

Western Oregon University  
Digital Commons@WOU

---

Honors Senior Theses/Projects

Student Scholarship

---

6-1-2017

# Knitting in 21st Century America: The Culture and Ideology of Knitting Groups in Rural Oregon

Robin Roemer  
Western Oregon University

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.wou.edu/honors\\_theses](https://digitalcommons.wou.edu/honors_theses)

---

## Recommended Citation

Roemer, Robin, "Knitting in 21st Century America: The Culture and Ideology of Knitting Groups in Rural Oregon" (2017). *Honors Senior Theses/Projects*. 136.  
[https://digitalcommons.wou.edu/honors\\_theses/136](https://digitalcommons.wou.edu/honors_theses/136)

This Undergraduate Honors Thesis/Project is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship at Digital Commons@WOU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Senior Theses/Projects by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@WOU. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@wou.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@wou.edu).

# **Knitting in 21<sup>st</sup> Century America:**

**The Culture and Ideology of Knitting**

**Groups in Rural Oregon**

By

Robin Roemer

An Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for Graduation from the  
Western Oregon University Honors Program

Dr. Isidore Lobnibe,  
Thesis advisor

Dr. Gavin Keulks,  
Honors Program Director

June 2017

## **Acknowledgments**

I wish to thank my advisor Isidore Lobnibe, the Anthropology department, Gavin Keulks and the Honors department, and my mom and dad for their help and support. I also want to thank all of the knitters who were interviewed in this study for sharing their knowledge with me and the knitters of the local group mentioned in this study. I want to thank Awana Black for letting me accompany her to events.

**Abstract**

Knitting has existed since the Middle Ages, and continues to thrive well into twenty-first century America. Why do people continue to knit, and why do knitters form themselves into social groups? This senior thesis investigates these and related questions in order to understand the culture of knitting and how knitters keep the practice alive. Drawing on participant observation and oral interviews, it further examines the identities knitters construct as members of knitting communities in rural Oregon, the differences in the craft based on the knitting practices employed, the materials and the patterns used, the gender ideologies of learning how to knit, and the role of online interactions.

## **Table of Contents**

<b><u>Acknowledgments</u></b>	<b>ii</b>
<b><u>Abstract</u></b>	<b>iii</b>
<b><u>Chapter 1: Introduction and Background of Study:</u></b>	<b>1</b>
Organization of Thesis	7
<b><u>Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework:</u></b>	<b>10</b>
<b><u>Chapter 3: Methodology:</u></b>	<b>20</b>
<b><u>Chapter 4: Transferring the Knowledge of Their Craft</u></b>	<b>24</b>
How Knitters Learned Their Craft	24
Teaching Others	29
Public Reactions to Knitting	32
<b><u>Chapter 5: Knitting Communities</u></b>	<b>37</b>
Knitting groups	37
Fiber Festivals	45
<b><u>Chapter 6: Indirect Transfer of Knowledge between Knitters</u></b>	<b>54</b>
Patterns	54
Internet/Ravelry	61
<b><u>Chapter 7: Knitting Ideology</u></b>	<b>64</b>
Why People Are Interested in Knitting	64
Gender Distribution in Knitting	71
<b><u>Chapter 8: Conclusion</u></b>	<b>74</b>
<b><u>References Cited</u></b>	<b>78</b>

**Appendixes**

<u>Interview Questions:</u>	<b>82</b>
<u>Charts:</u>	<b>83</b>
<u>Glossary:</u>	<b>84</b>

## **Chapter 1: Introduction and Background of Study**

Knitting is the “act of forming a fabric by looping a continuous yarn” (Barnhart and Stein 1963:675). The practice of hand knitting uses two or more needles or one connected needle to pull the yarn through the loops and hold it. The origin of the craft is uncertain because the earliest examples of knitting are only fragments and possibly used a slightly different method to create similar fabric. Knitting might have been used for making gloves between the seventh and ninth centuries based on fragments that were dated to that time (Bush 2011:16).

Socks made in Islamic countries were thought to be the original source of knitting from the thirteenth century or earlier (Bush 2011:16). Knitted socks were an important innovation because they maintained their shape and were made in one connected piece while stockings made from woven fabric had to be cut and sewn together (Bush 2011:12, 16). Many early examples of hand-knitted clothes were gloves made for priests in the thirteenth century (Jenkins 2003:562).

Other examples of knitted objects made during the Middle Ages include the leggings of a bishop in 1192 and pillowcases meant for the Spanish royal mausoleum of Castile between 1200-50 and 1275 (Jenkins 2003:562-3). Historical records of knitting started appearing in the fourteenth century including a document that described a girl that was undergoing an apprenticeship of knitting hose from a woman in Barcelona (Jenkins 2003:564). The exact date of the commencement of knitting is unknown because the historical and archaeological record is never complete. However, the evidence that does exist indicates that knitting is a practice which has lasted at least eight centuries.

The practice dates as far back as the emergence of guilds in the Middle Ages (Turnau 1982:20). Guilds were organized groups “formed for mutual aid and protection or for a common purpose, most frequently by persons associated in trade or industry” (Barnhart and Stein 1963:538). Later, trade of knitted items made by guilds became an important industry. By the fifteenth century, the cap or knitted hat industry was especially important for guilds, and it was influential in countries throughout Europe (Jenkins 2003:566). In 1496, Coventry, England had a capper (or knitted hat maker) for a mayor, and from 1531-1628 “the cappers were sufficiently rich and influential to be given a share in the governance of St Thomas's chapel in the parish church of St Michael” (Jenkins 2003:566). The influence of the knitting industry in this town went far beyond the guild and into the political and secular realms.

In the sixteenth century, stockings had also become popular (Jenkins 2003:566). Knitting machines were used concurrently with hand knitting in the seventeenth century (Turnau 1982:22). In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the volume of trade in knitted items between several European cities was so high that the craft was even taught to the poor as a means for them to earn a livelihood (Jenkins 2003:569-70). This is just one example of how and why the craft of knitting was transferred from one person to another historically.

Knitting was subsequently brought to America by the colonists who engaged in it as a pastime, and it has continued to endure in today's culture (Kooler 2004:16). Early colonists brought their craft with them and passed it on as the United States grew. Craftspeople could, and in some cases still do, create clothing from raw materials. Sheep owners could shear the



wool, clean, card, and spin it into yarn and knit it all themselves. Therefore, those people with sheep would not be dependent on others for clothing, which was an important feature for the Colonists.

During the eighteenth century women were encouraged to produce their own clothing so they could be independent of British imported clothing after Great Britain banned colonists from exporting worked wool materials with the Woolen act of 1699 (Strawn 2007). Knitting stockings for soldiers was a meaningful part of the Revolutionary war effort of women living in what was to become the United States (Strawn 2007). Many slaves were taught to knit clothing for their masters and for themselves and other slaves (Ibid). This is one example of how the knowledge of knitting was spread historically. Starting in the 1800's, craftspeople learned to make certain objects using written patterns, rather than learning from another person first hand. They used patterns to make objects such as socks, washcloths, or Victorian lace which they found in books and periodicals (Strawn 2007). Knitting was important as a utilitarian tool, but it was also used as a hobby for wealthy women who did complicated "fancy work" such as purses and Victorian lace (Strawn 2007).

As the United States expanded, pioneer women brought their knitting with them as they went Westward (Strawn 2007). An important aspect of knitting both historically and in modern times is that it is portable. Historically, this was important because it allowed travelers to create clothing while on the move (Strawn 2007). Missionaries introduced knitting to Native Americans who integrated their own designs and types of clothing into the practice (Strawn 2007). A well-known example of this is the Cowichan sweaters made by the Salish people (Strawn 2007). In this way, knitters continued to spread their craft.

Communities of people were brought together and taught to knit for certain purposes. Knitting was extremely common during the Civil War in the United States as many women made things for the soldiers on both sides of the war (Strawn 2007). Even though there were machines capable of making knitted cloth during the Civil War, the government and aid organizations encouraged handicrafts because the machines could not complete all of the necessary clothing for soldiers and they thought hand knitted items were sturdier (Strawn 2007). Knitting was so common that it was part of mainstream society. Newspapers, including the New York Times, published stories of women who knit and patterns intended for soldiers (Strawn 2007). In addition, a lot of the knitters belonged to aid societies (Strawn 2007).

Knitting was likewise used during World War I; the Red Cross taught children and adults to create items for the war effort (Strawn 2007). These communities were connected by the purpose of providing soldiers with warm clothes, but they were also connected through the activity of knitting. The Red Cross created standardized patterns for the objects which were most necessary, including socks, hot water bottle covers, washcloths, and many other items (Ibid). During this time, knitting was encouraged by society because making things for soldiers was considered patriotic (Strawn 2007). The high need for handmade items opened knitting pursuits to men as well (Strawn 2007).

There was a lull in knitting after World War I, during the 1920's, but it picked back up during the 1930's when the Great Depression made knitting a necessity again. This is when groups created for learning the craft became popular (Strawn 2007). Craftspeople knit useful things for themselves and their families during the Great Depression (Strawn 2007).

The craft may have become more popular during this time because yarn retailers, including department stores, hired knitting teachers (Strawn 2007). Yarn manufacturers put on fashion shows to show off patterns and encourage knitting (Strawn 2007). These demonstrations of knitting encouraged people to learn and continue the craft.

World War II brought knitting to the forefront again as one of the many war efforts was making items for the Red Cross to help soldiers and those displaced by the war in Europe (Strawn 2007). The Red Cross even taught a group of people to spin in order to find a way to produce cheaper materials (Strawn 2007). Again, knitting was patriotic and very common. In addition to being the first lady, Eleanor Roosevelt was also described as the “first knitter” (Strawn 2007). Department stores continued to have knitting teachers and some even created knitting corners in their stores (Strawn 2007). These groups might seem recognizable to handcrafters today who find similar groups held at yarn stores. Knitting during this time had a profound impact on the history of the craft. One artisan interviewed in this study, Jackie, mentioned finding a pattern that was called “knit for victory” from World War II. During and after the war, women made necessary items for their families which were not available because of shortages (Strawn 2007). Even after the war, stores would sell hand-crafted items to make up for shortages in manufactured items (Strawn 2007).

After the war and the shortages, knitting continued to be popular, although the reasons for knitting and the ideology surrounding the craft changed. During the 1950's, there was a growth of craft communities and yarn shops became self-service (as most are today) which allowed handcrafters to touch the yarn before purchasing it and find the

qualities they needed (Strawn 2007). In the 1960's, knitting was viewed with mixed feelings because it was attributed to the maternal side of women and the ways people viewed women's roles was controversial (Strawn 2007). The craft began to be seen in a different light during the 1960's and 1970's, when it became an art form (Strawn 2007). Knitting being seen as an art is just one example of people being interested in knitting for reasons besides fashion, utilitarian usage, or as a hobby.

From the 1970's until the present, a number of craft organizations have been created with different focal points. According to Deborah Robson, who wrote articles for knitting magazines and Strawn's book, the craft revival of the 1970's brought back hand-spinning. The interest in being able to make things from raw materials was part of a counterculture movement focused on going back to people's roots (Robson 2007). It began with weavers, who first took up spinning. In the 1980's knitters took up spinning as well (Robson 2007). At first, tools for spinning were hard to find (Robson 2007). Eventually, spinners were able to find more tools and materials from sources including fiber festivals. In 1974, the Black Sheep Gathering in Oregon and the Maryland Sheep and Wool Festival were created to celebrate and inform artisans about fiber for hand-spinning (Robson 2007). Currently, there are more than four fiber festivals and events in Oregon alone, the major festivals being the Black Sheep Gathering and the Oregon Flock and Fiber Festival.

