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Unifying yet dividing: voices of pussyhat maker–wearers who participated in the 2017 Women’s Marches

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Abstract

On January 21, 2017, several million protesters took part in the “Women’s March on Washington” and its more than 400 sister Marches held in cities throughout the U.S. and across the globe. One enduring image of these Marches was the (often pink) pussyhat. In this qualitative study we examine broader issues of inclusion and exclusion within craftivism and take a closer look at the way craftivism supported, and potentially detracted from, its intended purpose as a unifying symbol of the Marches. From a dataset of 511 surveys distributed and collected online, 71 “maker–wearers” were identified and investigated for this study. While our overarching question focused on the role of craftivism related to the inaugural March and the pussyhat, we seek to understand not only the voices of craftivists, but also the voices of marchers who reported negative and/or controversial associations with the pussyhat. Building on previous findings that the majority of marchers we surveyed perceive the pussyhat as an anti-Trump symbol that represented women’s power, strength, and solidarity, a small number of our respondents and emergent voices in mainstream media have indicated concerns about potential racism and trans person exclusion represented by the pussyhat. We conclude that even as the pussyhat is recognized as a unifying symbol, it is simultaneously representative of exclusionary, potentially divisive practices within both craftivism and feminism. As awareness of the pussyhat’s problematic symbolism is spreading, new conversations have spawned about intersectionality and the implementation of more inclusive practices.

Keywords: Pussyhat, Craftivism, Feminism, Intersectionality, Inclusivity, National Women’s March

Introduction

The National Women’s March and the pussyhat

On January 21, 2017, several million protesters, mostly women, took part in the “Women’s March on Washington” and its more than 400 sister marches that were held in cities throughout the U.S. and across the globe (Reilly 2017). One enduring image of these marches was the (often pink) pussyhat, described by one participant (Participant #423, Washington D.C. marcher, March 21, 2017) as “a symbol of bravery and strength to stand up against pussy grabbers.”

In the months leading up to the first National Women's March in Washington D.C., knitters Jayna Zweiman and Krista Suh took to social media and the Internet to encourage makers to make and share (mostly pink) pussyhats to wear during the March (Oringel 2017). Although the original motive was to create a visual stance at the Washington, D.C. March, the hat was seen at Women's Marches all over the world. The pussyhat initiative was intended to create a visual response to the 45th president's comments regarding his own entitlement to touch/grab women's genitals, an action generally recognized as sexual assault of women. A simple knitting pattern for a rectangle hat was provided that, when placed on the wearer's head, created two points that look like cat ears. This initial pussyhat concept then grew into the pussyhat project which defined the hat as "a symbol of support and solidarity for women's rights and political resistance" (Pussyhatproject.com, n.d.). After the first march was over, the project's website announced that "Young and old, rich and poor. Educated and not, religious and secular. Straight and LGBTQ, every race and color" donned the hat in Women's March throughout the world to "protest against the rhetoric used toward women and minorities" (Pussyhatproject.com, n.d.). The hat was so popular among participants that the hat itself became synonymous with the Women's March and was featured on the February 9, 2017 edition of *Time*. Additionally, museums such as the Victoria and Albert Museum in London have added several pussyhats to permanent collections, in reflection of its role as a key artifact from the event (Cascone 2017).

Through previous data analysis (Paulins et al. 2017) we learned that, while "promoting unity" and "women's solidarity" emerged as underlying themes of the pussyhat's symbolism, some women who marched offered critiques by pointing out ways that the hat was silly, exclusionary and potentially divisive. In this paper we take a closer look at the question of unity and division within craftivist movements, focusing on the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors primarily of the women who created pussyhats, but also considering the views of those who indicated an aversion to the pussyhats or recognized some aspect of controversy or exclusion related to its symbolism at the 2017 Women's Marches and beyond. Because the phenomenon of craftivism and its potentially exclusionary outcomes has not been investigated within the context of the pussyhats nor the Women's Marches, this work contributes important content to the existing literature.

Literature review

Craftivism

The making and wearing of pussyhats has been viewed as a highly visible and successful act of craftivism (Graddy-Lovelace 2017). Craftivism is the combination of crafting and activism with the purpose of forming resistance to injustice through the act of making (Greer 2011). Craftivism has been framed as a creative way to make individual voices stronger when protesting for a cause and contributing to the greater good (craftivism.com, n.d.; Greer 2014). Emphasizing community-building, craftivism allows individuals to come together in-person or in online communities with like-minded individuals (Corbett 2013; Fry 2014; Greer 2011). Crafting has long been used to help individuals cope with negative life occurrences and to provide a way to positively focus energy on the future (Pöllänen 2006). This redirection of energy into the creation of handmade items has a long history in women's participation in political protest. From the making

of suffragette's banners, to construction of AIDS memorial quilts, to a Danish protest of involvement in the US-Iraqi war where a tank was covered in pink crocheted squares (Black and Brurisch 2011; Greer 2014; Robertson 2011), creating handmade items has been a way that women have leveraged domestic and creative skills to demonstrate their investment in political activism.

Inclusion and exclusion within craft and craftivism

The inclusivity and diversity of participation in crafting and craftivism have been scrutinized. Scholars who examine historical practices of sewing and needlecraft have pointed out important class-based differences. For example, wealthy families would send their daughters to finishing school where they would learn advanced needlepoint techniques. In contrast, girls from lower-income families would enter the workforce to pursue sewing occupations (Tyner 2015). In this situation, all girls are pursuing needlecraft, but their social class status determines whether they engage in craft as a leisure activity or as a work-based necessity. In contemporary crafting, we see a similar pattern. Although crafters themselves often claim that their activities are inclusive and open to all people, academics have questioned the extent to which diversity is actually achieved. Most present-day craft groups do aim for inclusion and have a goal of bringing people together to participate in the making process (Levine 2014). Yet a closer look typically reveals that these groups and events are quite homogenous and exclusive as to who has the ability to participate. To partake in crafting, individuals must have money to purchase supplies and have leisure time available—because most handcraft activities take a considerable amount of time to complete. Additionally, as most of the communication about craftivism and craft now happens via social media and the Internet there are further limiting factors to who has access to and knowledge of the activity (Fry 2014). These participation limiting requirements restrict the variety of people who can participate, and leaders within the handcrafting community have acknowledged that the participation is predominantly White, middle class and highly educated women (Dawkins 2011; Fry 2014).

