

Men who Knit: A Social Media Critical Discourse Study (SM-CDS) on the Legitimisation of Men within Reddit's r/knitting Community

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Abstract

While knitting is commonly seen as a feminine craft, a great number of men also participate in this practice despite its association with women. These men who knit integrate their identity as knitters with that of being men, resulting in alternative masculinities that often fall back on features of hegemonic masculinity (Kelly, 2014). This study examines online discourses surrounding men who knit through the analysis of twelve threads from Reddit's r/knitting community in order to identify the ways in which knitters perform their identities and genders online. Social Media Critical Discourse Studies (SM-CDS) is applied as the approach to this study that analyses this data and examines the discursive strategies that knitters use to either resist or reinforce gender stereotypes. In addition to this, I look at the ways in which men who knit construct their identities within these discussion threads.

The main findings were that a dominant discourse of legitimisation existed to justify that knitting was an acceptable practice for men. Additional discourses that supported this related to identity, belonging, and empowerment, and were used by members of the r/knitting community to resist stereotypes around knitting as a purely feminine pursuit. Male commenters were found to label themselves and other knitters by emphasising their gender and sexuality in terms that were overlexicalised, suggesting that men who knit were reinforcing the gendered nature of knitting, while others sought to impress the idea that a person's gender had nothing to do with the practice. These opposing positions of both resisting and reinforcing gender stereotypes were found to have the same objective of seeking to legitimise men who knit.

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List of Acronyms

CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CDS	Critical Discourse Studies
DHA	Discourse-Historical Approach
SM-CDS	Social Media Critical Discourse Studies

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

14 August 2020

Signature

Date

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Ethics Approval

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) 18/320 on
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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Overview of the study

The number of men who knit is increasing, illustrating how knitting among men is fast becoming a popular pastime. This is in spite of the practice being regarded as a more feminine activity (Kelly, 2014). In Western cultures, knitting has not been traditionally viewed as an activity for men to partake in and still seems to be widely associated with women (Kelly, 2014) and feminine traits such as being warm and friendly (Prentice & Carranza, 2002). By participating in this feminine craft, some men who knit face assumptions about their masculinity and sexuality, therefore seek to reassert their heterosexual masculinity (Kelly, 2014).

Meanwhile, others embrace activities associated with femininity in order to create alternative masculinities that challenge gender norms (Kelly, 2014) and counteract the stigma of knitting.

I began crafting at a young age. After being taught by my mother to embroider and sew at the age of eleven, I later began to reject crafting's association with women's work as a result of observing unbalanced gender roles in the world around me. It was only a couple of years ago, in my early 40s that I decided to take up crochet, being of the mind that making something with my own hands would be a more meaningful gift to others. I learned to crochet from watching YouTube instructional videos but it was not until I began writing this thesis that I began to knit. I returned to the Internet for instruction and later attended a double knitting class by a well-regarded male knitter I had seen on YouTube called The Sockmatician¹ during his tour of New Zealand. Through this experience, I was struck by the fact that men who knit were not so visible in public, yet they had quite a presence on social media platforms. These platforms enable the instantaneous connection of digital communication between people around the world (Zappavigna, 2014) and therefore become a space where the identities of these men are more obviously articulated and performed.

¹ Nathan Taylor, known as The Sockmatician, is a male knitter from the United Kingdom with a successful YouTube channel. He attends worldwide craft festivals, running knitting workshops. He recently published a knitting manual targeted at men titled *Guys knit: The instruction manual* (2018).

1.2 Research focus

This thesis explores gender stereotyping experienced by men who knit, focusing on social media discourse in dedicated knitting forums that specifically reference the topic of men who knit. It was inspired, in particular, by the discovery of www.thestraightmaleknitter.com, the personal blog of a male knitter who, while referring to himself as The Straight Male Knitter, presented the masculine and feminine aspects of his identity through a mix of narrative storytelling and updates on knitting projects. He repeatedly referred to overtly masculine traits, such as his heterosexuality and virility, and masculine activities such as riding motorcycles, drinking whiskey, and smoking a pipe. This appeared to be an attempt to counter any perceived performance of femininity through his knitting practices. His efforts to challenge gender stereotypes made me question whether this was a common issue. However, there was a noticeable gap in research on knitting that focused more closely on both the gender of those who knit and how this was articulated within the communicative practices available in new media such as YouTube or Reddit. Because of this, I decided to investigate other online discussions around masculinity and knitting, in particular, to understand the ways in which gender is perceived and performed in an environment where individuals are largely able to maintain anonymity yet still create their own persona.

1.3 Gender as a social construction

Gender is widely considered to be the socially constructed definition of men and women, explained by Butler (2011) as something “performative” as opposed to the biological sex of male or female as assigned at birth (p. 34). While gender is popularly understood in Western cultures to have two categories of “men and women” (Kiesling, 2007, p. 656), Butler argues that gender is not binary and does not necessarily indicate a person’s sexuality or sexual practice. This also extends to “masculinity and femininity”, which are assumed to not be interchangeable (Kiesling, 2007, p. 656). However, much like gender, masculinity and femininity are also socially constructed terms, described by Johnson (2005) as sets of essential traits of men and women, resulting in fixed gender roles which men and women are expected to follow. Gender is

fluid, changeable, and greatly informed by outside influences, as can be seen in the back-and-forth gendering of knitting over time.

1.4 The gendering of knitting over time

When looking at the social construction of men who knit in online spaces, it is first necessary to look back at the origins of knitting and the journey it took to become the craft that we know today. From its earliest days, knitting has gone through many changes, both societal and technological. In this day and age, it is not as common to see men knitting in public as it is women. However, this was not always the case; knitting is thought to have emerged as something only men did. The gendering of knitting has changed over time, particularly throughout the 20th Century, when has continuously alternated between being done primarily by men or by women. This historical context is outlined below.

1.4.1 Knitting's origins

There is much controversy over where and when knitting originated; some theories have been disproven and some theories may yet to be revealed. However, it is widely accepted that knitting emerged in the Islamic world around the 9th to 11th century (Wilson & Frey, 2016), most probably through the production of fishing nets (Bucior, 2013). The word knit comes from the Old English *cnyttan* meaning to knot and describes the practice of weaving one continuous thread of fibre with two sticks or needles. The purpose of knitting developed over time with wealthy families in the West coming to have their own master knitters that exclusively knitted clothing and accessories for them. The earliest known of these items were made for the Spanish royal family in the 13th century (Hubert, 2010), suggesting knitting has long been associated with power structures.

As a respected trade across Europe, knitting's association with power and status led to the formation of knitting guilds. Irene Turnau's (1982) research on knitting in Europe between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries discusses the spread of these guilds, the earliest being active in Paris in 1268. By the early 1500s, there was the rise of all-male knitting guilds to protect trade secrets and knitting was considered a male-dominated craft, with knitters spending six

years studying the craft before being granted guild membership (Hubert, 2010). It is not known exactly when knitting came to be a pastime practised by women. However, as early as the mid-1300s, Italian and German painters depicted the Virgin Mary knitting with baby Jesus (Rutt & Hughes, 1987). This suggests that women knitting was representative of society at that time as it is unlikely Madonna would have been depicted introducing something male-dominated because doing so would have been disrespectful (Kooler, 2011), further suggesting that knitting had already become feminised at that time (Ervin & Conger, 2016).

1.4.2 From hand to machine

In 1589, an English man named William Lee was alleged to have invented the first knitting machine. Lee's machine was an attempt to win the affections of a young woman who he saw to be too busy knitting to pay him attention (Burton & Scott, 2019). This development was the first step in the dramatic shift to machine knitting. With machine knitting came hierarchal gender roles in knitting (Wilson & Frey, 2016). Men running the machines deemed that their physical strength was a necessity and by 1845, women were only operating 7% of knitting frames (Ervin & Conger, 2016).

In later years, smaller machines were created for home use and marketed to women in working-class families, encouraging them to knit as an extra source of income. This "outwork" kept women in the home and perhaps cemented the connection between women and knitting in the home, creating both a gender and a class division because those of higher status did not need the extra income (Ervin & Conger, 2016). When the industrial revolution took off in the early 1880s, hand knitting began to be seen as a hobby rather than a trade and something that was done in the home, by women. By the Victorian era, knitting had become a chore for women, with new methods of holding knitting needles being introduced to make the craft appear more lady-like to observers (D. Stoller, 2003), further associating hand knitting with femininity.

1.4.3 In war and protest

During World Wars I and II, knitting was promoted as a "patriotic duty" (Graham, 2008, p. 438), as seen in the formation of organisations such as *Knit a Bit for our First Line of Defence*

during WWI where women knitted for servicemen sent abroad (Keyel, 2016) and *Bundles for Britain* during WWII, where “patriotic ladies” knitted for servicemen in Britain (Dimitrova, 1997, p. 379). Crafting was used as a coping strategy for stress during wartime. In the United Kingdom, old items were unravelled and the yarn was reused, encouraging people to make do with what they had in a time when resources were scarce (Strawn, 2012). There was also a resurgence of interest in crafts in the 1960s and 1970s, associating anti-Vietnam War protesters with knitting as a protest action.

At this time, there were fears that natural resources would be depleted and alternative sources needed to be found. Minahan and Wolfram Cox (2007) suggest this “Flower Power” movement promoted a connection to nature and natural resources, such as yarns (p. 13). However, not long after, knitting began to decline in popularity due to a combination of the availability of time-effective and cost-effective machine knits, and newly available synthetic fibres. Consequently, it was far less common to see men hand knitting in public and the hobby began to be regarded as even more of a feminine pursuit. Even so, most of the expert knitters on television in the 1970s were men and it is still common to hear stories of both men and women being taught to knit by their grandfathers (Nicholson, 2013).

1.4.4 Knitting as feminist protest

The back and forth gendering of knitting continued throughout the 1970s. With the rise of second-wave feminism, at a time when the world was dominated by media (Gill, 2007), women who wanted to knit were judged for conforming to the “perceived male oligarchy” (Hemingway, 2013, para. 6). By the 1990s, during the rise of both feminism and gender studies, knitting was far less popular with younger generations. This was largely due to the ease of buying cheaper machine-knitted garments and it was at this point that hand knitting became seen as something only practised by grandmothers, particularly in the public sphere.

However, while second-wave feminism saw young women rejecting traditionally feminine activities such as knitting, the emergence of third-wave feminism in the early 1990s (Mendes, 2011) meant women were suddenly reclaiming them (Batkin, 2018). According to Minahan and

Wolfram Cox (2007), during the rise of third-wave feminism, the proportion of women under 45 that knew how to knit doubled between 1997 and 2002, indicating the beginning of a resurgence. In more recent years, there has been an increased popularity of knitting, with many “hipsters” taking up the pastime. The term hipster is primarily associated with White male millennials and their contradictory act of disapproving of cultural judgement, only to “surreptitiously reinforce it” (Hill, 2017, p. 1). By rejecting activities deemed popular in favour of those less common, hipsters unintentionally contribute to the popularity of such activities. The rise in hipsters knitting has resulted in other young men also taking up knitting as a hobby.

1.4.5 A revival

As knitting becomes a popular new pastime, it is simultaneously associated with sustainability and empowerment (Ervin & Conger, 2016; Minahan & Wolfram Cox, 2007), and has begun to represent an appreciation for handcrafted one-of-a-kind items that are just as much about the journey as the destination (Byron, 2019). Additionally, its revival has much to do with having disposable income and the time to do this craft - a return of knitting as a form of status.

Although many people argue knitting should not be gendered, Debbie Stoller suggests in *Stitch 'n bitch: The knitter's handbook*² (2003) that women have been doing this forever, neglecting to acknowledge the role men have played in knitting's history.

1.5 Social media and knitting

Despite gender norms having switched back and forth in knitting over time, it is still somewhat uncommon to observe men knitting in the present day, particularly in public. Knitting challenges these gender norms. Therefore, men whose intention is not to make political statements may “unintentionally do so by defying gender norms in public” (Kelly, 2014, p. 135). This can be seen in the reactions that men who knit receive when seen practising their craft in public. Meanwhile, social media platforms are places where knitters can find others with shared interests, during which discussions on gender happen organically.

² According to Harriet Bradley (2013) in her book *Gender*, the use of pejorative words such as bitch was re-appropriated as a strategy of expressing the “values, strengths and power” of women (p. 46).

1.6 Research on men who knit

My research focusses on the social media platform Reddit.com as a place where discussions that explicitly discuss the topic of men who knit thrive, in order to better understand the ways gender, in particular masculinity, is perceived in an environment where individuals are afforded the choice for their gender to remain undisclosed. In this study, I take a Social Media Critical Discourse Studies (SM-CDS) approach developed by Majid KhosraviNik (2017a) that brings together scholarship on digital media and theories relating to discourse theory and the social construction of gender identity (SM-CDS as an approach will be addressed in Chapter Four in more detail). This work is a critical investigation - not critical as in criticising, but by making the implicit explicit (Unger et al., 2016) in the identity construction of male knitters online. The following research questions guide my research.

1.6.1 Research questions

- RQ1. In what ways do online knitting communities on Reddit resist or reinforce gender stereotypes through their discursive practices?
- RQ2. In what ways do men who knit construct their identities on the social media platform Reddit?

1.7 Organisation of chapters

In this introductory chapter, I have introduced men's participation in the craft of knitting as a topic of interest, providing some context around the history of knitting and its gendered past before introducing the notion of social media as a space for discussions on gender to take place. The remaining eight chapters of this thesis are divided as follows.

Chapters Two and Three provide a review of existing literature in two different areas relevant to this study. Chapter Two looks at the literature which contextualises this study about men who knit, taking into account the concepts of hegemony, masculinity and reflexivity in relation to gender and identity construction. Chapter Three reviews literature in the context of social media platforms as spaces for communicative practice and the formation of online communities. It discusses the delineation of social media from technology and introduces online knitting

communities before looking at Reddit as a social media platform. Also included is an explanation of the operational workings of Reddit, along with the specific rules of Reddit's r/knitting community from which the data will be drawn.

Chapters Four and Five provide an overview of the methodological aspects of this research. Chapter Four situates this study within the field of Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) by introducing the concepts of discourse, critique, ideology, and power. Then, the application of the SM-CDS approach that will be used in this research is justified and explained, presenting its challenges and the ethical considerations relevant to online data collection. Chapter Five describes the design of the study using Reddit as a data source and is where I give an outline of the data collection process and demographics of the Reddit users. Details of the process of analysing the social media data are given and I also state my position as a researcher in this study.

Chapters Six and Seven provide the findings from my textual analysis. Chapter Six is concerned with the r/knitting community's arguments and justification for men who knit by looking at emerging topics such as age and masculinity. Additionally, I highlight the use of metaphor as well as humour as mechanisms for coping with and challenging societal expectations of gender. In Chapter Seven, I focus on the self-labelling of men who knit before discussing the widespread use of overlexicalization in marking gender to support a dominant discourse of legitimisation that emphasises men's masculine traits.

Chapter Eight discusses the findings of this study through a critical lens in relation to the research questions, considering the ideologies informing this discourse. These ideologies surrounding gender are further discussed in relation to the emergent discourses before situating the study within the theoretical confines of Giddens's reflexive project. Then, a discourse of legitimisation is discussed regarding the justification and validation of men's participation in the craft and the gendering of knitting over time. The chapter concludes with a focus on gender issues such as the representation of gender in knitting and the concept of the glass escalator.

In Chapter Nine, I conclude by reviewing my findings and the contribution of this research in the field of linguistics. In revisiting SM-CDS as a relatively new approach within CDS, I discuss how it has aided this study in light of the techno-discursive architecture of the Internet and its impact on discourses which are made visible on social media platforms such as Reddit. Finally, I note the limitations of the study and conclude with recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores existing scholarship on gender and identity – areas relevant to the topic of identity construction of men who knit and which are explored through the lens of CDS and knitting. First, hegemony (as defined in 2.3.1), and in particular hegemonic masculinity, is explored to provide context for the current societal expectations of gender. A discussion about identity then follows, focusing on Giddens' (1991) reflexive project. Finally, a discussion takes place on ways in which identity is afforded new capabilities through new media technologies.

2.2 Knitting

Since Strawn (2012) suggested that knitting had been largely overlooked in scholarly research, there has been an increase in research focusing on knitting. Strawn investigated the cultural and social aspects contributing to “the limited acceptance of knitting as an academic topic” (p. 1) and proposed that increased online presence would garner interest in the topic. Strawn also suggested that bringing knitters and knitting resources together through online knitting sources would provide validation for the academic study of knitting that is well suited to cross-disciplinary studies. Some such studies have examined knitting from various perspectives, exploring the topics of gender, feminism, masculinity, protest, identity, and new media.

It is difficult to discuss knitting without referencing its gendered past and associations with femininity. As such, I will explore the intersection of knitting with gender and identity research in the next sections.

2.3 Gender and knitting

There has been much scholarship on gender and identity. For example, Terman and Miles (1936) published on gender's relationship with personality and in more recent studies, Lippa (1991) has focused on hobbies and interests, such as knitting, in the measurement of gender identity.

There is an assumption that men and women are different kinds of people. Bem (1995, p. 329) describes this as “gender polarization”, a concept upheld throughout men’s dominance over women in the West’s patriarchal society. Glover and Kaplan (2009) cite Robert Stoller’s (1968) work as being the first study to make a distinction between sex and gender. This is also referred to by Oakley (1972), attributing the rules for masculinity and femininity as being set by society (as cited in Bradley, 2013), supporting the belief that gender is a social construct.

This social construction of gender is something Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell explores with her founding work on gender studies in the late-1980s and early-1990s, leading to the emergence of masculinity theory in the late-1980s. Connell is renowned for developing the idea that masculinity and femininity are not binary and that there are different ways of being a man or a woman but that these are framed in relation to hegemonic masculinity (Bradley, 2013), including the perception that knitting is something only women participate in.

Furthermore, discussion of knitting as a gendered activity lead to studies exploring feminism and knitting (Groeneveld, 2010). For example, in the 1960s and 1970s when knitting was discouraged due to its fundamental ties with being a housewife (Stannard, 2011), the emergence of the Stitch ‘n Bitch movement, in which women meet to knit, stitch, and talk (Minahan & Wolfram Cox, 2007), third-wave feminist knitting practices and moments of activism (Pentney, 2008), the intersection of knitting, feminism and gender construction through the examination of knitted objects (Myzelev, 2009), and knitting as a feminist project (Kelly, 2014).

Additionally, acts of protest were explored using craft as an instrument of political resistance (Newmeyer, 2008). For example, the Pussyhat Project in relation to craft activism (Black, 2017), which explores gender, race, class, and space.

Studies on the association of gender and craft have also explored the ways in which gender is established through everyday performances. Some have had a specific focus on knitting (Medford, 2006), such as Stannard and Sanders’ (2014) investigation of young women’s motivations in their participation in knitting, and research into the everyday performance of men knitting as queer pedagogy (Avramsson, 2016). Of note is the study *Knitting takes balls*

(Morneau, 2015) on how men's engagement in the feminised activity of knitting affects re-negotiations of masculinity. While Morneau's study draws some parallels at face value, it concentrates on face-to-face knitting groups as opposed to the negotiation of identity that takes place in online interactions.

2.3.1 Hegemony and hegemonic masculinity

Hegemony is described by Gramsci as "maintaining dominant social positions through less obvious but more basic means than direct coercion" (1994, as cited in Kiesling, 2006, p. 262). Simply put, hegemony is the dominance of one group over another. However, the term is far more complex when viewed through the lens of Gender Theory, which encompasses men's dominant place in society. Hegemonic masculinity is the dominant form of masculinity, a term coined with the purpose of focusing on the critique of masculinity (Donaldson, 1993). The concept of hegemonic masculinity has heavily influenced research on gender and social hierarchy in recent years (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), influencing thinking about men, gender, and society's hierarchies. This form of masculinity, or *manliness* as it is often referred to, is a prescribed set of behaviours and attributes that are assigned to men, which Connell presents as "an aspirational goal rather than a lived reality" (Wetherell & Edley, 1999, p. 339).

Some criticism of the concept of masculinity is focused on the suggestion that the experiences of men and women are being dichotomised (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). This is seen in Brod's (1994) view that the study of men only considers men - as if women's experiences are not relative to men's studies (as cited in Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Similarly, Connell and Messerschmidt suggest that gender is relational and masculinities are socially defined in contrast with femininity, therefore women are seen as central in the construction of masculinities "as mothers; as schoolmates; as girlfriends; sexual partners; and wives; as workers in the gender division of labor; and so forth" (2005, p. 848), thus recommending a relational approach to gender. This is where I position myself in this study - as a cisgender woman who knits, investigating the topic of men who knit through her perspectives of masculinity.

2.3.2 Masculine hierarchy and the gender order

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) explain that even masculinities are hierarchical in themselves, with non-hegemonic masculinities being subordinate to hegemonic masculinity, placing importance on power and heterosexuality. According to Connell (2005), hegemonic masculinity is not only the usual form of masculinity but it also depends on its subordinate masculinities and is “a culturally idealized form of masculine character” (p. 83), highlighting patriarchal dominance. This concept of hegemonic masculinity works to legitimise men's dominant position over women in society (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), positioning them “at the top of a hierarchy of historically specific masculinities” (Wedgwood, 2009, p. 335), devaluing anything less than.

This hierarchy is explained in Connell's (1987) gender order, which presents masculinities and femininities that vary across time, culture and the individual (Connell, 2005). It does not solely concern the hierarchical position of masculinities and femininities but also how they are negotiated through the gender order of a society, as seen in “dominance and subordination, struggles for hegemony, and practices of resistance” (Connell, 1992, p. 735) between men and women. The increased participation of men in the practice of knitting suggests that gender order relations in knitting are being challenged.

Hegemonic masculinity is seen as being dominant with non-hegemonic masculinities as being all other variations. These variations are referred to by Riviere as “intermediate types” - heterosexual men and women who display features of the “other sex”³ (1929, as cited in Butler, 2011, p. 68). In their study on masculinity in the U.S., Hogan and Pursell (2008) report that hegemonic masculinity is synonymous with the stereotypical presentation of males as strong, financially stable, good-looking, fit, virile and heterosexual, traits valued by society that “most men would strive to emulate” (Kiesling, 2007, p. 657). According to Simpson (2004), men often adopt strategies that enable them to re-establish masculinity that has been “undermined” by

³Use of ‘other’ implies that male and female are binary and that there are only two sexes. However, this fails to acknowledge those who are intersex. Harper (2007) reports that the sex of 1 in 2,000 babies born is sufficiently ambiguous for professionals to not be able to assign a sex of male or female. As a result, these Intersex children are often subjected to surgeries to “normalize” their genitalia (King, 2016, p. 360) to conform to male or female norms.

feminine occupations (p. 364), such as re-labelling the job to “minimize feminine associations” (p. 359). For example, male nurses. This suggests knitting would be an activity rejected by those wishing to establish themselves as masculine.

2.3.3 Redefining masculinity

Masculinities are practices that are accomplished through social action and thus differ depending on gender relations in particular social settings (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). They are “socially constructed, produced, consumed, and performed” (van Hoven & Hopkins, 2009, p. 493) but as society changes, so do the ways in which masculinities are defined. Referred to here in the plural, masculinity is not one singular category, it varies across cultures, generations, one’s own life and within societies (Kimmel, 2001), the ideals of which are context-specific (Bradley, 2013).

The performance of masculine identity is a strategy that is established through men’s “complicit or resistant stance to prescribed dominant masculine styles” (Wetherell & Edley, 1999, p. 337). A term widely used in recent academia to describe men who are softer and more caring is the *New Man* (Bradley, 2013, p. 57). New men are seen as being more concerned than women with relationships, fashion, health, fitness, and appearance (Jule, 2017), resulting in the presentation of a “more consumerist version” of masculinity (Bradley, 2013, p. 24) but still masculine, nonetheless. Although traditional definitions of masculinity can be seen as a means to counter the stigma associated with knitting (Kelly, 2014), evolving definitions such as that of the new man work to construct alternative masculine identities.

2.4 Identity and knitting

Like gender, identity is also a social construct, something that is performed (Butler, 2011) and a process that is embedded in social practices (Foucault, 1984). Discourse practices have a central role in these processes (Fairclough, 1989), defining how individuals participating on social media platforms “present themselves to others, negotiate roles, and conceptualize themselves” (de Fina, Schiffrin & Bamberg, 2006, p. 2).

Identity scholars explore identity from two main approaches, from within the more traditional frame of Conversation Analysis (CA) or the frame of CDS. These two approaches view the relationship between language and social life differently, with CA concentrating on the emergence of identities through “talk-in-interactions”, while CDS concentrates on a wider context seeing identities as being produced by, or imposed upon, people “through dominant discourse practices and ideologies” (de Fina, Schiffrin & Bamberg, 2006, p.5). CDS, therefore, gives more weight to the political and ideological context that influences identity formation and performance of hobbies such as knitting.

When looking at the history of human identity, Gilbert and Forney (2013) explain it as being divided into three stages: pre-modern, modern, and post-modern. Identity in a pre-modern society is based on one’s order of social standing, while in a modern society it is something internal and unique. However, a post-modern society presents multiple selves that are “capable of maximizing or minimizing multiple aspects of identity according to personal desires and the demands of a particular context” (p. 25). Therefore, identity can be seen as always being under construction, influenced by the world around us. This can be understood through the theoretical lens of Giddens’ (1991) reflexive project, as discussed below.

2.4.1 Giddens’ reflexive project

Giddens (1991) describes the present day as a late modern society, arguing that our society is a continuation of modernity, with less predetermination of roles that gives people more choices in the way they live. Giddens proposes that the choices we are given then make an impact on our lives. For example, as soon as you have choice you become vulnerable because people can judge you, or you can judge yourself, for the choices that you make. In a late modern society, people often have the freedom to choose their partner, career, life path and hobbies, which contributes to their identity-making. This self-identity is a person’s understanding of themselves and consequently becomes a reflexive project that is something to continuously reflect on and alter accordingly.

Our identity is always under construction, not only influenced by societal forces but also influencing them. The idea of the reflexive project is that the choices a person makes and the events that take place in their life are integrated into the ongoing story about their self. The individual is suggested by Giddens (1991) as being “active in producing and performing an ongoing narrative of the self” (Merchant, 2006, p. 238) and creating an association between people and consumption. Individuals’ choices are influenced by social forces which, in turn, act to change those societal forces. It is this mutual influence of the society on the individual and the individual on society that Giddens (1991) calls structuration. Giddens goes on to suggest that wide-reaching changes in economic, political and social orders enable the desire “to create and maintain new kinds of social networks” (1991, as cited in Merchant, 2006, p. 235). These networks allow new social identities to emerge (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001) and help to sustain a narrative of identity (Giddens, 1991) that is created through a connection with others (Merchant, 2006).

2.4.2 Gender identity

Postmodernity, and thus late modernity, has strongly influenced the evolving way we think about gender (Bradley, 2013) and the way our gender identities are constructed. One’s self can be understood as a narrative that is constantly being worked on and refined in a “reflexive project of the self” (Giddens, 1991, p. 180). Therefore, the intersection of what knitters say at both the micro and macro levels of discourse (defined in 4.2.1) gives insight into their identities in different contexts as well as, according to Kiesling (2006), their hegemonic identity in relation to their social world. However, people in hegemonic, or powerful, positions do not always feel powerful and may unknowingly employ the discursive strategy of situating an individual or group as other in order to re-establish their power status.