In the 1980's, people in the knitting community created overarching organizations. In 1981, the Craft Yarn Council of America was created. It performed several functions including creating a certification program for craft instructors and organizing charity groups such as "Warm Up America!" (Strawn 2007). In New York, a craft community created a

public event called the “knit-out,” which had 1000 people when it started in 1998 and grew to 35,000 people in 2006 (Strawn 2007). The Knitting Guild of America was created in 1984 (Strawn 2007). In the 1990's and 2000's, people encountered changes in knitting.

Technology has changed the way artisans communicate with each other. World events since 1993 have encouraged craftspeople to think about knitting for charities and have increased the number of charities (Strawn 2007). In the twenty-first century, the utilitarian purpose for knitted items has changed as industrialization allowed for the cheap mass production of clothing, but handcrafters have found more reasons to knit.

In the history of hand knitting, there have been periods of great proliferation of the craft, when it was heavily incorporated into society, and periods of less knitting, but it has continued to survive through those times. The things artisans have made and the reasons they have made them have varied across time as well, whether fashionable clothing or supplies for soldiers, depending on the needs of the recipients and the creators. The tools craftspeople historically used to learn to knit, including written patterns, classes, and groups organized around causes, continue to be used today. Although not as prolific in mainstream society as during certain times of U.S. History, knitting continues to be present in American culture today.

### Organization of Thesis

This senior thesis seeks to explore the knitting culture of the twenty-first century in America, focusing on the activities and experiences of craft communities in rural Oregon. The purpose is to investigate whether or not the knitting community is disappearing in the Willamette Valley and which elements of its culture and ideology play a role in its

continuation. The fieldwork for this thesis was conducted in craft communities during the summer of 2016. To gain an understanding of the culture and ideology of craft communities, I employed participant observation and oral interviews as explained in the second chapter of this thesis on the methodology of the research. The third chapter describes the theoretical framework used as a foundation for this study.

The results of this study begin in the fourth chapter, starting with the subject of how knitters transfer their culture from one person to another. In interviews, artisans were asked how they learned to knit to understand how they gained access to the culture. Additionally, I asked them if they had taught others to knit and about their interactions with people in public while employing their craft, which are the second and third sections respectively in this chapter. Examining how knowledge is passed from one knitter to another within a community allowed me not only to address questions such as how different cultural practices are passed to future generations, but also, the question of how the communities ensure that these cultural practices do not disappear. Chapter five delves into the culture of knitting communities and is divided into a section on crafting circles, which meet regularly, and a section on fiber festivals.

The use of patterns for knitting is described in the sixth chapter. These patterns involve the language used in knitting, including specific terms that are applied to the actions of the knitter, such as casting on and knit and purl stitches. The first section of the sixth chapter is based on the question “how do you use patterns?” to discover the impact patterns have on individual's practices. In the next section artisans are asked about the source of their patterns in order to understand the platforms by which craftspeople transfer

information. The third section in the sixth chapter came about as a result of this question because I found the internet played a significant role in the sharing of crafting knowledge in modern day society and that it had a role in the continuation of knitting. The ideology of knitters is covered in the seventh chapter by asking why they are interested in their craft in the first section and examining the concept of knitting as gendered toward women in the second section.

The final chapter concludes with the findings of this research and explains the relevance of this study. This study intends to determine if the knitting community is diminishing or stagnant by using interviews with knitters to show indications of the spread of knowledge and levels of people's involvement in knitting as well as examining the elements of knitting culture that affect the community's growth.

## **Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework**

This study of the continuation of knitting in America was influenced by other studies of spreading ideologies or training people in craft making. Although there are not very many studies of knitting groups specifically, studies have been conducted of crafting communities and communities of practice in general. These studies focus on such diverse aspects as the benefits of crafting communities for older generations and the nature of crafts as gendered as well as the influence of groups. Studies of elderly crafting communities completed by Maidment and Macfarlane (2011) introduce the topic of the identities crafting communities help to create. Another researcher, Mendoza-Denton (2008) focuses on community identity and the elements group members share including ideology and language. Kokko (2009) contests that the crafting activities performed in knitting communities are gendered and thus crafting knowledge is limited to a very specific group. Appadurai (1986) defines groups in terms of producers and consumers. He argues that the knowledge needed to create objects is limited to producers and it can be varied. In addition, he suggests that producers share a common ideology as well as knowledge about how to create a specific object.

The concept of a common ideology and production knowledge leads one to ask questions about how this knowledge is passed from one person to another. An anthropologist who was interested in the continuation of practices over time was Minar (2001), who studied evidence of spinning methods from marks on pottery shards in the South East United States. There are many different ways of transferring knitting knowledge including in person and through written patterns, but do written patterns transfer the ideology of the craft? The best way to answer this question is to study the knitters in person.



This thesis will draw on the body of research previously discussed, but it will differ through its focus on the dissemination of knowledge and ideologies of knitting both inside and outside the community. In addition, this thesis draws on Bourdieu's (Moore 2012:299-300) theory of praxis which emphasizes how individual actions are influenced by the individual's creativity and societal norms. It will not only consider the ways in which a craftsperson follows the techniques of knitting as they learned them, but also how they experiment with patterns and stitches. This approach recognizes the fact that knitting involves the socialization of individuals, but also can be developed uniquely through individual action (Moore 2012:293). Even if an artisan knitter follows a pattern exactly, the tension of the fabric they knit, the color of yarn, and any mistakes they make will still be unique and allow for creativity.

Craftspeople can be influenced in their work by local knitting communities, which could be considered communities of practice. Mendoza-Denton (2008) mentions the theory of communities of practice, in her ethnography of Latino groups in California, which can also be applied to knitting communities. Mendoza defines communities of practice as "communities of co-present, joint engagement centered on specific activities that provide us with structured action, and through which we craft social meaning." (Mendoza-Denton 2008: 210). Put differently, communities of practice are a group of people working together on the same activities which define them. One aspect of collective identity can be the language used within the group. For example, in knitting, there are certain terms used to define specific actions such as "knit," "purl," or "cast on." Artisans would know that to "knit" or "purl" a stitch is to insert the needle into the stitch and wrap the yarn around the needle a

certain way and to “cast on” is to create the first row of stitches. Even when craftspeople are not in direct contact with each other, a knitter can create the same type of object by following the directions another artisan wrote down. These directions, which are called patterns, are written using terms that knitters can decode. Despite the distance between members of the knitting community, they still share a common knowledge. This study intends to examine the extent to which crafting groups are considered communities of practice in which members' actions are affected by the group.

A study by Maidment and Macfarlane (2011) mentions how the women created an individual identity through their craft. We are often defined by what we do. For example, when somebody is forced to describe themselves, the person often describes their work, hobbies or interests. For the women described in the study, knitting is a very important activity and is, therefore, part of their identity. They carry their identity as artisans into the world, outside the crafting community. Maidment and Macfarlane argue that the women create this identity through accomplishments in their craft and physical objects attributed to them (2011:703-4). So when a hand crafter gives a handmade gift to another person they give a reminder of themselves with the object. Put differently, they gain status as accomplished knitters through the things they produce (Ibid). This connects to Bourdieu's theory of praxis because these women shape their identity through their actions. The objects they create through their actions are evidence of their unique identity as well as evidence of the way other artisans have influenced them.

Researchers such as Kokko (2009) have chosen to look at crafting communities largely through the lens of gender. The learning of crafts, such as knitting, is inherently

gendered and textile crafts are still gendered for women according to Kokko (2009). One piece of evidence for this argument is the transfer of knowledge of making crafts from one female family member to another and, consequently, socializing the girls in gender norms (Kokko 2009:726). Although in the early days, men knit as part of guilds or for utilitarian purposes, knitting may currently be stigmatized as a woman's craft. Despite these stereotypes, men belonging to knitting communities are not unheard of. Recently there has been an increase in patterns designed for and by male knitters. While my study of knitting will not be focused entirely on gender, it will be influenced by the insights of Kokko and the scholars who look at knitting as a gendered practice.

Other anthropologists have been interested in the results of knowledge being transferred over time. Minar (2001) wrote an article that gives insight into continuing practices from an archaeological perspective. Her research on spinning shows how practices have been taught and learned in the past, which can explain some of the factors involved in teaching crafts, such as knitting, today. Minar (2001) did a study of pottery sherds with spun cord impressed in them. She examined the distribution of the two ways cord can be spun to find that the way the cord was spun tended to stay the same over time in most sites, although changes occurred in pottery making in those cultures during that time period (Minar 2001:386). Minar proved that how spinners were taught influenced the way they spun rather than other factors including the method of spinning or handedness by interviewing modern spinners (Minar 2001:388). She argued that “most spinners interviewed did customarily spin in a particular direction. When asked why they chose to spin in that direction, most spinners indicated that it was the way they had learned to spin

or that it was the 'traditional' way to spin" (Minar 2001:388). Thus Minar shows that spinning direction or the method used to spin was based on custom rather than other factors. Therefore a particular attribute of material culture is maintained over time by the continued participation of individuals in the practice and the learning of the practice by new spinners (Minar 2001:392-3).

Minar, (2001), suggested that the way spinning was performed was shared between communities of practice rather than by traditional defined cultural groups. She cited a study by Newton of two communities in Brazil that were considered part of a cultural group by most standards but spun cord in different directions (Minar 2001:391). She showed that spinning was based on communities of practice because the women did not start spinning in similar directions until there was intermarriage between the two groups and women of one tribe joined the spinning community of the other (Minar 2001:391). Minar argued that in these communities the importance lied with the action rather than the result of the spinning which was obtained by the action (2001:392-3). She says, "it is not the appearance of the teacher's product but rather teacher's actions that are observed, imitated, and eventually learned" (Minar 2001:393-4). Minar showed this by noting that "several of participants in the spinning survey were unaware that their spinning produced physical evidence of the direction in which they spun, but they were conscious of having learned to spin in a particular way" (Minar 2001:393-4).

Minar mentioned that how the skill is taught can affect how the student learns. In her study of the transfer of spinning knowledge she said, "these experiments also demonstrate, however, that without specific instruction (i.e., "do it this way"), individual preferences can

have an effect on the direction of spin and twist” (Minar 2001:396). The different ways knitters learn could affect how closely they imitate those they learned from. As with other cultural activities, handcrafters learn to knit using different means and methods: some artisans learn to knit from books, others from online videos, and some learn from individuals or knitting groups. Studying how craftspeople learn knitting gives insight into the ability of people to learn from written materials rather than other people.

After the learner has acquired the craft, Minar argues, they continue to perform the task the same way (Minar 2001:395). She says that the brain would have to work much harder to do the same task a different way because it would have to consciously think about the process rather than doing it automatically (Minar 2001:395). More research into modern artisans’ teaching methods would be helpful for researchers like Minar. She was able to see the results of social practice through physical objects, but it was necessary for her to talk to modern spinners to understand how the activity was conserved.

Furthermore, through the study of how individuals learn to knit, this study finds the benefits of using different methods to teach cultural practices. Many people have traditional activities they want to pass on to future generations and this thesis explores how cultural practices are shared. In *The Social Life of Things*, Appadurai (1986:42) argues that there is often a disparity between the knowledge of the producer and the knowledge of the consumer of a commodity in societies where distinct groups produce the commodities. He argues that “in most societies, such production knowledge is subject to some discontinuity in its social distribution, either by simple criteria of age or gender by more complex criteria distinguishing artisan households, castes, or villages, or by even more complex divisions of

labor ...” (Ibid). Put differently, the knowledge of the craft, in this case, knitting, is not widely known by those who are not themselves knitters. An effect of this study is that it could help to inform the society in general and the consumers of knitted products about the production of knitting.

