



Scottish Kiltmaking: Knowledge and Practice Pilot Study

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Introduction. The kilt is key in the set of material culture objects that defines membership in Scottish culture (Martin, 1988). The kilt originated in the Highlands of Scotland around the 16th Century as the Breacan an Fhe'ìlidh (brek-en-an-feelay) (Loranger, 2014), a single piece of cloth wrapped and belted around the wearer. This utilitarian garment was particularly useful outdoors, as it could double as a tent or sleeping bag (Herman, 2001). The garment later evolved into the Feiladh Beg (phi-la-beg), or little kilt--the contemporary silhouette that is popularly known today (Martin, 1988). Upon unification with England in 1707, kilts became a point of contention, as they symbolized resistance to the British Crown, and were abolished via the Disarming Act (1746-1782) (Martin, 1988). The kilt was resurrected in the early 1800s by arbiters such as the author Sir Walter Scott and businessmen like the Sobieski-Stuarts. Since then, diverse groups such as punks and military units have adopted the garment into their dress code (Martin, 1988).

There is a dearth in the literature regarding those who create this iconic garment. Kiltmakers are an important component of the Scottish textile and apparel economy, and the Scottish government has developed training programs to attract younger people to the kiltmaking tradition (Scottish Qualifications Authority, 2008). Therefore, the purpose of this pilot study is to understand the experiences of kiltmakers in the greater Edinburgh area of Scotland.

Theoretical Frameworks. The research is grounded in two sets of theory regarding cultural and professional aspects of kilts. (1) Hamilton's (1997) Macro-Micro continuum and Stone's (1969) concepts of dress and identity help us understand various forces impacting the kilt's role in Scottish culture. Imperative considerations are kilt evolution, usage as a semiotic tool, and Scottish group inclusion. (2) Social Capital Theory (1988) provides a framework to understand kiltmakers' usage of physical and human capital, and informal networks in their practice.

Method. IRB permissions were obtained. As this study will serve to inform a larger study, a purposive snowball sampling method was used to select (n=4) kiltmakers from the greater Edinburgh area. An interview schedule containing open-ended questions regarding kiltmakers' demographics, practice, and community, as well as Scottish perceptions of the kilt was developed. 30-minute interviews were conducted in Scotland. One kiltmaker was videotaped for 10 hours making a kilt from beginning to end, and an instrument was developed to record key stages of kiltmaking. Interviews were transcribed into node format using Glaser and Strauss' (1967) method of constant comparison. The Principle Investigator (PI) coded a single transcript, and then compared codes to an audit coder's. As the inter-rater reliability was not 85%, the

researchers re-coded the transcripts until 85% was met, then codes were developed into larger themes. Video data was analyzed for key stages of the kiltmaking process.

Results. Major themes related to 1) Kiltmaking Industry, and 2) Kiltmaker Certification. Participant 3 noted that the *Kiltmaking Industry* is shrinking, due to inexpensive imports and foreign ownership,

we were inundated with work...we used to be about-what-15 kilt makers in one room, a whole bit of apprentices... the work was fast and furious, and we were still like 6 months behind, 6 months waiting list...there used to be—5, 800 [orders]. So at that point, there was another big turn down and suddenly we weren't getting as many orders. And then they [foreign owners] were starting to buy out—what coat company was buying the other kilt companies? The Sikhs.

It was also noted that the largest threat to the industry was cheap products and uninformed consumers. Participant 3 noted “fake, crappy kilts out there...it's just...because people don't know what they're made to look like on.” Participants also stressed the importance of countering negative trends in the market through *kiltmaker certification*. Participant 3 said, “Because we have the qualification, so why can't we put forward a certificate of authenticity? So they'd be able to give out this, you know, to cover the proper kilt makers.”

Significance & Future Research. These initial findings validate issues occurring within the Scottish kiltmaking industry and provide reason to conduct a larger study on kiltmaker experience and the potential for legislation to protect the industry. Kiltmakers verified a declining business and a need for marketing that dovetails into current kiltmaker certification.

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