced their approval of the bright pink shade I chose. While I was there, two women came with additional completed hats to donate and were loudly cheered by the active knitters.

On ravelry.com, hundreds of women posted photos of pussyhats in preparation for the march, and more than 5,000 joined the online groups that formed around this protest. In online threads, knitters announced places where they would gather to make hats, connected crafters with non-crafters who wanted to receive a hat to wear, and promoted craft stores that had pink yarn on sale, all while praising one another for taking the effort to create what they referred to as “a sea of pink” with knitted hats at marches in over 500 US cities. For marchers, taking the streets was a way of marking their opposition to the ideas and behaviors upheld by the recently inaugurated president. For knitters, it was also a chance to juxtapose the archaic connotation of their hobby with the political feminist edginess of this public protest, thus expanding the repertoire of meanings attached to their consumer identities.

In addition to being interconnected to knitters' tactics in the semi-public scale, knitters' heterotopias further enable their identity politics in the private scale. The visibility of these heterotopias, along with their assertion of new meanings for their consumer identities, makes this tactic effective in further compelling these women to seek regular access to leisure in their

activities at home. In an interview, Kendra (60-69, software developer) notes:

Fiber crafts are still associated with women and grannies, and so, they're not valued on some level. Yet, if you see the work out there that some people are doing, it's amazing. All the *yarn graffiti* that people have been doing in so many different places. The other day I saw a [photo of a] telephone booth in London covered with yarn. And there are other interesting things going on... That thing in which women knit and crochet while watching baseball games. It makes you want to knit more and be part of this. And I think it attracts more people to this hobby, which is important for the continuation of knitting. And it gives you visible, beautiful excuses to continue knitting rather than cleaning the house [laughs].

Some contemporary versions of feminism playfully use elements of girlie culture such as high heels, revealing clothing, and bright lipstick to boost women's self-confidence (Jantzen et al. 2006; L. Scott 2005). Yet, these elements uphold a link with the patriarchal objectification of women's bodies and youth. By contrast, knitters' heterotopias assert the cultural significance of feminine consumer identities that remain disparaged: those stereotypically associated with old women (Skeggs 2004). Further, as Kendra notes, these heterotopias provide an occasion to laugh at ideological constructions that bind women's domesticity to performing chores, and support the use of their involvement in knitting as a lever to reduce their involvement in home cleanliness. Here, knitting's material productivity and common use to produce handmade gifts are beneficial; they help these women preempt the possibility of being regarded as lazy and counterargue the perception of frivolity for doing something entirely self-oriented (Parker 2010; Radway 1984).

Most of our fieldwork informants have participated in at least one of the public tactics mentioned here, with non-participants regarding them with enthusiasm. However, we did notice some occasional doubt among knitters who were steeped in second-wave feminism in early

adulthood. As is common for this cohort (Heywood 2006), they wonder about the effectiveness of such public displays to reduce forms of gender inequality that they learned to view as more consequential, such as wage gaps and the proverbial glass ceiling. But this lingering concern did not stop them from supporting and enacting the tactics of consumer identity politics in the private, semi-public, and public scales that we describe. For them, pursuing equality through their hobby is complementary rather than conflictual to other routes, with the realm of consumption presenting itself as a viable way to do so amidst other life demands.

In summary, temporary heterotopias are part of a system of interlinked tactics of identity politics that knitters enact in the private, semi-public, and public scales. These revisionist tactics open up novel spatial possibilities for these women's self-expression and help them pursue their consumer identity project. These tactics allow them to construct their consumer identities in ways that assert that the feminine is valuable and exciting, while eschewing domestic containment, personal sanctions, and the negation of women's history.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Consumer research on space has explored primarily how social actors alter the properties of commercial, domestic, and public sites to turn them into what they view as more meaningful places. Though important, this theoretical perspective has rarely engaged with the role of social structure's power mechanisms in shaping people's differential access to space. Building on the "spatial turn," the present work extends consumer research by analyzing people's relationships to spaces as embedded in historically constructed power relations. In particular, by studying a politicized ethos of consumption, it contributes to this literature a conceptualization of space as

an affordance of social structure that individuals may use to assert their subordinate consumer identities and contest power mechanisms that produce this subordination.

