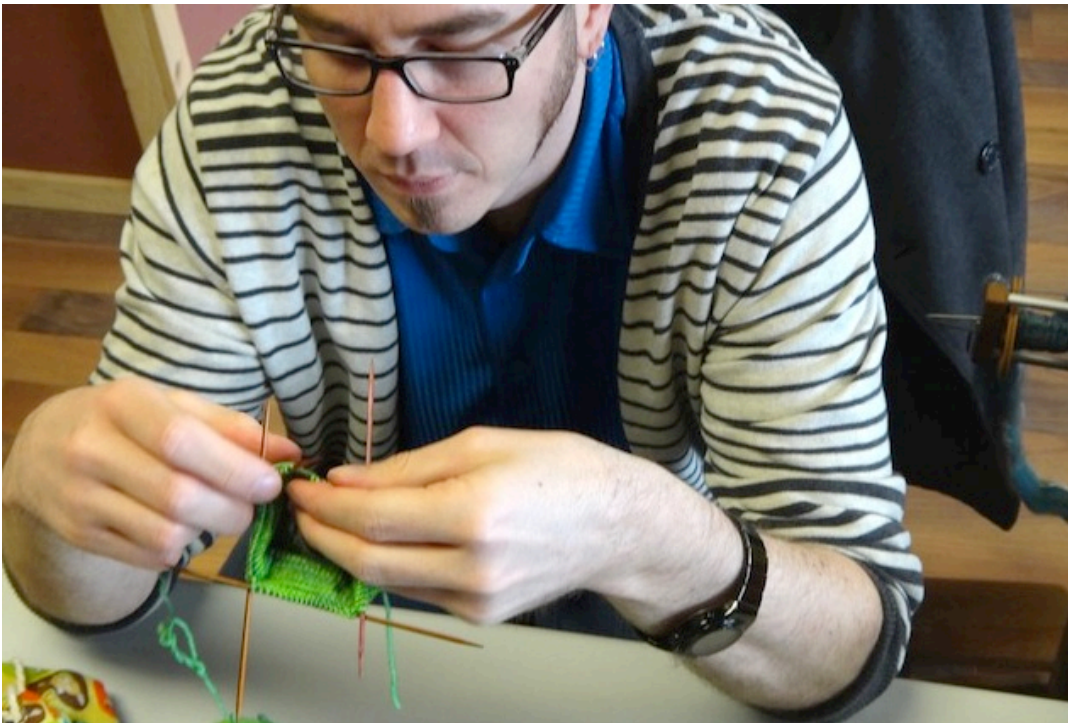




Street level in Toronto

Life\_design



Mathieu La Rose is the co-founder of online shop ManSpun.

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**DESIGN**

<http://www.thegridto.com/life/design/spinning-a-good-yarn/>

**Spinning a good yarn**

Toronto's crafting community is changing thanks to a new trend: men breaking longstanding stereotypes around the hobby of knitting.

BY: [Bethany Van Lingen](#)

When David Demchuk was a young boy growing up in Winnipeg, his mother taught him how to knit. He became proficient at it, but abandoned the hobby until the age of 22, when he started his first job at an employment office in Toronto. His female coworkers were avid knitters, and he soon joined the needle-clicking ranks on lunch breaks.

These days, Demchuk knits socks on the subway and in the atrium of his office building, where he works as a communications specialist for the CBC.

Demchuk's passion for knitting surprises his coworkers, like the one who initially didn't believe he'd knit his own patterned scarf. To prove his point, Demchuk pulled up his pant leg to show her his hand-knit socks.

"She was floored," Demchuk says. "And the crazy part was, that was one of the easiest scarves I've ever made. That's always the way."

Male knitters and yarn spinners are a growing part of Toronto's crafting communities. In taking up needles and drop spindles, they're part of a bigger movement that's turning this ancient handiwork into a downtown hobby.

Mathieu La Rose also attracts attention whenever he knits in public. He's a hit in yarn stores, where La Rose says women often tell him they're proud of him for joining what's traditionally been labelled a woman's craft.

"People will gather around just to watch me knit," La Rose says of his penchant for knitting in pubs and cafes. "It's like a spectacle."

La Rose says it was his best friend and roommate, Cindy Cole, who introduced him to knitting and spinning after a cheesy horror movie marathon. The two of them watched and worked to the point that La Rose had so much extra yarn, he opted to sell it the following week. La Rose and Cole soon started online shop [ManSpun](#), which features a photo of La Rose, shaving cream smeared across his face, gripping a skein of wool. La Rose balances his part-time hobby at ManSpun with a full-time day job as an IT analyst.



*Mathieu La Rose demonstrates the art of yarn spinning.*

Actor Kirk Dunn began to knit on the set of children's TV show *Girls Can! Boys Can!*, and kept up the hobby during his stint playing the titular role on *Dudley the Dragon*. He recalls sitting down in the famed dragon costume in between takes, which was too cumbersome to take off, and knitting away.

Now, he uses knitting as an art form. He has created two quilt-sized knitted "stained glass windows" based on symbolic images from Christianity and from Judaism. He's now working on one for Islam.

"People find it surprising about me. One of my friends said, 'You look like a football player, but you're a knitter.' It's helped me start up conversations with women who wouldn't normally talk to me," Dunn says.

Demchuk is openly gay, but he says it's wrong to assume knitting is strictly a gay man's hobby. "It was a factor, but not the reason I started knitting," he says.

The many stereotypes surrounding the hobby frustrate La Rose, who is straight, has a girlfriend who knits as well.

"There is just some assumption: 'Oh, you have a penis? You can't knit,'" La Rose says.

He says he tries to knit in public, partially as a way to challenge the notion that knitting and spinning should be attached to any gender or sexuality.

