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ABSTRACT: Knitting and knitting groups have been gaining popularity throughout the world over the last two decades. They have been used as a setting for data collection for various projects to study the benefits of knitting, and the many uses of knitting have been well documented throughout history. But the hospitable side of knitting is an area that has been under-researched, even though there is increased scholarly attention on hospitable practices with a view to improving well-being and the social fabric of communities. This conceptual article will attempt to fill this gap, taking a critical look at the hospitableness of knitting.

KEYWORDS: hospitality, knitters, yarn

Introduction

Nannas have been holding on to a secret for far too long — knitting can be used for more than creating winter woollies, as other handcrafts have, for example, quilting. Quilting has been used to clarify research processes and has been used to facility the co-creational aspects of research when gaining data from participants (Ausband, 2006; Koelsch, 2012). This article will concentrate on knitting, which is a method by which yarn (natural or synthetic) is manipulated (either by machine or hand) to create garments or other items. Knitting is a handcraft that has seen increased interest over the last two decades; it is an activity that is being taken up by many different people, can be learnt at any age, and can be an individual or group activity (Harkison, 2019; 2022).

Knitting has recently received considerable publicity due to the research that has been conducted on it highlighting its many therapeutic and calming benefits (Clave-Brule et al., 2009; Corkhill et al., 2014; Gant, 2015; Adey, 2018; Mansourian, 2021a). It has been shown to decrease the heart rate and slow one's breathing — in fact, knitting has been described as the "new yoga" (Reynolds, 1997; 2009). The many uses of knitting have been well documented throughout history; in the Second World War, spies were known to work coded messages into their knitting and then pass it on to the Allies for them to decipher the information (Adlington, 2016). In relation to religion, knitting is now being used as an aid to prayer, as a way to apply the gospel, and it serves as a starting point to explore faith for women who have not previously had a church connection (Dutton, 2014). Knitting has also been responsible for providing an important source of income for the Fair Isle (the northernmost of the British Isles) for the past 150 years (Butler, 2015).

Knitting has also been a way of tapping into people who belong to a specific social group to gain their opinions. Knitting groups have been used as a source of data collection for various projects; for example, students at the College of Arts and Tourism in Dublin, Ireland, interviewed a senior citizens' knitting group to gain input from older people in the community on a project they were proposing for the wider community (Gorman, 2017). Another example is a study that was conducted with "knit 'n' natter" groups in Chester and Manchester, England, to collect data that highlighted there were women who do not identify with "new knitting" practices and primarily pursue their hobby in a more conventional context. This "new knitting" practice is another use of knitting — political knitting — which employs knitting as a form of craftivist yarn-bombing, or guerrilla/graffiti-knitting, which installs knitting in public places, and is frequently the topic of news reports and social media sharing (Close, 2018; Harrison & Ogden, 2019). In another study, a knitting group in Edinburgh was used to explore social interactions and how links were formed. The conclusion of that study was that these knitters benefitted from sharing their knitting with other people and gained technical support, formed meaningful friendships, and felt part of a community (Court, 2020).

Engaging with communities in this way results in researchers not having the power experience of the more conventional academic research methods. A knitting group brings people together to facilitate co-creational aspects of knitting, and since knitting is a creative method that is organic, it is not so much of a prescribed method such as giving participants Lego or Ketso. They are able to focus on their own existing creation/creative skills, and data can be easier to obtain (with permission). Knitting is seen as a catalyst to bring people together — sharing a creative bond (Potter, 2017). This connectivity is also experienced online via the social network Ravelry.com — "the Facebook of knitting" — launched in 2007 (Harrison & Ogden, 2019). It is also worth noting that people who are more likely to take up knitting and join a group are already more inclined to be social and define that community as welcoming and friendly (Court, 2020).