This study focuses on the transfer of knowledge between the producers in my study. Appadurai mentions the unique nature of production knowledge:

*“The technical knowledge required for the production of primary commodities (grains, metals, fuels, oils) is much more likely to be standardized than the knowledge required for secondary or luxury commodities, where taste, judgment, and individual experience are likely to create sharp variations in production knowledge.” (Appadurai 1986:42)*

Knitted products would fall under the category of secondary commodities or luxury commodities, which as Appadurai points out, can vary considerably in the methods used to produce them. Knitting is a secondary commodity because it requires primary commodities including wool or yarn to create. The primary commodities that Appadurai mentions (oil, metals, and grains) are often produced in vast quantities, which would necessitate efficient production and is a possible cause of the standardized knowledge of production. Knitting, on the other hand, is not produced for quantity, but rather for the unique qualities of an object created by an individual, which allows more freedom for the diversity of production knowledge. Maidment and Macfarlane (2011) identify the unique characteristics of hand crafting items. They suggest that objects made by hand have a symbolic meaning or have a “gift” within them and they give the example of the gift of warmth from socks (Maidment

and Macfarlane 2011:704). The recipient of the gift not only receives a physical object, but an intangible gift imbued with the beliefs and ideology of the knitter as well.

Another aspect of the knowledge shared between producers of hand-knitted objects is the ideology. Despite the diversity of knowledge in secondary commodities, producers still share some ideals. Appadurai mentions that “with all commodities, whether primary or not, technical knowledge is always deeply interpenetrated with cosmological, sociological, and ritual assumptions that are likely to be widely shared” (1986:42). While studying learning and teaching production knowledge in a knitting community, this study seeks to better understand the “cosmological, sociological, and ritual assumptions” which knitters share. This study intends to learn the foundations of the culture of knitting by studying these assumptions or the ideology of knitting.

This chapter has examined how different theories relate to or consider the topic of knitting. Knitters are using Bourdieu's theory of praxis, knowingly or unknowingly by creating an object through personal action which can be influenced by groups or other artisans. The subject of this thesis was compared to the research of others, including Maidment and Macfarlane, who give insights into the identity women gain with participation in a crafting group. Mendoza-Denton's research influenced me with her concept of “communities of practice” although the community she studied was quite different from the focus of this research. Kokko focused on how gender was constructed through training in crafts. Although this study does not focus on the involvement of gender in crafts, gender could play a very important role in the ideology and concepts surrounding knitting. Individuals in the knitting communities also belong to the larger community of knitters, which shares

similar knowledge and ideas. Individuals can connect to the larger community through patterns found in books and websites rather than face-to-face. Appadurai focuses on the knowledge of groups that create objects, such as the community of knitters, by looking at the objects themselves. He argues that producers share a common knowledge which is often not shared with those who consume the products. Knitting should be studied academically so that everyone can be informed about the procedures and ideologies of those who create clothes and other objects.

This thesis takes a different approach because it seeks to study how artisans learn knitting in order to shed light on the ability of people to spread their craft culture by learning face-to-face. The task of anthropologists is to record everyday cultural practices with the view of understanding them and preserving them. Studying an activity learned from other people or books could show anthropologists how the records they create can be used by people to perform the specific activity and renew it in their culture for the benefit of the larger community. The need for scholarship about the importance of preserving the unique practices of social groups, such as knitting groups is underscored by the fact that certain individuals have special family patterns that may be lost if they are not captured and written down. It is for this reason that studying the differences between those that learn from others and those that learn from books could show if there is anything lost in the interpretation of words and pictures into a physical act. This thesis not only seeks to address the question of how we pass on our cultural heritage especially within the crafting community but it will also add to the knowledge of the under-examined craft of knitting. It will give knitters and those who do not knit more knowledge about the methods of teaching the craft and how that



affects what is learned as well as the culture and ideology of craftspeople. Knitting and other crafts need to be researched thoroughly because they are often underestimated as a part of society and a part of our culture.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The aim of this research was discovering the methods used to teach knitting and the culture and ideology that were shared among artisans, along with the many factors contributing to the continuation of the practice. The research for this study was conducted from June to September of 2016 in environments where craftspeople are often found such as fiber arts festivals, spinning circles, and a yarn shop. The research involved in this project included observations of the activities and social interactions that occurred in a knitting community. The knitting circle I attended met in a small local yarn shop in a small town in Polk County, Oregon, once a week for about three hours. There were often between five and eight people there, gathered on couches in the corner of the shop. In the shop, there were books, yarn, and patterns for sale. There were also a few tables with chairs around them with tools on them such as the skein winder. This study involved observations of how individuals knit in groups in order to gain a better understanding of different cultural practices in knitting.

Using the snowball method to gather informants from the primary contacts made at this knitting group, I went to events and other communities they knew about to find knitters to interview. The research was conducted by interviewing knitters individually with a series of questions designed to learn more about the way they learn and their involvement in the knitting community. Additionally, informants were also found at events such as the Black Sheep Gathering, Worldwide Knit in Public Day, the Wren Spin-in and the Oregon Flock and Fiber Festival which were brought to my attention by the members of the main knitting group. A total of nineteen artisans were interviewed in this study. A variety of gatherings

were attended in order to compare the interactions of craftspeople in different types of groups. Events and groups attended included Worldwide Knit in Public Day on June eighteenth, the Black Sheep Gathering on June twenty-fifth, the Yaquina Fiber Arts Guild on July sixteenth, the Wren Spin-in on July twenty-third, the Salem Handspinners on August sixth, the Salem Mill Stream Knitting Guild on August twenty-fifth, and Oregon Flock and Fiber Festival on September twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth. Some of these gatherings were guild meetings of communities which belonged to the North West Regional Spinners Association and they had a similar structure in their meetings. I was introduced by the leader of the group so the handcrafters would understand the purpose of my presence.

In this study, interviewees were given pseudonyms to protect their identity in alphabetical order based on the order they were interviewed. The first interviewee called Abbey in this study was the main contact who mentioned other communities and was part of the main knitting circle. The person called Barbara in this study was the first person interviewed at the Knit in Public Day in Albany along with Candace and Daisy. Edith, the next person interviewed, was part of the main group and she was interviewed before the circle met on June twenty-third. Fay, also a member of the main knitting group, was interviewed while traveling to the Black Sheep Festival on June twenty-fifth. The next event where knitters were interviewed was a meeting of the Yaquina Fiber Arts Guild on July sixteenth where I talked with those called Gabe, Haley, Ida, and Jackie. At the Wren Spin In, on July twenty-third, Karen, Lacey, Mabel, Natalie, Octavia, and Paige were interviewed. Those called Rachel, Sabrina, Tabitha and Valerie were interviewed at the meeting of the Salem Handspinners on August sixth.

Individual knitters were interviewed at events and groups while gathered in circles and working on their own projects. Potential informants were found by choosing craftspeople that were not engrossed in conversations and seemed to be at easier stopping points in their work. The informant was introduced to the project and reviewed the consent form. The interviews were structured by asking knitters questions about how they learned and who taught them, whether they knit in public, how long they had been knitting, how they determined which projects to work on, what they do with the objects they create, and why they knit. One purpose of these questions was to find out if certain artisans tended to rely on written patterns more than others. An additional purpose of these questions was to better understand the ideology behind the craft including why individuals knit, and their understanding of why knitting is still part of American culture as well as discussions of their interactions with people who see them knit. Another aspect considered in this study was the final purpose of the items craftspeople make.

A few of the informants answered the questions directly and succinctly, but many of them had stories that related to the questions or stories which were important to their lives and their knitting experiences. Many answered the question “how did you learn to knit?” when the question posed to them was about how long they had been knitting, and a few asked me the same question after they asked if I was a knitter, which shows that this was a relevant question for them. For each individual artisan, this study considered whether knitting and working with wool was passed down from generation to generation or if it was learned from a different source. It also considered the influence of classes, workshops, online patterns and instruction, patterns from other sources and the artisan’s participation in craft

communities and knit along projects. These techniques provided a way to understand the cultural ideas surrounding knitting in rural Oregon, especially the Willamette Valley.

## **Chapter 4: Transferring the Knowledge of Their Craft**

### How Knitters Learned Their Craft

The main reason that knitting has continued to exist in present-day America is that artisans continue to initiate new craftspeople into the knitting culture and share their techniques with other handcrafters.

The two most common methods of right handed knitting in America are Continental knitting or Picking done with the yarn in the left hand and English knitting or throwing done with the yarn in the right hand. Even within these two main types, knitters may hold the yarn and manage it slightly differently with more or less tension. There is also left-handed knitting. Handcrafters are taught to use one method when they first learn and they often continue to use that method throughout their life. People can be introduced to knitting in a variety of ways and through different relationships. In the interviews, artisans were asked when and how they learned to knit. They mentioned learning to knit from a variety of sources including family, friends, magazines, classes and in school.

People learning knitting for the first time often learned from a family member such as their mother or grandmother. Ten of the nineteen craftspeople interviewed mentioned learning from a female family member. It was surprising to find that about half of the knitters mentioned learning from a family member when there are so many methods people can use to learn to knit. Six of these artisans mentioned being taught by their grandmother, including Daisy and Jackie. Daisy started knitting as a child and has continued for 60 years. Daisy would sit in front of her grandmother mesmerized by her knitting, so she asked her

grandmother to teach her to knit. By showing an interest in her grandmother's work, she was able to gain access to the knitting community.

For those taught by an older family member, they often knit the way their relatives showed them and perpetuate the tradition that way. Jackie's Scottish grandmother taught her to knit using the throwing method. Jackie casts on the way her grandmother taught her, although it is different from the way other knitters cast on. Jackie suggested her way of casting on is not noticeable and people should do whatever works for them. In this way, Jackie carried on the traditional methods of her family rather than employing the craft the way those around her knit.

Handcrafter's descriptions of how they learned knitting shows how the culture and activity are transferred from one generation and person to another. It shows how the community grows. As with the spinners Minar examined in her study of cordage, knitters tend to work the basic stitches and hold the yarn the way they learned initially (2001:394).

Three of the artisans who said they were taught by a family member were taught by their mother including Sabrina. Sabrina has been knitting since she was four or five, which has been the last 85 years. Her mother, who was a sock knitter, taught her. She uses the throwing method to knit because that is how her mother taught her. In her family, handicrafts were utilitarian. Her mother had a farm and in the evening the girls would gather together and spin to make yarn for woven table linens and sheets. Sabrina continues the traditions of knitting that she learned from her family. Gabe was taught by a family member other than his mother or grandmother. Gabe was taught to knit by his wife 45 years ago

when he mentioned he was bored. Although no handcrafters mentioned learning from a male member of the family, that could change in the future as more men knit.