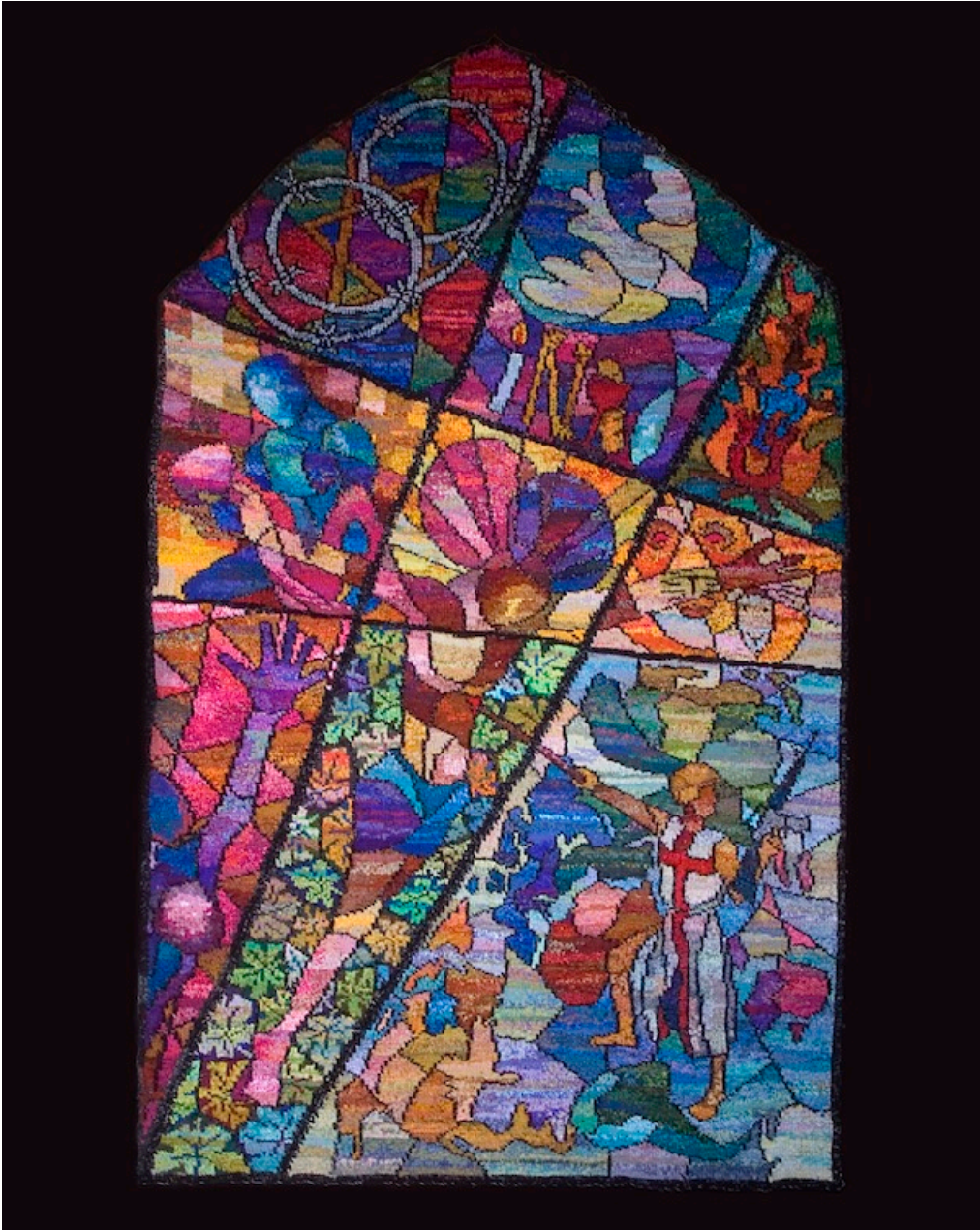
[Kate Atherley](#), a Toronto-based knitting teacher and author of knitting books such as *Knit Accessories: Essentials & Variations* and *Beyond Knit & Purl*, has a theory about knitting's place in contemporary gender roles.

"Many of these crafts skipped a generation," she says. "Our grandmothers knitted and sewed because they had to. They knitted to clothe their families, and [learned] to sew so they could maintain their family's clothes and pass them on to the next kid."

Consequently, Atherley says, Boomer generation women often saw these activities as a chore. Through the '70s and '80s, she says, women began to think of handmade items as less modern than store-bought ones. The rise of feminism also helped encourage these women to abandon the fibre arts.

Atherley believes that simply isn't a factor for the millennial generation.

"We don't have the association with work. We also see fibre arts as separate from gender roles. Now, it's a fabulous creative outlet and the ultimate expression of who you are," she says.



*One of Kirk Dunn's knitted "stained glass windows"*

Knitting stores are ground zero for this movement. Haley Waxberg, owner of Knit-O-Matic, has seen an increase of male customers in her stores over the past few years. She says these men are slowly getting comfortable being the ones doing the shopping.

"They still are some of the quietest customers in the store. They don't tend to ask very many questions."

Atherley adds that all knitters are keen to create custom items that can't be found anywhere else. With handmade hats and socks, the fit, colour, and style are unique creations, and there's also the added bonus of bragging to friends about not having bought it in a store.

Demchuk holds knitting interventions for his friends, stopping them from spending too much on knitwear and giving them free knitting lessons. He once knit a hat to save a friend from spending \$65 on a Club Monaco hat he admired. Demchuk gave the friend a handmade \$15 version and promised him knitting lessons.

He says the \$65 is better spent on beautiful yarn for luxury socks. For the people he cares about, Demchuk says he'll regularly knit socks, even for men with "feet the size of skis."

## **TAGS**

- [Kate Atherley](#),
- [Knitomatic](#),
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