Based on our extensive, mixed-method fieldwork, we delineate a range of tactics by which consumers respond to their differential access to space for self-expression: cultural decoding, response formulation, territory expansion, routinized retreat, and temporary heterotopias. We also specify that these tactics have three interconnected foci that occur in the three scales: *mobilization*, which is the use of space to strengthen collective identities and raise awareness of power mechanisms that produce the subordination of these identities; *redistribution*, which is the appropriation of space to expand one's possibilities of self-expression; and *co-existence*, which is the use of space in conjunction with legitimate cultural symbols as a way of increasing the overall visibility of one's identity and displaying new meanings for it.

We predict that people are more likely to pursue *redistribution* in the spatial scales where social structure grants their identities the most authority relative to other scales. Knitters focus on redistribution to increase their access to space for their hobbies in the private scale of home, where ideological constructions validate women's moral authority and expertise. In the public scale, though, where the expression of masculinized traits and activities has historically had the most currency, they prioritize the pursuit of *co-existence*. Linking these two purposes is the use of space for *mobilization*, which we predict will find favorable conditions in sites that attract multiple actors from a subordinate social category while keeping at bay dominant groups' influence. These foci (mobilization, redistribution, and coexistence) are complementary ways for actors in subordinate social categories to use space as they pursue greater cultural recognition.

We contend that a systematic focus on the social structuration of space may add depth and precision to research on the politics of consumer identity. In this stream, it is common for

scholars to rely on the metaphorical use of space to unpack core dynamics. Many works employ the constructs of social *position*, *trajectory*, and *field*, as well as the analogy that one experiences the effects of social class effects through a feeling of being *out of place* (Allen 2002; Arsel and Thompson 2011; Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013; Dolbec and Fischer 2015). Despite being grounded in spatial metaphors, these studies stress the articulation of identity politics through other elements, namely actors' enactment of certain ideologies (Luedicke et al. 2010; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007) and deployment of economic, social, and cultural forms of capital (Commuri and Gentry 2005; Henry 2005; Üstüner and Holt 2007; Üstüner and Thompson 2012).

Rather than extending our understanding of the spatiality of consumption relations, this metaphorical reference to space may have stifled this understanding by redirecting attention away from the concrete spatial structures that shape many social processes. Particular social positions are characterized by different cognitive schemas, assets, and social networks (Skeggs 2004), but they also are constituted by patterns of use of and access to space (Giddens 1984). Likewise, while social fields comprise particular logics, practices, and positions (Bourdieu 1984), they are also made of specific sites, whose access is restricted and unevenly distributed among these positions. For example, members of the field of fashion struggle over access to fashion shows (Dolbec and Fischer 2015) and surfers aggressively protect their access to the best waves (Canniford and Shankar 2012). In both cases, access to space expresses prevailing hierarchies and structures processes of social and cultural capital accumulation, constraining social actors' abilities to develop status-granting skills, such as early knowledge of fashion trends and surfing prowess. Limiting access to space often means directly restraining one's ability to participate in the power games that characterize social fields.

Looking retrospectively, the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s had a significant focus on

gaining access to space for black Americans: access to the voting booth, to better schools, to public transportation, to restaurants and hotels, and to homes in desirable neighborhoods. Mostly seeking coexistence in the public scale, these efforts were mobilized through activities in the semi-private scale of black churches where they had safe harbor.

Access to space is also important in social actors' struggles for greater prestige because it is an integral resource for people to increase the circulation of, and potentially legitimize, their identities. As a case in point, consider the work of Sandikci and Ger (2010) on the identity projects of middle-class Turkish women to destigmatize Islamic veiling. This project entails a subordinate social category (religious females) displaying a selected cultural expression in a multitude of urban spaces, where they seek to assert their identity positions, inspire other women to embrace their Islamic affiliation, and "participate in public life" (26). Likewise, refer to the identity project of at-home fathers, who "aggressively pursue recognition" to their newly acquired domestic skills and unusual gender roles (Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013, 37). This project includes the use of stereotypically feminized settings such as grocery stores and playgrounds, where these men often feel marginalized by other adults.

In analyzing these politicized projects of consumer identity, these illustrative articles delve into the role of a number of resources, from materiality to social support to morality. But this theoretical focus leaves unaddressed a number of arguably significant questions. For example: Which power mechanisms make the circulation of certain consumer identities in some spaces problematic? How does this differential access to space shape the acquisition of valuable forms of capital for certain consumer identities? And how do social actors intentionally increase their spatial visibility in order to build greater cultural recognition for their consumer identities?