Knitting tourism is now seen as an extension of that bond, extending people's skills by taking part in organised workshops

and tutorials to gain experiences from the places that wool is sourced from, to learn the stages that are taken to produce yarn from that wool, or to just have dedicated time to sit and knit. As such, knitting tours are becoming very popular — these can be found in various formats such as organised retreats, workshops, train trips, knitting tours and even cruises (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2015; Harkison, 2022). The demand for these dedicated places to knit has resulted in one of the world's first knitting hotels — Westcliffe Hotel, in Blackpool, England. This hotel was opened in 2016 by Paula Chew, and its unique destination attracts guests from across the country and abroad and is obtaining perfect scores on Trip Advisor (Marshall, 2016). More bespoke knitting accommodation followed: in 2018, Iona House was opened by the knitwear designer Belinda Harris-Reid, who now hosts knitting and crochet holiday retreats (getaways and learnaways) in Dawlish, in Devon, England (BBC Radio Devon, 2018).

The hospitableness of knitting

Telfer (1995) was one of the first academics to examine hospitableness, and she wanted to examine the trait of hospitableness to determine if it was a moral virtue in a philosophical context. What is interesting to note is that she defined "hospitality" first as she claimed that "hospitableness" had a distinctive character derived from the value that hospitable people had attached to it. Telfer's (1995) definition for hospitality coincided with King's (1995) publication asking "What is Hospitality?", the outcome of which was to propose a model of hospitality that could be used in customer service organisations. The interest in defining what hospitality is started over 40 years ago, with Burgess (1982) examining hospitality through the metaphor of gift exchange. It is suspected that hospitality has a history that is as long as the existence of human society (Ryan, 2015), and an interest in defining it continues. It is seen as a contemporaneous human exchange that is designed to enhance the mutual well-being of the parties concerned and is entered into voluntarily (Brotherton, 1999). But traditionally, hospitality occurs within the lived experience, and it is described as a gift given and shared between the "host" and the "guest" (O'Gorman, 2007).

As noted above, Telfer defined hospitableness in 1995, and then again in 2000. She stated that hospitableness was a personality trait that some people possess more than others (Telfer, 1995; 2000). She then differentiated between "good-Samaritan hospitableness" and "hospitableness to friends" (Telfer, 1995, p. 187), which is clearly within the domain of the private/domestic hospitality context. O'Connor (2005) took this definition a step further by suggesting that genuine hospitableness could not be grown over time or developed, and that it is imprinted into our personality or character at birth — almost genetically. Lashley (2007), however, suggested that hospitableness could be shaped by situational factors, for example, changes in the host's familiarity with their guest and dependent on the duration and frequency of the host–guest contact. Hospitableness comes from the hospitality that is shared between the host and the guest, and can be identified by four characteristics: it is given by a host to a guest who is away from home; the host provides for the guest's physiological and psychological comfort and security; it involves interactions between provider and receiver; and it involves a mixture of tangible and intangible factors (Hepple et al., 1990; Ariffin & Maghzi, 2012).

Hospitableness is about being able to create a warm welcome and maybe the desire to please relates to a host's own well-being. The host's hospitable attitude can significantly enhance the guest's well-being through catering for their physical, social and psychological needs (Kim et al., 2018). Knitting groups generally take place away from one's own home, in safe, welcoming spaces where people's mental and physical well-being is catered for and social interactions take place (Kingston, 2013; Potter, 2017). Knitters by themselves can interact online on the website Ravelry which acts as the community's marketplace, social media channel, forum host and pattern review site (Court, 2020). It has been well established in literature that knitting can actually have a significant social side, and the social interactions that happen between knitters are acknowledged; however, there is room to conduct further research into their significance (Court, 2020).

It is widely acknowledged that the role of hospitality services is to foster favourable social outcomes such as subjective well-being and belongingness, and to mitigate negative social outcomes such as distress and loneliness (Song et al., 2018; Altinay et al., 2019; Farmaki & Stergiou, 2019). Riley et al. (2013) conducted research on the therapeutic uses of knitting and concluded that knitting had significant psychological and social benefits, and that it could contribute to well-being and quality of life by combatting illness and loneliness. Research into the engagement in serious leisure activities, for example, amateurism, volunteering and hobbies has spanned nearly 40 years. The benefits for leisure pursuers come in physical, mental and emotional forms, and range from pure pleasure and a sense of fulfilment to self-actualisation, and maybe most importantly a sense of belonging (Heo et al., 2013; Riley et al., 2013; Corkhill et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2014; Liu & Yu, 2015; Mansourian, 2021b), which has clear parallels with what hospitableness can achieve.