Fields (2014) examines how social psychological processes prompt changes to the meanings and practices associated with knitting and, although not specific to knitting, there is also a body of interdisciplinary research related to craft in general, such as the ways three contemporary women narrate their identities as amateur craftswomen (Grace & Gandolfo, 2014), and craft, feminism and social media amongst indie crafters and activists (Jefferies, 2016). However, there

does not appear to be existing research covering the intersection of gender and knitting as well as new media technologies. Certainly, some studies on gender identity in wider contexts are available, such as Prislin and Wood's (2005) work on collective identity through the self-categorisation of oneself as male or female and gender identities developing across one's lifespan (Tobin et al. 2010). However, it is the area of SM-CDS that has attracted a focus on the power of language when it comes to identity construction. This has been mostly in the areas of ethnic minorities, immigrants and gender but also in relation to new media.

Identity is afforded new capabilities through new media technologies. Users of these technologies can "reinvent their identities and assumptions, repositioning them culturally towards the web, the digital, and the virtual" (Toledo Ramírez, 2013, p. 55) through their connections with others. These such connections on Reddit are what enable its users to produce and perform their identities as men who knit. Consideration of the structuration of these knitters' reflexive projects is a useful tool in understanding how men who knit represent their identities through their language use. When it comes to understanding the construction of the identity of men who knit there appears to be a lack of scholarly literature that specifically addresses this area in terms of language and discourse. Therefore, the potential for the social construction of identity through social media, especially that of male knitters, will be discussed in the next chapter.

2.5 Conclusion of Chapter Two

This chapter has explored the scholarship on gender and identity and situated current academic scholarship in relation to knitting. I discussed hegemonic masculinity and its position in the masculine hierarchies before redefining masculinity. I addressed the construction of gender identity and explained Giddens' reflexive project in regard to late modern societies and how this relates to men in the construction of their identities as knitters. The suitability for CDS was discussed in relation to identity, based on its inclusion of the wider socio-cultural norms presented through the text. The chapter ends with a discussion on the opportunities new media provides for research on gender and identity.

Chapter 3 Social Media and Reddit: A Place for Discourse about Men who Knit

3.1 Introduction

This chapter serves to situate my thesis within a wider societal context associated with social media and explain what social media platforms such as Reddit can offer to users who wish to talk about men who knit. I first discuss the scholarly literature on the Internet and social media where users have become active participants, not just consumers, in the digital world. I then turn my focus to literature on online communities and people who knit. The general contextual setting around knitting, and more specifically gendering of knitting, has been covered in the introduction. Therefore, I look more closely on the social media contextualization of Reddit as a social media platform whereby discourses about men who knit are articulated in online discussion threads. Next, the emergence of a participatory culture enabled through Web 2.0 provides a backdrop for the exploration of online communities. I then provide an outline of the operational features of the social media platform Reddit. The general rules, conventions, and functions of the site are explained before outlining the moderated rules specific to the r/knitting subreddit. Finally, I outline the opportunity this research offers for an understanding of gendered online discourses.

3.2 New media

The Internet is a social space in which communities with shared interests meet (Fuchs, 2008) in a non-geographic space (Baker & Ward, 2002). The term new media encompasses digital technologies that use platforms that enable mass communication, such as websites, podcasts, weblogs (blogs) and video logs (vlogs). These new media platforms give knitters new ways to engage in, and think about, their craft (Orton-Johnson, 2014), and connect to communities of other knitters.

Originally a collection of pages hosting hyperlinks, the Internet is a new media phenomenon that has evolved rapidly since its conception in the early 1990s. It is now a place where information can be shared through online communities, or social media, such as Facebook,

Instagram, and Reddit. These social media platforms are online spaces where communities are formed and knitters, men included, share their experiences. While Facebook and Instagram are platforms where users follow others in order to view their content, Reddit is a new media social media platform where users follow dedicated topics of discussion.

3.3 Social media

The new paradigm of social media communication works within the wider social, political and cultural fabrics of society. There has been a general change in the way identity is now surfacing in new ways across these spaces. This is influenced by pre-existing discourses taking place in society around the gender stereotyping of men who knit over time, as well as gender roles in society and the socio-cultural aspects of the craft. The users in this society are discussed as members of a digital world, as “human networks” and “webs of people that promote connectedness as a social value” (van Dijck, 2013, p. 4). Social media communities create a “third place” (Minahan & Wolfram Cox, 2007, p. 10). While a person’s first place is home and their second is work, a third place is somewhere users can operate on the Internet that is neither home nor work, forging connections with other users. Social media platforms thus provide affordances that enable interaction between Internet users, and gendered discourses, to be communicated.

3.3.1 Delineating social media use and technology

Social media is a subset of new media technology that enables the sharing of ideas, thoughts, and information through computer-generated communities. It is a tool that increases our ability to share, cooperate, and take collective action, “all outside the framework of traditional institutional institutions and organizations” (Shirky, 2008, as cited in Fuchs, 2014, p. 35). The persona that users present online is often different from that in the offline world and a sense of anonymity can affect the way that people act online (Joinson, 2002). Thus, the use of handles⁴ instead of real names provide a shield to identity markers such as gender. Even though users often reveal personal information when signing up to social media sites (McKenna & Bargh,

⁴ Handles are names people choose to be known by online. A person’s handle gives them a chance to “express unexplored aspects of the self” (Turkle, 1999, p. 643).

2000), there is an assumption that online spaces are intrinsically different to real-world interactions (Harrison et al., 2013; KhosraviNik & Esposito, 2018).

Social media technology is the result of technological advances, however, it cannot be solely defined as technology. Although online interactions have been viewed as a separate realm from the physical world for some time, KhosraviNik (2017b) suggests social media communication is “*independent of the medium* although the magnitude, penetrability, and formal aspects of its realised forms may be heavily influenced by the medium” (p. 3616). Online interactions are serving to delineate social media use in our everyday society.

These users are ordinary participants as opposed to institutional actors with mediation between culture and society. The norms of these social media technologies “should not result in reducing the notion of society into a cybernetic space” (KhosraviNik & Esposito, 2018, p. 59) as it has become a reflection of society, blurring the line between public and private spaces. Dana boyd (2010) introduced the concept of *publics* as an extension of communities to refer not to *the* public in general, but a collection of publics (p. 39). Furthermore, these networked publics are restructured by networked technologies and simultaneously become: (i) a space constructed through networked technologies and; (ii) an intersection of people, technology, and practice resulting in an imagined collective emerging (boyd, 2010, p. 39), such as the publics seen in Reddit.com’s subreddits (Hjorth & Hinton, 2019).

3.3.2 Social media in society

Men who knit are subject to stereotyping and the cultural stigma of effeminacy as a result of their participation in craft activities such as knitting (Avramsson, 2016). With low visibility of these men in public spheres coupled with the treatment they receive when knitting in public (or the public, as boyd illustrates), it is less likely that men will feel comfortable challenging these norms. As a result, men seek online communities to discuss their hobby and hold discussions on their gender identity and knitting (Minahan & Wolfram Cox, 2007) in a safe environment relatively free of judgement. This relates to the notion of gender and oftentimes the need for a safe place where one can discuss gender identity and knitting, which may not take place outside

of social media platforms. Reddit, in this case, with its rules for upkeeping kindness, therefore, becomes a space where men who knit may seek like-minded people or those who support them.

The ways in which people talk about and position themselves in their online discourse provides opportunities to analyse how their identities are constructed. They also enable the examination of which master narratives - established normative discourses - exist (Bamberg, 2002). As proposed by Strawn (2012), new media has been a strong influence on more recent knitting scholarship. For example, a knitting blogger going by the handle Yarn Harlot was the subject of research into grassroots creativity and community in new media environments (Humphreys, 2008) and with much of people's lives spent online, the activities that are carried out in this space have a formative effect on the construction of one's self. In fact, the computer has been called a "second self" as far back as 1984 (Turkle, 1999, p. 643). As technology advances at a pace that is hard to keep up with, so do the complexities of the identities that are developed in online communities such as Reddit.

3.3.3 Web 2.0

The Internet gives us continuous access to global information and a "constant connectivity" that has become an aspect of society taken for granted in Western culture (Keipi et al., 2016, as cited in KhosraviNik & Esposito, 2018, p. 46). Originally a collection of pages hosting hyperlinks known as Web 1.0, the Internet has evolved rapidly since its conception in the early 1990s into Web 2.0, a place where information is shared through online communities. Web 2.0, more recently referred to as the participatory web, somewhere features such as likes, shares, tags and upvotes are "constantly affording new communicative resources unique to these spaces" (KhosraviNik & Esposito, 2018, p. 61). This study forthwith refers to Web 2.0 as the participatory web.

Gauntlett's (2011) representation of the participatory web demonstrates that while Web 1.0 involved users working alone, they now "come together to work collaboratively in a shared space" (p. 5). However, the rise in different ways of accessing online spaces has meant the Internet is becoming less participatory and more consumer focused (Gauntlett, 2011, p. 156).

Even so, in specialised online communities, its users continue to participate, sharing lived experiences and allowing insight into constructed identities. This is reflected in Orton-Johnson's (2014) research into the way technologies on the participatory web become embedded as a part of the construction and enjoyment of leisure practice, including knitting. Furthermore, in the age of prosumption, which refers to the way in which online content is produced by those who consume it (KhosraviNik & Unger, 2015), it is no surprise that knitters turn to social media to connect with other knitters, sharing their patterns and works in progress as well as reflecting on their own, and others', lived experiences.

3.3.4 Online communities

Social media can be seen as an expression of this kind of participatory culture (Jenkins, 2008, as cited in Fuchs, 2014), in which the social and collaborative nature of social media platforms exist. Reddit's r/knitting demonstrates communities of such kinds of participatory culture and illustrates the very prosumption (as defined in 3.3.3) that embodies the participatory web (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). Accessing such networked publics (as defined in 3.2.1), one can not only observe the delivery of information to wide audiences, including strangers (Arendt, 1998) but also gain greater understandings of the discourses of groups of people in online communities.

Topic-based internet communities form on digital platforms and enable a way of socializing that results in new conceptualizations of community, operating as third places in which people may discuss aspects of their lives other than the official topic (McCulloch, 2019). Bratich and Brush (2011) have explored a resurgence of interest in the culture around crafting, something they call fabriculture, through gendered spaces of production and the blurring of old and new media in digital craft culture. Alongside the resurgence of knitting that is seen in the popularity of Stitch 'n Bitch and pub knitting groups, there has been a growing presence of knitters on the web (Orton-Johnson, 2014). This enhances social ties in the combination of online and offline relationships that brings knitting communities together (Humphreys, 2008), as well as informing the identity construction of people in these communities. These new forms of community provide forums to explore gender and language in new ways. This can be seen in research from

Minahan and Wolfram Cox (2011) which explores young knitters' identities by looking at their identity construction through crafting and the review of media images of women and knitting.

New media communication is used to form communities both online and offline. Due to the global reach of the participatory web, these communities are not specific to any particular geographical space and can afford new kinds of interpersonal interactions (Honeycutt & Herring, 2009) through the conversation-like exchanges that occur in social media posts (Zappavigna, 2014). These interactions include information sharing and, according to Strawn (2012), create an "online digital world that has brought knitters and knitting resources together beyond imagination" (p. 3). This has resulted in the conceptualization of an online community with a shared discourse that reflects knitters' perspectives on the world.

3.3.5 Online knitting communities

Online knitting communities are social groupings (Baym, 2000) with language practices that are "microcosms of the communities in which they are used" (p. 22). They are places rife with terminology that those outside of the group would struggle to comprehend. The topics that these online communities are organised around are just as important in shaping the group's communication patterns as the medium being used. The third places of the Internet such as r/knitting are successful at helping knitters find each other (McCulloch, 2019). Furthermore, those who participate, particularly the dominant gender, are also a strong influence when communicating online, along with "the topics they raise, the experiences they share, and the values they bring" (Baym, 2000, p. 200). Through sharing these experiences, Gauntlett (2011) argues that knitters feel connected to the social world. Orton-Johnson (2014) mirrors this view, stating that these sites provide space for knitters to produce and consume content in new "ways that fragment and augment traditional practices of knitting" while simultaneously "investing them with new forms of social meaning, engagement and connectivity" (p. 319).

Knitters seek to connect with other knitters online, on websites such as Ravelry, which has been described as "the Facebook of knitting", boasting 8 million registered users (Horton, 2019, para. 3), as well as forum threads like Reddit's r/knitting. These online communities, according to

Strawn (2012), have brought knitters and knitting resources together beyond imagination, becoming spaces where the differences between online and offline identities inform our language choices and how openly we speak.

The sharing of knowledge through social network sites such as Reddit encourages the produsage of creative work. In other words, “the collaborative and continuous building and extending of existing content in pursuit of further improvement” (Bruns, 2008, p. 1). Produsage thus affords new kinds of interpersonal interactions (Honeycutt & Herring, 2009) that develop into online communities where meanings are negotiated (KhosraviNik, 2017a). However, as Bradley (2013) points out, “technology has been, and remains, highly gendered” (p. 115). Online spaces provide by technology create an opportunity for the academic study of online and offline communities, prosumption in participatory web environments, and “the meaning of identity, connection, participation and leisure in networked societies” (Orton-Johnson, 2014, p. 312).

An example of such technology is Reddit. The first research focusing on Reddit since its conception in 2005 appears to be van Mieghem’s (2011) quantitative study, which examined the distribution function of the Reddit score. Later that year, a qualitative study was published on commonalities in the articles posted on Reddit (Wasike, 2011). The research of computer-mediated communication is a promising area due to “discursive negotiation and expression of social relations in cyberspace” (Herring, 2001, p. 625), therefore a social media approach to CDS will fill gaps in scholarship (KhosraviNik & Esposito, 2018, pp. 54-55). This is a critical discourse study that focuses on men who knit approached from a social media perspective. To my knowledge, there has been no cross-disciplinary research on knitting and gender in the new media context.

3.4 Reddit

Self-described as the front page of the Internet, Reddit is a social news aggregation website that provides a space for people with shared interests to form communities through specialised threads. These communities are referred to as subreddits, identified by the prefix r/. The site has hosted over 1.6 million subreddits since its formation in 2008 (Reddit Metrics, 2019; Snoop

Snoo, 2019) and users spend extended periods on the platform, with the average user spending 15 minutes 47 seconds on Reddit.com each day, compared to Facebook.com users who, according to Amazon's analysis of web traffic, only spend around 11 minutes (Kemp, 2018). Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Reddit hosts many communities dedicated to knitting, but also becomes an opportunity for ethnographic observation by researchers wishing to gain a greater understanding of the ways men who knit discursively construct their identities.

3.4.1 Reddit as a social media platform

People's discourse is influenced by the ways in which they communicate online, including the effect of the technological architecture (KhosraviNik & Esposito, 2018). Therefore, in order to relate this study to its social media setting, it is first important to provide context on the source of the data before discussing the data itself. Reddit is comprised of online communities of shared interest called subreddits. This is where users contribute to threads - or posts - of their own or others' content. These users are considered a part of pre-existing societies (KhosraviNik & Sarkhoh, 2017) where content is available for anyone to access. However, in order to start a thread or post comments, membership is required. This involves signing up with a verified email address and creating a unique username. Reddit members are then able to start discussion threads and/or comment on established threads as well as direct message other members. Unlike many other social media platforms, users can largely remain anonymous with no requirement for supplying a photograph or personal details such as age or gender.

The platform is composed of moderated subreddits, which are message boards dedicated to a particular topic, such as r/movies, r/politics, or r/meme where members post text, images, or links and can vote them up or down. This is referred to as upvoting or downvoting, similar to the way a 'like' functions within Facebook. The user that creates the subreddit becomes its first moderator and is then able to select other users to come on board as volunteers in enforcing the rules. The content being posted is not subject to any word count limitation as with other platforms such as Twitter but is unique in its use of karma points. These points are earned when a user's posts and comments are upvoted, becoming a measure of reputation (Leavitt & Clark,

2014). A percentage value is also displayed for each thread, indicating the net upvotes received, which provides insight into the popularity of the thread's topic.

Comments by Reddit users are asynchronous, with interactions responding to “traces left by a participant at an earlier point in time” (Kerry, 2019, p. 66). Furthermore, users are given the option of a sorting function that allows comments to be viewed in a different order according to ‘Best’, ‘Top’, ‘New’, ‘Controversial’, ‘Old’, or ‘Q&A’, depending on the reader's preference. Reddit's default setting is that of ‘Best’, which ranks comments by a calculation of their upvotes and downvotes (Randall, 2009), removing chronological order. Another defining function of Reddit is the ability to edit comments after posting them. This is something users often indicate within the text to maintain authenticity. After approximately six months, threads are archived, meaning that the commenting and editing function is closed. In other words, no further comments can be posted or changed, and data within the commenting hierarchy will not be added to. However, it is important to note that users are still able to upvote and downvote posts and comments, resulting in an ever-fluctuating number of net votes.

3.4.2 Reddit as a source of data

Humphreys (2008) reports that people who showcase knitting through engaging in new media platforms provide connections that are suited to qualitative analysis. Additionally, Humphreys suggests that online knitting communities are a valid object of study. Therefore, online communities of knitters offer further opportunity for research to understand the ways in which the identities of male knitters are constructed by both themselves and others, particularly when men are challenged with master narratives that regard knitting as a feminine craft. During my exploration of online discussions about knitting, I found that Reddit.com was a social media platform that appeared to attract a great deal of discussion on this topic and included many references to both gender and knitting on a variety of subreddits, including that of r/knitting.

3.4.3 r/knitting rules

r/knitting has been active for over 11 years (Snoop Snoo, 2019) and has a strong following, with subscribers tripling over the past year and a half (Reddit Metrics, 2019) now being comprised of

over 312,000 users that participate in conversations around a shared interest in knitting. The operational aspects of r/knitting are largely the same as other subreddits. However, its moderators outline the rules of the subreddit along with general guidelines for members. The first rule listed is to “be kind” (see Appendix C), containing a hyperlink to *reddiquette*, which is a set of etiquette guidelines that informally express “the values of many redditors, as written by redditors themselves” because it is “a community, not a bulletin board or marketplace” (Reddit Help, 2019). In the more recent rule listings, these have been replaced by “respect International Copyright” and “do not threaten, harass, insult, incite violence”, which maintains a message of kindness but emphasises the measures taken to keep the community a safe place. This is paramount on a platform where members can maintain a certain level of anonymity.

Reddiquette guidelines mirror these sentiments, with the top recommendations to follow being “remember the human”, and “adhere to the same standards of behaviour online that you follow in real life”, encouraging commenters to respect the prosumers they are interacting with as human beings behind the screen. Strict enforcement is also relayed of what type of threads can be posted on r/knitting and when. For example, WIP (work in progress) Wednesdays and FO (finished object) Fridays. This is done in order to ensure that content focusses on general discussions and interactions rather than turning into a show-and-tell scenario and encourages the r/knitting community to discuss aspects of their craft. Despite Reddit being a place where there is a tendency for gender to remain undisclosed, discussions often include commentary on gender, specifically male knitters.

3.5 Research opportunity

Despite such a broad range of publications dedicated to knitting, it is difficult to identify any research dedicated specifically to men who knit in the context of online spaces. Although the research by Morneau (2015) outlined above touches on similar themes of negotiated masculinity in a feminised activity such as knitting, the analysis of negotiations taking place online provides an opportunity to explore new territory and contribute knowledge to an under-researched area.

3.6 Conclusion of Chapter Three

In this chapter, I have provided a discussion on scholarship relating to the Internet and social media. I focused on Reddit as a social media platform, explaining its suitability for research on discourse around the topic of men who knit. The specifics of Reddit were discussed, r/knitting in particular, and I outlined the opportunity this research provides for understanding gendered discourses in an online setting.

Chapter 4 Social Media Critical Discourse Studies

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents details about Social Media Critical Discourse Studies (SM-CDS), an approach that has emerged from CDS, which I apply in my analysis of online discussions about men who knit. The first part of this chapter highlights the concepts of discourse, critique, ideology, and power, which underlie the various approaches of CDS. In the second part, I go on to explain and justify my choice of the methodological approach of SM-CDS, stating why it is the most fitting approach to conduct this research into the online representations of men who knit. I begin by discussing the SM-CDS approach, which has emerged and continues to develop within the CDS field in response to the rise of social media platforms and the complex relationship between discourse and the technological features of the Internet that impact upon it such as the ability to remain anonymous or to form online communities within discussion groups.

The SM-CDS approach, I believe, enables the analysis of discourse at many levels of society in order to gain a fuller understanding of how the producers and consumers of communicative content and practices impact and influence wider societal views. In this case, I am concerned with discourses on the topic of men who knit as found on the social media platform of Reddit. However, this also requires me to discuss the ethical considerations of the collection of publicly available online data for academic research, which I do in the final section of this chapter.

4.2 Critical Discourse Studies

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), embedded within Critical Theory, takes a critical approach to social research (Fairclough, 2003) that enables an examination of these knitters' networked discourse communities. It sees language as a form of social practice (Fairclough, 1989) used to "legitimize, maintain, and naturalize forms of social power and inequality" (Bouvier & Machin, 2018, p. 178). CDS⁵ is particularly helpful in the study of language and gender because of its

⁵ Van Dijk (n.d.) argues that Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) should in fact be referred to as Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) due to it being an overall approach rather than a specific method. Therefore, going forward I refer to the overall methodological approach as CDS.

focus on power. Foucault (1972) argues that those holding power dominance in a community or group use language to establish boundaries and possibilities of belonging, contributing to the identities of those in the group.

Fairclough (1995) suggests that CDS is an exploration of these practices. Fairclough and Wodak (1997) add that CDS demystifies ideologies and power through texts that are shaped ideologically by power relations. Furthermore, KhosraviNik and Esposito (2018) note that, from a CDS viewpoint, “collective identities including gender related constructs are inherently envisaged through discursive processes where boundaries of difference, uniqueness, and distinctiveness are constituted/ marked/represented” (p. 54). In short, CDS reveals the power represented through discourse and the values and ideologies of society. The critical analysis of such discourse is specifically relevant to this study’s examination of the hegemony and masculinity present in discussions on men who knit.

4.2.1 Discourse

Discourse is viewed by Fairclough (1995) as socially shaped but also socially shaping. It is a concept widely used by social theorists and analysts Foucault (1972) and Fraser (1989), and linguists Stubbs (1983) and van Dijk (1985). On a broad level, discourse is treated in linguistic terms, interpreted as written or spoken text above sentence level (Blommaert, 2005). However, when defining discourse, a distinction must be made between “big D” Discourse and “little d” discourse⁶ (Gee, 1999, pp. 5-6). While discourse can simply be described as stretches of language, Gee points out that Discourse presents ways of combining and integrating language through actions, interactions, ways of thinking, believing, valuing, and using various symbols, tools and objects that are central to critical analysis.

4.2.2 Critique

Critical analysis of discourse is explained by Unger et al. (2016) as “making explicit the implicit relationship between discourse, power and ideology” and a practice that may contribute to social

⁶ Throughout this thesis, I focus mainly on “little d” discourse, referring it in terms of my analysis at the level of language. The differentiation between Discourse and discourse are further expressed through reference to discursive practices (little d) and discourse practices (big D).

change (p. 279). They also suggest that by being critical in CDS, the researcher is also being self-reflective and self-critical. Therefore, by naming oneself critical, the researcher is implying explicit ethical standards, making their position, interests, and values explicit and their criteria as transparent as possible, “without feeling the need to apologize for the critical stance of their work” (p. 279). These critical perspectives, when applied to the study of gender identity, include a critical awareness of language (Talbot, 2010) and the way it involves social relations of power.

4.2.3 Ideology

Ideology is widely defined as a “coherent and relatively stable set of beliefs or values” (Unger et al., 2016, p. 279), a belief system that is not necessarily socially shared (van Dijk, 2006) but becomes so widely received that it becomes “part of the generally accepted attitudes of an entire community” (p. 117). Van Dijk further explains ideologies as being gradually acquired and potentially changing through one’s lifetime. However, ideologies are not simply the personal beliefs of an individual, they have social, cultural and political functions that are enacted in implicit discourse (van Dijk, 1995; Fairclough, 1995). Van Dijk (2006) adopts the term “ideological group” for a collective of people that are “defined primarily by their shared ideology and the social practices based on them, whether or not these are organized or institutionalized” (p. 120). Therefore, ideological collectives can also be seen as discourse communities in which ideological groups perform their identities.

4.2.4 Power

Power is a dominance of one group over others, something that is produced and reproduced in discourse. Power is therefore central to CDS, with different discourses and ideologies competing for dominance being highlighted in interactions. However, according to Unger et al. (2016), there are different powers in play: power *in* discourse, power *over* discourse, and power *of* discourse. Power in discourse refers to the “struggles over different interpretations of meaning”, power over discourse refers to the “processes of inclusion and exclusion”, and power of discourse refers to the influence of “macrostructures of meaning” (pp. 4-5). These meanings conveyed through discourse produce and reproduce power relations by drawing upon everyday

expressions and reaffirmations of social norms and practices (Foucault, 1995). Power, therefore, becomes even more central when those social norms involve gender power dynamics. With the rise of technology and the participatory web, approaches to CDS and gender have thus needed re-evaluation to ensure that they capture techno-discursive features as a part of the study.

4.3 Social Media Critical Discourse Studies (SM-CDS)

As a response to the critical study of social media discourse, SM-CDS has emerged as a theoretical model combining CDS with digital media and technology scholarship (KhosraviNik, 2014, 2017b, 2018). It brings rise to the practice of social media communication, which is able to explore the intersection of mass and personal communication (KhosraviNik, 2017b). In the case of online platforms such as message boards, there is a focus on participation and interaction, facilitating a bottom-up discursive power that is “fluid, changeable, and unpredictable” (KhosraviNik & Sarkhoh, 2017, p. 3615).

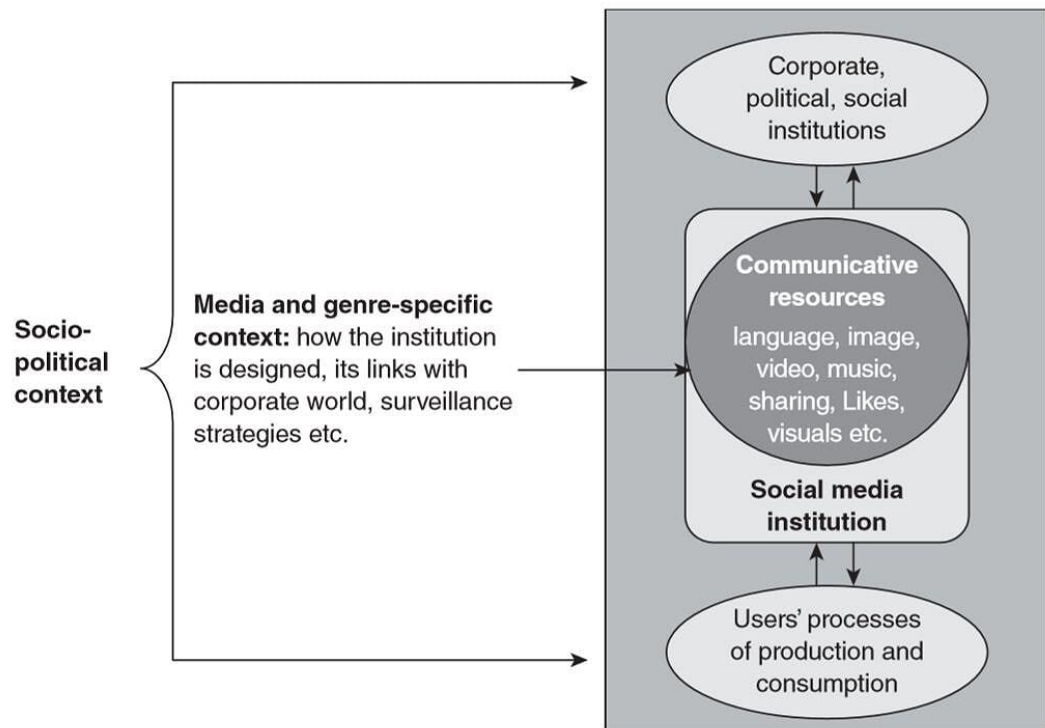
4.3.1 The ‘Social Media’ in SM-CDS

Social media (SM) is a form of digitally mediated communication that bridges the formerly separate genres of mass and personal communication (KhosraviNik & Sarkhoh, 2017, p. 3615). It facilitates synchronous and asynchronous participation in social networking, largely without limitations of geographical boundaries. It is viewed by KhosraviNik (2017b) as any “electronically mediated communication across online platforms, spaces, sites, and technologies” (p. 582). KhosraviNik goes on to suggest that social media users can: (i) work collaboratively in producing and compiling content; (ii) perform interpersonal communication and mass communication simultaneously or separately – sometimes en masse and; (iii) are able to access and respond to institutional and user-generated content.