A few craftspeople learned from friends or from other sources. Five of the knitters interviewed in this study mentioned learning from a friend, a class, at school, or from a mix of sources. Karen learned to knit in the late 1960's when she was in college. She was self-taught from magazines and a friend who knew a little about knitting. She also took classes at a yarn shop. She said she learned despite making mistakes early on. Those that learned to knit initially from books and magazines have a different learning experience because they do not receive all of the peripheral information those that are taught to knit in person receive. They have to infer from pictures how to complete the task without seeing their teacher's hand movements and with instruction that is not able to respond to their work. For those who learn in person, they receive additional instruction or reinforcement of the demonstration while they are practicing the craft for the first time (Minar 2001:396). As Minar pointed out this could affect their work as artisans with less instruction worked more freely rather than strictly as they were taught (2001:396). Knitters, such as Karen, may seek out additional help from friends or knitting groups after finding initial instruction in books and magazines. Natalie is another example of a knitter who did not learn from a family member; instead, she learned to knit at a yarn shop. Nobody in her family knits or is artistic, so that is her niche. Natalie thought of knitting as generational, especially on farms. In her experience, the segment of knitters that is under the age of 50 comes from a background without crafts.



Five of the knitters in this study first learned at a young age then put it aside, only to pick it up later as an older adult. Some of them learned to knit from different sources the second time depending on the resources they have available to them. These knitters continue the tradition of knitting, even when they do not knit throughout their lives because they choose to go back to it later. Craftspeople may have many reasons why they start knitting again. In Fay and Mabel's case, they needed something to do during the periods they were required to wait. Fay was taught early on by her grandmother, at age 4 or 5, but she did not knit very much. Fay resumed knitting again during nursing training while she was on call because she spent a lot of time waiting and everybody at her work knit. She also worked on handicrafts while watching her children play on the playground. Another reason she knit when her children were young was that it was cheaper to buy yarn to make mittens for her children than to buy mittens already made and in that way, it was also utilitarian. Currently, she knits because it is an addiction. While the reasons for knitting changed throughout Fay's life, she continued to find new reasons to knit. Mabel learned to knit 42 years ago, in 3rd grade. She took a break and resumed knitting again in graduate school when she was doing research following turtles because she needed something to do while observing them. She said she knits everywhere and everyday, anytime she is sitting. These two craftspeople started knitting again because they found it to be an occupying activity during times of waiting and it allowed them to be part of the knitting community, from which they could continue to learn.

A few of the handcrafters mentioned having multiple people who influenced their knitting during the periods when they were learning to knit again, including Ida, Edith, and

Tabitha. Ida had multiple periods of her life in which she went back to knitting. Ida originally learned to knit swatches from her grandmother when she was 9. When Ida was in college she knit scarves then stopped for 10-15 years. The next time Ida picked it up again she started knitting sweaters for everybody. Her most recent stretch of knitting has lasted for more than ten years and has been influenced by patterns she found on Ravelry. Edith's mother taught her to knit when she was eight. She took a break from knitting then picked it back up again when she was pregnant with her first child. Her friend taught her to knit but she was left handed, so her mother re-taught her to knit. She said that it was her mother-in-law who had the most impact on her creative efforts because she was inspired by the crocheting, knitting, and quilting her mother-in-law did. These crafts were something they could share and brought them closer together. Another example of this phenomenon is Tabitha, whose grandmother taught her to knit and she learned to knit in school. Her grandmother would knit from pictures. Tabitha joined a knitting group in Salem, but she didn't know the names of the stitches or the patterns so she watched a video to learn the names of stitches. Tabitha used a variety of resources to learn about different aspects of knitting, by learning the basics from her grandmother and learning how to read patterns from videos and a knitting community. She was not the only craftsperson to use communities and friends to learn certain aspects of knitting. Abbey suggested that even now after she has already learned to knit she would want help working on certain projects such as a sweater. She would want a mentor to help her so that it would fit correctly.

A few artisans were influenced by crafting communities when involved in another craft which inspired them to start knitting. Artisans that were interested in crafts such as

spinning and crocheting were introduced to knitting later through those crafts, including Paige and Valerie. Paige started with crochet learned from her grandmother. She learned spinning when she went to a demo and was hooked on the craft for the past 26 years. After learning to spin, she learned to knit using the continental method from a class in Colorado. She has been knitting for 22 years. She went to a knitting class in Salem that would deconstruct projects and explain them to help new knitters. Valerie's mother, who crocheted granny squares without using patterns, taught Valerie to crochet as well as teaching her embroidery. At house meetings in college, everybody would knit. Valerie first learned to knit on her own because her mother only knew crochet. Her sister helped her to learn a little although she was picking it up at the time too. She also took a knitting class in Beaverton where she learned to work in the continental style. Valerie was an example of transitioning from only doing one craft to learning knitting as well.

Understanding the ways knitters learned originally and the people that influenced them throughout their lives can give insight into how to teach others skills. Additionally, this knowledge can inform the larger community about how knitting has continued into the present day and possible ways it could be continued into the future.

### Teaching Others

Knitters enjoy sharing their craft with other artisans and those who express an interest in knitting, thereby continuing and encouraging the growth of their craft. Some knitters transfer the knowledge of their craft to friends or family members and help them to get started. Others initiate beginning knitters or show specific techniques to more advanced

artisans. Many of the knitters interviewed emphasized the importance of passing on their craft to others.

Several of the handcrafters interviewed mentioned teaching people in their family or close friends their craft. Many of the artisans were taught by family members themselves and they carry on the tradition when they teach others. For example, Sabrina has a grandniece that is absorbed by knitting, crocheting, sewing and embroidery, which she taught to spin. The niece watched like a hawk while Sabrina was spinning and asked to try. Sabrina taught her and said her grand niece was like a professional when spinning for the first time. Sabrina helped her grand niece get more involved in spinning by giving her a box of wool and one of the spinning wheels her husband had made. The grand niece was so ecstatic that she cried. Sabrina acted as a conduit for her niece to learn a new craft and was so excited by her interest that she generously provided all of the materials that her niece needed.

Daisy was one of the knitters who emphasized the importance of teaching others her craft. She thought it was important to pass on knitting, which she showed by teaching her children and her friend's children the craft. Daisy enjoys the common interest shared with other knitters and once helped a new knitter she just met. Daisy's freely given knowledge helps the knitting community to expand.

Edith didn't mention teaching relatives to knit specifically, but she enjoys involving her family in her creations and exposing them to crafts in that way. She likes working with one of her grandchildren, who helps her to pick the yarn and buttons for her projects. Another activity in which she engages her family is dyeing yarn. She said that these

activities bring people together and create a memory. Edith exposing her family to crafts allows them to find out if they are interested in them. It is a first step to being involved in the craft community. In each of these cases, knitters teaching others show how the knitting community can grow and it shows the joy knitters have in sharing their knowledge.

A few artisans interviewed wanted to reach out to a new generation of knitters that are not currently part of their network of family and friends by teaching children to knit in the classroom. Ida would appreciate it if they were teaching spinning, weaving, and knitting in school. Once she taught thirty-five fourth graders crafts because their teacher didn't like doing messy art projects. Ida volunteered for an hour once a week and did a variety of crafts with the classroom despite preferring to teach people on an individual basis. In addition, she was part of a knitting community where she was one of the people who would take turns helping the group. Ida thought teaching crafts to children was so important that she overcame her own reservations about teaching a class. Octavia's son is a fourth grade teacher and he asked her to do a demonstration for pioneer day. The fourth graders enjoyed her demonstration because they got to card, spin and weave little things, so they were involved in the whole process of creating something from fibers. Jackie and Lacey also mentioned helping to teach classes knitting at their children's schools. Those who taught classes at schools help to spread knitting and other crafts by exposing children to them when they may not have been exposed to crafts by their family.

In addition to teaching beginning knitting classes to children, some artisans teach more advanced knitters specific techniques. Lacey has volunteered to teach classes at a knitting retreat on the topics of magic loop knitting, shadow knitting, and interlock knitting

because those were things craftspeople suggested they wanted to learn. At retreats, handcrafters can increase their knowledge of knitting and connect with other artisans. The classes Daisy has taught experienced artisans were mostly focused on trying to read charts and make cables so knitters are not intimidated by them. Karen has taught classes on shawl knitting and knitting socks on two needles. She also mentors knitters who do not understand the pattern they are working from and answers questions for people who need help.

Whether in a formal setting such as class or a paid or volunteer position, knitters are open with sharing their knowledge. When someone comes to her booth, Natalie gives them advice as well as helping them as they purchase yarn. Craftspeople can continue to learn from each other about certain techniques or help each other to solidify the knitting process in order to expand their knowledge. Artisans are interested in sharing their knowledge of the basics or their specialties in knitting so others can enjoy the activity. In this way, they are eager to induct new members into the knitting community. This helps the community to continue into the future and expand.

#### Public Reactions to Knitting

Knitters are excited to share their craft with others in many ways, including exposing people to knitting by doing it in public. They find that they knit in their downtime wherever they are, whether in public places or in private, in groups or by themselves. Handcrafters were asked whether they knit in public and about the reactions of the people around them when they do so. When they knit in public, people react to their activity in a variety of ways. Sometimes people choose to interact with them directly about the knitting by asking questions or making comments, while other people just watch.

There is an event called World Wide Knit in Public Day dedicated to knitting in public. The event was organized through a website in order for solitary knitters to find other artisans in their community (About 2017). I went to this gathering at the Saturday Albany Farmers Market with a contact from the local knitting group I had been attending. Once in a while, someone would pass by and see the sign about Worldwide Knit in Public Day and ask the knitters questions or talk about people they knew that knit. In this way, knitting was made more conspicuous. It was also an opportunity for knitters to connect with other artisans they knew. Most of the knitters at this gathering knew at least one other person in the group if not most of the people there.

Often artisans interact with strangers in public places on an informal basis because bystanders take an interest in their knitting. These interactions allow knitters to expose people to their craft and they allow curious people to query knitters in order to learn more. For example, Ida said that the people who react to her knitting are either other knitters or those curious about what she is doing. Additionally, Ida found that people reacted to her doing crafts in public even when she was not the only one knitting. Ida met at a coffee shop with a member of the knitting group she belonged to and they would hand spin there. According to Ida, the men in the room would watch and say “that’s cool,” or “let me explain it” or “I know how that works,” and the women would glance at them out of the corner of their eyes without saying anything. She has had multiple experiences where people mistake one craft for another. For example, Ida said that sometimes people ask “You’re weaving right?” when she is knitting. People who look at her knitting may confuse it with other

processes, but when they ask questions or approach her it gives them an opportunity to become more informed about the craft.

Many artisans feel comfortable knitting in public places. Some of the craftspeople interviewed described knitting in public places such as at the doctor's office, at church business meetings, in the car, at the laundromat, while waiting in line, while waiting for their children, at restaurants, at concerts, at their children's sporting events and while camping. Karen said that while she is knitting in public some people ask her questions and look at what she is doing and others ignore her. She described a time when she was knitting at an airport and a Japanese lady came up and asked if she was knitting a baby sweater for her grandchild. Karen appreciated that the lady acknowledged and recognized her craft. Both Lacey and Paige experienced that when they knit in public the most common reaction was people who asked what they were making. Once when Paige was spinning in the observation car of a train to North Dakota, a man asked to take a video of her spinning and was amazed that someone would spin yarn when it could be bought instead. This interaction shows that craftspeople may have different values than other Americans because they value making clothes and other items by hand instead of buying into concepts of consumerism and wanting things already made. When Rachel knits in public, she thinks that the stereotypes of knitting change because people are exposed to the fun she has with the craft and the beautiful fibers she uses. These interactions with the public give people outside the knitting community the opportunity to expand their conceptions of knitting.