The articulation of politicized consumer identity projects may not always have a spatial

focus, but we posit that these projects rarely do not depend on claims that people make to the inherently limited resource of physical space. Thus, to understand more explicitly the way in which the politics of consumer identity are worked out, it may be useful to add an explicit analysis of the spatial organization of consumption relations to consumer researchers' conceptual toolkits. As a step in this direction, the present work places front and center some consumers' differential access to space and their struggles to contest this disparity, conceptualizing the geosocial character of the construction of politicized identity projects.

As a second contribution to consumer research, we depart from this literature's typical treatment of specific spaces as discrete, self-contained entities, an approach that some authors suggest has limited theory building on how consumers' actions in different places are interrelated (Castilhos and Dolbec 2017; Hoelscher and Chatzidakis 2018; Thompson and Üstüner 2015). In this regard, it is worth noting that the tendency to analyze spaces in relative isolation is not unique to the field of consumer research. Feminist scholars argue that such tendency is an epistemological legacy that reflects the persistence of masculine ways of knowing in social thought (Harding and Norberg 2005). Because most social scientists have historically been affluent white males, conceptualization of social action has been tacitly predicated on their lived experiences, which hinged on the clear division of spatial scales between males and females that prevailed well into the 20th century among well-to-do families. These scholars were structurally conditioned and allowed to make these clear geographical distinctions (Massey 1994).

Our work helps equalize this tendency by making explicit that even places that are typically seen as private, such as one's home, are enabled by concrete social interactions that are not located in the immediate setting. We show that knitters' gatherings in the semi-public scale equip them with ideological tools to deconstruct the home as a sacrosanct space devoid of power

dynamics. Further, these women use servicescapes to mediate the organization of highly visible tactics that they enact to pursue their identity projects in the public scale. Closing the loop, these conspicuous tactics supply women with additional reasons to repurpose servicescapes into contingent sites of mobilization while legitimizing their struggles in the private scale.

To this point, our emphasis on the interconnectedness of spaces in different scales offers new insight into the political capacity of servicescapes in contemporary consumer culture. In consumption research, these spaces have been conventionally portrayed as settings where people go to find support and friendship (Debenedetti et al. 2014; Oldenburg 1989; Rosenbaum 2006), escape some form of oppression experienced in other areas of their lives (Fiske 2000; Kozinets et al. 2004), or experience some sort of self-transcendence (Belk 2000; Joy and Sherry 2003).

A notable exception to these views is Karababa and Ger (2011). In studying the creation of the consumer subject during the rise of the Ottoman Empire, they conclude that coffeehouses were a place where consumers intentionally transgressed some of the predominant religious norms of the time. However, their historical data limited their ability to document and conceptualize how this form of consumer politics unfolds amidst the other activities that took place in coffeehouses. Drawing on our ethnography, we advance the notion that servicescapes may act as contingent sites of mobilization, as networked consumers with shared stakes in a consumer identity project intersperse their regular activities as patrons with multiple politicized conversations; such conversations, however, do not necessarily overshadow the joyful character of the focal servicescape by keeping a tone of casualness and considerable wit. This conceptualization enriches our understanding of how servicescapes can serve as platforms for identity politics that entail contesting both institutions (e.g., patriarchy) and mundane carriers of power (e.g., family members).

Taken together, we believe that these contributions provide researchers with a set of conceptual tools and geographical sensitivity to better understand the political dimension of space and the spatial dimension of identity politics. Our work reveals how incitement discourses and aesthetic repositioning underlie a politicized relationship to space; future research can look into other circumstances that lead people to politicize spatial access. Also, our work focuses on middle-class informants; to extend consumer research, future work may study the tactics of consumers who are less privileged to claim space for their self-expression. Another opportunity is to go beyond the tactics that subordinate social categories deploy to contest power relations, examining instead the spatial strategies used by dominant group members to maintain their positions. Our theorizing also leaves underexplored the reasons that lead some members of subordinate groups to take part in some tactics of contestation but not in others. And certainly, there is an opening for other research that examines how tactics in one spatial scale support tactics employed in other scales beyond providing ideological and material empowerment.

In conclusion, social actors' differential access to space is co-constitutive of a number of social processes. We highlight this relationship, which has been underexplored in consumer research, by studying how some middle-class women claim increased access to space for the expression of their culturally subordinate consumer identities. Their claims unfold at a nexus of privilege and oppression, conditioning a project that seeks greater cultural recognition tactfully, with improvisation, creativity, and reiteration, loop after loop, one stitch at a time. Driven by our findings, we suggest that consumer research would benefit from paying more attention to the spatiality of consumption relations, and we move in this direction by deepening theory on how people seek to shape these relations through a spatial axis of action. Cast off.

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