The convenience and availability of social media communication in Western society leads to the practice of being “always-on”, allowing for the ongoing pursuit of personal interests in shared spaces as well as the “creation and maintenance of global relations that validate and support identities and behaviours” (KhosraviNik & Esposito, 2018, p. 46).

Figure 1.

The Dynamic of Texts, Society and Social Media Institutions



Note. From "Critical Discourse Studies and Social Media: Power, Resistance and Critique in Changing Media Ecologies," by M. KhosraviNik and J. W. Unger, in R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies* (3rd edition, p. 214), 2016, London: Sage. Copyright 2016 by Sage.

Figure 1 summarises the dynamic process of texts, society, and social media institutions. It shows the communicative resources (language, image, video, music, sharing, Likes, visuals, etcetera), which includes hyperlinks and upvoting, within the discourse practices of social media institutions. The social media institution, in this case Reddit, is then within a socio-cultural context that is informed by the corporate, political, and social institutions from above and the users' processes of production and consumption from below. These processes inform and are informed by both the social media institution and wider socio-cultural contexts.

The wider socio-political context is shown as also informing the socio-cultural context, with media and genre-specific contexts influencing the communicative resources and social media institution. This media and genre-specific context refers to how the institution is designed, its links with corporate world, and surveillance strategies, etcetera. In other words, the design of

Reddit and the ways in which r/knitting users function within the message board genre are influenced by the wider socio-cultural and political context, in turn influencing the discourse practices on the platform, which in turn spiral back to influence the wider socio-cultural and political context.

KhosraviNik's SM-CDS approach centres on the discourse itself rather than the technology (2017b; KhosraviNik & Esposito, 2018), addressing more specific aspects than traditional CDS because it is interested in the way the discourse shapes and influences "the social and political sphere of our life worlds and vice versa" (KhosraviNik, 2017b, as cited in KhosraviNik & Esposito, 2018, p. 55). and how "various discourses may be upheld, perpetuated, facilitated and constructed" within this socio-political context (KhosraviNik & Unger, 2016, p. 215). In short, although social media discourse is delivered through the medium of social media platforms, it is the discursive practice itself that is central to its analysis.

Traditionally, CDS focuses on "elite-driven" top-down approaches (della Porta & Caiani, 2006, p. 87) that deal with inherently powerful texts such as news items or political speeches driven by "institutional actors" (p. 103). However, SM-CDS enables the researcher to take an observational approach to the processes that occur within language in use (KhosraviNik, 2014). This is discourse produced by non-institutional actors that KhosraviNik and Sarkhoh call "ordinary perlocutors" (2017, p. 3619). The user-generated content on these online platforms attracts public input, therefore contributors can be seen as being ordinary participants⁷ on this platform as opposed to political or institutional actors.

The affordances of social media's participatory web have created "new spaces for grassroots access through which certain bottom-up discursive powers can be exercised" (KhosraviNik & Sarkhoh, 2017, pp. 3616-3617). As a result, SM-CDS research spirals out from micro aspects of the analysis to the wider macro context levels (KhosraviNik & Esposito, 2018), providing a

⁷ Throughout this study, I have used the term *commenters* or *users* as opposed to *participants* in order to reflect the nature of their passive participation.

view of socio-cultural norms being represented in the text⁸. SM-CDS is thus the most suitable approach to address ways the gender of knitters is discussed across the participatory web. Therefore, I decided to address my research questions through SM-CDS, concentrating on bottom-up linguistic practices within content created by users of the social media platform Reddit.com (hereafter referred to as Reddit).

Focusing on Reddit, this research identifies online communities in which discussion about knitting has a high presence. This was observed in the exploratory stage of my research on men who knit where, using a search engine, I found numerous Reddit threads about knitting. It is reported that Reddit is the third most visited website in the United States (Booth, 2018), suggesting that it is a rich source of data representing authentic discourse. This authenticity is something that KhosraviNik and Unger (2016) suggest is reasoning for social media data being appropriate for research when considering global media production, consumption and “prosumption” (as defined in 3.3.3) (p. 229). Bouvier and Machin (2018) add that social media should not be seen solely as text, but as “situated actions used to achieve particular ends” (p. 184), in line with KhosraviNik’s (2017b) view that social media should not be seen as only a data source.

This approach focusses on Reddit users as members of what KhosraviNik and Sarkhoh (2017) call pre-existing societies while placing importance on social and cultural structures as context for the analysis of men who knit. In doing CDS on social media such as this, KhosraviNik and Esposito (2018) suggest the procedure should take into account its new context while also maintaining the core principles of critical studies, which Wodak and Meyer (2016) explain as being characterised by a problem-oriented approach that focuses on deconstructing ideologies and power through the investigation of semiotic data.

Gender Theory has a strong influence on this study, particularly Connell’s Masculinity Theory, research which Wedgewood sees as being the gender equivalent of “power structure research”

⁸ Within SM-CDS, KhosraviNik and Esposito (2018) recommend the term *text* be replaced by *communicative content and practices* “to capture the dynamic nature of meaning making in social media communication” (p. 58).

(p. 337) that can gain critical insight into masculinities and gender. The critical analysis of online discourse thus provides insights into societal power structures through the analysis of the gender stereotyping present in message boards such as Reddit. Analysis of computer-mediated communication, including that of social media, has largely come from frameworks within sociolinguistics (Androutsopoulos, 2008) and discourse analysis (Herring, 2005). However, an SM-CDS approach to gender stereotyping builds on this with an analysis of online discursive practices within social contexts (KhosraviNik & Esposito, 2018). While Humphreys' (2008) view that social media discourse is suitable for qualitative analysis, more complex representations of the discourse being analysed may be uncovered through the addition of quantitative analysis. For example, KhosraviNik and Esposito (2018) suggest that information such as the gender mark up of users can provide a socio-cultural characterisation of the users as members of society.

4.3.2 Challenges of SM-CDS

There are many challenges in taking on research using the emergent approach of SM-CDS. A number of fields have considered how to analyse social media discourse, and SM-CDS is just one that has been developed. Much research on computer-mediated communication has adapted the CA approach to social media interactions (KhosraviNik, 2017b). These types of interactions are what Gee (2014) suggests are focused on meaning-making and the essence of discourse analysis (KhosraviNik, 2017b). However, while CA involves social media interactions, it does not take into account the techno-discursive features of the technology when it comes to the analysis of social media discourse. Therefore, the critical analysis of social media interactions benefits from a critical discourse study that takes into account a techno-discursive approach and its effect on how discourse is constructed.

A second challenge is that few studies focus on the asynchronous textual communication in message boards such as Reddit (Paulus et al., 2016) so it was important to approach this Reddit data from a fresh, social media perspective of CDS while also accommodating technological challenges within new spaces of participatory communication (KhosraviNik, 2017b). However, the interactivity of social media communication also poses challenges to media communications

theories, for example the way audiences have been defined within previous theorisation (boyd, 2010; KhosraviNik & Esposito, 2018) and the assumption that online spaces are “intrinsically different from real interactions” (p.47). In the case of SM-CDS, it is strongly believed that online and offline worlds should not be viewed as separate, but that the data sourced from online ethnographic observation needs to be considered in wider socio-political contexts.

Thirdly, it is important to be mindful that any criticism of CDS may also apply to SM-CDS, including the suggestion that it places too much emphasis on texts rather than the relative societal context, and that what is thought to be critical analysis is often a biased interpretation (Blommaert, 2005). However, SM-CDS accounts for this in its delineated approach and by being situated within societal contexts, not only addressing power within its communicative content and practices as in CDS research but also contributing to the specific understanding of social media communication.

Additionally, data can easily disappear. Hyperlinks can be broken, resulting in content no longer being at the same URL (Barone et.al., 2015). If the content on these pages is not saved, it is at risk of being lost. Not only can content on pages disappear but it can also be edited, constantly capable of being changed unexpectedly. This unpredictability includes the governing rules (as discussed in 3.4.3). Another challenge with internet research is that many of the links being referenced may stop working in a short timeframe. Some researchers mitigate this by using the Internet Archive’s Wayback Machine (archive.org) (McCulloch, 2019). A final challenge for my research in applying SM-CDS is the ongoing debate with regards to ethics and internet research which I discuss in more detail in the next section.

In spite of the challenges outlined above, social media data provides communicative content and practices that are highly suitable for discussions on gender issues (KhosraviNik & Esposito, 2018). Therefore, it is the most suitable approach to address the ways in which the gender of knitters is discussed across the participatory web.

4.4 Ethical considerations

The use of computer-mediated communication for research purposes poses a unique ethical consideration (Herring, 1996) because although content published online is freely available to the public, it often contains personal information. A recent publication from Stainton and Iordanova (2017) noted that, when looking at whether data collected from blogs is public or private, there were no specific guidelines to work from, suggesting new media ethics is still a contested topic. While some researchers have proposed that ethical considerations are not a concern if we accept online communities as public spaces (Roberts, 2015), others consider that sites requiring registration should not be viewed in this way. More recently, in light of the ability to freely search for information online, user comments that can be viewed online are seen to be made in a public setting and should be considered by researchers as public data (Caplan & Purser, 2019). It could even be argued that the discrimination alleviated by research can outweigh any potential discomfort experienced by research subjects that may be disliked (Severin, 2018). This is due to any positive effects of research findings positively affecting the community. Seeing that Reddit content can be considered to be in the public domain and therefore readily accessible online, it has been observed as if in a public setting. However, there were further ethical considerations required.

Before proceeding with this study, ethics approval was required from Auckland University of Technology's Ethics Committee (AUTEC) (see Appendix A). This approval was dependent on permission from r/knitting's administrators for the reproduction of publicly available data in their discussion threads (see Appendix B). Although Reddit provides tools to aid the moderators of Reddit communities, it does not prescribe their usage and individual communities may have their own rules that moderators enforce. Therefore, in good faith, the moderators of r/knitting were contacted to explain the purpose of collecting the r/knitting data and how the data would be used in order to request permission and approval was given. The practice of requesting permission from website administrators is something that Rüdiger and Dayter (2017) refer to as an established practice in the research of computer-mediated communication, an action that addresses ethical concerns in relation to accessing freely available social media data. Once all

approval from Auckland University of Technology's Ethics Committee and the Reddit moderators had been obtained, I could then proceed with my research – the design of which is discussed next.

4.5 Conclusion of Chapter Four

In this chapter, I gave an overview of CDS and its core concepts of discourse, critique, ideology, and power. I also explained the Social Media Critical Discourse Studies (SM-CDS) approach as the methodological approach applied in this study. I then discussed the various challenges that arose from the critical study of social media discourse, such as the unpredictability of its content. Lastly, I considered the ethical considerations of conducting research involving computer-mediated communication, specifically that of social media communication.

Chapter 5 Design and Method

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I describe the design of my study, starting with a description of Reddit as a data source. This sets out the research design applied to address the research questions listed in Chapter Two about the construction of male knitter identity on social media message board Reddit. Then, an explanation is provided of how I identified data for collection, which follows a process recommended by Caplan and Purser (2019) specifically outlined for research on Reddit data. Next, I outline the steps taken in the sourcing of data from Reddit's r/knitting community, followed by an overview of the analytical process. I next outline the operational procedure advocated by SM-CDS scholars in the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data. Considering the importance of validity in research choices, justification of each method used is provided. This study engages in the same dual-level analysis engaged by KhosraviNik and Sarkhoh (2017) whereby the data analysis of the text itself is the first level and my critical interpretation of the data is the second level. This chapter concludes with a discussion about my position as a researcher.

5.2 Description of Reddit as a data source

The data set used in this analysis was obtained from Reddit.com, a social media platform that Goodman (2015) describes as “an unfiltered view of humanity” (p. 44). Reddit was chosen over Ravelry, another popular online community with over 8 million subscribers that is solely dedicated to knitting and crochet. This choice was primarily due to Ravelry content being hidden behind membership sign in and not freely available on the open Internet, but also influenced by Reddit being the most popular general interest forum of the 2010s (McCulloch, 2019) with over 330 million active users each month (Kemp, 2018) affirming it as a rich source of data. As I was already a Reddit user and had a personal account, I felt it necessary to create another profile based on my academic identity. This was important for my positioning in the research in order to define myself academically. Therefore, I adopted the username u/AUTlinguist to disassociate any academic research from my personal Reddit account.

However, this also required reflection on my positioning as a researcher to maintain transparency as part of this process which I discuss later in this chapter.

5.3 Data collection

Caplan and Purser (2019) recommend nine steps for identifying themes for analysis of data drawn from Reddit threads. While the first four steps of establishing a research question, gaining ethics approval for research and deciding on epistemological and methodological approaches have already been discussed in this thesis, it is steps five to nine that are most relevant in collecting a body of data for further analysis, which include identifying an original post to provide data to answer the research questions, deciding how to sort posts, deciding on the time frame in which the data is collected, copying the comments into a Word or Excel document, creating a separate document for each comment thread while only copying and pasting until the thread goes off-topic, and lastly, cleaning all the data, anonymising usernames.

In following step five to identify an original post that would provide data to answer my research questions, I conducted a search query within the Reddit search function under my username u/AUT linguist, using the term ‘men who knit’. This revealed a post within the r/knitting subreddit titled *[Discussion] Men who knit--the stigma and the community's response* (Thread 2), suggesting that r/knitting is a space where users address gender differences and thus an appropriate tool, and subreddit, for analysis. As a result, this study concentrates on posted content obtained from the r/knitting subreddit. Before collecting any data, as required as part of my approved ethics approval, I consulted with administrators of r/knitting to request the use of the threads as per regulations outlined on Reddit’s terms and conditions.

For step six, where I needed to decide how to sort posts from within r/knitting for analysis, I further identified relevant data that covered the topic of men who knit, by searching within the r/knitting subreddit for key words such as ‘boy(s)’, ‘man’, ‘men’, ‘male(s)’, ‘guy(s)’, ‘dude(s)’, ‘bro(s)’, ‘manly’, and ‘gender’ to view threads with these words in their subject title. A total of 42 threads across nine years were selected on this criterion and filtered for posts that specifically referred to the practice of men who knit. Due to the scope of this study, it was not possible to

expand the data collection to incorporate all subreddits referring to men as knitters, for example r/casualknitting. Concentrating on one subreddit is a form of purposeful sampling that is widely used in qualitative research, suggested by Patton (2002) as being the most effective use of limited resources for the identification and selection of information-rich cases.

For step seven, I needed to select a time frame from which I drew the data. I decided that, due to the ways in which language online is dynamic and rapidly changing (Crystal, 2011), I would restrict the results to those that had been posted within the previous three years as this was within the scope of my research. As shown in Table 1, the final selection contained 27,239 words in total. Table 2 shows that these were sourced from 12 threads posted between June 2016 and April 2019. I chose to capture the data while displaying Reddit's default setting of 'Best', which displays comments ranked by a calculation of its net upvotes this is the default setting displayed by Reddit in order to promote the most relevant conversations taking place (Randall, 2009). A specific date was chosen to record each post's net votes, representing a specific moment in time before beginning the analysis. All of the threads selected are those which have been marked as archived, preserving the data set being analysed.

Table 1.

Overall Data

Features of data sourced from r/knitting	Number
r/knitting subscribers*	316,832
Posts analysed	12
Range of years between posting and retrieval	1-3
Total number of unique usernames posting	396
Total number of comments	611
Total number of words	27,239

Note. data accurate as of 27 November 2019

Once it was decided how to sort posts, and the time frame of data that would be collected, I then proceeded to step eight, where each of the twelve threads was saved in .pdf format using the free PDF conversation site webpagetopdf.com in order to preserve the hierarchical nesting of

comments. However, because of Reddit's new look, launched in April 2018 raising issues (Kaser, 2018), I saved this data in the old format to ensure the same data was presented but without omissions⁹. While the text across both formats remains unchanged, multimodal features differ. However, this study focuses on textual communication practices. While some researchers decide to only include the most popular posts in the data set (Caplan & Purser, 2019), I included all comments from these threads for consideration to give a true representation of conversations taking place. This is also due to Reddit's "Best" format not being presented in chronological order. Therefore, cutting off data collection when comments go off-topic would have risked eliminating the inclusion of rich data. Next, the text was transferred into a Word document, compiling a stripped-back version that retained hierarchical commenting and hyperlinks for the coding stage. This document was initially assessed for emergent discourses before additional closer readings were undertaken to further code primary and secondary topics by hand.

The final of Caplan and Purser's nine steps required cleaning the data and anonymizing the usernames. In order to formulate codes for each user that represented disclosed genders and geographical locations, I followed the user link of each contributing member. This resulted in a snapshot view into recent posts by the users across all the subreddits they subscribe to in order to assess referential pronouns, locational references, and revealing personal statements to code their self-disclosed gender¹⁰ and location as well as the listed karma points, which accumulate through upvotes, and duration of time since joining Reddit. Although this process was time-intensive, it was necessary to provide a basis for anonymizing the data with user codes. As shown in Tables 3 and 4, these codes are presented as gender, time on Reddit, geographical location, and karma points obtained. A male user that joined Reddit two years ago from the United Kingdom with 900 karma points would be coded as M-2-UK-1 and for any duplicates, additional lettering was used to differentiate. For example, M-2-UK-1a or M-2-UK-1b. Additionally, those whose accounts have been deleted, thus not having this information

⁹ The number of comments listed on each thread's title banner is not representative of actual comment numbers due to parent comments being deleted by users, resulting in child comments remaining viewable but uncoded.

¹⁰ Care was taken to code users by the gender they explicitly self-referred to. There is no reliable way to determine that the indicated gender matches the commenter's actual gender (Danet, 1998). However, Baym (1998) suggests that most users create online identities consistent with their offline selves.

available, appear as 'username deleted'. In the case of time on Reddit and karma points gained, numbers have been rounded up to the nearest year or thousand points. For coding purposes, this assisted in the understanding of users' status within the community. For example, M-13-US-117 indicates this user has been involved in the community since its beginnings and has earned a high number of karma points that may influence how their opinions are received.

5.3.1 r/knitting threads

Social media data provides content that is highly suitable for deliberation on gender issues (KhosraviNik & Esposito, 2018), such as the representation of men in a hobby dominated by women. As Table 2 shows, twelve r/knitting threads were selected.

Table 2.

Reddit Threads Selected for Analysis

Thread/Title	Created	Upvotes	Comments	Upvoted
1 Gender neutral knitting stuff	Jun 2016	12	14	76%
2 [FO] In September 2016, a colleague said 'Men don't knit!'. Challenge accepted.... 3 months and many YouTube teaching videos later, this is what I wore to work. Description to come.	Dec 2016	2,818	134	89%
3 Completed my first real scarf. And they said guys can't knit pffft	Feb 2017	1,195	73	90%
4 [Discussion] Men who knit--the stigma and the community's response	Jun 2017	47	33	98%
5 Just a dude who likes to knit lace blankets. Ain't nothin wrong with that	Sep 2017	2,323	72	99%
6 I wanted to say thanks, too the guys on here who post photos with their finished pieces.	Dec 2017	405	70	99%
7 Is Male Knitting Becoming A Thing?	Jan 2018	0	21	45%
8 'Twas the best a self taught 14 y/o boy could do.	May 2018	387	42	98%
9 How many men frequent this Reddit?	Nov 2018	48	44	90%
10 First ever knitted anything! #boyswhoknit	Dec 2018	888	39	96%
11 Views/opinions on male knitters?	Jan 2019	27	48	79%
12 Introducing new knitting sub r/BrosWhoKnit	Apr 2019	74	19	82%

Note. data accurate as of 27 November 2019

Also listed are the threads' corresponding creation date, upvote total, number of comments posted, and upvoting percentage. The upvote score listed on a thread indicates the net number of upvotes and downvotes while upvoting percentages indicate the percentage of total votes that were upvotes.

One of the defining features of this social media platform is the ability to upvote or downvote someone's discussion thread or comment. Therefore, if a Reddit member votes for a post that showcases a man who knits, or perhaps disagrees with a discussion taking place, this can be conveyed through the upvoting process. The number of upvotes a thread gets is displayed clearly and often results in increased exposure of popular threads on Reddit's homepage, enticing members from outside r/knitting to get involved.

5.4 Data analysis

The data analysis was both quantitative and qualitative to ensure that I was able to gather contextual information about user demographics such as gender prior to the actual discursive analysis of the comments. These processes are described below.

5.4.1 Quantitative

Before proceeding with the discourse analysis of the collected data, it was important to identify certain demographics in order to understand the constituents of the online community on the Reddit posts. An initial look at the breakdown of gender, location, and post popularity of social media users enables researchers to identify patterns that will serve to inform the qualitative analysis for this research. In a study on gendered language in computer-mediated communication (Thomson, 2006), it was found that both men and women used more gender-preferential language in discussions around gender-stereotypical topics than in discussions around non-gender-stereotypical topics. As such, consideration of the gender of those posting threads or comments relating to men can provide valuable context for the analysis of discursive devices relating to the construction of identity. This was achieved manually, through a close reading of user posts. Additionally, the number of net upvotes that a comment receives, similar

to the concept of likes on Facebook, provides context for how an opinion is received by the r/knitting community and its power of influence.

5.4.2 Qualitative

In applying the SM-CDS approach in this research the first step in the process was to familiarise myself with the data through multiple readings. I considered what was relevant to my research from an “overall operational procedure” as suggested by KhosraviNik and Esposito (2018, p. 61) in their investigation into online misogynistic discourse. They recommend three phases: (i) identification of macro-contextual elements (ii) a textual analysis, and (iii) comparison of the findings with similar research that “explicates the findings within the wider social context on the topic” (KhosraviNik & Esposito, p. 62). These phases are explained in more detail below.

1. The **macro-contextual analysis** considers both the use of media technology as well as the socio-cultural context of society, involving three aspects:
 - a. A discussion of media technology characterisation; what users experience in an online presence.
 - b. A discussion of socio-cultural characterisation; the way users are discussed as members of a real-world society, delineating social media use from technology and situating social media’s role in society.
 - c. After a general contextual setting, the specific context of Reddit, along with specific use and suitability for deliberation on issues faced by men who knit are discussed. This includes a description of the Reddit threads selected, along with their range, relevance, and background takes place – specifically relating to men who knit.
2. The **textual analysis** aims to address the representation of men who knit in online discourse. Therefore, it requires examination of a range of communicative content and practices to account for the What, How, and Why questions within CDS (Bamberg, de Fina, & Schriffin, 2011; KhosraviNik, 2010). Following the close reading and formulation of general themes, further readings were conducted to focus on the identification of salient representations and associated discursive strategies and their

linguistic devices within these themes that were then extrapolated back to relate to societal and cultural contexts. I drew on analytical tools commonly used in CDS that specifically relate to identity construction and the Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). A number of researchers using SM-CDS have found these DHA tools useful for studying collective social identities in discourse including Persian national identity (KhosraviNik, 2010; KhosraviNik & Sarkhoh, 2017), which aim to demystify hegemony within discourses “by deciphering the ideologies that serve to establish, perpetuate or fight dominance” (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009, p. 88) as well as to create better understandings about the discourses surrounding in-groups and out-groups. The analytical tools from Wodak and Meyer (2016) that I deemed useful in looking at the discursive strategies of identity construction on the Reddit threads - and which relate to each of my research questions - are listed below.

- **Nomination** to identify the discursive construction of social actors, objects, phenomena/events, processes and actions through the use of linguistic devices such as labelling, metaphors, and deictics.
 - **Predication** to identify the discursive qualification of social actors and actions through the use of linguistic devices such as adjectives, nouns and pronouns in the stereotypical or evaluative attribution of traits.
 - **Argumentation** to identify the justification and questioning of claims of truth and through the use of linguistic devices such as generalization and fallacies
 - **Perspectivization** to identify the writers’ point of view and whether they express involvement or distance through the use of linguistic devices such as deictics, metaphors, and narrating anecdotes from personal experiences.
 - **Intensification or mitigation** of utterances through the use of linguistic devices such as humour, and verbs of saying, thinking or feeling.
3. The **case study** then considers the findings of my analysis of the discourse about men who knit and positions the communicative content and practices within its immediate and wider social context relating to attitudes and beliefs about gender identity

construction in relation to the activity of knitting. However, given the scarcity of similar research relating to male knitters, there is a greater concentration on the macro-contextual and textual analyses in this study, therefore wider societal discourses on masculinity and gender stereotyping will also be reflected on.

5.5 Researcher positioning

As a final part of this chapter in describing the SM-CDS methodological approach and study design, it is also important for me to position myself as a researcher. This is in response to the criticism that there is potential for CDS research to become unduly influenced by a researcher's political agenda (Baker, 2012), though it is understood that no research can be completely unbiased. Establishing the parameters of my positioning as a researcher by declaring my own biases and experiences that may influence the critical interpretation of this data is a necessary inclusion. As noted earlier, I am a cisgender woman taking into consideration Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) view that gender is relational and that masculinities are socially defined in contrast with femininity (as discussed in 2.3.1).

However, as a person who practises crafts such as knitting but not being a participating member of online knitting communities, I am also in a unique position of being able to relate to the members of this particular subreddit without being part of the inner circle. This, I believe, enables me to approach this research objectively while also relating to the users. Internet research does not require the researcher to be a visible participant (Mann & Stewart, 2000), but this personal experience enables me an understanding of the research as an "intimately engaged participant" (Collier, 1998, as cited in Smith, 2003, p. 73) – an inside perspective without influencing the participation or perception of the users.

5.6 Conclusion of Chapter Five

In this chapter, I began by outlining and explaining the methodological approach of SM-CDS. I highlighted the benefits that SM-CDS brings to social media discourse research, but also noted some of the limitations in applying an emergent approach still in its formative stages. In the second part of the chapter, I presented the research design used for close analysis of Reddit

threads about men who knit. A description of the specific process of data collection was given along with details of the application of quantitative and qualitative procedures in analysing the data drawing on existing literature relating to research using Reddit. The analytical tools of CDS to be used in this study were also discussed. In concluding this chapter, I clarified my position as an intimately engaged researcher given my personal experience of knitting and familiarity with online message boards.

Chapter 6 Discursive Practices within the r/knitting Community

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present the findings of my analysis that indicates the ways in which the r/knitting community respond to gender stereotypes through their discursive practices. First, I present quantitative information about the threads that were selected for analysis, which includes demographic details such as self-disclosed genders and geographical locations. In the second, more comprehensive section, I present the qualitative findings from my analysis of the discursive strategies and linguistic means by which the entire knitting community justifies men as participants of the craft. These include the language knitters use to challenge the gender stereotyping of male knitters.