One person interviewed said that for them knitting in public has become part of her identity and this is recognized by the people around her. Mabel spins or knits while watching



TV and during meetings at work and she knits in public at coffee shops and restaurants. Her friends call her “knits under the table.” She said that sometimes people think she is not listening while she is knitting but they usually do not say anything about it. She found that curious children ask questions and it starts conversations. They want to know whether she is crocheting or knitting and they want to know more about her actions. As Appadurai pointed out, the recipient of items made by craftspeople often does not have the same knowledge as those who made it (1986:42). In addition to seeing knitters in public, people are exposed to knitting by encountering hand crafted objects in their lives. Artisans introduce people to knitting by selling or giving away hand-knitted items or they wear them in public, showing pride in their handiwork. Abbey mentioned a friend that makes a living from handmade dolls and a goat dairy with a fiber arts studio in front. Abbey said the friend had a diversity of skills, so when times were tough she could do something else to add to her income. Another way handcrafters introduce the public to knitting is by having handmade objects in public. A very recent example of public exposure to hand knitting was the use of pink hats in the Women's March on Washington when thousands of hand-knit hats were worn by protesters. In the main knitting group I attended, someone brought up that yarn bombing (covering public places with hand-knitted or crocheted pieces of fabric, commonly including lampposts and trees) is very common all over the world. Edith mentioned that some people view knitting as an art form. As Strawn mentions there have been art exhibitions of handmade objects or knitting including the exhibit “Radical Lace and Subversive Knitting” (2007). People exposed to hand crafted objects are shown that knitting

is not obscure and only a thing of the past, because it still exists as an activity in which many artisans participate in modern times.

These interviews show that knitting is not only relegated to the private sphere of the home. Knitting in public places may inspire curiosity or other reactions in non-knitters because it has been associated with the private sphere in the past, although there have been periods of history where it was common to knit in public. Even during WWII, a period of time when knitting was common, there were those who criticized public knitters, including etiquette columnist Post who told knitters activities they should not do in public (Strawn 2007).

Hand-knitted objects are displayed in the public sphere when they are worn by knitters or their friends and family. Knitting can also be used as a visual political statement when a hand-knitted object is displayed as a form of art or when they are used for political demonstrations. All of these avenues make knitting more visible to those who are not currently part of the knitting community.

## **Chapter 5: Knitting Communities**

### Knitting Groups:

Historically, the introduction of knitting groups and public classes in places where yarn was distributed occurred at a time when knitting was extremely popular (Strawn 2007). The Great Depression might have been the main reason for the increase in knitting during that time, but some suggested that public classes encouraged the growth of knitting as well (Strawn 2007:Ch8). Knitters suggested that the number of yarn shops and fiber arts groups has also increased in the last 30 years. A greater number of yarn shops could be a cause of the growth of knitting or be an indication of it. Knitters enjoy being able to discuss their craft with other artisans so they can learn and share their own knowledge. Knitters can interact through groups that meet regularly or at events that only happen once a year.

I was able to discern some elements of knitting culture by observing knitting communities and how individuals in the groups interact with each other. Knitting can be performed in groups or as a solo activity but some knitters appreciate the community groups provide and they use it as a way to connect to other artisans. Craft communities are tangible representations of the wider knitting culture and provide opportunities for knitters to learn from one another in informal environments. My research involved regular attendance at one knitting group and visitations to other groups. Knitters were asked about additional groups that they attended as part of the interviews.

The main knitting group I observed gathered weekly in a local yarn shop. They sat on couches and chairs in a semicircle in the corner of the shop. The circle was small enough that generally the conversation was held as a whole group, but sometimes people broke into

smaller side conversations while the rest of the group continued their conversation. When one person was talking, everyone seemed to be listening but they usually had their eyes on their work when they were actively knitting. They might glance up at the person speaking, back talk (making noises of agreement or indications that they were listening) or add to the conversation, but most people's eyes were on their knitting. Some handcrafters paused in their knitting when they were more actively involved in the conversation. Often the knitters would count stitches to themselves or say the pattern out loud when they needed to concentrate because with more difficult projects it was easy to make mistakes or lose their concentration. This was considered a social norm in this group and it did not interrupt or distract from the main conversation and it was not considered impolite. It was also a social norm to have silent pauses where nobody talked and everyone knit without it being awkward because they were occupied with their craft.

The normal protocol of conversing with others in American culture such as making eye contact, trying to fill pauses, and not talking to oneself was not followed because the knitters divided their attention between the conversation and their knitting. The craftspeople had a shared understanding of how to talk or listen while knitting, so that in this community the speaker knew they were heard while others were knitting and listening at the same time.

In community discussions, there were several patterns. Members of the main knitting group shared about the projects they were working on and designs they were using. They freely shared the knowledge they had gained about tools or techniques or creative

ideas for problem-solving related to knitting. For example I observed, one knitter asking for advice on how to decrease the crown of a hat. In this way, the knitters in the group could learn from other members and be influenced by their designs and work. However, I observed they did not all knit the same way. Compared to the historical communities of practice described by Minar (2001) which were mostly homogeneous in the way they spun, knitters were taught in a variety of styles since the people who taught them did not generally come from the same community. Knitters were influenced by the people who originally taught them the basic method, but they were also influenced by the knitting community to which they currently belonged.

The behavior of group members was affected by their access to supplies in the yarn shop where the knitting circle was held. They shared some tools, such as wires for blocking and shaping knitted objects, and a skein winder which stayed in the shop. Sharing materials is another way they formed a community and made the shop a communal space. The shop was also a source for materials. While the circle was gathered, sometimes group members would wander around the shop looking at yarn. Other times they asked the owner if she had specific items in the shop or if she could order them. The shop owner sat and talked as part of the group rather than staying behind the counter. She got up if someone wanted to buy something and greeted customers who were not part of the group. She also greeted group members when they entered, but in a familiar way.

Once I arrived early to the main knitting circle, and a group member was alone so I was able to interview her and ask her questions about something I had heard being

discussed in the group called Knit Alongs. She described a Knit Along as a project that starts with a pattern that someone suggests and others like, which teaches them a new technique. They all knit the same pattern at the same time as a group project rather than one person teaching the project as a class. Each person works on their own version of the design with their own materials. Because they are using the same pattern as a group they can help each other with the project depending on their individual strengths. She mentioned that usually there is a date designated for starting and completing the project, but with this group, ending dates were flexible. They were not actively working on a Knit Along while being observed, but one person showed their finished project at one of the meetings. The person being interviewed mentioned that if the Knit Along is connected to a shop, people usually use materials bought in the shop. She articulated that shop owners often end up teaching patterns, but there were many advanced knitters in their group so teaching was unnecessary.

In interviews with two of the members of the main group, we discussed the group and knitting communities in general. Edith mentioned that some people use internet videos to learn techniques, rather than learning directly through a teacher at a yarn shop. Fay mentioned that they used to have a class at the shop that hosts the knitting group although they currently do not have one. Perhaps availability, as well as a person's preference, is a factor which plays a role in an artisans' decision to learn in person. Edith compared the use of quilting bees historically to knitting groups today because women can be creative and social at both types of gatherings. She noted that people open up more when they are

knitting something. She argued that the conversations they had at the knitting group were unlike the small talk she usually makes with other people. This was possibly the case because they were doing something with their hands while they were talking. The divided concentration of the knitter could allow them to focus less on filtering their thoughts and the progression of the conversation, so that conversation flows differently.

There were commonalities between the craft circles I observed and differences. All of the craft communities met in one circle with everyone facing each other, except for the Mill Stream Knitting Guild which gathered in circles around tables that they used for a craft project. This explains why knitting groups are sometimes referred to as "knitting circles." In a circular orientation, all of the people at group meetings could feel included because they could see everyone else. This was helpful in groups with "show and tell" sections because everyone could easily see the person sharing their work. In larger groups, spinners and knitters would talk mostly with their neighbors unless there was a point in which a group meeting was called. Both the Yaquina Fiber Arts Guild and the Mill Stream Knitting Guild had group meetings while they were gathered. During the meetings, they discussed business and news related to the group, future events, and they had a show and tell section. In the show and tell section, each artisan had the opportunity to share work they had finished or were working on. The Yaquina Fiber Arts Guild was part of the North West Regional Spinners Association (NwRSA). The NwRSA is a larger organization which has a conference each year, publishes a newsletter, and has members from Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Montana (<https://www.nwregionalspinners.org/Pages/about.php>). The Yaquina Fiber Arts Guild was

also different because they had a table set up for people to show their work in addition to the show and tell. As with the main knitting group, members of the Salem Hand Spinners still shared the projects they were working on with their friends, but on an informal basis. Except for the Albany Knit in Public day, the other knitting groups I visited were generally much larger than the main group I attended regularly. The Yaquina Fiber Arts Guild, the Salem Handspinners, and the Mill Stream Knitting Guild only met monthly and the Knit in Public Day was an annual event.

I was able to discuss the Yaquina Fiber Arts Guild with guild members Abbey, Gabe, Haley, Ida, and Jackie during the interviews. According to Abbey, the guild was originally started by weavers but they later included mostly spinners and knitters. Abbey, Haley, and Ida appreciated that this group had a show and tell portion where people could ask other knitters "how did you do that?" and see everyone's project, whether successful or not, and share their own work. Abbey noted that she liked this particular gathering because it is a happy gathering with just fiber artists and none of the people are uptight. Haley and Jackie mentioned feeling especially comfortable in this particular group in comparison to other types of communities. Jackie found the group she spins with very supportive, especially when times are tough. Gabe liked this community because it is a social gathering based around making things from fiber, where people are creating things at the same time as talking. Gabe found that new people come into the community all the time. The way this group is conducted makes it easier for new people to come, according to Abbey. Gabe mentioned that others come regularly and for some people, it was the main group gathering



in their lives. Perhaps the welcoming aspect of fiber arts groups, such as the Yaquina Fiber Arts Guild, is that people of all abilities are welcomed because they are interested in fiber arts in an inclusive and supportive community, rather than a competitive or judgmental group.

This group is a good representation of how a crafting group can fit into the wider community of Oregon knitters. Gabe pointed out that people don't realize that members of this community have connections to a lot of other groups, for example, one of the members (Mabel) is an organizer of the Black Sheep Gathering. Ida said she can hear about what is going on in the knitting community better by belonging to this group. Also, Haley mentioned they have access to the newsletter Loose Threads that is published by the NwRSA through this group. Some of these group members were also at other knitting events I attended.

The craftspeople I interviewed had many things to say about aspects of their knitting communities, as all but three were actively engaging in craft activities at their events or groups when I interviewed them. Gabe found there was a duality in knitting groups: performing the same task or “what we do” was what connected the group, but there were differences in what they got out of it. Some find the group a source of identity. According to Barbara, when artisans are attending a group it gets them back to themselves. Paige, Karen and others mentioned the groups they belong to were a source of inspiration and it was interesting viewing the things other artisans have made. Candace found that knitters were generally sharing and open to giving advice or helping fix a mistake. In crafting communities knitters can ask questions of other handcrafters about specific processes or how to make certain objects. They freely share their knowledge with the other knitters on the easiest way

to complete certain tasks. As Gabe said, knitting is based on the basic knit and purl stitches (which beginning knitters are taught), but they can be used a variety of ways. Artisans may explore new variations of these stitches, or use of color, or creation of an object they have not made before and for these aspects the knitter could be more greatly influenced by those in their current crafting circle. While handcrafters were inspired by each other in group gatherings, many opted to bring easier projects into their shared meeting times.