Inclusion and exclusion within American social movements

This paradox of inclusion and exclusion is echoed in many of the major historical social movements in the United States. Social movements typically harness ideologies of unity and solidarity as they attempt to spread their message of social change, but a closer look at such movements often reveals that leadership, if not overall participation, is limited to the middle- and upper-classes and to more highly educated individuals who have both the knowledge and time to invest in protest activities (Piven et al. 2015). At times, it is this very exclusion which has caused new social movements to spawn. For example, Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton were American Abolitionists who were denied the right to participate in the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London in 1840 because they were women. Eight years later, Mott and Stanton joined forces to organize the Seneca Falls Convention, recognized today as the beginning of the first wave of the American feminist movement (Wellman 2004). This pattern of inclusion and exclusion repeats itself more than 100 years later, where women's first-hand experiences of sexism within the American Civil Rights Movement led them to start the second wave

of American feminism (Hewitt 2010). Notably, both waves of American feminism are criticized for elevating the voices and interests of wealthier, more highly educated White women to the detriment of working-class women and women of color (Hobson 2016).

Theoretical frameworks: intersectionality and Black feminist perspectives

First proposed by Crenshaw's (1989), intersectionality theory highlights the ways that race, class, gender, age, and other social statuses linked to privilege and oppression interact with each other. This paradigm highlights the fact that an individual's race and class status shapes how that individual experiences gender, so that a Black woman's experiences of gender are qualitatively different than a White woman's gendered experiences. Intersectionality includes generational influences that frame perspectives of both lived experiences and historical knowledge. As a result, this theoretical approach sheds light on the main shortcomings of both the first and second waves of American feminism, which for the most part were led by relatively wealthy White women who often failed to recognize the ways that women of color and working-class women experienced gender oppression differently. We believe that intersectionality theory helps to explain tensions that are seen among participants of the 2017 National Women's March.

In addition to Crenshaw's (1989) groundbreaking work on intersectionality, our research is informed by other Black feminist scholars who have long been talking about the ways that race, class and gender identities are experienced simultaneously, and how women whose lives are lived on the margins have a unique vantage point for understanding structured privilege and oppression. In 1977 the Combahee River Collective released "A Black Feminist Statement" (reprinted in 2019) which explains, "we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking" (Combahee River Collective, 2019, p. 29). Barbara Smith (1983), a member of the Combahee River Collective, writes about the "simultaneity of oppression" to emphasize that social identities based on race, class, gender, and sexual orientation cannot be understood separately from one another. In *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, bell hooks argues that "it is essential for continued feminist struggle that black women recognize the special vantage point our marginality gives us and make use of this perspective to criticize the dominant racist, classist, sexist hegemony as well as to envision and create a counter-hegemony" (Hooks, 2015, p. 16). In a speech delivered at Amherst College in 1980, Audre Lorde describes Black women as "watchers" whose survival depends on carefully studying the language and practices of privileged groups. As a result, Black women and others on the margin have unique insight into structures of privilege and oppression, providing them with greater clarity. Even as the differences among us often cause division, Lorde (1984) concludes that "we must recognize differences among women ... and devise ways to use each other's difference to enrich our visions and our joint struggles" (Lorde, 1984, p. 122). Patricia Hill Collins (1986) builds on this idea of Black women's unique position in society, calling it the "outsider within." Collins argues that Black feminist thought, which results from Black women's experiences as outsiders within, provides a framework which

allows scholars to produce “distinctive analyses of race, class, and gender” (Collins, 1986, p. 15).

Method

Our paper relies on qualitative data gleaned from a 2017 survey of adult women who had participated in any of the Women’s Marches across the United States on January 21, 2017. The survey was constructed to enable relatively quick completion, anticipating that social media distribution would result in respondents with relatively short attention spans replying using phones or tablets. The questions on the survey were designed to glean information about pussyhat wearing, methods of acquiring the hats, attitudes about the hats—including comments about symbolism, and marchers’ reasons for marching. Respondents supplied demographic information about themselves, the location of their march, and insights about their participation in the marches, such as transportation methods and friend groups. The research questions for this study, designed to explore the role of craftivism and potentially unifying and dividing aspects of the pussyhat craftivism activity, were:

- Did maker–wearers exhibit qualities commensurate with craftivism in their descriptions of pussyhat construction and wearing?
- What were the unifying aspects of pussyhat craftivism?
- What were the potentially dividing aspects of pussyhat craftivism?
- Were diversity and inclusivity evidenced in the craftivism activities of pussyhat making and wearing?
- Was exclusivity recognized by the maker–wearers as a limitation (or paradox) to the activity of craftivism?
- As we frame our work using the theory of Black feminist perspective, how do we advance the conversation about inclusivity in craftivism?

We used convenience and snowball sampling techniques to distribute a link to the online survey. Initial requests were launched by the research team via emails and social media postings on Facebook and Twitter. While a broader aim of the study was to investigate the symbolism of the pussyhat and reasons for marching, we identified the opportunity to explore craftivism within the context of the Women’s Marches, and focused on that investigation here. A total of 511 usable surveys were completed, collected between February 24–April 10, 2017 (45 days). Usable surveys were determined as those participants who indicated “yes” they were female and marched on January 21. After careful review by two investigators, the dataset was determined to be authentic (13 potentially qualified surveys were eliminated, judged to have supplied fake data). Of interest for this study are 71 respondents who identified as maker–wearers (221 respondents wore hats made by others; 219 did not wear a hat). Using this qualitative data set of 511 surveys, our research team extracted the data of 71 women who indicated that they made and wore their own hats. We label these women “maker–wearers.” We retained data from all survey participants to enable our investigation of dissenting voices with respect to pussyhats.