In the analysis of the primary and secondary topics examined from the 12 threads, I identify several discourses which provide an opportunity to investigate the ways in which the r/knitting community resists or enforces stereotypes around men's participation in the craft of knitting. These include discourses of identity, belonging, and empowerment through a discourse of legitimisation that appeared to be dominant in the data. A particular feature within these discourses was the use of humour, in particular sarcasm as a counter-discourse to men's discursive construction of their masculine identities.

6.2 r/knitting users

When it comes to the analysis of commenters on the Reddit threads, it is important to have an understanding of who these commenters are based on the information they provide. The Reddit members examined in this study are those that are subscribed to the r/knitting subreddit and have initiated or sustained a conversation around the topic of men who knit. As Table 3 shows, r/knitting subreddit contributor self-disclosed their genders. There were 396¹¹ unique usernames in the data. These users consisted of 260 female (65.7%), 115 male (29.0%), 17 (4.3%) not

¹¹ Of the 396 unique usernames, one of them accounts for all usernames listed as 'deleted'. This results from a user having deleted their account since posting their comment(s). The username deleted occurs 21 times across the data set, suggesting that the actual number of users may be much higher than 396.

indicating gender, and 4 (1.0%) non-gendered automated software known as bots¹², which are user-generated programmes that are programmed to complete specific tasks.

Table 3.

User-identified Identity Markers for Gender

Gender	Additional self-disclosed information	Users
Female	Including 6 gay, 2 transgender (F)	260
Male	Including 10 gay, 3 transgender (M)	115
Bot	(BOT)	4
Undisclosed	Including undisclosed location and deleted usernames (UD)	17

Note. The bracketed letters display the codes used in the anonymised usernames.

Table 4.

User-identified Identity Markers for Geographical Location

Geographical location	Countries	Users
North America	Canada (CA) 27, United States of America (US) 262	289
Europe	Austria (AS) 1, Europe (EU) 3, France (FR) 1, Finland (FL) 1, Germany (GM) 2, Ireland (IR) 2, the Netherlands (ND) 1, Norway (NW) 3, Romania (RM) 1, Russia (RU) 2, Scandinavia (SC) 1, Sweden (SW) 1, United Kingdom (UK) 11, Ukraine (UR) 1	31
Oceania	Australia (AU) 8, New Zealand (NZ) 1	9
Bot	Non-geographical (BOT)	4
Asia	China (CN) 1, Hong Kong (HK) 1, Singapore (SN) 1	3
Undisclosed	Including undisclosed location and deleted usernames (UD)	64

Note. The bracketed letters display the codes used in the anonymised usernames.

As shown in Table 4, the r/knitting subreddit contributors also often self-disclosed their geographical location, which is represented in the anonymisation coding of the commenters' usernames. A significant concentration of commenters was identified as being from North America, with 289 (73.0%) being from the USA or Canada. The remainder was comprised of 31

¹² Bots scan Reddit for key words to determine when to post an automated response. Some bots can be summoned by users. For example, posting "Wikibot, what is knitting?" will result in a bot titled "WikiBot" posting a summary from Wikipedia's page on knitting.

in Europe (7.8%), 9 in Oceania (2.3%), 4 non-geographical bots (1.0%), 3 in Asia (0.8%), and 60 not indicating any geographical location within their recent posts or comments.

Considering the transnational nature of the participatory web and English being used as its common language, or lingua franca (Baker & Sangiamchit, 2019), it is no surprise that the users were spread across the globe, indicating that r/knitting's subscribers are closely representative of overall Reddit users in regard to geographical location. TechJunkie.com reports statistics that indicate 58.4% of Reddit users are based in the United States, with the next most represented country hosting users being the United Kingdom, at only 7.4% (Sattelberg, 2019). Furthermore, of these US-based users, two-thirds are estimated to be male. While these geographical statistics are consistent with this data set, there are notably fewer men participating in r/knitting compared to Reddit as a whole, which is reflective of knitting's association with femininity.

With the popularity of knitting in this day and age being dominated by women, it is no surprise that women greatly outnumber men in r/knitting. However, it is important to note that social media is a place where identities can be concealed or reinvented, enabling minority groups to have a safe place to participate in discussions. Internet users see themselves as part of a digital world when using platforms such as Reddit, with their contributions functioning as a way to share knowledge and facilitate community. The content posted to r/knitting analysed in this study is no different, with users experiencing the ability to share and connect in a safe place.

6.3 Topics of discourse

In this study, I was interested in the discourse of users that served to justify their beliefs about gender and knitting. Following an SM-CDS approach, I looked at primary and secondary topics first to determine the emerging discourse. The subject headings of the 12 threads, which were created by the user who began the thread, determined my list of primary topics. Then, a closer reading of the comments within each of the twelve discussion threads determined the secondary topics, which served to provide a more comprehensive insight into discussions taking place around the topic of men who knit. Additionally, this analysis revealed a number of argumentation strategies that provide a basis for arguing for the legitimisation of men's

participation in this knitting community, showing how these users' discursive practices are influenced by societal ideologies and stereotypes around knitting and gender.

6.3.1 Primary topics

One of the most important aspects of SM-CDS, which also applies to CDS in general, is the identification and classification of specific topics of discourse (KhosraviNik, 2010; KhosraviNik & Sarkhoh, 2017; Reisigl & Wodak, 2009). The primary topics have been formulated from the user-generated subject headings of each of the discussion threads (see Appendix D). Of the 12 threads, there were five primary discourse topics that: (i) discuss the topic of men who knit; (ii) challenge the view that men do not knit; (iii) present men's finished objects as discussion starters; (iv) promote Reddit communities for men and; (v) address the gendering of "knitting stuff". Within these 12 threads, topics (i-iii) contained three threads each, (iv) contained two threads discussing Reddit communities and (v) contained one discussing the gendering of knitting tools.

6.3.2 Secondary topics

Secondary topics were identified by a close examination of threads, which led to the compilation of sub-topics across the twelve discussion threads. This is an approach modelled by KhosraviNik and Sarkhoh (2017) in their social media discourse study on Arabism and anti-Persian sentiments on participatory web platforms. The commonality of secondary topics across the twelve discussion threads serves to validate the results in terms of triangulation of the data. These secondary topics revealed categories such as masculinity, encouragement, age and skill. Coding of these categories (see Appendix E) took place during the close reading of the threads and contributed to identifying discourses of identity, belonging and empowerment. However, these were dominated by an overall discourse of legitimisation, whereby commenters discuss men overcoming obstacles and seek to justify the existence and acceptance of men who knit. These discourses are explored through discursive strategies such as nomination and argumentation and are discussed in the next, more comprehensive, sections.

6.4 A dominant discourse of legitimisation

The identification of legitimisation discourses is a valid category of understanding when investigating the assumption that men who knit are effeminate. However, key in the legitimisation of men's involvement in the knitting community is to first highlight the power imbalances that create the need for legitimisation in the first place as found in the analysis of the threads.

6.4.1 Patriarchal power imbalances

The patriarchal dominance that is synonymous with hegemonic masculinity sees knitting as less valued because, in the present day, knitting is widely seen as a craft that only women participate in. However, when men do take part in such activities, they appear to be increasing the craft's value and further highlighting gender imbalances in today's society.

F-7-US-9 There is sort of a thought process that knitting is something that is naturally feminine, therefore it's less interesting when women do it, but when men do it they're breaking barriers.

F-5-US-6 [...] and don't you know when men have a go at something traditionally feminine, they're inherently sooo much better at it and immediately rise to the top.

Women have long been experiencing power imbalance in male-dominated fields, with the "glass ceiling" metaphor being widely used to describe the invisible barrier that women are unable to break through on the upward trajectory into management positions (Baxter & Wright, 2000; Cotter et al., 2001; Morneau, 2015; van Dijk, 2006). Conversely, in the case of men in female-dominated areas, there is a phenomenon referred to as a "glass escalator" (Budig, 2002; Williams, 1992), where men excel disproportionately as they are assumed to be more suitable due to their "assumed masculine qualities" (Budig, 2002, p. 261). Metaphors such as this form the discursive construction of new ideas (Janks, 2005) and are investigated more closely in a later dedicated section (as discussed in 6.5.3).

To be breaking barriers implies the presence of a power struggle, with something to be fought for and overcome. However, it is implied by F-7-US-9 that she does not agree with the idea that men need to break through barriers and that women do not receive equal credit for their

contributions. This is reflected in several responses to r/knitting threads that focus on discussions around men's participation in the craft and highlight the inequalities present in today's society.

M-8-CD-46 There are lessons to be learned there about devaluation of work seen as feminine.

These proposed "lessons" are not outlined by the commenter, but their suggestion signals to readers that they should consider gender imbalances and the devaluation of women's work when approaching this topic of discussion. Oakley (1972), along with other feminist writers such as Rubin (1975), linked the oppression of women to the concept of gender, resulting in the concept of patriarchy, "a social system of male dominance" (Bradley, 2013, p. 17). Rubin further suggested that it was also possible to have a matriarchy as an alternative social system, a term referred to in the data through the suggestion that the female equivalence to patronizing should be "matronizing".

F-5-US-8a Are there some other ways men could be shown they're genuinely welcome and valued in our hobby without being patronizing (I wonder -is there a feminine equivalent of that word? Matronizing, maybe? Anyway...) or unfair? How do we acknowledge that they're treated differently by most people and try to correct it without over correcting and treating them differently ourselves?

Overlexicalization is a discursive feature that reveals ideological meanings within discourse (Fowler et al., 1979). Teo (2000) suggests this results in statements being over completed so that no further interpretation is required, for example "male knitter" rather than just "knitter" (further explored in 7.2). Matronizing is suggested as an overlexicalization by Talbot (2010), a term that F-5-US-8a equates to unfairness. She seeks suggestions as to how to acknowledge the way men who knit are treated in society while avoiding patronizing (or matronizing) men who participate in r/knitting, thus avoiding the glass escalator effect from occurring in r/knitting through the "overcorrecting" of its community members. However, of the responses, many implicitly acknowledge the glass ceiling, with some suggesting change will eventually come over time.

username deleted As long as we treat work, hobbies, sports, etc as having a gender bias, this will be an issue. How we stop it is with our children. We can't change the way our current society's stigmatizes these things because it's something we've been indoctrinated from a young age (dolls and dress up are for girls, toy soldiers and sports are for boys...that kind of thing). What we can do is teach our children that they don't have to fit molds that way.

By acknowledging the stigma that men who knit experience in today's society and the gendered activities that children are socialised into, this commenter is seeking to legitimise the involvement of men in the pursuit of knitting. Essentially, they are supporting Gidden's (1991) theory of structuration - suggesting that, over time, norms will change and that by demonstrating best practice, the younger generation will reflexively model behaviour that removes any stigma from the act of men knitting.

6.4.2 The original knitters

The original knitters are believed to have been men according to Hubert (2010) and Wilson and Frey (2016). Considering this gendered history of knitting (as discussed in 1.4), it is no surprise that there are multiple references to these origins in the data. Seeking to legitimise men's presence in r/knitting, women appear to be framing the activity as something originally masculine in order to justify and encourage men's participation.

F-5-US-6 I've seen the sentiment thrown around that back in the day guilds were male-only, so knitting as a legally protected trade with economic value is for men, and knitting as a frivolous parlor activity with unpaid and ignored labor is for women.

F-4-US-3 Knitting has been manly much longer than its been a hobby for elderly women.

F-5-UD-88 And in the old days men knit all the time, how it became a stereotypical 'girly' thing over time I have no idea.

Knitting's origins are framed here as being associated with "male-only" guilds, as "manly", and something not previously stereotyped as "girly" – clearly referencing knitting as a craft originally practised by men. In doing so, these commenters also frame their statements in relation to women's association with the craft and the stereotyping relating to age and gender seen in today's society. For example, exhibiting views that present-day knitting is a hobby for

old women and is associated with femininity. Of note are the references made to knitting as a trade with economic value when associated with men but as undervalued when associated with women. This suggests long-standing power dynamics in the gendering of knitting. Although the first male-only knitting guilds date back to 1268, this gives a Western perspective of knitting that does not take into account evidence of it originating in the Middle East.

M-8-CD-8 [...] you'll see that a lot of the earliest knitting guilds were men only and some of the earliest "knitters" were male fishermen¹³ weaving nets and the like, and passing time while being shepherds [...]

One of the origin stories commonly shared on r/knitting is that that early fishermen's knotted nets were an important moment in the history of knitting. M-8-CD-8's use of speech quotations around the word "knitters" functions here to define the actions of these fishermen while casting doubt on whether their actions are classified as knitting but rather as "weaving" or other tasks encompassed by the expression "and the like". However, it is interesting to note that these fishermen are seen to be "knitting" as an attempt at "passing time" – counter to the common belief that historically, men knitted as a trade while women knitted as a hobby. This gendered past is also referenced through overlexicalization of the already gendered term "fishermen", through the addition of "male". This overtly emphasises the role of men in knitting's early timeline and contributes to a commonly appearing argument that men were the original knitters and that they are merely "reclaiming" it as a masculine pursuit.

F-7-US-22 Actually men used to do a lot of knitting - only men could be members of the craftsmen guilds. Great to see it's being picked up again - and love your work!!

F-4-US-3 Good on you for taking the challenge presented and reclaiming traditions that have existed for centuries!

These historical references work to justify men's participation in r/knitting and seek to reclaim the activity as male. Putting the past into perspective, these comments, likely unintentionally, position women's contributions to knitting's complex history as irrelevant and suggest

¹³ I have ensured the original spelling, grammar, and punctuation of the commenters has remained intact in these reproductions.

ownership over knitting by men. This reclaiming of knitting as masculine legitimises men's present-day participation in knitting.

6.4.3 Legitimising masculinity

Legitimising men who knit was often done through references to knitting being a masculine leisure pursuit. Men's leisure activities often take place outdoors and revolve around sport, with drinking being a significant aspect (Bradley, 2013). Additionally, when in groups in public, hegemonic masculinity is often on display, as if to "seek to maintain place in the patriarchal pecking order" (Bradley, 2013, p. 153). However, knitting is primarily seen as an indoor leisure activity, further challenging its credibility as a masculine pursuit. It appears common for men who knit in public claim to be doing so with a drink in hand, or while watching sport, suggesting they seek to assert their masculinity and dominance.

M-5-US-1b	Woah woah woah. Who sais guys cant knit? Let me know so I can put on my hockey jersey, selfmade knit hat and fuck em up.
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The repetition of "woah" is an alternative spelling to "whoa", which originates as a command to stop a working animal and bring them to a standstill (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). It is often used when someone is interjecting a statement they disagree with, in this case, perceived claims that men are not able to knit. It suggests M-5-US-1b is signalling non-knitters that hold these views to stop expressing them. They are also implying that when challenged by someone with these views, he would assert his masculinity by wearing the uniform of a sports team, his own knitted item, and demonstrating his physical strength by fucking them up, in other words, fighting them. This masculinity, or "manliness" (F-7-US-7a) was referred to throughout the data in terms of men not only talking about sport and physical strength, but also consuming alcohol and possessing body hair.

F-2-US-30	There were always guys sitting around between classes knitting, having a beer.
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F-1-UD-2	Grab yourself beer, a ball of your favourite super fine merino and some 2.5mm DPNs and we'll have a pair of socks together in no time!
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It is interesting to note that references in the data equating men to knitting and drinking alcohol were made by women, both as an observation (F-2-US-30) and as an invitation (F-1-UD-2). For example, when introducing the new subreddit r/BrosWhoKnit, F-1-UD-2 suggests men “grab a beer”. Drinking beer is closely associated with the performance of masculine identity (Gough & Edwards, 1998), reinforcing the association between masculine leisure activities and alcohol.

Body hair, particularly facial hair, is referred to extensively throughout the data to assert men’s masculinity. Many of the men who participate in this forum disclose having beards as an identity marker, affirming their masculinity and challenging any perceived femininity. When one of the threads broached the subject of a teenage brother being a knitter and thanking the men of r/knitting for sharing their finished objects, one of the male commenters responded with “tell him that men with beards also knit” (M-4-SC-3), creating a sense of inclusion and implying that men without beards who knit are not necessarily seen as being overly masculine.

M-9-US-47 Very much presenting as male, beard and all.

M-8-US-9 Same as your dude, have a huge beard, covered in tattoos, played in punk bands forever, married to a mega babe. We knit together & it rules!

These references to facial hair as an identity marker are possibly made as a claim to one’s masculinity. References to tattoos and being in a band align with masculine ideals and by referring to having a “mega babe” as a wife, M-8-US-9 is signalling his sexuality as heteronormative. Furthermore, masculinity’s perceived associated traits include manliness, the noun form of the adjective manly, which came up regularly across the data set in association with the strength and dependability of soldiers.

F-7-US-7a I don't get why people say you can't do something based solely off gender-- my grandma said that her friends that went to the navy in the war all knit, and did needlepoint. (They were all men, all wwii, so you know they were concerned with "manliness") Kinda odd how we forget so quickly.

The bracketed information in this comment serves to provide extra information for the readers’ clarification. F-7-US-7a uses this function to emphasise that the WWII military personnel her grandmother shared anecdotes about were men, suggesting this equates with manliness. To

suggest that these men who knitted during the war were “concerned” with performing their masculinity speaks more to the views of the present day when the comment is being made rather than the views during the war when less stigma was attached to knitting and gender than there is today. By referring to society as forgetting these facts, F-7-US-7a appears to be challenging the people who say men do not knit and thus legitimising men’s knitting during wartime as well as in the present day. These current attitudes towards knitting and gender are being challenged by much of the r/knitting community, at times by comparing them to attitudes towards knitting practices during WWI and WWII. Of particular note is that in the data, there appeared to be many additional references to war through the strong use of metaphors related to warfare that seem to be associated with masculinity, which deserves further discussion.

Metaphors of warfare

Teo (2000) describes metaphorical language as a bridge that traverses literal and factual meaning and takes us into a world of ideological persuasion. Therefore, metaphors aid in “re-structuring our thinking”, helping us to perceive reality in different ways (p. 34). In the discourse of men who knit, there is a strong historical link to WWI and WWII through anecdotes of soldiers’ participation in the craft of knitting and the metaphorical discourse of warfare seen in the common use of language associated with war and battle (see Appendix F).

Warfare is often a battle to either death or surrender, with an objective to assert dominance and survive. In cases where people are struggling to survive, combat metaphors may be the most fitting description for what they are going through (Carey & Russell, 2002). Men have always been stereotyped as in battle, in a historical context, whether it be battle with swords or planes, metaphors of war look at the male role through history as the defenders, helping to gain insight into one experience through another, influencing stereotypes that enforce dominant power structures (Levinson, 2009). This is representative in the use of warfare terms throughout the data.

Yarn bombs, while not actually exploding, are the covert attack of yarn crafts situated in public spaces, often seen as an act of protest. There is a common understanding of terms associated with knitting culture, so when F-4-US-1c refers to loving the work of an artist who “yarn

bombs”, there is a bond of shared knowledge formed with the reader, generating positive connotations. However, to be bombarded implies a not so pleasant experience, usually at the hands of those in the out-group (as discussed in 6.5.3).

F-5-US-8a There's nothing wrong with men who knit, it's unfair that they have to fend off so much nastiness for no good reason. No one deserves to be attacked for a perfectly harmless hobby--and yet, men who knit are bombarded with jokes about their masculinity and/or sexuality. The rest of the community sees it happening and collectively hates that men are targeted in this way.

In a thread topic discussing the stigma men who knit are subjected to, F-5-US-8a shares her observations of societal stereotypes surrounding knitting that are reflected in r/knitting discussions and their application to the experiences of men in the r/knitting community. She describes men as being “attacked” and “targeted” for knitting – being “bombarded” with jokes that put their masculinity and sexuality into question. These are metaphorical attacks that male knitters unfairly have to “fend off” as if in battle. By engaging in such metaphors of conflict and combat, Carey and Russell (2002) suggest that commenters are representing ways of being in the world that they may not wish to be associated with.

It is clear that here, F-5-US-8a is making a commentary on the jokes that men who knit are subject to, not wanting men to be subject to these attacks. Speaking on behalf of “the community” that “sees” this stigma happening, F-5-US-8a is denouncing the way men who knit are under attack from others. In response to this post, one commenter gives an example of gendered stigma through sharing that they were treated differently when identifying themselves as a particular gender, to which F-5-US-8a responds with additional metaphors of warfare.

F-8-US-6a Yes, that's not the way it *should* be, but it's up to the individual which battles they want to fight.

Here, F-8-US-6a implies autonomy for those under attack, suggesting that it is their own choice whether they enter into these “battles”. This highlights the techno-discursive nature of social media communication in that those who are subject to stigma in online spaces can choose to walk away with an action as simple as exiting the screen, executing agency over their actions and thus asserting power. Warfare is synonymous with power struggle, with one group exerting

dominance over another, such as the forced enrolment of men into the armed forces during wartime.

M-8-CD-8 Some vendors have given me the condescending “Oh, were you drafted into carrying your partner’s bags?”

When men are encountered in yarn stores, it is often presumed they have been forced into this environment by a woman, drafted as if forcibly selected to fight for a cause. By referencing the military, men are continuing to legitimise their place in the r/knitting community. This community is likened by M-12-US-110 to “an army” of knitters, descriptive of a collective of specially trained people ready to serve their cause. This also serves to reference military forces such as the soldiers who fought for dominance in WWI and WWII yet also knitted openly without shame. Soldiers in the army are still widely considered as masculine. Therefore, by explicitly associating men who knit with these soldiers, r/knitting commenters are forging a connection between knitting and masculinity in order to legitimise male knitters’ presence in the knitting community. However, gendered stereotypes persevere in Western society, with the expectation that men reject feminine pursuits in favour of performing their masculinity through exhibiting traits such as strength and skill.

6.4.4 Legitimising skill as a masculine trait

Knitting is a craft that requires skill in holding and operating knitting needles, handling yarn, and mastering, while sometimes combining various stitch techniques. These skills were frequently talked about relating to both technique and experience but also in regard to transferable skills that enable providing for others and surviving in the wild. References were also made to possessing mathematical skills suitable for the “male brain”. Mathematics is a “traditionally androcentric domain” (Bergvall, 1996, as cited in Jones, 2011, p. 735) that indexes masculinity. In other words, mathematics has mostly been focused or centred on men but is also associated with knitting. This association can be seen with celebrity knitter Nathan Taylor, who goes by the moniker ‘Sockmatician’, coining a name that blends a knitted item, the sock, with the profession of a mathematician. However, F-5-US-16b took exception to a

statement in Taylor's (2018) book *Guys knit: The instruction manual*, which she equated to men being inherently skilled.

F-5-US-16b I was interested enough to go have a look, and I have to admit that I personally rolled my eyes a little bit about his direct manner of addressing the "system-adherent, pattern-loving male brain" in his according methods of instruction because I can't personally agree that our brains are so strictly tied to sex

By indicating an eye roll, F-5-US-16b is expressing annoyance or disbelief (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Her disagreement appears to be with the proposition that men are highly capable at skills associated with mathematics and that these skills are representative of biological sex, a personal view suggesting that all people are capable of skilled tasks, regardless of gender. To drive home their point, F-5-US-16b uses italicised capitals to express that this association between mathematical and knitting is not unique; maths is often referred to as a useful skill for knitters.

F-1-US-3a Knitting is a skill and an art that is quite old. Men and women have been doing it for ages. Also, it's been proven to be good for the brain and arthritis in the hands as we grow older. Lastly, it uses lots of math.

M-13-US-149 I write code to generate my knitting patterns sometimes, just to save me from having to write things out. There's all kinds of cool math in there.

When suggesting that knitting is a skill and an art that both men and women do, in that order, F-1-US-3a may be unintentionally perpetuating the stereotype that firstly, men are skilled and secondly, women are artistic. In saying that, M-13-US-149 is sharing his technological experience of coding knitting patterns so as to avoid writing, which could be seen as a form of art. Both of these commenters, however, add their observations of knitting's association with mathematical skills as additional to their primary statements – to support their views rather than being the focus of their discussion. Other statements I found pointed to a male skillset relating to activities or professions that can also assist with knitting, including professions such as sport, medicine and engineering, all suggested by women.

F-3-AU-1 Knitting is actually used by some coaches to build finger dexterity for football players. So really nothing wrong with that!

F-5-CD-12 Knitting is also an excellent way to develop fine motor skills! Which can help with a range of bad ass careers (surgeons, mechanics, welders etc)

F-5-CD-12 I'm teaching my son how to knit because it really helps hand dexterity and he wants to be an engineer when he grows up.

Knitting is seen to require manual dexterity (Stannard, 2011), and the same skills that are needed to read computer programmes are needed to read knitting patterns (Minahan & Wolfram Cox, 2007) as it is considered to be mathematics and counting based (Parkins, 2004). The above examples encouraging men to knit align with the idea that men possess the skills that make them suitable for jobs in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and professional sports. In addition to the academic skills like mathematics that are entwined with knitting, practical survival skills were also brought up throughout the data in terms of males providing for others and surviving in the wild. The discourse of legitimisation as men being survivors and providers reinforces the role of men possessing these all-encompassing skills.

M-3-CD-34 Fellow male knitter here.... explain to him exactly how valuable a skill this will be during a zombie apocalypse.

However, of the fourteen references to apocalypse in the data, all but one were made by women, suggesting that references to survival skills focus on the link between knitting knowledge and human survival rather than the on gender of the knitter. Essentially, knitters are arguing that gender is irrelevant to knitting skills and the ability to provide.

F-3-US-15 Give me a rock, a sheep, and a couple of pointy sticks and I'll keep you warm during the nuclear winter.

F-9-UR-37 Those who laugh will be coming to you with cold feet after the apocalypse.

Men as providers were also widely referenced in the data, where they were seen as saviours with the ability to knit socks to keep people warm in times of disaster. Obtaining wool from a sheep and modelled knitting needles out of wood to form “pointy sticks” are suggested as ways of sourcing the materials and tools needed to knit and provide warmth during apocalyptic events. Discussions around men being providers and having the skills needed to provide for family in times of need also framed men as protectors, further legitimising their participation in the craft. This finding is explored further through the additional discourses outlined below.

6.5 A discourse of belonging

References to belonging were identified across the data set. Belonging captures the desire for attachment, “be it to other people, places, or modes of being” (Fortier, 2000, as cited in Wodak, 2008, p. 201). It is more than just membership to a social media platform, it is the desire for an identity (Wodak, 2008) that positions the contributors to r/knitting within a shared community. Discourses of belonging are strongly categorised by the uncertainty that stems from a person not yet being what they want to become (Wodak, 2008) and are most often constructed by “highlighting differences and juxtapositions” (p. 201). Gender is a factor in these constructions of identity, with the equality and inequality discussed in r/knitting representative of the commenters’ desire to belong.

6.5.1 Finding equality

Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields are androcentric domains that are gender polarizing (Bergvall, 1996, as cited in Jones, 2011). Women in STEM are subsequently faced with the predicament of how to respond to the conflict of the traditional female role. One of the comments in response to the thread *[Discussion] Men who knit--the stigma and the community's response* (Thread 4) poses questions around the ways men and women are treated differently in r/knitting when they identify themselves by their gender. F-8-US-6a relates this to her personal experience of participating in STEM fields.