Often the projects that artisans chose to make depended on their current environment. Six interviewees said they would bring easier projects to knit for group gatherings. Barbara found that knitting was hard to do with other people because it takes a lot of concentration, so she enjoys spinning groups more. She said it's easy when counting stitches (to track the knitter's place in the pattern) to be over stimulated with other people around. Many artisans had the same problem and found it easy to mess up difficult projects during group meetings.

The execution of easy projects during knitting groups did not hamper discussion. Some artisans suggested that it was easier to interact in conversations while engaged in a craft because there was less focus on communication while half of their attention was on their knitting. Barbara also pointed out that people spinning or knitting in groups can be social without talking and still be part of the community. Barbara worked at a mental health institution and she created a crafting community by teaching the residents knitting. They could sit in silence and still be companionable if they wanted. Some of the people at the institution weren't usually communicative. At first, they communicated with just her and

later they communicated with each other through her. Knitting in these situations can bring people together into communities. Through observations of the main knitting group gathered at the shop, I learned that they acted as a supportive community. There was lots of laughter and jokes, but they shared serious topics too. They told each other about family, other hobbies, outdoor activities, work, and many topics not related to knitting but important to their lives. The community gathered because of knitting but their connection to fellow group members went deeper than only discussing the craft. Whether making deeper connections to friends through knitting groups or meeting strangers at festivals and immediately connecting with them through their craft, knitting can create relationships.

### Fiber Festivals

Festivals are similar to knitting groups because they are gatherings of knitters and other artisans. Festivals provide opportunities to network with artisans that have similar interests, to explore new crafts, and to buy materials. However, festivals are different from knitting groups in several ways. Festivals are larger gatherings, which only occur once a year and often last several days. They have vendors selling craft tools and materials. The three festivals which were part of this research were the Black Sheep festival, the Wren Spin-In, and the Oregon Flock and Fiber Festival. The knitters I interviewed also mentioned other festivals. Abbey said that there was an event in Prineville put on by the High Desert Woolgrowers. Barbara mentioned the nice festivals they have in Maryland. Each festival had many things in common, although there were some differences based on the environment and the interests of the organizers of that particular festival.

I found certain aspects of the festivals were similar and I could expect to find some variation of them at any other Oregon fiber festival. The festivals I attended lasted between one and four days. They were often much larger gatherings than the knitting groups but the size could vary. The larger festivals took place at fairgrounds, likely because those locations had a lot of space and barns for animals. The festivals had knitting and spinning circles like those found in knitting groups, but usually, there were multiple circles rather than the one big circle often found at knitting groups. They often had vendors selling materials for all kinds of fiber arts including wool fleeces and yarn, spinning wheels, drop spindles, and items for felting. At the festivals, it was also common to find at least one vendor selling food. Vendors were also selling other products from sheep and goats including soap made from goat milk. At the festivals, there was music, classes, demonstrations, competitions, and animals that have coats which are used for fiber arts. The scope of the festivals went far beyond knitting into spinning, felting, weaving, and taking care of animals, working with different types of materials, dyeing, lace tatting, crocheting, and many other crafts. The types of animals at the festival depended on the rules of the festival, but there were always sheep and often goats, rabbits, and alpaca and their fibers as well as silk. The booths and events at the festivals focused on natural fibers rather than man-made fibers.

Most natural fibers are bought at yarn stores owned by fiber artists, online directly from the people processing the fibers, or in person at festivals and from the farms. People buying directly from the farmers may even get to see the animal the fleece came from and learn its name. In this way, people can be even more connected to the entire process of creating clothes from sheep to finished product.

The first festival which was part of this study was the Black Sheep Gathering in Eugene which lasted from June twenty-fourth to twenty-sixth. I attended on June twenty-fifth. In the main building, they had vendors, competitions, an information booth and most of the main activities including spinning circles. The wool judging was held in a smaller building across the parking lot and the animals were in a building attached to the main structure. There were also vendor booths and knitters outside the main building. One thing I immediately noticed while walking around the main building of the Black Sheep Gathering was that it was a woman dominated gathering. There were male vendors and festival goers, but it was shocking to see a crowded gathering of so many women and it struck me that it is not a common occurrence in society to see such a large gathering of mostly women.

At this festival, there was a definite emphasis on sheep's wool especially breeds which are naturally colored, although they did have a small section of Alpaca products. The judges described the qualities of the wool as they judge the fleeces based on "handspinning quality and character, stressing cleanliness, strength and uniformity" (Wool, Mohair and Alpaca Show and Sale 2017). Those attending the judging could learn more about the valued aspects of wool and the differences between different breeds. Abbey mentioned that some artisans dye fibers while others try to find the natural colors of wool such as brown, silver, black, honey, and creamy white. Colored wool has been the focus of this gathering since its inception.

Mabel was one of the organizers of the festival and told me about its' history and organization. She said that the Black Sheep Gathering is a fiber festival that has been going on for forty-two years. Originally the festival was a one-day potluck but over the years it has

grown to a three-day festival (Black Sheep Gathering - the Movie 2009). The fiber at the festival comes from colored sheep, goats, and alpacas. Mabel said that this year there were forty-five to fifty workshops about all kinds of crafts, techniques, and animals. She mentioned that there were one hundred twenty vendors and four or five hundred animals and fleeces. She argued it is considered the best fleece show in the country and added that it is completely volunteer run. There were competitions at the festival including the sheep to shawl competition, and fleece and sheep competitions. In the sheep to shawl competition, artisans card, spin, and weave cleaned unprocessed wool in teams at the festival. According to the Black Sheep Gathering website, all of the work for the competition must be done by hand and, "teams may bring a light as the only electrical equipment allowed" (Fiber Arts & Yarn Show 2017). The mission of the festival is to spread the knowledge of colored wool as well as supporting fiber arts (Black Sheep Gathering 2017). Mabel got involved with the Black Sheep festival in 1992 when she attended. She gradually became more and more involved by entering competitions, winning a prize, and volunteering until she ended up helping with the organization of the festival. Paige also mentioned that once in a while she enters knitting and spinning competitions such as the ones at Black Sheep.

The second festival I attended was the Wren Midsummer Spin In. It was held on July twenty-third, at Wren's community hall. This event was like the Black Sheep festival except on a much smaller scale. There were only about 25 vendors selling yarn, fleeces, and tools compared to over a hundred vendors at Black sheep and it only lasted one day. The festival was not highly publicized as most of the publicity was word of mouth. There were vendors inside the building and outside, as well as a knitting/spinning circle inside and outside. Since

the weather was sunny the circle outside was more popular. There was also an old-time string band playing and a food station. Outside, there were a few animals including an alpaca and a few rabbits. I interviewed some of the knitters in the larger circle and observed their interactions. The knitters and spinners in the circle talked to the people next to them and sometimes had larger discussions as a group. When discussing the Wren Spin in, Abbey said she liked that at the festival she was just able to focus on fiber and forget everything else for a while. They had a place for demonstrations and classes directly outside the building with places for people to sit on hay bales. Some of the demonstrations included felting, working with silk and making and using drop spindles. Abbey talked about the demonstrations they had at the Wren Spin-In. At this particular event, they did not charge people to attend the demonstrations like they did at the other festivals. Some of the demonstrations were trying to push product such as silk. Other demonstrations were taught because the teacher wanted to do them and get others excited about their topics.

The final festival I attended on September twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth was the Oregon Flock and Fiber Festival (OFFF) in Canby, Oregon. Mabel mentioned that OFFF is similar to the Black Sheep Gathering but she said they had fewer animals. The festival had a building for sheep and goats and a different building for llamas and alpaca and a building for rabbits whose fur is called angora. It seemed that at this festival, they encouraged a greater variety of fibers from different animals rather than focusing mainly on sheep as they did at the Black Sheep Gathering. They had competitions and classes, spinning circles, and vendors both inside and outside. They had a section for food vendors and a stage for music. They had exhibits of prize winners and various crafts displayed by different guilds and groups in the

second story of one building. There were more families at this event and it was more welcoming to them with events such as a goat obstacle course which children could enjoy.

The reason for all of these festivals is to discuss different materials that people can use for crafts especially natural fibers. The most common material knitters mentioned was wool, although festivals had fibers of all kinds. Even within the category of wool, many people at festivals were interested in the differences between the wool of different breeds of sheep and goats. One thing Abbey mentioned about natural fibers was that they are a renewable resource. For example, sheep produce wool and they can be sheared year after year without hurting them. There could be multiple reasons for the interest in wool and hand-spun yarn in Oregon. The use of wool and other natural fibers for yarn could be related to Oregon's participation in the hand-spinning revival. One other reason for the use of natural fibers could be the weather; Abbey mentioned that wool was good for cold weather and in the wet climate of the Willamette Valley wool can keep people warm. Natalie found that in warmer places like Utah and California they sell more sparkly yarn and less hand spun yarn and wool. Festivals introduce knitters and spinners to using new materials such as angora or alpaca fiber. Gatherings of spinners can also encourage people to try to use unusual materials such as dog fur.

Knitters can be introduced to new fiber arts, in addition to other fibers, at festivals, where they can watch demonstrations of activities such as spinning and felting, and see the crafts other people have made. Often people sell the materials and tools needed to complete these projects at festivals, so it is easy for artisans to start a new project. Some knitters are curious and always interested in learning new things. Often knitters go back and forth from



spinning to knitting because they can spin yarn from a fleece and use the spun yarn to knit something, and then start the process over again for a new project. Ida was trying to get involved in spinning when she went to the Oregon Flock and Fiber Festival and saw people spinning there. She bought a spindle at the OFFF to practice drafting because people on Ravelry said it was easier to use than a spinning wheel. The person who sold her the spindle gave her a quick lesson. Three other spinners mentioned buying materials or being introduced to spinning through a festival. A few of the spinners mentioned becoming involved with the reintroduction of spinning in Oregon during the craft revival of the late 1970's and 1980's. Knitters grow as individuals and as a community by learning other related crafts such as spinning, crocheting, and felting and incorporating these crafts into their knitting. Sixteen of the people interviewed mentioned working on a craft other than knitting (see Chart 1). By incorporating other crafts such as crochet stitches into knitting patterns, knitters expand the possibilities of ways that they can create things and the variety of patterns. When knitters communicate and work with other artisans they can spread the use of knitting as well. Seven of the people interviewed mentioned being able to crochet. Indeed, knitting and crocheting are closely intertwined because crochet is a very similar process to knitting except that it is completed with one hooked needle instead of two.

other crafts	crochet	spinning	felting	dyeing	weaving	quilting	other
Abbey	yes	yes					
Barbara	started with crochet	yes					
Edith				yes			
Gabe	yes	yes					
Haley	yes						
Ida		yes			yes		
Jackie						yes	
Lacey		yes			yes		
Mabel		yes					
Natalie		yes					
Octavia	yes	yes	yes	yes			making rugs, dolls
Paige	yes	yes					embroidery
Rachel		yes					
Sabrina		yes					
Tabitha		yes			in the past		
Valerie	yes	yes					embroidery, machine punch knitting

**Chart 1: Involvement in Other Crafts**

Although fiber festivals only happen once a year, as Paige mentioned, they provide an opportunity for people at the festivals to interact with other members of the fiber arts community in spinning circles and at the booths. Barbara mentioned that sometimes knitters have friends they have made through knitting that they only see at festivals. In a conversation with Abbey, it came up that the knitting community is bigger than the outsiders realize. My attendance to multiple gatherings and groups made me realize this from my own experience as well. The Black Sheep Gathering and the Oregon Flock and Fiber festival had thousands of attendees. Knitters could learn from classes or demonstrations or just from discussing crafts with other people at the festival. They could be inspired by the work of others and share their own work with others. In this way, festivals are necessary for transmitting information about knitting and other crafts within the community.