Data were analyzed using content analysis through a coding sheet designed to categorize qualitative data according to alignment with key terms and concepts for each of our research questions. Each of the survey data sets had an identification number that connected demographic and categorical data provided by respondents with their responses to specific survey questions. The data were organized in an Excel spreadsheet, where *in vivo* codes were entered along with demographic information. The spreadsheet enabled manipulation of data allowing comparisons across demographic categories, and across categories that we labeled “maker–wearers,” non-makers, hat wearers,” and “non-hat wearers.” These categorical comparisons facilitated our exploration and analysis of intersectionality trends. Three members of the research team participated in individual coding and spreadsheet manipulation of the data, which provided us with the opportunity to confirm consistency and assure the validity of our findings.

Results

The sample

Nearly all (70; 99%) of the maker–wearers in our study made hats that they called pussyhats. Of the marchers who wore hats that they did not make themselves, 150 (68%) described their hats commensurate with our definition of a pussyhat. The maker–wearers, similar to the other categories of marchers, were overwhelmingly White (78%), highly educated (89% held at least a bachelor’s degree with 58% holding a graduate degree), and heterosexual (93%). The maker–wearers in our sample ranged in age from 26 to 76 years old, with a median age of 49 and mean age of 50. More than two-thirds of the maker–wearer marchers ($n = 46$) were in their 40s and 50s. The average age of hat wearers who did not make their own hats was 47; non-hat wearers’ average age was 45. Compared to the entirety of our survey sample, maker–wearers were older and slightly more diverse, yet they were proportionally more heterosexual than participants in the other two categories (see Table 1).

More than half (57.5%) of the 511 respondents participated in the Washington, D.C. March, while the remaining respondents took part in organized satellite marches across the country. A slightly smaller percentage (45%) of the maker–wearers marched in Washington, D.C. compared to our total sample. The remaining 55% of maker–wearers took part in sister marches around the United States, with diverse geographic regions represented: Northeast = 10; Midwest = 10; Northwest = 8; Southwest = 8; Southeast = 3). Most marched with family members ($n = 22$) or a group of friends ($n = 36$), while some joined an arranged tour group ($n = 3$) or reported that they participated independently ($n = 4$). For many of these women, participating in the march was a joint activity that involved planning and coordination. Notably, the maker–wearers necessarily had to plan their march activities, evidenced by the fact that they constructed pussyhats for the occasion, and most constructed additional hats to distribute to other marchers. As one respondent noted, “we drove three teens and two adults to meet up with three more adults and four teens in DC.” One woman reported that “Two friends flew in from out of state, stayed with me, and we went together.” Another maker–wearer explained, “I hosted a party beforehand where we made signs and had bloodies and bagels before hitting the street!” Reflective of the planning necessary for hat distribution, a wearer (non-maker)

Table 1 Demographics of maker-wearers compared to non-makers wearers and non-wearers

	Maker-wearers		Non-makers, hat wearers		Non-hat wearers		Total = 511	
	(n = 71)	%	(n = 221)	%	(n = 219)	%		
Age								
Gen Z (18–22)	0	0.0	4	1.8	5	2.3	9	1.8
Gen Y (23–40)	13	18.3	54	24.4	83	37.9	150	29.4
Gen X (41–51)	29	40.8	69	31.2	56	25.6	154	30.1
Boomers (52–70)	22	31.0	71	32.1	64	29.2	157	30.7
Silent (71 +)	5	7.0	0	0.0	5	2.3	10	2.0
Not reported	2	2.8	23	10.4	6	2.7	31	6.1
Average age	50		47		45			
Race/Ethnicity								
Non-White	12	16.9	14	6.3	23	10.5	49	9.6
White	56	78.9	184	83.3	190	86.8	430	84.1
Not reported	3	4.2	23	10.4	6	2.7	32	6.3
Education level								
HS/GED	6	8.5	5	2.3	3	1.4	14	2.7
Technical/associate degree	0	0.0	16	7.2	15	6.8	31	6.1
In college	0	0.0	5	2.3	5	2.3	10	2.0
Bachelors degree	22	31.0	50	22.6	61	27.9	133	26.0
Graduate degree	41	57.7	122	55.2	129	58.9	292	57.1
Not reported	2	2.8	23	10.4	6	2.7	31	6.1
Sexual orientation								
Heterosexual	66	93.0	168	76.0	181	82.6	415	81.2
Non-heterosexual	3	4.2	29	13.1	32	14.6	64	12.5
Not reported	2	2.8	24	10.9	6	2.7	32	6.3

shared that she (a minister and D.C. marcher) obtained a pussyhat “knitted by a member of my church.” A maker-wearer who marched in D.C. documented her preparation and role of supplier by disclosing, “I knitted a pink pussycat hat for myself, my daughter, and several of my friends.”

As would be expected, the portion of pussyhat makers is substantially smaller than the totality of marchers (in our sample, 14%) and represents just a fraction of all who wore hats. Using our data set, about one quarter (24%) of hat wearers were maker-wearers. With respect to demographics, the maker-wearers, being somewhat older, may have more time and financial resources compared to the entire sample of marchers—though further data collection would be needed to definitively address this topic. The maker-wearers’ activities spanned the nation, just as the marches did. Given the smaller portion of maker-wearers who marched in Washington, D.C. compared to the other groups, perhaps their contribution to the greater cause was through their craftivism rather than their participation in the main march on the Nation’s Mall.