F-8-US-6a	<i>*cackling from woman with multiple STEM degrees*</i> OK on a serious note, when I participate in sci/tech all I want is to be treated the same as everyone else. I go by agender handles online (and laugh when people refer to me as "he"). So I get that feel. Sometimes I prefer to hide my gender, because I feel like it shouldn't matter, and it's just easier if it would otherwise distract others from the point at hand.
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The scene is set in this anecdote by bookmarking the opening statement with asterisks. One of the uses of asterisks in computer-mediated communication is to narrate the commenter’s actions (McCulloch, 2019), which, in this case, is italicised for emphasis. In this example, F-8-US-6a indicates she is cackling, which is a loud, high-pitched laugh often associated with witches or trickery. This is done to inform the readers that she, a woman, has more than one STEM degree - as if fooling those holding ideological expectations. She immediately counters this with “OK

on a serious note”, acknowledging the playfulness of the previous statement. The commenter shares that she sometimes prefers to “hide” her gender by using agender handles, or usernames, when communicating online, trying out what Danet (1998) calls being “gender-free” (p. 130) and adopting “camouflage” (p. 137). F-8-US-6a acknowledges amusement at being mistaken for a male at times, describing explicit disclosure of gender as a distraction and something that she prefers not to do so she can be “treated the same as everyone else”. Järviluoma and Roivanen (2003) explain that gender differences are internalised and affected by language, therefore it may not be entirely possible to completely hide the gender that one aligns with.

To help remove the stigma associated with knitting that men experience, the women of r/knitting are actively seeking to educate readers with recommendations on how to work towards gaining gender equality in r/knitting. They suggest doing this by talking about why they are interested in the craft.

F-8-US-6a	<p>Talking about why you're interested and what you like about it is a great way to open up the conversation and normalize it as a fun thing that anyone could relate to.</p> <p>For things us women in the knitting community can do - refrain from making gender-related comments, and don't go overboard with the effusive praise for dudes just because they're dudes.</p>
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Consequently, women hope to normalise knitting as something all people can take part in, irrespective of gender. This is a process that is already taking place in r/knitting through the very discussion of gender inequalities. By suggesting that women stop themselves from focusing on gender in their thread responses and upvoting, F-8-US-6a is, in effect, fostering an environment where all knitters can contribute and belong to the r/knitting community with equal expectations.

According to Wodak (2008), discourses of belonging tend to highlight commenters’ desire to identify with “the other”, and seldom with “the same” (p. 201). In such cases, commenters are seeking to identify with other knitters; women with men and men with women, rather than as belonging to a pre-existing community defined by “we” or “us” (Wodak, 2008, p. 201). This highlighting of differences from ‘others’ in r/knitting demonstrates the knitters’ desire to belong to a community of knitters where gender does not instil judgement over their abilities.

6.5.2 A subreddit just for men?

The creation of subreddits that provide spaces that are safe and free of judgement for minority groups is a necessity (Workman, 2014) and was found to be an important part of the discourse of belonging in this research. Such spaces enable these groups the freedom to perform their authentic selves. Men have historically benefitted from patriarchal dominance and are arguably not in need of the same level of protection that safe places provide for marginalised people such as women of colour or the LGBTQI+ community. However, when it comes to male knitters, it appeared that, as a minority group, r/knitting provided them with a supportive network to belong to. This original post advertises the creation of a subreddit for men, r/BrosWhoKnit, welcoming all men to subscribe regardless of skill level. Interestingly, it is a woman proposing the creation of this community for “bros”.

F-1-UD-2

r/BrosWhoKnit - Welcome. This is the place for bros, blokes, fellas, dudes and lads to chat about the dark arts of plain, purl and all things between. If you're just starting out, been around the needles for a while or a Fair-isle supreme guru master, then this is the place for you. Questions, advice, showing off and general knitting banter are all welcome. Grab yourself beer, a ball of your favourite super fine merino and some 2.5mm DPNs and we'll have a pair of socks together in no time!

This new community is framed as a place where men can ask questions, give advice, and show off their finished items. Working together in this way enables prospective subscribers to this male-coded community to participate in “banter”, a form of witty conversation in a teasing manner (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). These are collaborative activities that develop a sense of community and belonging (Turner, 2018). It is also proposed that male knitters “grab a beer” when embarking on their next knitting project.

Drinking alcohol is involved in the performance of masculine identity and creates a sense of collective belonging (Gough & Edwards, 1998; Thurnell-Read, 2015), suggesting that the F-1-UD-2 has created this subreddit as space for male knitters to perform their masculinities. Subsequently, the formation of this community for men did not sit well with some female knitters in the community, putting a “bad taste” in their mouths. In other words, giving them a negative impression.

F-5-UD-6 I think this just originally put a bad taste in my mouth because I took it as males participating in a female dominated craft and not wanting to be associated with female knitters.

The idea that men joining this subreddit do not want to be associated with female knitters suggests a devaluation of women and aligns with the construction of hegemonic masculinity (Gough & Edwards, 1998). When F-5-UD-6 states that this perceived attempt at distancing male knitters from women in the craft “originally” left a bad impression, it implies that she no longer feels this way and that perhaps through engaging in a discussion about the reasons for providing men with specialised subreddits, her opinion was adjusted. Ironically, in this discussion on providing safe spaces for male knitters to discuss the craft, it is women’s voices that dominate the conversation. Of note is that one of the men to respond had many more karma points – suggesting higher status within the community causing his words to carry more weight.

M-3-US-20 Because patriarchy shames men for doing “feminine” things to the point that some men feel the need to have male-coded spaces and products in order to feel safe in pursuing their interests. It might seem ridiculous to some in the knitting community, but things like that sub come from a place of deep fear of being othered by “mainstream” society, and they should be encouraged to participate.

The response of this male knitter provided a perspective that suggested “male-coded spaces” were needed due to society’s othering of male knitters. While acknowledging that some knitters may find this point of view “ridiculous”, M-3-US-20 shares a sense of “deep fear” in some men of the way they are treated when knitting, suggesting men need encouragement from others to help them feel safe. The following response from a male knitter provides some insight into the benefits of a dedicated space for the discussion of knitting projects by men.

M-3-US-7b No it’s interesting to me because as nice as it is to see everyone’s newest shawl, I have no interest in making one. As nice as the vibrant color choices you see in many projects posted here, it isn’t my style and I don’t draw any inspiration from them. I’m interested that this new sub could be a place where I could find male specific pattern ideas with muted colors and textures that are my style.

r/BrosWhoKnit is being suggested as a place for patterns and finished objects of interest to men – in itself perpetuating antiquated stereotypes such as the belief that colours are gendered. The desire for attachment that Wodak (2008) equates with belonging is related to the desire men

have for finding others with similar interests and needs. Men who knit may well feel welcome in r/knitting but they also desire a space where male-specific projects are showcased.

M-4-UD-1 Because birds of a feather. People like to relate with people like themselves. To be in a group is animalistic and safe.

M-4-UD-1 suggests people like to be a part of a group or community. However, describing a men's group as "animalistic" feeds into the idea that men knitting is natural and instinctive, detracting from the valuable input women contribute to knitting culture. By highlighting the differences that men and women who knit experience, a sense of belonging to a shared culture is created. This common knowledge that knitters share binds them together.

6.5.3 The glass escalator

The concept of the glass escalator sees men who knit excelling in a craft that is predominantly practised by women. Research on men working in female-dominated fields reveals a type of discrimination men experience in which their work opportunities are enhanced and they gain access to higher-paying positions (Williams, 1992), a metaphor that stems from the glass ceiling effect, in which women are held back from progressing in male-dominated fields. However, Williams (1992) also highlights that not all men experience this glass escalator effect in the same way – it is often their performances of masculinity which achieve a higher status. In the case of r/knitting, these performances include disclosing one's gender when posting comments. Male knitters sometimes feel shame as a consequence of knitting's perception as a feminine craft in this patriarchal society. As a result, other knitters, generally women, direct praise at these men to encourage their participation and help them feel welcome. This encouragement is seen by some as being disproportionate due to unevenness of praise being given to men in the r/knitting community.

F-5-US-8a Particularly interesting to me were the men who posted about how differently their posts are treated when they identify themselves as men even when the ones they didn't identify their gender in where more intricate/beautiful than the ones where they did.

It appears that knitters who identify themselves as male in r/knitting threads receive a great number of encouraging comments and upvotes compared to women when they disclose their

gender than when posting more impressive work without disclosing their gender. It is implied here that finished objects of a much higher quality and skill level do not receive as much praise as a less intricate item explicitly posted by a male if the knitter conceals their identity. This appears to be a result of women overcompensating for wanting men to feel welcome in the community, perhaps a reflection of the way women can relate to feeling excluded in male-dominated domains. Men who disclosed their gender were seen, particularly by women, as being treated differently. This appeared to lead to the glass escalator effect in regard to the number of upvotes men's finished objects received, as observed by F-5-US-8a in her original post discussing the stigma men receive as knitters.

F-5-US-8a It's no secret that men are given a much harder time about this hobby than women because it's considered a feminine hobby--never mind that men have knit for centuries too. The (largely female) knitting community seems to recognize this and feel uncomfortable about it.

This unevenness of praise is suggested as being a way of compensating for the stigma male knitters receive when participating in a feminine hobby, recognising that men are a minority in the knitting community. Although women are encouraging the participation of men who knit in online knitting communities, at the same time they are complaining about the disproportionate upvoting men receive. Even so, it is positive to see women encouraging men and upvoting their achievements but they seem to be feeling a sense of unfairness that men who do not knit well are having their posts upvoted disproportionately. This leads back to the ideological assumption that women are undervalued and these women of r/knitting may be feeling resentment towards this unequal treatment.

F-5-US-8a That can translate into many more upvotes/more attention for their work, which, like I mentioned before, some men actually don't like, since it stills sets them apart from the greater knitting community when they just want to be treated like everybody else.

Here, F-5-US-8a references men's desire to belong and not be singled out. As a result of male knitters experiencing the glass escalator effect by receiving disproportionate praise for the items they post, women appear to feel uncomfortable. F-5-US-8a suggests men also dislike this happening and just want to be treated equally as knitters. Responses to F-5-US-8a's post

addressed solutions to these issues, suggesting that women take action to give praise where it is due, not because of gender. The upvoting and downvoting function of Reddit adds a layer of agreement and disagreement for commenters to engage in. The upvotes men receive, whether disproportionate or not, are still examples of support coming through as a step to give men a sense of belonging in the knitting community.

F-8-US-6a For things us women in the knitting community can do - refrain from making gender-related comments, and don't go overboard with the effusive praise for dudes just because they're dudes. (It's just another way of singling them out.) But if you see someone else acting weird because a dude is knitting, that's a good time to either talk to the someone or talk to the dude and give him some extra encouragement.

Members here are being advised not to single out men “just because they’re dudes”. However, at the same time to look out for instances where men receive negative reactions to their knitting, suggesting this is an opportunity to educate these people about the importance of encouraging men’s participation. This comment gives a contradictory message – discouraging excessive praise, while also encouraging knitters to target their support towards men. Overall, these women of r/knitting are expressing their awareness of the gender stereotyping men experience as knitters and are working to promote equality in the knitting community – a space where everyone belongs – yet simultaneously are acknowledging that men are being disadvantaged by societal norms and may require encouragement to be aware that they belong.

6.5.4 Non-knitters as an out-group

Acknowledging knitters as an in-group, with shared knowledge and cultural practice, can at the same time create the notion of an out-group of people outside of those parameters. Although non-knitters are not participating in these discussions, they are being talked about by knitters in regard to lived experiences (see Appendix I). It has been noted that r/knitting is a place where kindness is promoted and exhibited but there are cases of taboo language being used, such as the swear word “fuck” when knitters refer to non-knitters. Swearing is traditionally associated with working-class men asserting their masculinity (Jones, 2011). Along with aggressiveness, it is not necessarily masculine in nature but is ideologically linked to men due to “cultural norms of masculinity” (p. 722). Swear words like fuck are a phallogentric use of language that sees the

world read through “the male gaze” (Bradley, 2013, p. 45). However, all four occurrences directed at non-knitters were produced by women.

F-9-US-151	Keep it up. And fuck whoever makes fun of you.
F-8-US-9	Fuck people who judge you for your hobbies.
F-3-US-2e	Fuck anybody that looks down on you for your contributions to the culture.
F-3-US-2d	You do you! Fu@k the haters.

According to Fairman, (2009), fuck is the most frequently used swear word by men and women and, in this figurative context, is being used as “fighting words” (p. 83) to insult non-knitters. These four comments are all variations on “fuck you”, which is “the most common obscene insult” in the English-language (van Zoonen et al., 2011, p.157). The comments are comprised of “fuck” followed by an out-group member, such as those who “make fun of”, “judge”, “look down on”, or “hate” male knitters. Fuck is being used metaphorically here, to describe “domination” (van Zoonen et al., 2011, p. 159) and suggests that knitters view themselves as being of higher power status than non-knitters. Further references to non-knitters are consistent with this view. Each of these examples uses insulting language that situates non-knitters as a lesser-than out-group.

Those people outside the knitting community, that are not active in the r/knitting discussions therefore unable to respond, are being framed as “naysayers” (F-9-US-115; F-2-US-2c), “bullies” (F-2-US-2c), “assholes” (F-3-UD-13b) and “critics” (F-3-US-2e), with their actions being described as “rude” (F-1-US-3a), “shitty” (F-11-US-5) and “evil” (F-8-UD-15). All of these expressions are interestingly being made by women. By othering non-knitters, these women appear to be solidifying knitters as an in-group that includes all knitters, especially males. These women are indicating that they seek to stand up for male knitters, protecting them from criticism and simultaneously providing encouragement such as “keep it up” (F-9-US-151) and “you do you!” (F-3-US-2d) so that male knitters feel that r/knitting is a place where they belong.

6.6 A discourse of empowerment

A discourse of empowerment was identified in which the r/knitting community empowers male knitters, encouraging them to be agents of social change by resisting stereotypes and giving them the confidence to participate. They appear to be encouraged to openly be male knitters and reassured that their sexuality is not compromised by being a man who knits.

6.6.1 Empowerment through encouragement

r/knitting is an online community with standards and rules promoting kindness. It has a notable lack of trolls - a term describing a person who engages in online abuse or harassment (Bishop, 2014). This affirms the subreddit as a positive environment and reflects the moderator-enforced rule 'be kind' (see Appendix C). With this in mind, it is no surprise that kindness in this forum is commonplace, with over a third of all comments containing a message of encouragement. This was the most highly occurring theme across the twelve threads and suggests that the encouragement and empowering of men who knit is common practice among all knitters regardless of gender. A large number of these encouraging comments appeared in a thread posted by a man describing being challenged by a work colleague's claim that "men don't knit" (M-5-HK-3) (Thread 2). He shares his journey, from learning how to knit through video chats with his mother and watching YouTube videos, to shopping for yarn in local stores, to the challenges faced in knitting sleeves, and finally on settling on the finished object being a vest variety of a Christmas snowman jumper.

The encouragement displayed by the r/knitting community towards M-5-HK-3 is welcoming and embracing of men who knit. Comments such as "I love you for proving her wrong!" (M-6-US-2) compliment the way he responded to being challenged to *do* something rather than being challenged *by* something. These compliments are more often directed at the male knitter, not the finished object itself. However, some comments do complement the knitter's work.

U-4-FL-17	Wow. To go from zero to that in just a couple of months is beyond impressive. Kudos!
F-6-US-5b	dude, you did better than I probably would have done! WTG!!!

Commenters suggest M-5-HK-3 is skilled, despite being a beginner knitter, calling his knitting “beyond impressive”. Both of these comments follow the same pattern of starting with an exclamation, followed by a reference to the male knitter’s skilful abilities and ending with an exclamation of respect, such as “Kudos!” or “WTG!!!”. WTG is an acronym based on the conversational phrase “way to go”, something McCulloch (2019) calls a “social acronym” (p. 11) and is commonplace in computer-mediated communication. Here, “way to go” gives an encouraging pep-talk, as does “kudos”, a sign of praise resulting from an act of achievement (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Many comments in the r/knitting threads are being emphasised with one or more exclamation marks, with 464 appearing across the data set in total. Punctuation such as this offers varying functions and is suggested by McCulloch (2019) as showing “warmth and sincerity” in computer-mediated communication (p. 124). Similarly, full stops mark a typographical tone of voice, acting as an indicator of falling intonation “even when it is not serving to end a sentence” (McCulloch, 2019, p. 114).

F-5-UD-9 You. Are. The. Bomb.

Statements that have been punctuated with a full stop after each word give pause of effect to each separate word, increasing the intensity of the message. In this case, being “the bomb” is slang for someone being very good (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), intended as a compliment.

However, the use of non-sentence-final full stops, which equate to the message being delivered with the falling intonation of a newscaster’s voice, (McCulloch, 2019), intensifies its delivery and emphasises the compliment. This typographical function provides a matter-of-fact delivery to cement the statement as factual.

As shown in Table 5 (also see Appendix J), ten consecutive positive comments on display showed a sense of community, establishing relationships with other commenters seeking to reaffirm their place and feel a sense of belonging. They illustrate exclamations of encouragement and compliments given to men sharing their finished objects in r/knitting, showing that men are gaining acceptance from women within the community.

Table 5.*Encouraging Comments*

User	Comment	Points
F-3-RM-12	Please post the whole blanket, it looks amazing!	13
F-3-US-1b	Damn...I want to see the WHOLE blanket now! 🤩🤩	23
F-7-US-2c	Ain't NOTHING wrong with that! Beautiful work!	8
F-5-US-13	YES! please, more male representation in the fiber community!	12
F-4-UD-282	Looks amazing! Great job.	7
F-8-US-67	Ugh that is so beautiful!!	6
M-2-UD-1a	So beautiful and timeless :')	6
F-4-CD-1	Absolutely gorgeous. 10/10	7
F-5-US-3b	That is beautiful. I wish my dude would knit with me.	6
F-5-US-69	More dudes need to knit. Period. That is gorgeous work.	5

Note. Encouraging comments from the thread *Just a dude who likes to knit lace blankets. Ain't nothin wrong with that* (Thread 5). Data accurate as of 27 November 2019.

These comments include adjectives such as “amazing”, “beautiful” and “gorgeous”, used here to compliment the man’s work. Also present is the use of ALL CAPS, the capitalisation of full words generating a typographical tone of voice that indicates strong feeling and, in the case of these examples, the use of a single capped word in the full statement is used emphatically (McCulloch,2019). Such discursive features are commonly found within online speech and assist in the meaning-making cues audibly present in face-to-face communication.

6.6.2 Empowerment through assurance of men’s sexuality

Support for male knitters encourages them to comfortably perform their identities and share their authentic selves. Metaphors associated with homosexuality were often used in the context of men who knit. For example, men who knit that discuss their lived experiences in online communities often refer to ‘coming out’ as a knitter, suggesting non-heteronormative sexuality is hidden or kept secret. The expression ‘coming out’ stems from ‘coming out of the closet’, generally referring to the revelation of one’s non-heteronormative sexual identity. However, in these cases, men are revealing their knitter identities.

F-5-CN-6 It seems to be increasingly prevalent that men are "confessing" they knit, or know how to. I use quotes and that particular word because it seems to be linked to femininity (and feminine=shameful for many US men).

The typographical quotation marks around “confessing” suggests it is being used to stress the word, making it stand out (Wright, 2016). By explicitly referencing the use of quotations in their example, F-5-CN-6 is acknowledging knitting’s perceived association with femininity and likening men who knit to non-heterosexual men concealing their identities.

M-9-US-47 I've gotten mixed reactions -- generally teasing from other men, but women sometimes forgo the "that's gay" and give me a "you knit? That's cool!" instead.

This encouragement is given to empower some men who knit. However, it suggests the alternative is non-heteronormative sexuality as an insult, further supporting the view by some that knitting is effeminate. This can also be seen in other references to sexuality, such as when M-11-US-1 uses the homophobic slur “fag” to state what they have not been called.

M-11-US-1 I guess I'm old enough that I don't know anyone so insecure in their own masculinity that they would call me a fag for knitting. Also, women love it.

M-1-US-1a I (17m) have been knitting/crocheting for pretty much my whole life, and have never met anyone else of the male persuasion who didn't just call me a fag and get on with it.

Heterosexuality is central to hegemonic masculinity (Talbot, 2010) and the use of swearing and taboo language such as “fag” is traditionally associated with working-class men wishing to assert their masculinity (Jones, 2011). Furthermore, Cameron (1997, as cited in Kiesling, 2007) suggests that by a male speaker constructing someone else’s identity as gay, they are implicitly claiming that they are not gay themselves. This distancing from homosexuality seen with “women love it”, combined with a homophobic slur, suggests that crafts such as knitting and crochet are at risk of appearing feminine. However, not all men have been in the closet or are embarrassed about knitting in public.

M-2-UD-84 I taught myself to knit at 24 and I've been doing it ever since; I've knit in public hundreds of times and refuse to feel self-conscious about it, because I could be sitting there with my phone like a zombie reading Twitter but I'm actually creating something instead.

By refusing to feel self-conscious about knitting in public, M-2-UD-84 is acknowledging that feeling this way is a real option. Openly performing one's identity in public is essentially revealing one's true self to the world, regardless of the consequences.

6.6.3 Empowerment through humour as a rhetorical device

Humour strengthens bonds and releases tension (Holmes, 2007), helping people deal with sensitive subjects on anonymous platforms such as Reddit. As well as working to enforce “a sense of belonging” (Partington, 2006, p. 108), humour also fosters creativity (Holmes, 2007), which is used as a resourceful response to the challenges of online interactions such discussions around the stigma experienced by men who knit. Humour had a large presence in the discussion threads which, on further examination, appeared to be a discursive strategy to deal with the sensitive topic of masculinity and knitting and to serve as an empowering tool. It is used by social media consumers “for a number of reasons, including social acceptance and connectivity” (Calavita, 2004, as cited in Holton & Lewis, 2011, p. 5) as a rhetorical tool (Acevedo-Callejas, 2015). It also initiates and maintains social connections (Martin & Ford, 2018), which are key features of online communities. Although there are negative implications of using humour because it “tends to draw on stereotypes about individuals based on their sex” (Acevedo-Callejas, 2015, p. 149), the humour appearing in the r/knitting threads are not explicit jokes, but these uses of sarcastic remarks appear to be used to alleviate or mitigate the tension in navigating difficult topics of conversation.

Creativity

Creativity is expressed in the use of linguistic play through assigning new words as labels to describe men who knit. This is achieved by creating neologisms through the blending of old words to form new words with new meanings (Liu & Liu, 2014) and using creative typographical features to contribute to meaning-making. The use of creativity thus assists in men performing their masculine identities.

To describe someone as a ‘bear’ signals that the person is a strong gay man with a big, burly, hairy body who has facial hair, serving to give a sense of masculinity (Quidley-Rodriguez & De Santis, 2017). This creative new word, or neologism, BearBroMo blends the first syllables in the words bear, brother and moustache, foregrounding the importance of sexuality. The addition of ‘Mo’ suggests that men who knit have facial hair further disassociates the bear identity as effeminate and equates men in this community or brotherhood, with masculine traits. In addition to neologisms, creative typographical features add layers of meaning and can also be used to reinforce a community’s social ties. For example, the “sarcasm tilde” (McCulloch, 2019, p. 134) can convey irony or disagreement with what has been said.

F-5-US-6 I’d love it if the knitting community could move beyond the level of
wow a ~man~~ we’re at now.

The use of sarcasm tildes around the word “man” not only serves to convey sarcasm but the addition of an additional word-final tilde, for example “~man~~”, is something McCulloch explains as a lengthening to indicate the sarcastic inflection of “man” with a “sarcastic sing-songy voice” that “makes the shape of a tilde” (p. 138). Out of the context of this discussion, “*wow, a man*” could be interpreted as a response of impressed surprise, presented in italics as a way of emphasising (McCulloch, 2019). These elements of imagery, like humour, enhance the liveliness of interactions online (Holmes, 2007). Therefore, by using typographical features, F-5-US-6 appears to be criticising the community’s tendency to disproportionately praise men for their involvement in knitting, possibly hoping for them to “move beyond” this state to a place where gender is not relevant to their participation in r/knitting.

Sarcasm as a counter-discourse

According to Martin and Ford (2018), sarcasm is a type of irony. It involves saying the opposite of what you intend to mean, in a manner that continues to convey your true opinion. It is subtle and contextual, and “the ultimate in-joke” (McCulloch, 2019, p. 133). Sarcastic remarks serve as a way to involve the reader emotionally and create a sense of familiarity (Chiaro, 2017), or to assert authority over another person (Ritchie, 2018). Furthermore, humour such as sarcasm can

be used to express the complexities and problems of the social world while also creating group solidarity, group identity, and individual identity in discourse (Baym, 1995).

When male knitters are disclosing their identity as hyper-masculine, it is to counter any perceived femininity, regardless of sexuality. Effeminate men who knit do not appear to be justifying their involvement in the craft and perhaps are not judged in the same way as other men when knitting in public, perhaps due to their association with pre-existing stereotypes of knitting as feminine. This is seen in the thread *Introducing new knitting sub r/BrosWhoKnit*, in which a new subreddit aimed at men who knit was being shared, containing a comment which sheds light on this judgement.

F-2-US-5 TIL that GNC men never get hate.

Here, the commenter refers to gender non-conforming (GNC) men who identify outside of society's expected binary. The comment contains the prefixed TIL, a common social acronym based on the conversational phrase "today I learned", which originated from Reddit's r/todayilearned subreddit and is currently standard vernacular across social media platforms. Although not explicitly labelled as sarcasm, this comment is sarcastic in so far as it conveys a negative evaluation from a positive statement. The commenter is expressing that she has observed, as a result of the preceding discussion comments that men who conform to the traditional definition of man do in fact get hate.

There is a notable absence of explicitly hateful comments on this subreddit - the hate referenced appears to be pushback against men having their own separate communities. Online communities are often seen as safe places for the marginalised, so the idea of men needing their own space is a challenging concept for some, as seen in the following comment using the italicised word "sarcasm" as a precursor to the text. This has been used to explicitly inform readers not to take the comment literally.

M-6-US-3 *sarcasm* because bros are constantly bombarded with hatred and ridicule for everything they do! Let them have their safe space. It's not like the already run the dang world.

Humour can either unify or divide and is suggested by Baym (1995) as a strategy helping to construct and deconstruct identities. Here, M-6-US-3 refers to men's privilege throughout history and their role in the patriarchal running of the world. It could be assumed that this challenge was made by a woman, however, the comment was made by a man. In saying that, M-6-US-3 describes himself in other threads as a gay man, a demographic subordinate to hegemonic masculinities, and coming from an ideology where safe spaces are much needed.

Another typographical feature used to indicate sarcastic intent is the descriptor /s at the end of a statement (Das, 2019), originating from a programming language. This form of computer language is sometimes used to create in-jokes, building solidarity online (McCulloch, 2019). For example, the programming language </sarcasm>, which has become shortened to /s.

M-5-US-32 I make sure that when I knit in public, I wear my 49ers jersey, open-carry holster with my S&W 45 auto, deer urine, and camo face paint. /s

Here, M-5-US-32 is challenging the hyper-masculine declarations of some men when referencing knitting in public. We know it is unlikely that M-5-US-32 actually wears his 49ers American football team jersey, while also wearing a holster containing a Smith & Western (S&W) handgun, covered in deer urine and camouflaging face paint while knitting in public. However, by ending this statement with /s, M-5-US-32 is explicitly stating that he does none of these things. According to McCulloch (2019), the problem with using irony punctuation such as /s can mean that if the readers do not understand the implied message, the commenter is no better off than had you not used it. This comment also challenges an association of sport and warfare with masculinity, an in-joke that may not be understood by all. It suggests a counter-narrative of rejecting these hypermasculine declarations by mocking those who emphasise their masculine traits.

Declarations of masculinity are expressed in the following example in an observational manner. F-5-US-6 is commenting on common representations of the men in r/knitting who explicitly declare their masculinity. This next comment suggests the prevalence of praising and sexualization of men who knit within the community, using features such as the capitalisation of words as typographical tone of voice to emphasise their delivery and indicate sarcastic intent.