Previous literature has investigated the concept of hospitableness by examining its relationship with satisfaction in hotels and restaurants, and in the customer experience (Tasci & Semrad, 2016; Mody et al., 2019; Scholl-Grissemann et al., 2021). It has also examined the importance of hospitableness in guest and host relationships for the sustainable development of destinations (van Rheede & Dekker, 2016). Hospitableness has been investigated in the context of hospitality to explain how migrants are welcomed through employment in the hospitality industry (Linge et al., 2020). Future research in health care institutions, care homes, hospitals and even refugee camps to investigate the influence of hospitableness and physical surroundings on patients, children, the elderly and refugees has been suggested by Altinay et al. (2023) to ensure hospitality revisits its positioning in the socio-economic environment and develops more strategic partnerships within it.

Researchers are examining ways to measure hospitableness and it has been suggested that it is crucial, especially from the experiential view of consumption. This perspective has become important as a result of the paradigm shift from a utilitarian view to an experiential view of consumption in experience economies (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Pine & Gilmore, 1998; 1999; Petkus, 2004; Oh et al., 2007). Furthermore, it is suggested that this paradigm shift may render "hospitableness" as an essential dimension of the creation of memorable experiences. Researchers are being encouraged to explore and expand the boundaries of hospitality (Morrison, 2018), and it can be seen that hospitality research is gradually expanding into domains

that have been unexplored (Altinay et al., 2023). Exploring the hospitableness of knitting would push these boundaries and using one of the instruments of measuring hospitableness could determine what the hospitableness of knitting actually is.

Methods

Blain and Lashley (2014) and Lashley (2015) have stated that although there is a growing body of work on "hospitality", few authors study the nature of "hospitableness" as a distinct concept. Their study sought to understand the traits of hospitableness through a motive-based model, and then to use this conceptual framework to develop an instrument that would be able to measure individual hospitableness. After two phases of research, and finally testing this instrument on 33 participants, Blain and Lashley (2014) and Lashley (2015) suggested that this instrument was ready to be tested in an array of settings such as hospitality, tourism and leisure. It consisted of 13 questions which are embedded in a cluster of questions that have been devised from earlier iterations of the research instrument. It was used to measure individuals' concerns with respect to their impressions of genuine hospitality, and to identify reciprocity and "calculate" hospitality.

This article proposes that to explore the hospitableness of knitting, this instrument could be used to determine the nature of hospitableness through knitters and knitting groups to determine if it has the power to enable creativity and improve well-being and the social fabric of communities through the methods and nature of hospitable practices. One suggestion is that the three H factors of hospitableness, heart-warming, heart-assuring and heart-soothing, could be measured in knitters and knitting groups by repeating the study by Tasci and Semrad (2016). To gain empirical data, future research would need to choose one of these measuring instruments and conduct field work to determine what the hospitableness of knitting is. At present, researchers have only used knitting as a source to collect data and no actual research has been conducted to determine how knitting creates hospitableness.

Concluding comments

In recent years, there has been a revival in knitting. It has many uses that can be seen throughout history and there are many benefits that can be achieved through knitting. Knitting groups are seen as a setting in which to collect data on various issues and topics. At the same time, there has been increased scholarly attention on hospitable practices and how they improve well-being and the social fabric of communities. The aim of this article was to critically examine the hospitableness of knitting. What has been determined is that there is a hospitable side of knitting, and this has been highlighted when knitting groups have been used to gain data on other things. Literature on the hospitableness of knitting is missing and there is an opportunity for this to be researched. So, it is time to explore and push the boundaries of hospitality using different mediums, for example knitting, to co-create spaces to think, mind-travel and find hospitableness and well-being. Knitting could enable creativity and improve well-being and the social fabric of communities, and could be used as a new way to create new spaces for thinking about hospitableness. I would welcome fellow travellers on this journey.

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