Our survey allowed each respondent to explain what the pussyhat symbolized to them. Many of the maker-wearers used the words “unity” and “solidarity” to describe the symbolism of the pink pussyhat, reflecting the Pussyhat Project’s stated goals. One New York City marcher reported that the hat was a “secret hand shake,” and a D.C. marcher

explained that “the hat made me part of the tribe.” Another woman who marched in D.C. stated that the hat “gave a diverse group of people a way to connect and identify supporters of women and their rights.” For at least one woman, the solidarity symbolized by the pussyhat was more important than her individual dislike for the hat. As this woman, who marched in Sante Fe explained, “I love hats, but not this color pink and not this shape. This is a hat that says out loud that I don’t matter as much as the movement. I made the hat and wore it in solidarity, and to make a great big visual statement. I’m proud of the hat, and proud I wore it, even though it isn’t my style and isn’t very flattering.”

Did maker–wearers exhibit qualities commensurate with craftivism in their descriptions of pussyhat construction and wearing?

The maker–wearers in our study were craftivists. Collectively, they expressed satisfaction from the unity they felt in preparation of their hats—and often additional hats for others—for an event in which they could make their voices heard while standing in solidarity with other like-minded women. In strong reflection of the concept of craftivism, respondents shared their motivation and experiences for making and wearing pussyhats with statements such as, “The hat is meant to announce loudly that women are people, that we demand respect, and that the resistance is creative and dedicated” and “I like the empowerment of using a traditional women’s art to create a protest item. I made two for other friends and a random one that I gave away to a lady on the metro going into town that day.” The maker–wearers mostly knit or crocheted their pussyhats, and a few specifically volunteered that they had used a pattern from the Pussyhat Project website. In a particularly illustrative example of craftivism, a woman from Utah elaborated, “I wore a handknit pussy hat that I knit using yarn hand dyed by a fair trade organization in Uruguay that employs and supports women earning a fair wage.” Many respondents describe the original artistic interpretations they used in pussyhat construction. In keeping with the stereotyped roles of women as nurturers and family leaders, two maker–wearers offered details about the unique and meaningful pussyhats they crafted; one New York City marcher “sewed [a pussyhat] from my daughter’s pink toddler coat, lined with dark pink velvet” while a Los Angeles marcher “made it from an old onsie.”

Further evidence of the craftivists’ role in the broader pussyhat phenomenon were documented by wearers who did not make their own hats. A pussyhat wearer who marched in Washington, D.C. revealed, “We didn’t know about the hats and we kept seeing them at every place we stopped. So we asked a lady and she had extras!” Other D.C. marchers reported hats “offered to us as we were leaving for D.C.,” “given to me by a stranger on the bus,” and “someone in a church group made them and was giving them to people going to D.C.” Marchers in other cities described similar ways of obtaining pussyhats. We documented evidence, through analysis of in vivo codes for the following craftivism phenomena: resisting injustice, making individual voices stronger, community building with like-minded people, coping with negative life occurrences, and focusing on a positive future. Table 2 contains a presentation of representative comments that supported our coding and documentation of craftivism. It is notable, and the authors recognize, that numerous comments display one or more craftivism concept, showing the phenomenon with a wholistic and multi-faceted lens.

Table 2 Evidence of craftivism concepts through maker-wearer in vivo codes

Respondents described the activity of pussy hat making and wearing for the purpose of...			
Concept	In vivo code	Location of March	Age
Resist injustice	It is a pussy hat representing and in defiance of the President's previous comment	Chicago	53
	I have been knitting hats for friends as my way to promote the cause	Washington, D.C.	58
	You can't grab this. We now call ourselves the resistance	Boston	57
	It's a protest of trumps crude remarks about women	Columbus, OH	63
	It was part of my protest 'uniform.' People wore it to make a statement, to assert power in a word and consequently reclaim power that 45 tries to take away from women	Boston	46
	That women will band together to protect each other from injustice and harm	Washington, D.C.	36
Make individual voices stronger	I feel strongly that the new president and those who he surrounds himself with are anti women and I want women's voices to be heard	Madison, WI	73
	Women's rights and to remind the president we cannot be ignored simply because we did not vote for him	Washington, D.C.	47
	I wanted to show the new administration that I was watching and would not be silent	Washington, D.C.	64
Community building with like-minded people	Solidarity with all other women	New York City	47
	[The pussyhat is a] cheeky and humorous comment about the sexism and misogyny of our current President; plus an "in solidarity" kind of statement with other groups	Washington, D.C.	50
	I'm a stay home mom but left the babies at home with my husband and met up with 4 girlfriends from my previous job. We met up with even more friends at the march	Denver	44
	Solidarity, mostly! I needed a hat because it was cold. I wanted a hat that would add to the sea of pink on the national mall	Washington, D.C.	40
Cope with negative life occurrences	Like so many women, I am a maker and the symbolism of taking traditional women's work to flip DT's lewd comments was perfect	Denver	44
	Pussy I think is an attempt at a proud reclaiming of a word that is often used in a derogatory manner	Washington, D.C.	21
	Pussy grabs back!	Washington, D.C.	52
	Emblematic of women will not be negatively defined by a word used pejoratively	Washington, D.C.	46
	To let the world know that women can be powerful too and to recapture the word for our purpose	Washington, D.C.	64
	women owning the word pussy	Washington, D.C.	53

Table 2 (continued)

Respondents described the activity of pussy hat making and wearing for the purpose of...			
Concept	In vivo code	Location of March	Age
Focus on positive future	I marched because I needed to give hope to others at risk, even when I felt little hope myself in the face of the powers of greed and viciousness that currently prevail	Santa Fe, NM	58
	So women and men do not suffer from women losing what women before us have worked so hard to get	Chicago	53
	To stand up for the generations to come. For their water, for their reproductive rights, for the Earth that we will leave them	Santa Fe, NM	53
	To take a stand against bigotry, misogyny, corruption and environmentally damaging policies	Park City, UT	46
	For my 10 year old daughter	Los Angeles	41

Not surprisingly, several of the maker-wearers emphasized the symbolic importance of the craftwork that is represented by the hats, and introduced evidence that maker-wearers expressed care-giving and nurturing through their craftivism. One respondent did not simply describe the hat as a symbol of solidarity, but articulated it was “a home-made signal of solidarity.” Another maker-wearer wrote that “it was a unifying piece of apparel, handmade to show the grassroots beginning of the movement.” Yet another explained that the pussyhat is “emblematic of women as creators and caregivers that will not be negatively defined by a word used pejoratively.” Several of the maker-wearers commented that the act of making hats is itself empowering. One woman explained, “I like to knit; I like the empowerment of using a traditional women’s art to create a protest item.” Another woman stated, “I also knitted hats for other marchers. Knitting is meditative to me. Making this [was] empowering.” It is striking that both of these women described empowerment as being linked not merely to knitting, but also to the act of distributing their handcrafted items to others.