However, unlike previous examples, sarcasm is not explicitly stated. Instead, typographical tone of voice throughout the comment serves to set the tone and the parting comment implicitly indicates sarcasm.

F-5-US-6 I've been feeling annoyed with the "I'm a MALE knitter" threads where the OP says something to the effect of "I know it's not the most masculine hobby" or whatever and people in the comments are completely tripping over themselves to congratulate the OP for their braveness and to reassure them of their masculinity. "Oh it's not feminine. You're a MAN knitting so it's inherently MANLY." "It's not GIRLY crafting. It's a MANLY post-apocalyptic / zombie / homesteading / going off-grid in Alaska survival skill!" "I'm a/my boyfriend is a 6'4" MANLY muscular MAN weighing 200 lbs dressed in leather/flannel. A biker/lumberjack with a BEARD who KNITS *gasp* without shame!" "Oh my gosh a MAN who knits so SEXY! It's just the SEXIEST thing possible I am so aroused!" Can we just, not?

F-5-US-6's observations suggest that men who knit are subject to being showered with adoration, sarcastically implying that they are "tripping over themselves" in the rush to give praise. When the commenter interjects a statement with "*gasp*", italicised for emphasis, they are narrating the action of gasping (McCulloch, 2019). This gasp conjures up an image of the commenter holding their hand up to their mouth, gasping in mock disbelief at a hypermasculine male knitter would feel shame for being a knitter. Lastly, F-5-US-6 indicated that men who knit are seen by women in the knitting community as overtly sexy, suggesting heteronormative ideals. We understand that she is not, in fact, "aroused", but using sarcasm to highlight the inequalities men and women face when knitting.

Male knitters are seen as sexy and attractive, as shown in the comment "male knitters = marriage material" (F-2-UD-13) in which any perceived femininity of men who knit is challenged by framing them as heteronormative. Additionally, references to knitting being framed as a survival skill are challenging performative masculinity. This highlights the view that knitting is considered a craft when women do it, but a valued survival skill when men do it. However, the commenter's use of typographical tone of voice to imply sarcasm challenges these views.

F-5-US-16b (and it inadvertently conjures an image in my mind of a woman with her arms full of yarn all like DURR HOW DO I USE MATH TO MAKE ME SOCKS?)

In this discussion of mathematical skill as a male trait, F-5-US-16b adopts these same features of italics and capitalization to portray sarcastic intent. This is made clearer by the use of “DURR”, which mocks an insult or action and is associated with sarcastic phrases (Beef Wilson, 2003). Sarcasm is used here to challenge the view that only men are skilled in mathematics and are thus incapable of knitting complex patterns, such as socks, that involve complicated counting of rows and stitches. This view is not only emphasised by typological features but also with academic language like “conjugates” and “inadvertently” in stark juxtaposition with social language such as “all like” and “DURR”.

Shared knowledge is of importance in the discussion of humour. When humour is too culture-specific, those outside its culture of origin will not necessarily find it funny (Chiaro, 2010).

Therefore, in order to comprehend these sarcastic references, the reader must recognise that: (i) all other masculinities are considered subordinate to hegemonic masculinity; (ii) men emphasise the performance of their hypermasculine traits to counteract any perceived femininity and; (iii) patriarchal privileges have benefited men historically.

Table 6.

Sarcastic comments

User	Comment	Points
M-6-US-3	<i>sarcasm</i> because bro’s are constantly bombarded with hatred and ridicule for everything they do! Let them have their safe space. It’s not like the already run the dang world.	-9
F-6-NW-37	(C) Because a lot of guys get bullied for doing things that are perceived as feminine, such as knitting... Everyone has the right to a safe space, and it doesn’t affect you that this subreddit exists, so there’s no need to be snarky.	10
F-2-US-5	(C) TIL that GNC men never get hate.	3

Note. Sarcastic comments from the thread *Introducing new knitting sub r/BrosWhoKnit* (Thread 12). The child nesting of comments with (C) denotes hierarchical nesting of comments. Data accurate as of 27 November 2019.

The presentation of comments in Reddit is hierarchical, with the ability to view the nesting of parent and child (C) comments enabling asynchronous turn-taking. As Table 6 shows (also see

Appendix K), these two responses to M-6-US-3's sarcastic comment reveal the reactions of women in r/knitting, suggesting a precarious sentiment towards this sarcasm.

Seen in the context of turn-taking within r/knitting, F-2-US-5's TIL (today I learned) comment was posted in response to M-6-US-3's explicitly sarcastic comment on patriarchal dominance. Initially thinking it was a mark on my computer screen, the hyphen appearing before M-6-US-3's comment, "-9 points", took me by surprise. It is a relatively uncommon display of negative points, indicating that this downvoted comment was not received well by readers, a pushback against the ideological practices it represents. F-6-NW-37 challenges the view that men do not need a safe place and equates their sarcastic comments with snarkiness, a clear sign of the stance they take towards the stigma experienced by men who knit. The last number in F-6-NW-37's username code indicates they have earned 37,000 karma points, signalling their views would be received with more respect than someone with just a few.

The result of sarcasm, in this case, is not the mitigation of tension nor the creation of group solidarity that Baym (1995) suggests, but an added tension within the thread's commenters. Interestingly, McCulloch (2019) notes that in examples of other platforms in which karma points are utilised, those with a higher accumulation of points tend to be less polite than regular users. Therefore, despite an accusation of snarkiness possibly being interpreted as snarky itself and in contempt of the "be kind" rule, there is a certain power and authority that comes with having a high number of karma points associated with one's account. F-6-NW-37 is essentially using her power in this context to defend the rights of men to have a safe place to discuss their craft. Using humour therefore empowers knitters to feel comfortable talking about difficult subjects that arise in their discussions.

6.7 Conclusion of Chapter Six

Knitters that take part in online communities such as r/knitting are resisting or reinforcing gender stereotypes towards men through their discursive practices. In my analysis of these Reddit threads, I revealed a dominant discourse of legitimisation, in which the knitting community seeks to justify men's involvement in the craft. Men's justification for knitting

included references to soldiers knitting and claims to masculinity, which were often achieved through metaphors of warfare. Additional discourses of belonging and empowerment showed that there is a desire to belong equally to this in-group of knitters, despite evidence of disproportionate upvoting of men's posts. I found that this sense of belonging is partly achieved through highlighting non-knitters as an out-group. Despite men disclosing their gender in order to be seen more visibly in the forum, I found that it is women that are empowering men to participate. This empowerment was also demonstrated through the use of humour as a rhetorical device. Humour was expressed through the creation of neologisms and blended terms, as well as sarcasm, which revealed a counter-discourse that assisted in the construction of the identities of men who knit as non-hegemonic and in acknowledgement of men's patriarchal privileges. While I have discussed the discourses of the r/knitting community as a whole, understanding how male knitters construct their identities requires further investigation. This will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

Chapter 7 The Labelling of Men in r/knitting

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present an analysis that identifies the ways in which the identities of men who knit are constructed in the r/knitting community. First, I present the qualitative findings from my analysis of the linguistic means by which the identities of men who knit are constructed. These findings include identification of the discursive strategy of nomination that men who knit use to label themselves, other men who knit, and the knitting community as a whole. This provides an opportunity to investigate the ways in which men, a minority in this subreddit, discursively construct their identities as both men and knitters, starting with the ways men label themselves and others. An additional feature of men's speech that is explored is the overlexicalization of the term knitter. Because of the scope of my research, this analysis was confined to discursive construction (nomination) by only the men of r/knitting.

7.2 A discourse of identity

7.2.1 Identifying gender

It is well understood that identities are constructed in and through discourse (Bamberg, de Fina, & Schriffin, 2011). Although online forums such as r/knitting are places where people can hide their identities and be anonymous, Anarbaeva (2016) found that when members disclose identity markers to the community, it “encourages other community members to communicate and interact” (p.2). This was evident across the data of my study set where male knitters shared information about their gender and age, resulting in other men engaging in the discussion by stating similar features of their identities. My analysis found that a discourse of identity had a strong presence in the Reddit threads, which related to both the gender and age of the male knitters. Male knitters frequently disclosed their gender and age across the data set. For example, M-2-US-8 and M-11-UK-1 used “33m” to describe themselves as 33-year-old males. Such cases in the analysed threads mostly appear in discussions where gender is the topic of discussion, perhaps as a sign of solidarity where support is being given to men who knit. This is the focus of my discussion in the following sections about the nomination strategies men used to

label themselves and others, with a discourse of gendered identity also being explored throughout this chapter. Therefore, it is the combined use of gender with age that will be focussed on here.

7.2.2 Identifying age

While there was some othering going on between men and women in r/knitting, it became evident that this was happening between generations as well. Knitting appeared to be seen as stereotypically something older woman do. Although the gendering of knitting has changed over time, present-day societal views deem the craft as being associated with older women; a hangover of women from the 60s still knitting while subsequent generations became products of the synthetic machine knit era.

M-4-UK-118 I knit in public a fair bit around strangers and acquaintances alike, and I've never received comments about my gender for it -- but I get a lot of comments about my age. People tell me about their grandmother who knitted, they say they've never seen someone so young knitting, they say it's a dying skill, that kind of thing.

M-4-UK-118 interestingly notes that their age receives more stigma than their gender, with references being made to older generations more traditionally being knitters. Minahan and Wolfram Cox (2010) suggest that grandmothers provide an important connection with a past that can be “celebrated as a source of learning, loving and nostalgic comfort” (p. 39). They further note that grandmothers may be “tolerated with humour or discounted with distaste” (p. 39).

M-5-HK-3 Anyone can knit. I set out to prove to people that knitting is not just something geriatric grannies do to torture their grandkids with bad clothing. Anyone can do it, and there are so many things you can do that you can step away from the stereotypes.

Age is portrayed as irrelevant in this comment, with societal views of older women being framed as “geriatric” – in poor physical health - and capable of “torture”. This creates othering of older female knitters and frames them as an undesirable identity. Younger people taking up knitting in the present day see themselves in contrast to their grandparents’ generation and fear being labelled as “a granny” (F-5-US-1d) for taking up the craft. Age was not only referred to in

terms of generational stereotyping but also for identity references, using a common method found in online forums to state their identity as age/gender, for example “25m” (M-5-US-1c). Although online forums such as r/knitting are places where people can choose to hide their identities and be anonymous, marking identity in these ways was a common theme throughout, often in solidarity, to add representation when discussions questioning the presence of men who knit in r/knitting were taking place.

M-9-UD-3 34M, started knitting about a year ago and now I knit everywhere I go.

This 34-year-old male was encouraged by another male knitter’s comment to interact by sharing information about his identity. By fore fronting his age and gender, he marks these factors of his identity in solidarity, adding further information about his experience and acts of public knitting in order to validate his presence in the r/knitting community. Kelly (2014) suggests that men intentionally make political statements by knitting in public and with the participatory web being viewed as a public space, we can see men’s visibility in online knitting forums as political statements that challenge societal norms.

7.3 Labelling

The naming of and categorizing of people such as men who knit is a powerful normative force (Talbot, 2010) that provides insight into men’s identity constructions. In looking at nomination in my data, that is, the ways in which male knitters’ identities are constructed through various linguistic means, I focused on Reddit users - whether they were those who identified as male knitters or were people (male, female or other) referring to others who were male knitters. I wanted to know how men described themselves and others in a space dominated by women and how men were constructing and reconstructing their identities in the process. This analysis was based on the notion that some people in society still regard knitting as a feminine activity, while others regard gender irrelevant when it comes to knitting. The patterns of language that I became aware of were identified through the use of the linguistic devices of labelling (naming), and self-referencing, as well as the gendered overlexicalization of terms.

We can organise ourselves and others into categories such as ‘friends’, ‘colleagues’, ‘neighbours’, or even ‘knitters’, depending on the context. The activities and features such as these that we use to categorize ourselves and others relates to our everyday knowledge of people (Järviluoma & Roivanen, 2003, p. 69) and gives insight into the ways we construct our identities. According to Watson (1994, as cited in Järviluoma, et al., 2003), this type of categorization is a “culturally methodical” social activity (p. 70) that helps people navigate the situations they find themselves in. This section categorises the naming strategies employed by men who knit in the r/knitting subreddit, comparing and contrasting the choices they make when labelling themselves, other men who knit, and the r/knitting community as a whole.

7.3.1 Labelling of self

The different labels that men who knit used to refer to themselves appear to suit different purposes, such as declarations of solidarity, relating to other, sexuality, gender, age, experience, and masculinity (see Appendix G).

Solidarity

Male solidarity is described by Kiesling (2007) as a discourse that indicates a bond between men as a given, where men desire to operate in a space exclusive of women and aspire to be men through their social performances. In the data, solidarity is frequently expressed through descriptors such as “fellow”, which appears 15 times in reference to knitters across the data set. With a number of interpretations, in this context fellow is used as an adjective form of a noun that describes “a member of a group having common characteristics” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), such as the same kind of job, interest, or experience.

Figure 2.

Identifying Solidarity in Male Knitter Identity Construction

fellow	+	male dude guy boy fellow	+	knitter
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Fellow is often used in order to state solidarity with other knitters, following the common structure of *fellow* + (*adjective*) + *knitter*, as shown in Figure 2, with the modifying adjective generally encompassing gender and age labels, for example “fellow male knitter” (M-3-CD-34; M-13-ND-3) or “fellow young, male knitter” (username deleted). The use of “dude knitter” pairs hypermasculine dominant language with an activity that is perceived as feminine. Similar gendered terms such as “dude” and “guy” operating as adjectives in these statements present an identity that shares the role of being both a man as well as being a knitter and indicates to readers that they are not the only men in the forum.

M-8-CD-18 Just checking in as a fellow dude knitter. Good work, man!

M-2-UK-1 o/ fellow boy knitter

A male redditor announcing their presence in r/knitting signals to readers, more specifically other male readers, that there are other knitters out there just like them. Arriving in an online space is portrayed through members like M-8-CD-18 “checking in”, marking themselves as present in an area where they would otherwise go unnoticed. In the case of M-2-UK-1, their way of checking in is by modifying their self-labelling with the symbol “o/”, a pictogram of a person raising their arm. This works to announce their presence in the thread as if a school child recording their attendance.

M-8-US-8 Fellow fellow knitter here! And well done, OP! Keep at it.

Interestingly, both the previous definition of fellow as an adjective and the alternative use as a noun meaning “man” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.) are used in conjunction with each other here, executing wordplay through use of homonyms side by side as statements of solidarity with other male knitters. The presence of these knitters in r/knitting is also announced with references to the knitters’ sexuality as added performances of masculine identity.

Sexuality

Gay identities, such as that of the bear, are often confined by descriptions that see them as counter to the natural hegemonic order that equates with heterosexuality. Despite the fact that gay men are negatively impacted by the hegemonic gender ideals present in society’s wider

discourses, these ideals are firmly maintained by them. The term gay bear identifies a man as being homosexual while also emphasising their idealised masculinity in being a bear. Just as butch women are more accepted in male-dominated professions because they present as masculine (Gibson & Meem, 2002), men who knit are more accepted in female-dominated arenas when presenting as feminine.

Figure 3.

Identifying Sexuality in Male Knitter Identity Construction

fellow gay
gay male + bear + knitter

It is assumed by many that these men who knit must possess feminine traits. This suggests that the men who label themselves as bears are rejecting these assumptions and asserting claims to being real, manly, men. Likewise, the emphasis on masculine features such as body hair is a strategy used to reject any perceived femininity and align with binary gender conforming norms. As such, the sexuality of the gay men of r/knitting is disclosed with descriptors such as “bear” (M-5-UD-2), as shown in Figure 3. This label is also used alongside “gay” (M-7-CD-24; M-5-UD-2), emphasising the commenters’ sexuality while embracing masculinity and rejecting any perceived effeminacy.

M-7-CD-24 Always great to meet a fellow bear knitter ;). Fist bumping back and friending you

Fist bumping is a method of homosocial bonding (Baxter-Webb, 2016), often between men, where someone forms a fist with one hand and connects it with another person’s fist. This action is associated with being ‘hypermasculine’ and ‘macho’ (Salovaara & Rodi-Risberg, 2019), suggesting that M-7-CD-24 is seeking to appear this way to other bear knitters. Additionally, while it is not unexpected within specialised communities such as r/knitting to encounter others with shared interests, “fellow” was almost exclusively used to refer to knitters’ selves. Only once used to refer to another knitter - expressing delight at meeting “a fellow bear knitter ;)” (M-5-UD-2).

Gender

Gender is often disclosed as an identity marker in online interactions, conveying social meaning where visual cues are not always available. By combining their gender with a shared interest, such as introducing themselves as “a male knitter” (M-3-US-20; M-2-US-8; M-2-UD-2a), “a bloke knitter” (M-2-AU-1), or “a guy who knits” (M-6-US-51; M-7-UK-12), the men of r/knitting are establishing their place in the online knitting community and differentiating themselves from women in order for their minority group to be better seen. However, there are some men who present themselves solely with their gender as an identifying factor. For example, as “a man” (M-3-US-7b) or “a male” (M-2-US-8). In some cases, the commenters begin their statements with “As a male [...]” (M-5-UD-33; M-8-CD-8), foregrounding the importance of their gender in relation to the statement that follows, aligning themselves as members of a particular group.

username deleted	As a fellow young, male knitter, great job. There are more of us than most people realize.
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Creating awareness around the presence of men in r/knitting is something this person believes is most widely known by other members. This goes to show the importance of these men’s labels working towards being more visible as legitimate knitters.

Age

Age is represented in a vast amount of the labels men assign themselves in r/knitting. These declarations of age act as identity markers that represent experience and align the person with particular generational groups. Internet users commonly identify themselves using the standardised *age + gender* format at the beginning of a comment or post, setting the scene for relevant information to follow. Declaring one’s age can be seen as an act of solidarity, commonly appearing alongside gender markers in response to queries about whether there are any other men who knit participating in the forums. The age labels were predominantly concentrated within threads that discuss r/knitting as a community for men, such as *How many men frequent this Reddit?* (Thread 10), that questions readers whether there are any other men “out there” (M-1-US-1a).

When the person who posted the original thread topic states their age and gender, the commenters appear to replicate this in their responses. The examples from my data set use this general format, with some variety, for example the use of brackets “(33m)” (M-2-US-8), forward slash “39/m” (M-2-UK-2), capitalization “41 M” (M-10-US-16a), reversal “M/44” (M-2-US-2a), and the full-word form of “20-year-old male” (M-3-US-1). In some cases, gender is omitted, with men simply stating their age. This suggests that this is sufficient for these men who knit in declaring their identity construct. However, declarations of age are often followed up with references to relative knitting experience.

Experience

Experience is communicated by male knitters through the labels they assign themselves. This is achieved not only through men sharing their age but also by presenting themselves according to their skill level and experience with the craft. Table 7 (also see Appendix L) shows the responses to this thread, demonstrating that men who knit are concerned with reinforcing their justifications for participating in r/knitting with references to their experience as knitters.

Table 7.

Comments disclosing age

User	Comment	Points
M-11-UK-1	33m here. Taught to knit as a child – I still have a few projects on the go. My kids want to learn too.	12
M-2-US-2b	M, knitting for 17 years.	11
M-2-AU-3	47m, just getting back into it. Learnt from my mum and grandma as a boy.	11
M-2-US-1b	I’m a 27 year old guy and I’ve been knitting for about a year now.	11
M-5-CD-6	Hello. 29, started a few months ago.	10

Note. These comments show men disclosing their age in the thread *How many men frequent this Reddit?* (Thread 9). Data accurate as of 27 November 2019.

In some cases, men are explaining that they have knitted most of their lives, with intergenerational teaching taking place, while others are relatively new to the craft. One commenter states that they are “new-ish to knitting” (M-10-UD-72), implying they have taken

up knitting recently. This disclosure of experience is also shown in the label “a new (18m) knitter and a crocheter” (M-2-UD-14) which suggests that although the knitter may be inexperienced, their skills are expanded upon through also knowing how to crochet – validating their presence in a forum full of crafters with a variety of skills. This is perhaps an indication that the men announcing their presence in this subreddit find importance in sharing what stage in their life they are in when declaring their participation.

Masculinity

Masculinity is expressed through the validation of masculine qualities the knitters possess. For example, through reference to facial hair, which features prominently in the labels men give themselves when presenting as masculine. Having body hair or possessing a “big beard” is often equated to being a masculine man and thus justifying a man’s participation.

M-13-US-149 I like to think I'm pretty manly (big guy, big beard)

Brackets are often used to provide additional information. Here, they complement the claim of being manly by being both hairy and large. In this case, “pretty” is also used as a positive quantifier, which is not as extreme as if the commenter had used intensifiers such as “very”, which dominate the data in terms of adverbs of intensity (see Appendix H). This suggests the commenter is working to convince the reader of their eligibility to belong to this group.

Likewise, the comment “presenting as male, beard and all” (M-9-US-47) tells the reader that the commenter presents themselves as a particular gender so as to make themselves identifiable, in this case, as a man. Being male here is equated to possessing a beard, something generally associated with heteronormative masculinity, with the exception of bears.

These labels function to align the men of r/knitting with other members of the group so that they can take part in constructing “a jointly meaningful, group-specific identity” (Jones, 2011, p. 722). It was found that the majority of the men in r/knitting are labelling themselves as belonging to the group-specific identity of “knitter”. This noun is then modified, usually predicated with gender and often either the age or experience of the person or people concerned, for example “young male knitter”, working to present a marker of identity that validates the

knitter as being a part of the wider group. It seems that it is a frequent occurrence for this to be used to join in solidarity with other men who knit, making them aware of the presence of other male knitters in the r/knitting space.

The findings of this self-labelling had similarities to how male knitters constructed the identities of other men within the knitting community. I discuss this in the next section.

7.3.2 Labelling of other

Solidarity

In the analysis of the data, labels that suggested solidarity amongst male knitters were evident.

This is represented in the way men who knit refer to other knitters and is evidenced in the following example:

M-9-IR-47 What up my knitta? 🤔

“My knitta” is a pop culture reference to a character from the American animated sit-com *Bob’s Burgers*, in which one of the main characters, the non-Black mother in the family, meets a fellow knitter in front of some yarn for sale in a store and exclaims “Whaddup my knitta” (Fox429, 2013). This phrase derives from the slang term “what’s up my [n-word]¹⁴” commonly found in African American Vernacular English (AAVE). The n-word is largely context-specific and has “a wide array of meanings” (Kennedy, 2002, p. 34) depending on whether the speaker is Black or not.

When used by White people, the n-word is most commonly used as a racial slur (Holt, 2018). Therefore, in light of recent developments in the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement (Holt & Sweitzer, 2020), it is important to raise the question of whether expressions which carry underlying racial meanings are appropriate to reproduce¹⁵. Holt (2018) states that intention of

¹⁴ *The n-word* has been described as “one of the most complex, perplexing, and emotionally incendiary words in the American lexicon” (Currie, 1997). Therefore, as a non-Black researcher, I do not use this word in its entirety, even for the purpose of explaining pathways to language use in the data. The reader may make their own deductions as to its phonological connections with *knitta*.

¹⁵ This is a question explored in Holt’s (2018) examination of how identity construct and BLM operates differently between Black and White Americans. Holt suggests a “victim-centered approach” (p. 423) going forward – something that identity researchers need to consider in future research. As a result, I have chosen to only refer to the term as *the n-word*.

the speaker, and context around why it was used, matters when referring to the n-word. The nature of anonymised identities in social media communication makes it difficult to know whether the commenter using this phrase is Black or not, coding of M-9-IR-47's user identity reveals that they are not based in the United States of America, which is both a reflection of the transcultural nature of language and media, old and new, and suggests they may not be a speaker of AAVE.

In its singular, the n-word is generally used in reference to men. Writer Gloria Naylor (1995) explains the n-word as being a positive validation of masculinity when used by Black relatives in her childhood, reflective of its differing meanings. She further explains that this was her community's way of taking a derogatory word that "white people used to signify worthlessness or degradation" and rendering it "impotent" (p. 2). When used with a possessive adjective, such as the user's quote above, the n-word can become a term of endearment between Black people (Naylor, 1995; Jeshion, 2020). The creators of Bob's Burgers have played with this phrase to replace the n-word with the pronunciation-spelled knitta (knitter) and its replication within r/knitting, in this case, appears to serve as a term of endearment and solidarity with another male knitter.

The meaning expressed through M-9-IR-47's use of this phrase is enhanced through the use of emoji. Emoji are graphic representations that often include facial cues (Rodrigues et al., 2017) not available in computer-mediated written communication and provide nonverbal indicators of emotion (Dresner & Herring, 2010). The addition of 😊, or the "grinning face with smiling eyes" emoji (emojipedia.org), to the phrase "what up my knitta?" displays a digital embodiment (McCulloch, 2019) of the intended message. These visual features are used more frequently by young people (Leung & Chang, 2017) and are deliberate cues to what Dresner and Herring (2010) suggest is more than just an expression of emotion but a prompt to the intention of what is being said in any given situation. In this example, rather than suggesting a racial reference, the echoing of the Bob's Burgers reference of "Whaddup my knitta" combined with a grinning face may well suggest an intent that points to the expression of light-hearted humour and solidarity with other men who knit.

Age

Age is used similarly to label others but, although men who knit refer to themselves by a specific age, other knitters are referred to by comparatives or life stages. For example, when sharing an anecdote about colleagues that knit, they are additionally labelled as “older male colleagues” (M-5-SW-2) or as “an old woman” (M-3-US-1) when depicted stereotypically as being in a rocking chair. With knitting being seen as something that old women do, labelling a knitter as old is not necessarily out of the ordinary. However, when including an age marker in the solidarity exclamation “another teen knitter!” (M-2-UD-2b), a signal is being sent that perhaps young knitters are not so common, even though the Internet is dominated by digital natives – younger people who grew up with an abundance of knowledge around social media practices.

Experience

The labels men give to other knitters in regard to experience are infrequent. This is perhaps due to men not talking about their own skills so much as those of others. However, when men do refer to the skills and the experience of other knitters, it is not necessarily representative of being highly skilled at knitting but in terms of experience over time. Labels such as “expert knitter” (M-8-US-2) and “*serious* knitter” (M-2-UD-84) are given to equate knitters’ experience with higher status. Experience, in the data, is rarely equated to age. This indicates that men are less likely to categorise others by their abilities – choosing to focus on gender instead. By focussing on gender rather than ability, these men are demonstrating the importance of knitting as an inclusive craft while fostering discussions on societal views on gender.

Masculinity

Masculinity, on the other hand, is prevalent in the labels given to describe other men who knit. As with self-referencing, men who knit are describing other male knitters by their masculine traits, including possessing body hair, such as “men with beards” (M-4-SC-3). Visiting pubs and/or consuming alcohol are additional traits that are associated with hegemonic masculinity. Therefore, it is interesting to note the identifiers used to establish masculinity.

M-12-US-110 sometime you have to go to ireland and see all the macho, battle scarred tough rural men knitting at the pub. its an eye opener

These men are not only being labelled as rural, country men, but also with, arguably excessive, masculine traits of strength in order to establish their place in the pub whilst also knitting.

Likewise, knitters (and crocheters) who are men are being labelled as “manly”, representative of men higher in the masculine hierarchy. It is also important to note the status of this commenter as they have been active on the site for around twelve years and have accumulated almost 110,000 karma points in the process. Just as the traits described by M-12-US-110 indicate masculinity existing at the upper end of the masculine hierarchy, it is fair to say that this commenter holds a similar position in the hierarchy of commenters within r/knitting, with their opinions holding higher stead, as one of the original members of the subreddit’s knitting community.