The growth of interest in natural fibers crafts is evidenced by the growth of festivals in the last forty years. In Oregon, it started with the Black Sheep festival and grew to the Oregon Flock and Fiber Festival, the High Desert Wool Growers' market day, the Wren Spin In and other events. The increase in attendance at fiber festivals in Oregon shows an increase in the interest in handicrafts and possibly the growth of the knitting community.

There were several aspects of knitting culture which were present in the knitting communities explored in this section. Many knitters value being able to teach and learn from one another in craft communities and festivals by seeing and being inspired by the work that other artisans have done. Community gatherings are also a place for knitters to explore related crafts. Knitters appreciated having a supportive community where they could connect through the common interest of fiber arts. A possible reason group members felt comfortable in craft communities was because artisans of all abilities could be part of the same group with little judgment. This situation could encourage new members to join. Fiber festivals and knitting groups held at yarn shops provide opportunities for people to learn new crafts such as knitting and give them a place to find the materials they need to complete the craft. The principal reason for knitting and crafting culture is an appreciation of making objects by hand.

## **Chapter 6: Indirect Transfer of Knowledge between Knitters**

### Patterns

Patterns are a method for knitters to teach other artisans specific skills or ways of forming objects and inspire them even when they are not part of the same physical community. Patterns, or written instructions describing the stitches and techniques used to make a specific object or design, have been used for over a hundred years. The format of patterns has changed over the last century because the definition of stitches has become more standardized and specific. For example, in today's patterns different ways of increasing (adding stitches) or decreasing (lessening the number of stitches) are described with the exact stitches used, where in earlier patterns the directions just told the knitter to increase or decrease. Patterns allow for communication and instruction between artisans because they help knitters to describe concepts for designs to fellow handcrafters in a way that can be understood and recreated. Patterns can be written in different forms that the artisans have to decode. Often in modern patterns, the row is written out in abbreviations and a key is given to describe the abbreviations. For example, the first row of a pattern could be written out in this way: Row 1: K6, p2, yo, k3tog, yo, p2, k6. A craftsperson would be able to translate this to mean that they were to knit six stitches, purl two stitches, wrap the yarn over the needle, etc. Instructions can also be written out as a chart where each row on the chart corresponds to a row of knitting and each square is a stitch. For example a shaded square can represent a purl stitch and a blank square can represent a knit stitch (Figure 1).

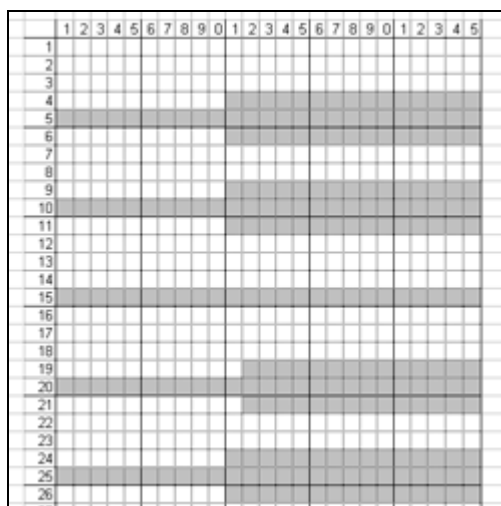


Figure 1: Knitting chart with the shaded squares representing purl stitches and the white squares knit stitches (after Bohne 2006, Shadow Knitting Pattern).

Craftspeople were asked how they use patterns to gain a better understanding of the process and they had varied responses. A few artisans only use patterns for instruction on how to make certain objects for the first time. Others follow the pattern strictly without varying it at all. Many knitters lie on a spectrum between these two extremes by following a pattern and adjusting it to fit their needs better. In this way, the patterns are a lot like recipes because the handcrafters, like cooks, can follow the directions exactly, adjust them to their tastes or varied ingredients, or experiment while making their dishes. Some creative knitters design patterns for themselves and other craftspeople.

Candace, Ida, Octavia, and Valerie are artisans who follow patterns precisely. Ida follows the directions precisely with lots of marks to remind herself where she left off in the pattern. Additionally, she makes patterns easier to follow by adding notes so all of the parts

she needs are on the same page. She prefers patterns written in words or abbreviations to charts, although she makes her own charts to visualize the project.

Test knitters are often precise about following patterns as well. Advanced and careful artisans may work new designs as part of test knitting. These craftspeople use a new pattern that the creator wants tested to create the designer's object and give the designer feedback. Karen has completed test knitting for designers and yarn companies. Karen said when she works on those projects she has to be more careful about gauge and she cannot have mistakes. She said that test knitting is a good experience but she occasionally helped designers that were fussier and then it was not as enjoyable. When Mabel is test knitting she follows the pattern exactly, but when knitting for herself she often modifies the pattern.

Some artisans, like Mabel, are more flexible about following the pattern. Craftspeople may slightly change the designs to fit them better or to fit their style of knitting. The patterns Edith prefers are made in one piece, with no sewing required, so she adapts designs so they are knitted together instead of sewed. She thinks this is a common practice. Edith finds that craftspeople are resourceful. For example, one knitter in the group was adding a color-work pattern to a sock design. Edith described artisans using unconventional methods to perform a specific function as using the mind of an engineer. She gave the example of designs created by younger knitters with shoulders/sleeves made using short rows instead of traditional methods. Paige uses patterns too, except when making a basic sock. She only modifies designs to add cuffs or change minor aspects, such as changing the toe in a sock pattern or changing the decrease in a sweater sleeve. Artisans may use patterns as instructions or inspiration on how to make certain types of garments, and then once they have learned how

to make that object, they create their own designs or work without one. Fay is one of these artisans; she follows the pattern when knitting the item for the first time, but adapts it to make it fit her better. She might use a different decrease for the shoulder of a sweater because it looks better and fits the pattern better. Fay said she always has to drop two needle sizes from the directions because she is a loose knitter. In addition, she changes the yarn by using the same weight yarn as in the pattern but different materials than it recommends. In this way, she can use the pattern to learn from other artisans and still create unique designs.

Several handcrafters choose to use patterns part of the time and create their own designs the rest of the time. Lacey uses patterns for certain projects, but not others. She uses patterns for making sweaters and pants because the stitches change in order to shape the garment. With the baby blanket she was making, she didn't work from patterns. Instead, she used the repeat of stitches she needed because the blanket was square and didn't require increases or decreases to change the shape. Mabel is a knitter who uses patterns sometimes and otherwise creates her own designs. Mabel chooses her next project from the queue of projects she has already planned. She enters competitions and does test knitting for projects she wants to wear and she designs her own patterns. When she is designing something, she chooses a project that will help her remember a specific time. For example, she wanted to make a pattern to remind her of the sea turtles she saw in Hawaii. Once in a while, "mistakes" can be an inspiration. For example, Mabel made a vest that was too low, so she attached a lace panel onto it. Creative artisans combine their knowledge of making certain objects with stitch patterns to create their own designs.

A few craftspeople informed me how they are able to create their own designs for the objects they make. When creating designs, knitters may use stitch patterns to create a certain effect such as a lacey fabric. Mabel has created her own shawl designs based on her knowledge of the shape of a shawl and a lace stitch pattern. Creating her own pattern involves a lot of math and numbers because she has to use specific increases. She uses her own sizing, colors, and designs and sometimes uses pattern software. One artisan admitted to using patterns but explained how he could create his own designs. Gabe currently uses written patterns, but he is working toward creating his own. He suggested that the knitter has to be a mathematician and look at the structuring of the item they are making to create a pattern. For example, if he was going to make a vest (or a sweater) he would choose the type of sleeve he wanted (for example, Raglan, Dolman, or a set-in sleeve) and once he knew the pattern for that type of sleeve, he could add it to the body of his sweater. He would base his sweater on the measurements of the intended wearer. He said the artisan has to understand how the object is shaped and what they have to do to create it from the patterns they find. He was not the only craftsperson that discussed making his own designs.

Other knitters rarely use patterns, or they use them for ideas, but choose to create their own concepts for objects. Jackie didn't use patterns except as inspiration. Instead, she chose her next project after she had spun yarn based on the feel of the fibers. For example, occasionally the yarn she made "told her" it wanted to be a scarf. Abbey suggested that the stitch she crochets had to fit the yarn and design so that it all works together. Abbey mentioned that she uses patterns to inspire her and as a jumping off point. She usually wants to change the pattern. Sabrina makes up her own designs and "lets her brain decide."



In school when she learned to knit, they would work from patterns but later she did whatever was comfortable. These artisans show their creativity by making their own designs.

Knitters have a variety of sources for the patterns they use. Several receive patterns from friends or families or find them at festivals. In addition, artisans find them in books and magazines. Seven of nineteen knitters said they find patterns in books, four found them in magazines, four found them from other handcrafters, and one person mentioned finding them at fiber festivals (as shown in Chart 2). Most artisans, such as Karen, collect patterns from multiple sources, including magazines, books, and Ravelry. Eleven of the nineteen craftspeople in this study mentioned finding patterns online through Ravelry or alternative online sources. Barbara indicated that an artisan has to know the name of the pattern they are knitting or have finished when they go to events because other handcrafters want to know what it is called, so they can find it on Ravelry to make it themselves.

	Ravelry	books	magazines	other online	fellow knitters	festivals	own patterns
Abbey		yes old books	yes old ones	yes			
Barbara							
Candace							
Daisy	yes		Used to use	yes			
Edith	yes	yes					
Fay		yes	yes	yes			
Gabe				knitting paradise			
Haley							
Ida	yes						
Jackie							
Karen	yes	yes	yes				yes
Lacey							
Mabel	yes	yes			yes		yes
Natalie							
Octavia	yes	no	no	yes			
Paige	yes				yes		
Rachel	yes	especially about fibers			yes		
Sabrina							yes
Tabitha							
Valerie		yes			yes	yes	

Chart 2: Sources of Patterns

When knitters cannot learn from one another in person, they can still share ideas and ways to make objects through patterns. The patterns artisans use help to strengthen the knitting community in a few ways. Patterns act as a way of communicating a concept for a project to knitters in a form that they can use to recreate the object. The handcrafter can input their own creativity into the process by choosing a yarn that they prefer or adapting the pattern to their needs. Knitters are a good example of Bourdieu's theory of praxis because they are influenced by the patterns of other craftspeople, but they still use their own creativity, even when the only change is picking out their own yarn (Moore 2012:293). Artisans are influenced by their immediate knitting community by viewing items other knitters have made and being inspired to make them. When showing their work to the group, knitters would often give the name of the pattern and its source. In those

communities that encourage creativity and exploration with knitting, artisans are even inspired to create their own designs. Even if they create their own patterns, they are often inspired by seeing other handcrafters' designs or popular trends in knitting. Creative individuals use materials or techniques in new ways to create new designs that increase the variety of patterns that artisans can work from. Other craftspeople can learn the techniques the designer used by following their pattern. New designs can be published in books and magazines, but they are most easily published online. The use of websites such as Ravelry allows for even greater access to a vast variety of patterns.

#### Internet/Ravelry:

As discussed above, knitters have many sources for the patterns they use, including websites. They can connect to other artisans directly through interest groups and festivals, but they also use the internet to connect to the knitting community indirectly. One craftsperson, Candace, said that technology is used by knitters for creating patterns and communicating. She said that artisans can find materials, ideas, and communities online, all related to knitting. Handcrafters can find online videos and websites dedicated to teaching specific techniques. The main resource I heard craftspeople mention was a website called Ravelry. Barbara said there are lots of groups and workshops on Ravelry. Half of the handcrafters interviewed in this study mentioned finding patterns on the internet and eight mentioned Ravelry specifically when asked where they find their patterns (as shown in Chart 2).