We asked survey respondents whether they would continue to wear their pussyhats after the conclusion of the Women’s Marches. There was fair evidence of the pussyhat emerging as a lasting symbol of resistance and women’s empowerment with more than half of all pussyhat wearers reporting that they plan to wear their hats in the future. While most of the 70 maker-wearers who responded to this question indicated that they either definitely would wear the hat again ($n = 49$; 70%) or might wear the hat again ($n = 16$; 23%), a small number ($n = 5$; 7%) stated that they would not wear the hat again. This positive plan for future pussyhat wearing is in contrast to the hat wearers who did not craft their own, with merely 56.6% (125) reported planning to wear the pussyhat again, and 19% (43) of the non-makers said they might wear the hat again. The tendency for pussyhat makers to be somewhat more invested in continued wearing of their hats compared to wearers who were not makers could be due to the time, effort, and skill that the craftivism activity required.

Many of the women explained that their hand-made pussyhats were good for everyday use, especially during cold weather. Several maker-wearers also indicated that they wore the hat to make a political statement, and that they planned to wear the pussyhat to future protest marches. For example, one respondent who marched in D.C. explained, “it sparks great conversations when I wear it, either in other local protests or around town.” Other responses that we received to this question touched on multiple reasons for wearing the hat. One maker-wearer commented that “It’s a pretty cute hat. I am happy to wear it for practical purposes, and I also am happy to wear it as a symbol for what I stand for.” Another respondent stated, “I wear it every day cuz it’s still cold. I like it, plus it’s a small act of resistance every single day. I also wear it to local marches and protests.” Yet another maker-wearer commented, “I wear it to keep warm and to show others my political leanings, that I am a White woman who did NOT vote for Trump.”

Several of those who responded to our question about wearing the pussyhat again with a “maybe” ($n = 16$) also had practical reasons for this answer. Some of these respondents ($n = 5$) explained that they do not typically wear hats. For example, one respondent explained, “I live in the south, [and the pussyhat] is a winter hat so I am not sure when I will have a chance to wear it.” Some of these respondents ($n = 4$) cited reasons related to comfort or style for not wearing the hat again. For example, one maker-wearer reported that her hat was too itchy, while another explained, “It’s very bright, and I’m more of a conservative dresser.” However, a sub-set of those who responded “maybe” to our question ($n = 7$) were unsure about wearing the hats because of the political statement associated with the pussyhat symbolism. Though some of these maker-wearers could envision wearing the hat to another march, they had no concrete plans to do so. Further highlighting the link between the pussyhat and its political messaging, one maker-wearer explained, “It’s overtly political, which I don’t care to be,” while another stated, “I live in a very small town. I’m still trying to find enough courage to make political statements like that on a regular basis.” Acknowledging the perception that other people would interpret the pussyhat as a political statement, and in further recognition of the risk taking that comes with protest, one maker-wearer explained that “I don’t want to get harassed while commuting to work.” Another maker-wearer, in strong activist fashion, mentioned that she will wear a pussyhat on the occasion that she has “been summoned to jury duty and think it may start a necessary conversation.” These representative, yet individual, comments reflect the shared meaning of the pussyhat as a political statement of dissent for the current US presidential administration as well as a way to identify the wearer as a feminist and strong supporter of women’s rights. While some women were eager to incorporate the pussyhat into their everyday wardrobes, most qualified their future wear plans with statements like this one: “I will wear it again when I march again. I don’t feel the need to wear it just around.” Others qualified the pussyhat’s usefulness with the often stated explanation, “when it’s cold out.” A pussyhat fan and maker-wearer who marched in Seattle concluded, “It’s a pretty cute hat. I am happy to wear it for practical purposes, and I also am happy to wear it as a symbol for what I stand for.” In recognition of the risk of being overtly political when wearing the pussyhat, a D.C. marcher shared:

I initially didn’t wear it again because I was afraid of being called out. Then I decided this past weekend to wear it in the red county where we have a vacation home in PA. I figure, the jerk with the big confederate flag on his truck at the grocery

store speaks his mind, why don't I speak mine? At the very least, we cancel each other out. I will also wear it at any of the Wednesday protests at our local US Rep's office, at least until it gets too warm.

Additional evidence of craftivism as a deliberate, visible, and political-movement oriented activity was documented through voices of women who marched in smaller venues than Washington, D.C., New York City, and Chicago. A maker-wearer who marched in a small Georgia town described,

I found out about the Pussyhat Project and then went online to find out more. I found instructions on how to make the hat. I believe that it is a way of reclaiming the word "pussy," after Trump's comment and turning it into a statement. Where I marched, not many people knew about these hats and there were only a few other women who had one.

Collectively, voices of our craftivist respondents associated future wearing of their pussyhats with a "small act of resistance every single day." One optimistic and predictive craftivist who marched in New York City said she will wear her pussyhat again "when Trump is impeached."

Perhaps surprisingly, most of those who stated that they would not wear the hats again ($n=5$) had practical, rather than political, reasons for selecting this answer. One maker-wearer reported that her pussyhat was lost. Two others had given their pussyhats away to other people, and one had donated her pussyhat to a museum. The remaining maker-wearer who indicated that she would not wear the hat again was "not sure" why she had chosen this response.

What were the unifying aspects of pussyhat craftivism?