7.3.3 Labelling of community

Men label the members of r/knitting not only as a “knitting community” (M-5-SW-2; M-3-US-20) but also as an “online community” (M-5-UD-33), representative of the new media platform that enables their communication. Additionally, the social media platform itself is referenced in regard to the knitting community, with “this reddit” (M-1-US-1a) and “this subreddit” (M-5-UD-33) being used to encompass all knitters that participate in r/knitting discussions.

Furthermore, when talking about the community at large, men refer specifically to the knitting community, or knitters, as well as the r/knitting subreddit rather than the inclusive we pronoun. Machin and Mayr (2012) suggest this inclusive “we” is problematic in that it can be used to make “vague statements and conceal power relations” (p. 84). Its notable absence from the data, bar one occurrence, indicates that power relations are not trying to be concealed, particularly in reference to gendered power relations.

Masculinity

As with labelling of themselves and others, men who knit are making references to masculinity in their labelling of the r/knitting community as a whole. Many labels men use to refer to the collective reference masculinity. This is a sentiment that was shared by a woman in r/knitting

who posted a link to her creation of a new subreddit titled r/BrosWhoKnit, an invitation ironically created by a woman, as “a place for bros, blokes, fellas, dudes and lads” (F-1-UD-2). All these labels are alternatives for ‘man’, each with a slightly different connotation, and are also widely used by the men of r/knitting. For example, “dude” (M-7-CD-24) indexes a person as “young, White, and male” (Kiesling, 2006, p. 265). While “lads” are also thought of as young, a “bloke” (M-2-AU-1) describes an ordinary man and is commonly used in Australian English, as is “fella” (M-6-AU-7), a non-standard spelling of fellow, which (as discussed in 7.3.1) can refer to both a man and someone with a shared interest. Listed together in their pluralised form, these terms encompass a variety of men – calling attention to all men who knit, regardless of age or status, to join this specialised community for men.

M-7-CD-24 KnitBros!

The interactions of this discourse community on r/knitting is representative of community membership and “a view of the meaning behind the linguistic features (practices) that they use as mutually negotiated and specific to them as a collective” (Bucholtz, 1999, as cited in Jones, 2011, p. 721). This blending of knit and bros, the abbreviation for brothers. Use of ‘Bros’ in the title of this thread signals to brotherhood representative of membership to a male community. Furthermore, by referring to a collective group of knitters as brothers, an emphasis is placed on brotherhood and comradeship to address the men of r/knitting. This modification of a gendered term with a shared interest seeks to reference the masculinity of male knitters in this community.

7.4 Overlexicalization in identity construction

In examining the ways in which male knitters were labelled in general, it was found that there was a great deal of overlexicalization used to mark the gender of men commenting in r/knitting. Overlexicalization is a pragmatic strategy that Fowler et al. (1979) refer to as an important linguistic device revealing ideological meanings carried by discourse and provides “synonymous or non-synonymous terms for communication of a specialised area of experience” (p. 211). Teo (2000) argues that overlexicalization creates “over-completeness” in discourse, suggesting that it results in no further analysis or interpretation of the term being needed (p. 20).

In addition, Fowler et al. (1979) suggest that powerless people are often overlexicalised. For example, a lawyer may be labelled as a ‘female lawyer’ whereas a male lawyer is just labelled as a ‘lawyer’. According to Teo (2000), “there is a certain stigma or markedness attached to ‘male nurse’ since nurses are presumed to be female” (p. 20). Therefore, the use of overlexicalised compound terms such as ‘female lawyer’ and ‘male nurse’ implies that these professions are gendered (Talbot, 2010). Likewise, knitting is gendered. It is presumed to be a woman’s hobby, reflecting existing social constructions of the craft being gendered as female. As a result, men who participate in knitting experience similar stigma, suggesting that male knitters hold less power in the knitting community. By calling themselves male knitters, the men of r/knitting are therefore enforcing the gendered nature of knitting.

Teo (2000) suggests that overlexicalization, such as that of the term knitter, often results in judgement. It deviates from societal norms and “reflects perceptions and judgements from the essentially biased standpoint of such cultural norms or social expectations” (pp. 20-21). The men of r/knitting commonly use overlexicalised gendered terms to label other men in the subreddit, essentially reflecting their inherent judgement and ideologies of gendered norms. For example, ‘male knitter’ dominates the labels used in these r/knitting threads, being used 42 times across the data set to refer to men who knit. As such, the male commenters in this study are described in terms of “who they are” or “what they do” (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 81). However, ‘female knitter’ is absent from the data, suggesting that women hold less judgement in the knitting community. Women who knit are simply referred to as knitters. This is with the exception of examples using the relative clause who, such as “a woman who also knits” (M-4-CD-53), in which the use of “also” distances the relevance of gender from the act of knitting. In contrast to this is the example of “a man who doesn’t not knit!” (M-7-US-2a), where double negation suggests the knitter is always knitting, which creates a closer connection between their gender and crafting pursuits.

Another creative application of overlexicalization in the data is through the use of portmanteau. A portmanteau is the blending of the sounds and meanings of two separate words by combining its segments to encode different meanings, which Attridge (1988) describes as being “a

powerful weapon in the attack on conventional assumptions” (p. 153). The assumption that knitting and crochet is primarily an activity for only women to participate in is challenged by the portmanteau “brochet”, a blending of brother and crochet that is used in the naming of another subreddit community for men who crochet.

M-3-US-7a Not knitting but r/brochet. There are many manly knitters and crocheters out there.

Brochet can be seen as another overlexicalised term to refer to men who participate in yarn crafts, but also displays creativity evident in the terms male knitters use to talk about the male knitting community. Furthermore, instead of using the descriptor ‘male’ as an overlexicalization of knitters and crocheters, the commenter utilised the term manly. This choice suggests that the discussion of men in the knitting community not only reminds readers that men also knit, but that these men possess hegemonic masculine traits – a clear attempt at the legitimisation of their presence in knitting subreddits.

7.5 Conclusion of Chapter Seven

In this analysis of the communicative content and practices in the Reddit threads, I have drawn on various linguistic features to examine the findings and have explicated them within the wider social context of men who knit. I concentrated on the identity construction of the men participating in Reddit’s r/knitting threads, revealing a discourse of identity in which male knitters discuss their gender and age and challenge generational stereotyping. I identified the use of the discursive strategy of nomination whereby men use various labels across all twelve threads – to describe themselves, other knitters, and the community – which revealed themes that validated the secondary topics outlined in Chapter Six. Men who knit were framed in the data through the over-completeness of overlexicalised terms such as ‘male knitter’ that served to highlight the gendered nature of knitting and also suggest that male knitters hold less power in the knitting community. I found further support for a dominant discourse of legitimisation that presents solidarity with other knitters and emphasises men’s performance of their masculine identities as attempting to distance themselves from assumed effeminacy. A discussion on these findings follows in the next chapter.

Chapter 8 Knitting as a Reflexive Project

8.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the reflexive nature of men's involvement in r/knitting, in terms of Giddens's (1991) theory of structuration and the existing ideologies around knitting and gender. It presents the key observations that arose from the analysis of the Reddit threads from the r/knitting community. These include the legitimisation of men as knitters, the stereotyping of gender roles, social media platforms as safe places for discussion of sensitive topics, justifying being a male knitter, and claims that gender is irrelevant in this craft.

8.2 Ideologies surrounding knitting and gender

The relationship between discourses and social processes is explored in CDS (and therefore SM-CDS), particularly in terms of ideology and power relations (Heberle, 2000). The discursive practices of men who knit and the social processes taking place on the social media platform Reddit have revealed a number of points of interest. For example, the gender stereotyping of men who knit and the ways in which men discursively construct their identities in a place where people feel safe to hold discussions on difficult topics. These men who knit consequently feel at ease to post comments in a safe place, where other members may share their ideologies and understand their lived experience, theoretically understanding and sharing the same ideologies.

Theorizations about gender are shaped by the contexts of the time (Bradley, 2013). For example, knitting in recent years has been viewed as a hobby for women despite its association with men as far back as the 13th century, when it was considered a well-respected trade. The move away from knitting as an affordable way of providing clothing to family members, or as a patriotic duty during times of war, has resulted in a craft that holds little importance or respect within a patriarchal society. Therefore, its association with feminine traits such as timidity and compliance has seen knitting become trivialised as a pastime that men reject as feminine. To resist these stereotypes, men appear to be performing hegemonic representations of their masculine identities in order to reject hegemonic ideals.

Hegemonic masculinity embodies cultural ideals (Talbot, 2010). This notion of hegemonic, heterosexual masculinity embodies both masculinity and gender roles in general, with “a physical predisposition that can be used to explain uneven power relations between men and women” (Connell, 2005, as cited in Taylor & Jackson, 2018, p. 630). The ideologies held in today’s society around what it means to be a man heavily influence the behaviour of men taking part in crafts associated with femininity. As a result, these men are reinforcing masculine stereotypes to counteract any perceived feminine traits while at the same time resisting the notion that knitting is for women. Not only are gender norms being challenged in this context but so are expectations of age-appropriate crafts. The long-held belief that knitting is for older women is being challenged through men’s use of age markers when marking their identities in social media communication.

Technology and computer knowledge are at the core of gendering. Men are associated with the tools and science that comes with technology. Although computers were for a long time presented as “gender-neutral machines”, there has been a decline in women training for positions in computer science (Bradley, 2013, p. 116), as seen in other male-dominated STEM fields. Bradley (2013) suggests that gendered structures at the macro level have rules, conventions and restraints that people “find difficult to resist without being penalized” (p. 26), with there being degrees to which different groups can challenge these rules. For example, men are afforded the ability to challenge the stereotypes of knitting through their hierarchical position in the patriarchy. That being said, if roles were to be reversed, these challenges may not be as welcomed. This can be seen in women’s participation in STEM careers, where women continue to face challenges. This example of agency versus structure enables actions but also constrains them (Bradley, 2013; Fuchs, 2014). Furthermore, male identity within the digital space relates to the attitudes and beliefs around gender identity construction. This continual process will be discussed further in relation to Giddens’ (1991) theory of structuration and the reflexive project which was introduced earlier in Chapter Two.

8.3 Knitting as a reflexive project

The late modern society we live in affords people choices in the ways they are able to live.

Those with the privilege of being able to resist dominant societal stereotypes are able to do so without fear of consequence. Therefore, by challenging the gendered stereotypes of knitting and being more visible in doing so, men who knit are reshaping the way society views male knitters. This view supports Giddens (1991) theory of structuration, a reflexive project where people are looking at what takes place in society, for example a rise in men knitting, and their personal decisions are influenced by these actions in the society around them. In turn, men's participation in knitting theoretically becomes more normalised and less associated with stigma, over time reducing the gendered stereotyping associated with the craft.

Giddens' theory of structuration represents the cyclic influence of society on the individual and the individual on society and is an important contribution to our understanding about how individuals have the power to transform society. Giddens (1985) defines this power as “transformative capacity” (p. 7), with the ability to alter events through intervention (Fuchs, 2014). Nowadays, many of these transformations are taking place online, across geographical borders. Unger et al. (2016) note that we must consider how the participatory nature of social media discourse is produced and under what constraints.

According to Bakar (2014), stereotypes are portrayed through the comments that people post and these discursive practices reflect their ideological values. Despite the theoretical ability proposed by Giddens for ideologies to change through discursive interactions, r/knitting data shows tensions and as much as we would like to think we have moved on in late modern society, we are not quite there yet. Being able to have an ethnographic observation of Reddit threads has brought these stereotypes to attention, where men are welcomed with open arms into the knitting community but are discouraged from performing their masculine selves, particularly if that self is on the hegemonic end of the hierarchy scale or aligned with a more privileged group.

Although there is some resistance to traditional gender stereotypes, which shows in the tension portrayed through the use of sarcastic remarks (as discussed in 6.6.3), group membership and identity contributes to structuration. Richeson et al. (2007) suggest this has “a profound influence on social perception, affect, cognition, and behavior” (p. 8), with the hierarchical organisation of groups being a key feature of group membership. It is the differences within and between these groups that have the transformative power to influence society. For example, the New Man represents contemporary masculinity (Gill, 2003) that occurs in the intersection of power and knowledge where “practices, ideas and way of living are normalized” (Gill, 2003, p. 35). These differences, in turn, continue to “influence the perceptual, cognitive, affective, and behavioural responses of group members in systematic ways” (Richeson et al., 2007, p. 9), which sees responses such as the justification of male knitters’ membership in the knitting community and the validation of their participation in the craft.

8.4 Key observations

8.4.1 The legitimisation of men as knitters

Knitting is a creative pursuit that enables crafters to express their identity not only through their choices of patterns and yarn but also through their participation in knitting-focussed online forums that provide a safe place to perform their authentic selves. While knitting patterns and techniques have been traditionally shared through old media print publications, the rise of new media technology and the participatory web has enabled knitters to connect across geographical distances, bringing together localised and globalised ideological beliefs in one place. Reddit is one such place where knitters and their beliefs converge at the intersection of individuals, culture, and media technology, a nexus KhosraviNik (2017a) describes as being a place where meanings are negotiated.

The first key observation to arise from this study of the analysis of twelve threads within r/knitting revealed a dominant discourse of legitimisation as well as uncovering discourses of identity, belonging, and empowerment, in which men who knit seek to justify their participation in knitting and validate their involvement in the craft. The association of military personnel with masculinity was found to be used as a justification for arguing that knitting can also be seen as

masculine. Many knitters shared knitting's origin stories, highlighting the prominence of men in knitting's early history as a way of cementing men's place in the history of the craft.

8.4.2 The stereotyping of gender roles

One of the purposes of this study was to investigate how language is used to reinforce social inequalities, such as the ideologies that perpetuate gender stereotypes. These ideologies around knitting and gender are enforced through discourse and social practices, providing insight into power imbalance in society. Power is central to gender dynamics and the expressions and reaffirmations of these social norms and practices are representative of this power (Foucault, 1995). The ideologies around the gendering of professions, such as the challenges faced by women working in STEM, are replicated in the experiences of men operating in female-dominated areas. This leads to the over-completeness of terms to describe these roles and perpetuate power imbalances. Although certain attitudes have changed, you still see residues of these ideological assumptions. Our gendered identities are not imposed upon us but we are continually engaged in creating and recreating them (Bradley, 2013). My second key observation from this study was that traditional stereotypes were prevalent in regard to hegemonic masculine traits and the societal view that knitting is feminine. I had assumed that men would be their own biggest supporters, but it was women who proved to be the ones continuously encouraging participation from men, revealing a discourse of empowerment from which men's participation and visibility in this online forum is being encouraged.

8.4.3 Social media platforms as safe places for discussion of sensitive topics

Social media is a place where you can gather with other people with shared interests and feel comfortable to talk about topics that would have greater sensitivity in a face-to-face situation. This was a third key observation from my research. Sensitive topics are often navigated through the use of humour, which can be used to alleviate or mitigate the tension of these difficult topics of conversation, possibly making it easier for people to deal with them. It could be argued that the uses of sarcasm analysed in this study make it easier for the commenters to thus communicate with each other and broach sensitive topics such as patriarchal privilege and hegemonic masculinity, and to navigate their responses to the stigma and stereotyping that

Western societies subject them to. However, through the analysis of sarcastic remarks made about traditionally masculine traits, a counter-discourse was uncovered. This counter-discourse challenged the traits associated with hegemonic masculinity and rejected their association with men who knit.

Stereotypes towards men who knit that sees men participating in female-dominated areas as effeminate was found to be challenged through the way men label themselves and others. This analysis revealed overlexicalization with the term male knitter, much like what is seen with male nurses or female firefighters, which emphasised knitters' masculine identities. This was also found to be true of creativity, in which men used creative language construction such as neologisms to stake their claim as masculine knitters, demonstrating their ability to be creative. This creativity was shown to be not only in the craft itself but also in the creation of new words, developing neologisms that incorporated language that emphasised the male knitters' gender or masculinity. Surprisingly, masculinity is expressed in regard to manly traits, not necessarily heterosexuality. In such cases where sexuality is mentioned, they are identifying as gay – more specifically, bears, which in itself is an attempt at aligning towards their more hegemonic masculine traits.

A key component of this study is concerned with understanding how the new context of interaction on the Reddit platform sits within the wider societal context in attitudes and beliefs to men who knit. Men who choose to participate in this craft are doing so against the grain of society's expectations of masculine performance. As such, the findings of this analysis provide a deeper understanding of attitudes in relation to gender and knitting.

8.4.4 It's okay to be a man and knit

Boys constantly have to prove their masculinity (Talbot, 2010), learning throughout their lives that by performing aspects of their masculinity, they can expect to gain the respect and prestige that Connell (2005) calls "the patriarchal dividend" (p. 81). However, when participating in an activity deemed feminine, men seek to justify their participation by performing their most hegemonic traits. Thus, references to gender and masculinity abound within r/knitting,

constantly reinforcing the internalization of cultural norms. Even so, this may be changing in post (and thus late) modernity (Danet, 1998). A fourth key observation from the study was that male knitters participating in the r/knitting community appear to continuously feel as if they need to justify their presence with references to aspects of their masculine identities, such as their manliness. These references include aligning themselves with the strengths and validity of masculinity within the armed forces, referencing their body hair, and reminding readers of knitting's origins, to name a few.

Men who knit, specifically heterosexual men who knit, often reference masculinity as a way to counteract the stigma of knitting (Kelly, 2014). These performances of masculinity, in which men avoid behaviours viewed as feminine seek to avoid giving an impression of homosexuality (Kiesling, 2007), aligning male knitters with a construction of masculinity that justifies their knitting practices. This was seen in discussions in which references were made to soldiers knitting in order to justify the craft as a masculine pursuit. Male soldiers are symbols of strength and endurance (Bradley, 2013) and are often equated with hegemonic, heterosexual masculinity. Therefore, when the men of r/knitting relate their participation in the knitting community to soldiers that knitted during WWI and WWII, they are labelling soldiers as masculine. Fallacies such as 'Soldiers knit. Soldiers are masculine. Therefore, knitting is masculine' alluded to in the data proceeds to justify men's participation in knitting.

Possessing body hair, particularly beards or moustaches, is also considered highly masculine. References to body hair in the constructions of these men's masculine identities demonstrate the importance given to presenting as masculine in order to resist being perceived as effeminate. This is a feature also seen with non-hegemonic masculine identities, such as bears. These bears are gay men characterised as big, burly and hairy, who possess physical traits generally associated with hegemonic masculinity. By identifying themselves as bears in this way, these men are seeking to resist from being perceived as effeminately gay and align themselves with the traditionally masculine.

It is widely accepted that knitting originated through the practices of men and consequently developed into a well-respected trade exclusively for men to take part in. The history of knitting is varied and loaded with gendering. Men seeking to justify their interest and participation in knitting use examples of evidence of the earliest knitters being men to provide justification for their actions. Through sharing anecdotes about historical events associated with knitting's origins, commenters are reminding readers of men's exclusivity in the early knitting trade. These references are made extensively as a way to reclaim men's place in the timeline of knitting and justifying their present-day participation in the craft.

Men not only justify their gender but also seek to validate knitting as a genuine hobby worthy of their participation. While men are stereotypically thought to be more authoritarian and aggressive, women are thought to be more encouraging of democracy and participation (Bradley, 2013). This tendency towards encouraging participation is reflected in the women of r/knitting welcoming men to the community. Additionally, it represents a discourse of empowerment that legitimises and validates men's participation in r/knitting.

Boundaries and categories are created by the dominant members of society that control discourses (Talbot, 2010). Therefore, by labelling themselves and other male knitters specifically by their gender and sexuality, men who knit are aligning themselves with masculine dominance. These male knitters appear to distance themselves from perceptions of femininity by using labels that align with hegemonic traits. An aspect of this is heteronormativity, which Bradley (2013) equates to male power, suppressing homosexuality that could be seen as "undermining patriarchal control" (p. 46). The male knitters that openly share their homosexuality often emphasise their masculine traits so as to distance themselves from being perceived effeminate. Although the discourses uncovered through analysis of the communicative content and practices of r/knitting reveal that men are being validated as legitimate participants, there is an emphasis placed on those men being masculine. This was seen in the ways some of the gay men of r/knitting are also performing their masculine identities through labels such as bear and references to body hair, distancing themselves from being perceived as effeminate.

Hegemonic masculinity can be viewed as an ideal form of masculinity for males in Western societies, dominating all other masculine ideals within society. The hegemonic masculinity seen in r/knitting threads has a focus on having a beard, participating in or watching sport, and possessing physical strength and skill. It might even be suggested that the men of r/knitting, whether or not possessing these hegemonic traits themselves, discursively align themselves with hegemonic masculinity in order to seek the benefits of being atop of the gender order whilst also engaging in the craft of knitting. While men are seen to be in possession of power and dominance, not all men feel this way. The advantages that men experience in regard to patriarchal dominance are related to “group norms and not the experiences of individuals” (Kiesling, 2007, p. 660). The men of r/knitting, therefore, are not necessarily feeling the power that they have been prescribed. Kiesling (2007) argues that this is particularly the case with men who do not fit the stereotype of the ideal man or challenge the cultural discourses of masculinity.

8.4.5 Gender is irrelevant

Movements towards gender neutrality tend to involve women accommodating men’s characteristics and not vice versa (Bradley, 2013) and this was supported in the fifth key observation I made in this research. Therefore, it is interesting to note that swear words traditionally associated with men are being used by the women of r/knitting, as seen with the frequent use of “fuck”. Historically, men as a group are able to control “crucial power resources” such as physical power, economic power, and symbolic power (Bradley, 2013, p. 205), the latter of which includes discourses. Men, therefore, are in a position to challenge societal stereotypes around knitting without the fear of resistance that women would experience in the same position. People in such positions of power, in this case, the men of r/knitting, do not easily surrender these privileges, maintaining hierarchical dominance over the group in concurrence with women’s support and encouragement of their pursuits. When men are in groups, signs of hegemonic masculinity are apparent in the patriarchal pecking order, with “senior men over junior men, heterosexual men over gay men, men over women” (Bradley, 2013, p. 153). Bradley further suggests that women fit themselves in around men’s competitive

displays of masculine behaviour, “appearing as support services” (p. 153) that demonstrates a discourse of empowerment where women encourage and support men.

The discussions going on within the r/knitting community regarding men’s place in the knitting community reveal disapproval. Some people, particularly the women of r/knitting, are resentful towards men receiving disproportionate upvoting of their finished objects. These are claims that imply a larger amount of praise for knitting is freely given to men for items that that, if done by a woman, would not stand out as particularly special. These are the same women that claim gender is irrelevant when it comes to knitting and all that matters is that you have hands to knit with. Perhaps women are pushing back simply because they have so often been in that same situation and can relate to these men’s experiences. From feminism has come a move away from exaggerated femininity and masculinity and instead the acceptance of varying femininities and masculinities across the spectrum. However, feminist work has drawn heavily on Foucault’s work, which fails to answer who holds the power, and in whose interests, it is exercised (Bradley, 2013). To disregard gender does a disservice to the struggles women have faced throughout history, at the hands of patriarchy.

8.5 Conclusion of Chapter Eight

In this chapter, I have provided a discussion on the analysis of the discursive practices of knitters in Reddit’s r/knitting community, highlighting five key observations that were drawn from the findings. By challenging the stereotypes that the ideologies around knitting and gender perpetuate, the r/knitting community is reshaping the way society views male knitters. This demonstrates a reflexive project where people look at what is taking place in society, in other words, acts which then influence their personal decisions, which continue to affect the society around them.

Knitters seek to justify men’s participation in the craft by equating present-day men who knit to male knitters of the past and making claims to masculinity in order to reject any perceived effeminacy. These knitters also validate men’s presence in the forum, often claiming gender is irrelevant while also making a great effort to perform their masculinities. However, the rise of

new media technology and the participatory web brings these knitters together in an online community where meanings are negotiated and identities are performed in new and interesting ways.

I found that the men who choose to participate in this craft are doing so against the grain of society's expectations and simultaneously seek to disregard these ideational stereotypes while also reinforcing them through performed masculinity. Through rejecting these stereotypes and increasing the visibility of practising their craft. I proposed that men are slowly influencing and changing society's perceptions, working to normalise knitting as an activity for everyone.

Chapter 9 Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

This chapter considers this study in light of my research questions into the gendered construction of men who knit. I evaluate the significance of the five key findings and how these contribute to the field of identity construction and the methodological approach of SM-CDS. I reflect on the limitations of the study and offer suggestions for future research that can build on these findings. I conclude this chapter with my observations about this study and recommend SM-CDS as a methodological approach.

9.2 Reflecting on the study

From trade to hobby to patriotic duty to revival, historical changes have impacted on the practice of knitting since its beginnings, whether this has been through technological advances or feminist views. Knitting is a gendered craft that has swung between a man-only profession, to a women-only craft, and more recently to an activity navigated by all genders. The social media platform Reddit was found to offer a place where those within the knitting community could discuss and debate what it means to be a male knitter.

This study aimed to answer the two research questions:

- RQ1. In what ways do online knitting communities on Reddit resist or reinforce gender stereotypes through their discursive practices?
- RQ2. In what ways do men who knit construct their identities on the social media platform Reddit?

In response to the first question, the findings of my analysis of an online community of knitters (of all genders) showed that overall there was a discourse of legitimisation that sought to justify men's participation in the craft. It was interesting to find that this was performed in two ways by the commenters. There were those who either resisted the gender role stereotyping of male knitters or those who reinforced it. That is, some commenters resisted the notion that a person's gender had anything to do with the practice of knitting, while other commenters reinforced

masculine stereotypes through associating knitting with traits of manual dexterity and mathematical skill that are traditionally associated with men. Although these may seem to be opposing positions, both the resistance and reinforcement of gendered stereotypes had the same objective – to legitimise men as knitters. This dominant discourse of legitimisation became apparent when I analysed the secondary topics that emerged from the data. The discourses of identity, belonging and empowerment also indicated that knitters sought to justify and validate men's participation in the craft, resisting the stereotypes that frame knitting as a women's pursuit.

In response to the second question that asked how male knitters constructed their identities within the Reddit community, the analysis showed that commenters further reinforced masculine stereotypes through the labels they give to themselves and other knitters. These labels aligned with masculine traits that justified knitting as a valid pursuit and were often overlexicalised, emphasising men's gender as a crucial component of their identity.

An SM-CDS approach was used in this study to highlight the social construction of gender identities and to challenge the passive acceptance of the status quo (Talbot, 2010) as it appeared in an online community. This enabled an examination of knitters' language to be understood through taking notice of the social and cultural contexts in which it occurs (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006) and passively shaped by the processes that surround it. The findings of this study support Giddens' (1991) theory of structuration in that the visibility of men who knit (in this case through Reddit posts) influences other male knitters to participate openly in the craft, thus shaping the perceptions of men who knit over time.

9.3 Overall contributions to knowledge

As the Internet reaches almost 40 years of existence, its use and the impact of its social media platforms become vital research areas (Steinfeld, 2013) as people's practices continue to shift and change (Lee et al., 2013) and power imbalances also shift. The notion of power is and always has been prominent in the discussion of masculine discourses. However, men do not always feel powerful - as was discovered in my analysis about men who knit. The critical study

of discourse about men who knit has therefore contributed to a greater understanding of how communicative content and practices reinforce or resist the status quo of existing social practices and inequalities (Heberle, 2000), such as the gender stereotyping of men who knit and pre-conceived notions of what it is to be a man.

This study has highlighted the stigma that men who participate in crafts such as knitting experience and the ways in which the knitters of r/knitting work to reject the societal expectations that frame knitting as effeminate. In doing so, I have been able to suggest ways of framing the community's responses to this stigma by suggesting the reflexive project as a lens to view progress.