Women's power and strength emerged as unifying and overlapping themes of pussyhat craftivism. Approximately one-third of the maker-wearers referred to women's power and strength when explaining what the hat symbolized. In a particularly effusive statement, a maker-wearer who marched in Utah explained, "Women are angry, fed up, and we are reclaiming our power. We will not be silent." Another maker-wearer explained that the hat represented, "solidarity of women across socio-economic and cultural divides." A 64-year-old Washington, D.C. marcher exemplified the unifying activity of craftivism by describing how she "made it with five others"—presumably so that she could distribute pussyhats to five additional marchers. Similarly, a Chicago marcher described her craftivism: "I made it myself along with seven others that I distributed to my daughter, niece and other women we met on our way there and at the march" while a 48-year-old woman who marched in Boston disclosed, "I knitted five hats, one for myself and four to share." Another woman, who marched in Boston, said, "I also knitted one for a friend." In an appropriate summary of the unifying result of pussyhat craftivism, this D.C. marcher (age 40) declared her pussyhat was for, "Solidarity, mostly! I wanted a hat that would add to the sea of pink on the national mall."

What were the potentially dividing aspects of pussyhat craftivism?

Even as our analysis shows widespread agreement that the pussyhat is an anti-Trump symbol which represents women's power, strength, and unity, a closer look at the data also reveals a small but persistent undercurrent of dissatisfaction and distrust of the hat. A small number of women (36 of the total survey respondents, representing 7.0%) supplied either their own negative or controversial comments about the pussyhats or statements that recognized other people hold negative thoughts about the hats. Even though there were recognitions (to varying degrees of aversion) that there were controversial elements of the pussyhat, the power of the pussyhat as a defining element of the marches is clear, with 12 of those women reporting that they actually wore a pussyhat for the march, six of whom were maker-wearers. One maker-wearer provided insight about her journey toward accepting the pussyhat, stating, "At first I was put off by the name of it, and contemplated not wearing it. But I took it [to the March] and was so happy I had it. It was a little outside my comfort zone." Another craftivist, in defensive recognition of criticisms of the pussyhat, reflected that "I do not believe it was supposed to look like a vagina, like some seem to think. It was just a simple knitting pattern!" Some maker-wearers just did not find the pussyhat in keeping with their fashion preferences; one illuminated the collective force of the pussyhat phenomenon declaring, "the hat says out loud that I don't matter as much as the movement" and another simply stated that she recognized that the pink color is gender-stereotyped. In a powerful statement about the way pussyhats defined a movement, a marcher in Utah confided that she was not sold on the pussyhat idea.

but a friend asked me to knit one for her. Then I knit one for a friend who was marching in DC. I ended up enjoying knitting them, so I knit one for myself. I ended up absolutely loving how visually impactful the pink hats were. I loved seeing people wearing them all over the world. It ended up being one of my favorite parts of marching. And one of my favorite memories.

Of the 36 women who provided comments that were negative or showed awareness of controversy, 13 (12 non-wearers) specifically noted that the pussyhats serve as a symbol marginalizing women of color and/or people who are trans. As such, the pussyhats can be seen as a symbol of exclusivity and division, rather than inclusivity and unity. Admittedly, this is a very small portion of the marchers we surveyed (only 2.5%); however, it is important to recognize that our survey was distributed very soon after the 2017 March. At that time, little dissent regarding the pussyhat was expressed through the mainstream media. This research, documenting a trickle of dissent about the pussyhat's symbolism is important for both recording and ultimately better understanding a potentially divisive role of the pussyhat as a craftivist phenomenon. The complexity of the paradoxical nature of the pussyhat as a unifying yet dividing artifact is described by this wearer (non-maker) who recognized a connection between racism and the hat, proclaiming:

Initially I was put off by the idea—I didn't like that it wasn't entirely inclusive (not everyone's pussy is pink) and I felt that it was somewhat trivializing the meaning of the march. But then when I showed up in DC and a million women were wearing hats that they'd made by hand—wow. It was an amazing contrast to see the sea of handmade pink hats of sisterhood vs. the sea of red "make America great again"

hats that were made in China from the day before.

Dissent with respect to the pussyhat was voiced by non-pussyhat wearers with statements such as [they were] “primarily worn by White women,” and created to “make cis gender women feel connected.” Noting that the Women’s March was “a celebration of women and their power” one pussyhat critic mused, “I want to say it’s also a celebration of all female-identifying people, even those that don’t have a literal “pussy” but I see how it might not be.” Calling out the paradox between the support for human rights intended by marchers as the most visible symbol of the March, a respondent exclaimed, “they completely ignored the fact that the overwhelming majority of “pussy” in the world is not pink. I think the women (mostly White) who wore the hats colluded in racism.” Evidence that the pussyhat’s meaning as a symbol is evolutionary, this respondent reflected:

I didn't wear it because, in general, I stay away from those types of gimmicky things. I'm glad I didn't. I wish I could say that I realized myself that they excluded people who identify as women but don't have "pussies." I didn't think of that at the time and heard the criticism later. I'm glad I didn't do anything that kept folks from feeling included.

This difference in interpretations is even more stark when comparing the responses of maker-wearers to those of the non-wearers. On the whole, none of the maker-wearers expressed any concerns about problematic interpretations of the hats. Rather, the women who made their own hats expressed that the hat was a symbol for them of how they were united with “women across social and cultural divides.” They viewed their craftivist act as a way for them to identify and connect with others that hold the same beliefs and support of women’s rights. In contrast, 13 non-makers (12 of whom were non-wearers) expressed race- and gender-related concerns with the symbolism of the hat. Despite the fact that they represented only 5.5% of the 219 non-wearers in our sample (and 3.0% of all 440 non-makers), these dissenting voices bring an important viewpoint that deserves closer attention.