The techno-discursive design of social media platforms can affect social thought, thereby influencing users' behaviours. Therefore, in observing this Reddit community of knitters through their posts, I found that commenters felt more comfortable articulating their thoughts and engaging in difficult topics of discussion in this way. Furthermore, understanding these discourses through knitters' use of sarcasm and metaphors (particularly the widespread use of those associated with warfare) enabled a deeper understanding of the ways in which people navigate sensitive situations. Therefore, this analysis of social media discourse provided insight into a moment of time in the experiences of male knitters in an environment where they are afforded anonymity as well as empowerment. Taking this approach, I felt, was more productive than if I had conducted a survey or focus group research.

9.4 Overall contributions to SM-CDS

The identity construction of men who knit, although researched by Morneau (2015) in reference to face-to-face interactions, is a unique topic when it comes to understanding the nexus of knitting and gender in terms of CDS and computer-mediated communication.

Considering that social media and Internet use increasingly defines the ways we communicate in society (Bouvier & Machin, 2018), social media research is an area that benefits from an increased focus, especially when viewed in terms of power structures and hierarchies of the dominant discourse in the "outernet" (Sussman & Tyson, 2000, p. 383).

Machin and van Leeuwen (2016) argue that societal changes require a shift from critical analysis of formal texts, towards more common texts such as those found within social media discourse. My study, which took an SM-CDS approach, has contributed to this call for an investigation into social media discourse. While there has been SM-CDS research around the topic of gender to do with online misogyny (KhosraviNik & Esposito, 2018), I am not aware of any other research that has looked specifically at gender stereotyping of male knitters. The observation of bottom-up discourses about male knitters on r/knitting in my study enabled me to understand the discursive construction of the identity of a group of people brought together as an online community through a common interest. Although the focus of the research was the discourse of identity construction, the methodological approach of SM-CDS meant that I took into account the techno-discursive features of the Reddit platform. That is, how the affordances of the technology of the platform, such as anonymity and usernames, or the use of macro multimodal elements such as emojis or upvoting, influenced the discourse about men who knit.

9.5 Limitations

There were some limitations in conducting this study. Firstly, I adopted a relatively new approach of SM-CDS because of its applicability to the observation of online discourse, which took into account the techno-discursive features of social media. There were not a large number of other studies demonstrating the application of SM-CDS on which I could model my own work as existing studies were limited to nationalism (KhosraviNik, 2017b) and misogyny (KhosraviNik & Esposito, 2018). Even so, I was able to look at some of the articles published by KhosraviNik and others that outlined the steps and processes within SM-CDS research (KhosraviNik, 2017b; KhosraviNik & Esposito, 2018; KhosraviNik & Unger, 2016; Unger et al., 2016) to establish guidelines for applying this approach to work on gender stereotyping.

Secondly, the interpretation of the communicative content and practices of the Reddit community depended on the readers' perception of social, historical, and political perspectives of the world (Heberle, 2000). People that communicate online may use specialised language specific to the platform they are interacting on to which different interpretations may occur. Researchers may never know the true intent of a commenter's communicative content and

practice, for example sarcasm. Therefore, this analysis can only be based on my own interpretations, which are made to best of my ability. It is also important to note that as a woman researching a topic about men, I had to distance myself as much as possible from any bias when it came to ideological beliefs associated with being a cisgender woman.

9.6 Possibilities for future research

The scope of this particular research was limited by time factors for the completion of this thesis as well as the restriction of word limit. However, in considering possibilities for future research, more extensive research could be conducted in the multimodal features of knitting forums across a range of social media platforms. KhosraviNik and Esposito (2018) suggest, in their outline of how to approach SM-CDS, that multimodality is now at the forefront of discursive practice. Multimodal analysis enables the description of complex interactions using a variety of communicative modes (Norris, 2004), which are important to the critical analysis of mediated discourse (Sissons, 2012). As such, a multimodal analysis of r/knitting would likely produce valuable insight into knitters' performative practices, such as the photos men post of their finished items, or the images known as 'flair'¹⁶ that accompany r/knitting subscribers' usernames.

There are also opportunities for future research to investigate other participatory platforms or websites where knitters perform their identities. In the case of Reddit and r/knitting, English is the lingua franca, or common language, of its subscribers and much research is English-centric. However, there are members of the knitting community whose international cultures and languages would provide rich insight into the non-Western cultural norms and practices in the nexus of knitting and gender. As outlined in this study, pre-existing socio-cultural ideologies impact on the performance of identity and gender. Therefore, it would be also worthwhile to revisit this topic in future years to investigate any changes that structuration has had on society and to observe whether any increase in the visibility of male knitters has resulted in a reduction

¹⁶ Within the r/knitting subreddit, the flair options for users include balls of yarn and knitted scarfs, sweaters, or socks. These are displayed next to the commenters' usernames.

of stigma towards men who knit and whether this reduces the glass escalator effect in regard to gender inequalities.

9.7 Conclusion

To conclude this chapter and study, I highlight five key observations from this analysis of social media discourse and comment on the overall outcomes of this research. The first key observation demonstrated that analysis of the discursive practices of Reddit's knitting community r/knitting identifies a dominant discourse of legitimisation and additional discourses of identity, belonging, and empowerment. These discourses see knitters resisting the stereotypes around men's participation in the craft of knitting.

The second key observation supported traditional ideological stereotypes in regard to masculinity and the societal view that knitting is a feminine pursuit. Women were found to be the ones championing men, encouraging their participation in knitting as a craft and r/knitting as a community, supporting a discourse of empowerment that sees men's participation and visibility in this online forum being encouraged. The theoretical reflexive project of the self, that sees men's knitting practices are socially shaped but also socially shaping, suggested that the identity performance of male knitters is influenced by the actions of other knitters' actions in the society around them, resulting in men's participation in knitting becoming less associated with stigma over time – reducing the gendered stereotyping and perceived femininity associated with the craft.

The third key observation was that social media is a place where you can meet with like-minded people and feel comfortable talking about topics that would have greater sensitivity in face-to-face situations, such as discussions on stigma and gender. I found that humour, in particular sarcasm, was used to alleviate or mitigate the tension created by such topics, making it easier for people to deal with the tension and better relate to each other.

The fourth key observation showed that male knitters participating in the r/knitting community felt the need to justify their participation by referencing aspects of their masculinity. These references included men aligning themselves with traits such as strength, mathematical skill,

and the possession of body hair. Masculinity was further validated through references to soldiers knitting and the origins of knitting being linked to men. These male knitters discursively constructed their masculine identities through labels that emphasised their gender, an action that suggests they hold less power in the knitting community despite the glass escalator effect that sees them favoured in upvoting practices.

The fifth and last key observation was the identification of women's desire for gender neutrality, in which they adopted language associated with men, such as swearing, and offered advice for ways the community could avoid praising men disproportionately yet still encourage their participation. This was seen to be a strategy that women employed from a place of understanding because the men of r/knitting were in a position to challenge societal stereotypes around knitting without the fear of resistance that women would experience in the same position.

Finally, I wish to highlight that an important aspect of this study was to validate SM-CDS as a valuable method to study critical discourse due to its bottom-up approach. This use of SM-CDS has been little explored outside of topics of national identity and could be examined further from a social media and gender perspective. I conclude that more research should be done using SM-CDS, as social media is a valuable source of rich techno-discursive data. I hope that this study inspires others to explore SM-CDS on the performance of other minority groups in regard to identity construction, although the opportunities are endless.

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Glossary of Terms Used in the Reddit Threads

/s	Indicates the preceding comment was intended with sarcasm.
Amigurumi	A Japanese word for small knitted or crocheted toys that are often in the shape of animals, food, household objects and scenery.
Bespoke	An item that is custom made for a particular customer or user.
bf	Abbreviation for boyfriend.
Bistitchual	Somebody who both knits and crochets. A wordplay on ‘bisexual’.
Block	The process of wetting or steaming the final item of knitting to set it to the finished size and achieve consistency across the stitches.
Bouclé	An uneven yarn with a surface of loops and curls.
BTW	Acronym for by the way.
Cable	A style of knitting where you cross multiple layers of yarn over each other to create a bulky weaved texture.
Cables	See circular needles.
Chart	Stitch-by-stitch instructions for how to knit an item. A pattern presented in a table or list form.
Chiao Goo	An online store for knitting accessories.
Circular needles	Shorter than traditional needles, joined together by a flexible cable that allows the stitches to curve into a round shape, used when knitting jumpers.
Colourway	A range of combinations of colours.
Colourwork	Knitting where stitches are knitted alternately in various colours.
Contrasting	A difference in lightness, brightness and/or hue between two colours that makes them more or less distinguishable.
Crochet	To make an item by interlocking loops of yarn with one hook.
CSS	Acronym for Cascading Style Sheets, which describes how HTML elements are to be displayed on computer screens.
Decrease	The reduction of the number of stitches in a row.
Double knitting	A technique that allows you to produce a double layer of stockinette stitch fabric with mirror-image colourwork while knitting both sides at the same time.
DPNs	Acronym for ‘double pointed needles’. A u-shaped cord needles with points at both ends. Often used simultaneously as a set of four to complete advanced projects to knit things in the round that are too small for circular needles. See Circular needles.

Embroidery	To decorate fabric by applying thread with a needle.
Etsy	An e-commerce website that focuses on supplying handmade or vintage items.
Felting	The process of making a textile material by matting, condensing and pressing fibres together.
Fiber	<i>(British English: fibre)</i> Fibre is the starting material for yarn. It can originate from wool, bamboo, cotton, synthetic, or other, sources.
FO	Finished object. A completed knitted item.
Freya	A versatile pattern that can be adapted into dresses, cardigans, sweaters, etcetera.
Frog	Ripping out your stitches when you've made a mistake. A wordplay on the onomatopoeic sound of frogs being similar to "Rip it". Also referred to as tinking, or to tink (knit spelled backwards).
FWIW	Acronym for 'for what it's worth'.
Gauge	The number of stitches and rows a crafter can knit or crochet per inch using a particular yarn, needles or hook.
GNC	Gender non-conforming.
Guild	An association of artisans who practice their craft/trade in a particular area of expertise.
imgur	Imgur is an online image sharing community and image host.
IMO	Acronym for in my opinion.
IRL	Acronyms for in real life.
KAL	Acronym for Knit-along. A Knit Along is when a group of knitters knit the same type of project (same pattern, same technique)., helping each other out along the way.
Knit	To create multiple loops of yarn, called stitches, in a line or tube to make an item using at least two knitting needles, abbreviated to <i>k</i> .
knittit	r/knittit is a Reddit community.
Lace	A delicate knitting style characterised by intentional 'holes' in the fabric arranged with aesthetic consideration.
LGTB	More recently evolved into LGBTIQ+, an acronym that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, asexual and encompasses other terms of gender identity such as non-binary and pansexual. Used to describe experiences of gender, sexuality, and physiological sex characteristics.
Lurk	To read something online without commenting or contributing, therefore being invisible to the rest of the group or community.

LYS	Acronym for ‘local yarn store’.
Nuvems	An Amazon workspace which helps automate, integrate and simplify products on the internet.
o/	Visual representation of a person raising their arm in attendance.
OMG	Acronym for oh my god/goodness.
OP	A reference to either the Original Post in a thread or the person who posted it.
Purl	A type of stitch that looks just like the back of a knit stitch. Abbreviated to <i>p</i> .
Ravelry	Ravelry is a website that is used both as an organizational tool, and a yarn & pattern database for knitters and crocheters.
Skein	A length of loosely coiled yarn.
Spinning	Ancient textile art. Plant, animal or synthetic fibres are twisted together to form yarn.
Stitch marker	Small rings made from plastic or metal that you place between stitches to mark an important stage in your knitting pattern.
Stitch ‘n Bitch	A reference to social knitting groups since World War II. A rhyming wordplay on the association of stitches with knitting and to bitch as colloquial slang for gossiping.
Stitches	A measurement used in fibre crafts.
Stockinette	A basic knitting stitch which alternates a knit row with a purl row.
Stranded	A technique for working two (or more) colours of yarn in the same row. Also known as Fair Isle knitting.
Sub	Abbreviation for a subthread or subreddit, a thread that is subordinate to another.
TSA	Acronym for travel safety authority.
Wiki	A website or database collaboratively developed by a community of users. Allows any user to add and edit content.
WIP	Acronym for work in progress. An uncompleted knitted item.
Yarn	Yarn is a long continuous length of interlocked fibres, used for knitting items.

Appendices

Appendix A: *Ethics Approval*



Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTC)

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E: ethics@aut.ac.nz
www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics

AUT

TE WĀNANGA ARONUI
O TĀMAKI MAKĀU RAU

28 August 2018

Philippa Smith
Faculty of Culture and Society

Dear Philippa

Ethics Application: 18/320 **The master narratives of online discourse surrounding men who knit**

I wish to advise you that a subcommittee of the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTC) has **approved** your ethics application.

This approval is for three years, expiring 28 August 2021.

Non-Standard Conditions of Approval

1. In the Information Sheet include advice about the opportunity to review transcripts.

Non-standard conditions must be completed before commencing your study. Non-standard conditions do not need to be submitted to or reviewed by AUTC before commencing your study.

Standard Conditions of Approval

1. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using form EA2, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>.
2. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using form EA3, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>.
3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTC prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form: <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>.
4. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
5. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTC Secretariat as a matter of priority.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

AUTC grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval for access for your research from another institution or organisation then you are responsible for obtaining it. You are reminded that it is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard.

For any enquiries please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz

Yours sincerely,

Kate O'Connor
Executive Manager
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Appendix B: *r/knitting Moderator Permission*

[r/knitting](#)
Research:

[expand all](#)
[collapse all](#)

[~] to /r/knitting sent 8 days ago

Dear [r/knitting](#) moderators,
I am a postgraduate student in Linguistics at AUT University in Auckland, New Zealand. I am doing a Master of English and New Media Studies; researching the discourse surrounding knitting and gender on social media platforms. Through this research I would like to examine common themes that appear in [r/knitting](#) subthreads such as 'Men who knit -the stigma and the community's response' and 'The Manly Art of Knitting'.
I am therefore writing to request your approval to use the posts from some [r/knitting](#) subthreads in my research. Your approval would be included in the ethics application to my university to conduct this analysis and I would be happy to share the findings of my research with you on its completion.
Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions by emailing me at this address: hrz2977@autuni.ac.nz
I look forward to receiving your response at your earliest convenience.
Yours faithfully, Angela Desmarais

[Permalink](#)
[Reply](#)

[~] from

[M] via /r/knitting sent 7 days ago

I don't mind. other mods what say you?

[Permalink](#)
[Delete](#)
[Report](#)
[Block User](#)
[Mark Unread](#)
[Reply](#)

[~] from

[M] via /r/knitting sent 6 days ago

Wouldn't you need approval from the individual users? Or the reddit admins? I've never done this type of research so I can't speculate.

[Permalink](#)
[Delete](#)
[Report](#)
[Block User](#)
[Mark Unread](#)
[Reply](#)

[~] from

[M] via /r/knitting sent 6 days ago

First, I'd like to say I'm super cool with it.
Second, regarding the specifics of IRB approval, there's an ongoing reddit-based research project in my lab right now and I can totally poke them and see what kind of approval they needed to get (or not) to use reddit data – I think because it's publicly posted on the internet you don't actually need a whole lot of consent, but if you were to (for example) interview individual users beyond the content already available on [r/knitting](#) that you would need those users' consent. BUT I imagine you're already looking into what your university needs in terms of ethics approval for a human subjects study so if you already know what's up then IGNORE ME :D

[Permalink](#)
[Delete](#)
[Report](#)
[Block User](#)
[Mark Unread](#)
[Reply](#)

Appendix C: r/knitting Rules

We only have 9 rules, and they are visible on the desktop sidebar. If you are a mobile user, please check your individual app for instructions on how to view them or see below:

- **Do not threaten, harass, insult, incite violence.** Be kind -- and use [reddiquette](#).
- **NO SPAM.** We're a community, not a bulletin board or marketplace. Keep promotional content to the bi-weekly (Thursdays) BSTP thread.
- **If your post is NSFW please first think of others.** Use titles that are descriptive and SFW. !@#\$ at your knitting in the comments.
- **Please -- *no memes, pets, cutes, funnies.** Use care with humor. Avoid memes/pics without a strong knitting connection. Provide commentary and background if you feel strongly about posting a "funny" or a simple photo...
- **Do not post WIPs outside weekly thread.** WIPs, unless asking for help, go in the weekly Wednesday WIP thread.
- **FOs: include design and yarn info in the COMMENTS, and check back to answer questions.** Put [FO] in [brackets] in your title for automatic flair. Use links! Use [/u/RavBot](#)! *[SPECIAL NOTE FOR DESIGNERS -->Posting a finished object is fine, please post your FO only once per pattern and only one pattern per week to front page.] Again: all you need to do, as a designer, is post a comment in the BSTP thread and then you can say "self made & pattern available for sale/free - I have posted the pattern link in the buy/sell/trade thread" and link there.*
- **Avoid direct links to personal blogs, stores, or sites.** Linking inside text posts is usually fine, but see the earlier rule about spam.
- **Respect International Copyright.** Do not post pictures of patterns or large sections of pattern text. If you're posting enough of a pattern that a reasonably competent knitter could recreate the item (e.g. entire cable chart for a cabled hat or mittens) that's probably too much. It's probably fair to ask that they only post the portion of the pattern that they absolutely require clarification on. No pictures of patterns. When in doubt, [message the mods](#).
- **Yarn and/or Stash pictures are for Mondays only.** Yarn and/or Stash pictures go in the "Look What I Got" thread which is posted on Mondays. Because yarn could be used in any sort of fiber craft it is not necessarily knitting specific. Some exceptions for mega-acquisition times (like the holidays) might occur but will be explicitly stated by a moderator.

Appendix D: *Primary Discourse Topics in r/knitting Threads around Men who Knit*

Primary topic	Thread subject line
Discussion on the topic of men who knit	[Discussion] Men who knit--the stigma and the community's response Is Male Knitting Becoming A Thing? Views/opinions on male knitters?
Men challenging the view that they don't knit	[FO] In September 2016, a colleague said 'Men don't knit!'. Challenge accepted.... 3 months and many YouTube teaching videos later, this is what I wore to work. Description to come. Completed my first real scarf. And they said guys can't knit pffft Just a dude who likes to knit lace blankets. Ain't nothin wrong with that
Men's finished objects as discussion starters	I wanted to say thanks, too the guys on here who post photos with their finished pieces. 'Twas the best a self taught 14 y/o boy could do. First ever knitted anything! #boyswhoknit
Reddit communities for men	How many men frequent this Reddit Introducing new knitting sub r/BrosWhoKnit
Addressing gendering	Gender neutral knitting stuff

Appendix E: Secondary Discourse Topics in r/knitting Threads around Men who Knit

Secondary Topics	Comments containing topic	Frequency of topic across comments
Encouragement	217	Encouragement by men (47) Encouragement by women (176)
Skill	139	Experience (69) Technique (40) Survival (25) Providing/practical (18) Mathematical (9) Transferable (9)
Gender	122	As an identity marker (66) Stereotypes (45) Disclosure (10) Neutrality (9)
Men who Knit	82	Anecdote about a man who knits (33) Stigma (23) Knitting as a feminine pursuit (15) Sexuality (11) Men get a hard time (10) As a phenomenon (9) As exceptional (6)
Age	74	As an identity marker (41) In general (25) Generational stereotyping (14)
Inclusion	66	Belonging to a community (51) Lack of patterns catering to men (14)
(In)Equality	60	Treatment received by non-knitters (44) Importance of craft, not gender (20) Upvoting of men's finished objects (11) Comparisons with women in STEM/gaming (9)
Public	55	Knitting in public (23) Visiting yarn stores (17) Positive experiences (12) Negative experiences (9) Attending knitting groups (9)
Masculinity	42	Manliness (21) Watching/playing sport (14) Possessing strength (9) Possessing body hair (8) Consuming alcohol (5) Performative humour (5) Watching TV (4)
Celebrity	40	Well-known male knitters (31) Male celebrities who knit (9)
Purpose	29	For improved mental health/relaxation (22) As a challenge (7)

Secondary Topics	Comments containing topic	Frequency of topic across comments
Power	26	Cost (11) The patriarchy (10) Class (7)
Origins	22	Men as the original knitters (22)
Warfare	22	Soldiers (12) War (16)
Attraction	14	Knitters making ideal relationship prospects (8) Sexual desire (7)

Appendix F: *Metaphors of Warfare*

Source	Metaphors
Thread 1	battle scarred tough rural men an army of other knitters on his watch
Thread 2	once I hit that target to torture their grandkids tackle it you are the bomb
Thread 3	a hero
Thread 4	toy soldiers battles they want to fight they have to fend off so much nastiness to be attacked bombarded with jokes men are targeted
Thread 6	supported the arm barricading myself plenty of ad hoc weapons during the nuclear winter while the cavemen are fighting in the streets is gonna fly under the radar for a bit, so I'm gonna have it fortified dictate what you enjoy
Thread 7	were you drafted into carrying your partner's bags?
Thread 9	yarn bombs
Thread 11	survival skills the hat survived along with him smashed to pieces
Thread 12	going off-grid survival skill bombarded with hatred

Appendix G: Men's Labels of Themselves, Other Knitters, and the Knitting Community

Purpose of the label	Men labelling themselves	Men labelling other knitters	Men labelling the community
Solidarity	a fellow young, male knitter fellow guy knitter a fellow dude knitter fellow male knitter fellow fellow knitter here! o/ fellow boy knitter	My knitta	
Relationship to other	a child of a knitter	male college friend My mum knits his best man	
Sexuality	gay male bear knitter fellow gay bear knitter	a fellow bear knitter	BearBroMo
Gender	A male knitter another male knitter a bloke knitter knitting and crocheting man here man a man man here male as a male presenting as male, beard and all a guy who knits m	a woman who also knits male friends who can knit The woman Man A woman a male knitter a man another man a man who doesn't not knit! lovely men	Male knitters Male knitter Men Women We men Male female Males who knit
Masculinity	pretty manly (big guy, big beard) 'presenting as male, beard and all'	macho, battle scarred tough rural men knitting at the pub manly knitters and crocheters men with beards	KnitBros! bros, blokes, fellas, dudes and lads bros BROS r/BrosWhoKnit
Experience	a new (18m) knitter and a crocheter new-ish to knitting	an expert knitter a new male knitter a <i>serious</i> knitter	Knitters "knitters"
Relationship status		a single male that also knits	

Purpose of the label	Men labelling themselves	Men labelling other knitters	Men labelling the community
Men as the original knitters		the original knitters male fishermen an army of other knitters	
Age	20-year-old male 21yo male 47m (25m) 33m 41 m (17m) (33m) A 27 year old guy 29 36m (18m) (30m) 45m 40 m thirty-four years 34 39/m 60m M/44	older male colleagues an old woman in a rocking chair another teen knitter!	
Other		another knitter any other knitter other knitters	
Community			Any knitting community The knitting community An online community Reddit This subreddit This Reddit

Appendix H: *Adverbs of Intensity*

Intensity	Adverbs	Occurrence in data
Strong adverbs	especially	10
	extremely	1
	completely	3
	totally	10
	terribly	1
	absolutely	7
	really	72
	very	103
Medium adverbs	rather	1
	pretty	35
	quite	8
	fairly	10
Weak adverbs	not terribly	1
	slightly	0
	a bit	10
	Not at all	0

Appendix I: *Non-knitters*

Source	References to non-knitters
Thread 2	naysayer; evil people
Thread 3	filthy liars
Thread 4	non-knitters; less than friendly
Thread 9	someone who calls you names;
Thread 11	naysayers, bullies; rude person; fu@k the haters; your critics; the people who made fun of you; people were shitty to you; whoever makes fun of you; non knitters; assholes; people who judge you; [people who] look down on you;











Appendix J: *Encouraging Comments*

F-3-RM-12	<div> <div>↑</div> <div>↓</div> </div> <div>13 points · 2 years ago</div> <div>Please post the whole blanket, it looks amazing!</div> <div> Give Award Share Report Save </div>
F-3-US-1b	<div> <div>↑</div> <div>↓</div> </div> <div>23 points · 2 years ago</div> <div>Damn...I want to see the WHOLE blanket now! 🤩🤩</div> <div> Give Award Share Report Save </div>
F-7-US-2c	<div> <div>↑</div> <div>↓</div> </div> <div>8 points · 2 years ago</div> <div>Ain't NOTHING wrong with that! Beautiful work!</div> <div> Give Award Share Report Save </div>
F-5-US-13	<div> <div>↑</div> <div>↓</div> </div> <div>12 points · 2 years ago</div> <div>YES! please, more male representation in the fiber community!</div> <div> Give Award Share Report Save </div>
F-4-UD-282	<div> <div>↑</div> <div>↓</div> </div> <div>7 points · 2 years ago</div> <div>Looks amazing! Great job.</div> <div> Give Award Share Report Save </div>
F-8-US-67	<div> <div>↑</div> <div>↓</div> </div> <div>6 points · 2 years ago</div> <div>Ugh that is so beautiful!!</div> <div> Give Award Share Report Save </div>
M-2-UD-1a	<div> <div>↑</div> <div>↓</div> </div> <div>6 points · 2 years ago</div> <div>So beautiful and timeless :')</div> <div> Give Award Share Report Save </div>
F-4-CD-1	<div> <div>↑</div> <div>↓</div> </div> <div>7 points · 2 years ago</div> <div>Absolutely gorgeous. 10/10</div> <div> Give Award Share Report Save </div>
F-5-US-3b	<div> <div>↑</div> <div>↓</div> </div> <div>6 points · 2 years ago</div> <div>That is beautiful. I wish my dude would knit with me.</div> <div> Give Award Share Report Save </div>
F-5-US-69	<div> <div>↑</div> <div>↓</div> </div> <div>5 points · 2 years ago</div> <div>More dudes need to knit. Period. That is gorgeous work.</div> <div> Give Award Share Report Save </div>

Appendix K: Sarcastic Comments

M-6-US-3	<div><div>↑</div><div>↓</div></div> <div>-9 points · 11 months ago</div> <div>sarcasm because bro's are constantly bombarded with hatred and ridicule for everything they do! Let them have their safe space. It's not like the already run the dang world.</div> <div>Give Award Share Report Save</div>
F-6-NW-37	<div><div>↑</div><div>↓</div></div> <div>10 points · 11 months ago</div> <div>Because a lot of guys get bullied for doing things that are perceived as feminine, such as knitting... Everyone has the right to a safe space, and it doesn't affect you that this subreddit exists, so there's no need to be snarky.</div> <div>Give Award Share Report Save</div>
F-2-US-5	<div><div>↑</div><div>↓</div></div> <div>3 points · 11 months ago</div> <div>TIL that GNC men never get hate.</div> <div>Give Award Share Report Save</div>

Appendix L: Comments Disclosing Age

- M-11-UK-1   12 points · 1 year ago
33m here. Taught to knit as a child - I still have a few projects on the go. My kids want to learn too.
[Give Award](#) [Share](#) [Report](#) [Save](#)
- M-2-US-2b   11 points · 1 year ago
M, knitting for 17 years.
[Give Award](#) [Share](#) [Report](#) [Save](#)
- M-2-AU-3   11 points · 1 year ago
47m, just getting back into it. Learnt from my mum and grandma as a boy.
[Give Award](#) [Share](#) [Report](#) [Save](#)
- M-2-US-1b   11 points · 1 year ago
I'm a 27 year old guy and I've been knitting for about a year now.
[Give Award](#) [Share](#) [Report](#) [Save](#)
- M-5-CD-6   10 points · 1 year ago
Hello. 29, started a few months ago.
[Give Award](#) [Share](#) [Report](#) [Save](#)