What specific concerns did these women share? Some commented on the “whiteness” of the pussy hat movement, questioning its ability to be inclusive at what was promoted as a diversely populated event. One woman commented, “I think the women (mostly White) who wore the hats colluded in racism.” Other non-wearers expressed that they felt the hat was “steeped in White supremacy,” with one woman commenting, “I saw a lot of women excited about wearing it, but to be honest it was entirely White women and didn’t seem all that inclusive to me.” This woman, a non-wearer, continued with her response to emphasize the color of the hat, remarking that “not all women have pink pussies.”

Who are these small number of women who expressed concern about the symbolism of the hat, and do they differ from the larger sample of respondents? We were especially interested in examining these women’s racial identities and sexual orientations. As mentioned above, among our survey respondents, the maker-wearers segment included proportionately more women of color (16.9%) than the non-maker wearers (6.3%) and the non-wearers (10.5%) groups. Furthermore, of the 12 women who expressed concern about the pussyhat with respect to race and gender, 11 identified as White and one identified as Black (the Black respondent who expressed a concern also identified

as heterosexual). Put another way, of the 474 survey respondents who identified their race or ethnicity, 2.5% of the White marchers expressed a concern about the symbolism of the pink pussyhat, while 2.4% of the non-White marchers expressed concern. While not generalizable from our data, there is no emergent trend supporting racial identity as a factor when it comes to recognizing and naming the hat's potential racism or trans exclusion.

Were diversity and inclusivity evidenced in the craftivism activities of pussyhat making and wearing?

We analyzed the maker-wearer dataset looking for demographic trends and also for recognition expressed by our participants of inclusivity and diversity in their pussyhat making and wearing. Due to the pervasive heterogeneity of our sample with respect to sexual orientation and race we cannot draw any comparative conclusions about intersectionality and how the marchers' experiences were shaped by their interlocking gender, sexual orientation, racial identities. However, we emphatically note that the voices of non-straight (including trans) and non-White women are needed to fully understand intersectionality of their lived experiences.

In fact, most comments from respondents exhibited a desire for unity and inclusivity in the meaning of the pussyhat by declaring it a symbol of women's rights, a symbol of political resistance, a symbol of equality and justice for all, and a way to take back ownership of derogatory words describing female reproductive genitals. For example, an Asian craftivist who marched in Washington, D.C. explained that she marched, "to stand up for women and all our rights, to resist the Trump administration, to protest misogynistic, racist, anti-semitic and anti-immigrant language and actions."

Interestingly, of the 71 maker-wearers in our sample, only 4.3% identified as non-heterosexual, while 14.6% of the non-wearers and 13.1% of the non-makers who were wearers reported non-heterosexual identities. Again, though not generalizable, in our sample, craftivists were comprised of a smaller portion of non-straight women than the other two groups. Of the 13 women who expressed specific concern about the symbolism of the pussyhat with respect to its non-inclusiveness related to race and/or sexuality, 10 identified as heterosexual and three identified as non-heterosexual (all 3 of these respondents identified as White; 1 respondent identified as lesbian and 2 identified as bisexual). We note that, even though three times as many heterosexual respondents compared to queer respondents expressed concern (10:3), based on their small representation in our sample, the respondents who were non-heterosexual were roughly twice as likely to recognize and mention the potential racism and transphobia symbolized in the pink pussyhat than those who reported heterosexual identities (4.7% compared to 2.4%).

Although our dataset allows only exploratory analysis regarding intersectionality, there is evidence to support the need for greater representation of voices of color and queer voices to fully understand the role of the pussyhat in craftivism, and intersectional applications of its meaning.

Was exclusivity recognized by the maker–wearers as a limitation (or paradox) to the activity of craftivism?

The pussyhat craftivists in this study, overwhelmingly, did not reference nor acknowledge their privilege to be craftivists in statements made in the survey. We recognize that our data may not have fully captured our participant's recognition of and understanding of privilege due to limitations in survey questions, and therefore this topic is recommended for future investigation. Based on the types of responses we received from respondents, we suggest future research among craftivists with questions that ask how much time and how much money is spent on craftivism activities, ways of participating in craftivism communities, composition of the members of craftivist communities, motivations that undergird the desire to engage in craftivism, and the issues of most concern to the craftivist.

As we frame our work using the theory of Black feminist perspective, how do we advance the conversation about inclusivity in craftivism?

The obvious lack of racial diversity—in both our sample, and as evidenced in media coverage of the event itself—is a concern. It is important to realize that the path to equality and justice for people who live on the margins lies in the responsibility of the privileged majority. In 2017, only a small number (just 3%) of survey respondents voiced concerns about possible racism and trans exclusion embedded in the symbol of the pink pussyhat. These women are applying an intersectional perspective to their interpretation of the hat, pointing out that issues of race and sexuality are inherently linked to issues of sex and gender. Considering that the survey respondents were disproportionately White and heterosexual, it is perhaps not surprising that they would overlook ways in which the hat has the potential to exclude racial and gender-sexual minorities. Black feminist theorists such as Audre Lorde and Patricia Hill Collins have asserted that non-White women would be more likely to recognize problematic aspects of the hat. These are the women whose racial identities have led them to be “watchers” (Lorde 1984) and “outsiders within” (Collins 1986), statuses which have placed them at the margin and perhaps given them a better vantage point from which to recognize structural inequalities and the cultural symbols that represent embedded privilege. This was not necessarily the case in our study, as our analysis revealed that Black women reported concerns about the symbolism of the hat at approximately the same rate as White women. However, our survey results do support the notion that marginalized women may be more likely to view the world with an intersectional lens. In this case, it was the non-heterosexual women who were roughly three times more likely to express concern about the pink pussyhat's potentially racist and transphobic symbolism. This could perhaps be due to the overtly sexualized theme of the pussyhat, and therefore a greater awareness of gender-based marginalization by non-heterosexual women compared to Black women.

With respect to advancing understandings of intersectionality, our qualitative analysis of the voices of 71 pussyhat maker–wearers supports the notion that there is an opportunity to educate White craftivists to specifically recognize their power to use a position of privilege to leverage positive change with respect to inclusion, diversity, equity, and access.

Discussion

We were especially interested in learning more about the “maker-wearers”—those women who participated in the march while wearing a pussyhat that they made for themselves to determine whether craftivism was displayed, and if so, to document that. The words of the maker-wearers confirm that these women directly engaged in craftivism, using their skills to create tangible symbols of protest. A particularly well-articulated and representative voice proclaimed, “like so many women, I am a maker and the symbolism of taking traditional women’s work to flip DT’s lewd comments was perfect.” She went on to note her appreciation for “a bold visual statement that can’t be ignored.” The maker-wearers demonstrated craftivism through statements about empowerment, translating hand-skills to symbolism, and community building by making individual voices stronger.

Many of the findings discussed here confirm previous research on crafting and craftivism. For example, our research identifies a high degree of agreement that the pink pussyhat serves as an anti-Trump political statement that also represents women’s strength and power. Both maker-wearers and non-wearers focused on these shared meanings, confirming the power of craftivism to convey political beliefs (craftivism.com, n.d.). The hat was widely seen as a unifying symbol, underscoring how craftivist efforts bring individuals together (Corbett 2013; Fry 2014; Greer 2011). Yet, our research also illustrates how social movements in general, and craftivism in particular, can be exclusionary in practice even when organizers and activists aim to be inclusive. That the 511 survey respondents were predominately White and highly educated emphasizes the previously identified insight that participation in craft and craftivism, as well as activism in general, is often exclusionary (Dawkins 2011; Fry 2014).

Our findings are consistent with Piven et al. (2015) who observed that the exclusive nature of craftivism is neither intended nor desired, but instead can be attributed to the fact that considerable resources are needed to participate. Craftivists must have ample resources to purchase supplies and time to sew, knit, or crochet. Additional leisure time is needed to participate in the March. Craftivists in this study did not articulate their privilege (though they were not specifically asked about privilege and craftivism) but they did widely voice the proactive, supportive, and productive outcomes of their efforts. Both the organizers of the pussyhat project and the many maker-wearers who participated in the project have clearly expressed a desire for the hat to be inclusive and to demonstrate women’s solidarity (thepussyhatproject.com, n.d.); however, such intentions are not enough to overcome the structural and ideological constraints that undermine true inclusion.

Even though only a very small number of women who chose not to wear a pink pussy hat to the 2017 Women’s March expressed concerns about the symbolism of the hats, the idea that the hat represents exclusionary rather than inclusionary practices is one that is poised to spread. We see this in our own survey results, as represented by one respondent who was concerned about the hat excluding transwomen, but who also stated, “I didn’t think of that at the time and heard the criticism later.” Scholar and activist Brittney Cooper wrote about her own experience with the 2017 National Women’s March in her 2018 book *Eloquent Rage: A Black Feminist Discovers her Superpower*, conceding that part of her wanted to participate in the protest march, but that “on the day

of the Women's March I skipped it and went to my girl's spot for a very Black brunch in Brooklyn," because "I knew I couldn't be trusted to act right amidst a sea of pink pussy hats and white women struggling to understand what intersectionality means" (Cooper 2018: 174). In January 2018, as Women's March organizers were gearing up for an anniversary protest in cities across the U.S., the *Detroit Free Press* ran an article titled "Why some feminists are ditching the pussyhat" (Shamus 2018). Not only did this article present how the pussyhat could be seen to exclude both brown and trans women, it also conveyed that organizers of the Pensacola, Florida March were actively discouraging protesters from wearing the pussyhat to their event. By late 2019, as Women's March organizers were gearing up for a 2020 protest, they tweeted that "we have created a space for women of all backgrounds, of all experiences to come together" (Women's March, [@womensmarch] 2019) and in an email sent to supporters were referring to participants as "women and femmes" (O. Khan, 2019 Personal Communication, December 11, 2019).

Conclusion

In the pussyhat, a highly recognizable symbol has emerged that is irrevocably tied to the 2017 Women's Marches. Despite its criticisms, the mere existence of the pussyhat has provided a platform for continued education and understanding about inclusion and exclusion—providing many people a new lens to consider their privileged roles as participants in social movements, including the way craftivism is itself a privileged activity. As additional Women's Marches continue to be held each year, we see attitudes toward the pussyhat changing, in such a way that derivatives of the original pink pussyhat may evolve in response to the now recognized exclusionary aspects of this symbol. Additionally, and ironically, focused attention on the pussyhat has yielded conversations about intersectionality that have advanced insights and information-sharing on the topic of exclusionary behaviors, including sartorial practices. Our research supports the fact that intersectionality shapes women's lives, such that women of color and LGBTQ+ women who participated in the 2017 Women's Marches came to view the pink pussyhat differently. Our findings also provide guidance for future research exploring how intersections of race and sexuality relate to social movements for women's empowerment.

Suggestions for future research

Important opportunities for future research include investigations into pussyhat craftivists who did not march, to glean more about the motives and activities of craftivists—and in particular in this phenomena of craftivism, where there was strong urging to make hats for others who were planning to participate in the Women's Marches. Future craftivist-focused research should investigate the expression of care-giving through the act of making-for-others. Additionally, the development of buy-in and particular affinity for the pussyhat as a sartorial craftivist artifact could be further explored, as trends in desires to wear their pussyhats again were stronger among craftivists than non-makers. Such affinity would be interesting to study longitudinally, particularly because of the evolving pleas to refrain from wearing, rather than produce pussyhats.

The voices of people who were not represented in our survey need to be included in future research. Specifically, voices of women of color, queer voices, and people who are

trans need to be heard and contribute their perspectives and experiences with respect to Women's Marches and the pussyhat.

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Authors' contributions

NLM designed and distributed survey, cleaned and analyzed the data and drafted the manuscript. AM analyzed the data and drafted the manuscript. VAP designed and distributed survey, cleaned and analyzed the data and edited the manuscript. JLH and AH designed and distributed the survey. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Consent for publication

The authors give consent for publication.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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