Ravelry is a free website that offers many services to craftspeople. The most widely used service mentioned by artisans was access to patterns. Ravelry has both free patterns

and patterns handcrafters can purchase. Ravelry also houses many online forums where craftspeople can connect with other artisans about a variety of topics, including designs, knitting advice, buying and selling materials and tools, and charities accepting hand-made items. Some of these forums are similar to knitting groups that meet in person because they have a specific regional focus. These forums are for groups connected to specific locations such as yarn stores, or events happening in that area. Other forums are interested in a specific aspect of knitting or patterns designed by a specific craftspeople. The artisans who create their own designs can post them on Ravelry to easily share them with the knitting community. The website allows handcrafters to keep a record of the items they have made and share their projects with other artisans as knitters do in physical group meetings. Additionally, Ravelry has places where artisans can find materials and sell leftover yarn or homespun yarn.

One craftspeople explained that Ravelry was directly responsible for her reintroduction to knitting and her progress in learning more about her craft. Ten years ago Ida started knitting again using Ravelry as a resource. She chatted with artisans online and looked at projects. She did the Ravelry Olympics and knit a sock which helped her realize that she could produce all different kinds of objects. Even when she was connecting to other handcrafters in person, Ravelry and her online connections played a role. While Ida was knitting at a yarn store, she used Ravelry to find questions she could ask the craftspeople in the store. She said that if she had not had Ravelry as a resource she would not have signed up for a class. She continues to use Ravelry by getting most of her patterns from it. Ida found that her knitting improved with Ravelry because she could learn new techniques and find

projects. It was surprising how often knitters mentioned Ravelry, but it is an indication of changes in how the craft is shared and used.

Ravelry and other websites are an indication of a change in knitting in that it integrates technology into the knitting community. Although knitting, something with a long history and at times considered “old fashioned,” might seem incompatible with modern technology, knitters are able to use it to further their craft. The people in this study used it to connect with artisans who may not be part of their immediate craft circle, but are still part of the knitting community. They also used it to learn more about certain practices in their craft by knitting new patterns. It gave them more access to many resources, including online knitting communities, sources for materials, and an immense supply of patterns available to them through websites such as Ravelry. In addition, artisans can use websites to communicate about in-person events such as Knit in Public Day. They can use the internet to find videos and instructions for certain techniques or ask other handcrafters questions about difficulties they are having on a project through knitting forums. Craftspeople can have more access to materials by researching yarn vendors or fleece sellers directly online and having the materials shipped to them. The location of physical yarn stores and craft circles can be researched online as well. By embracing technology, the craft can be preserved and the knitting community can continue and grow into the future.

## **Chapter 7: The Ideology of Knitters**

### Why People Are Interested in Knitting

Ideology is the beliefs of a particular group, in this case, the knitting community. Knitters might approach their craft differently and insert their own character into their craft, but they have some shared beliefs related to handicrafts. They value and share an appreciation for handcrafted fiber objects, whether made by themselves or by others. They also share beliefs about why people knit.

Knitters have a variety of reasons they are interested in their craft, although they mentioned some common themes. The peace and calmness some attributed to the act of knitting was the most important benefit for them. For others, the act of knitting was a way to keep their hands occupied while their mind was working on other tasks. A few craftspeople mentioned knitting for the purpose of making things for other people. Several knitters were interested in the planning and design aspect of knitting. Other artisans enjoyed the act of creating an object and some enjoyed having a completed object. A few knitters went so far as to describe knitting as part of their identity or integral to their lives. A number of knitters could not point to only one reason they were interested in their craft. Many knitters suggested that others knit for the same reasons they did which were also the reasons for it continuing to be a common activity.

Knitting can help people to be comforted and calmer. Six artisans described knitting as calming, contemplative, or a time for reflection or meditation. Other knitters had their own way of describing this sentiment. Fay said that in their hectic lives, people find knitting soothing. In her own life, her involvement in knitting helped her get through hard times. Ida

described knitting and spinning as her sanity. Natalie employs the craft because it is her “mental health savior” and she thinks that is the same reason that knitting is still part of the culture. Abbey suggested that making crafts is a stance against a fast paced life and that knitting is calming because “creativity is the resolution of inner conflict.” In some cases, knitting can help to diffuse or relieve outer conflict as well. Edith mentioned that managers she knew knit during conference meetings. In one case, this was helpful during a stressful meeting where one knitter from one group noticed the knitted bag from an artisan in the opposing side and the connection of knitting eased the conflict. Edith found that during 9/11 more people came in the yarn shop because they wanted something hands on to do and they wanted to talk about the situation. Whether working through internal or external situations, knitting can help comfort or calm the people who do it.

As with Edith's example of the managers who knit during meetings, for some knitting is a way to keep their hands busy while they are doing something else. Five people mentioned knitting in situations which required sitting quietly because it was difficult to sit and not be doing something. For a few of the people interviewed, including Natalie, the portability of knitting was greatly appreciated because it meant they could knit while running errands. Knitting was nice for Lacey when she was raising children because it was portable and it felt good being able to wear things she made. Ida found hand spinning on a spindle to be portable as well so she always carried a spindle. She would spin yarn in store lines and at her husband's train shows. A few of the artisans interviewed mentioned knitting at times when they wanted to be present for family members during difficult times. Gabe found knitting to be a quiet project that he could work on when it was difficult to be patient. For instance, he knit when he was waiting for his wife at the hospital. Fay knit while sitting

with her parents to keep them company. She could still connect with them more than if she was reading or doing another activity, even if they didn't have the energy to talk. For one knitter, working on a tactile project helped her to listen during a class, perhaps because she is a kinesthetic learner. When Ida was in a hand spinning class for three full days, she felt more focused on the lecture with her hands busy. Jackie said it was common to always be working on something when sitting down in her family, and in that way, they were always productive, even during their leisure time. Jackie knit at meetings sometimes because it was easier to keep quiet.

Another reason knitters employ their craft is to make things to give to other people. Five knitters mentioned making things for family and friends and three others mentioned giving away the things they make. Fay has family in Vermont so she knit warm sweaters for them. For Ida's generation, sewing and knitting clothes was cheaper. Ida made a lot of her children's clothes. Sometimes knitters make things and donate them to charity. Edith found that people like to knit for others who are having a hard time. Three of the knitters interviewed mentioned making objects for charities. Edith said that some people hang hats and scarves in the trees for people to take. In addition to knitting for her family, Fay knits prayer shawls for her church, baby hats for the hospital and, in the last few years, patterns for herself. As Edith pointed out, some craftspeople knit for people in chemotherapy, bringing comfort to the recipient. As Maidment and Macfarlane suggest, these knitted objects can carry additional meaning for both the recipient and the knitter, such as giving "the warmth of socks" (2011:704).

Many artisans enjoyed the creative aspect of knitting, including planning, learning new techniques, and working with complicated patterns. Several knitters described their



favorite part of knitting as starting and planning new projects, aspects of which include finding the design and picking out the color of the yarn. Lacey enjoys working with beautiful yarn and finds knitting addictive. Several artisans described knitting as a stimulating practice for the brain. Gabe described knitting complicated patterns such as Aran knits as “food for his mind.” Karen said that knitting is cognitive because knitters have to count stitches and focus. This could make knitting more engrossing because there is more to engage the mind. Edith and Tabitha reiterated that knitting involves a lot of mental energy. Tabitha knits lace, an often complicated type of knitting, because of her grandmother’s beautiful lace edges. Daisy likes the challenge of reading the pattern. She likes knitting complicated fishermen’s sweaters with cables and making objects with variegated yarn which create different color designs. Several artisans mentioned learning new aspects of knitting as one of their favorite parts of knitting. Ida likes to learn new techniques and does not often do the same project twice. Octavia said that she had no favorite part of crocheting except that there are so many things to learn. Rachel knits because it is fun, relaxing, challenging and interesting and she can learn from it.

For some artisans, the act of creating, rather than the product is the most important aspect. Paige claimed that she knits because it is entertaining and she likes to choose designs and make them. Paige's favorite part is the actual knitting. She likes to use a variety of stitches and techniques including stockinette stitch (plain knitting) as well as textured things like cables, moss stitch (a combination of knit and purl stitches which creates a bumpy fabric), and sometimes she likes lace. Gabe said that he was process oriented rather than project oriented. Gabe says he mostly spins for enjoyment rather than making yarn and eventually he ends up with a pile of yarn. He knits because he enjoys it and it is fun, not for

the purpose of making things.

Conversely, a few artisans appreciate the accomplishment of doing an activity and coming away with a finished product. Octavia mentioned that she crochets because she receives pleasure from creating something. She appreciates putting in the time and coming away with a finished object. Mabel described her favorite thing about knitting as having completed a project and having the accomplishment to show for her work. She found that once she blocks her knitted objects, they are better than anything she could find in the store. Lacey asserted that she knits because it is soothing, enjoyable, and she gets something out of it.

For some artisans, the act of creating is so ingrained into their lives and identity that it would be difficult to imagine life without it. Barbara found that for her, crafts are a grounding point. Knitting helps her recognize her identity and it is fulfilling. Haley explained she has a need to create and can't help making things. She said it feels like it comes from a higher power. She said, "who knows what will come out." Jackie said that knitting and spinning is a compulsion, but she can't always spin at the times she wants to spin, so she knits instead. For Fay knitting has become an addiction. Another example of someone showing their pride and identity in their knitting was Mabel, who said she wore something she had knit every day. As Maidment and Macfarlane suggested, knitting and other crafts have become part of crafts people's "meaningful identity, as they realize their individual goals and creative aspirations" (Maidment and Macfarlane 2011:703-4). The people who said they were hooked or addicted to knitting showed that they celebrate their connection to the craft as part of their life.

Craftspeople suggested many different reasons for knitting continuing to play a part in modern American culture, often based on the same reasons they chose to knit. Rachel thought that knitting is part of culture because it is a way to relax and continue to create. She found that American culture is generally technological and overwhelming and knitting is a way to get back to basics. Natalie added that our society is used to instant gratification through getting something with the click of a button but knitting is not that way. Natalie thinks that the craft is preserved because people want to get away from the fast pace of life and because artisans pass it down from generation to generation. She maintained that half of the people pass on knitting from generation to generation and sell their work, while the other half knit because it is a form of recovery as a less aggressive activity in an aggressive world. Haley claimed that it is part of culture because it is soothing and it takes us away from the discouraging things that happen. Karen thought that knitting is part of the culture because it is relaxing once it is learned, and practical.

The creative aspect of knitting is another reason crafters argue that knitting is still part of American culture. Daisy asserted that knitting is part of American culture because it is creative, relaxing, and portable (unlike weaving). Ida thinks knitting is a part of our culture because we need to do something with our hands. Mabel concluded that knitting is part of culture because people like to make things. For example, there is the “do it yourself” concept. She conveyed that people want to feel productive and be connected to the history of making. Octavia suggested that making handicrafts connects people and it makes people appreciate what it takes to make clothes. When people sew and knit their own clothes they can choose what it looks like. The choice of colors and combinations of materials they can choose is attractive to craftspeople according to Ida. She also thought that people need to have a

creative outlet whether drawing, painting, making cartoons or doing crafts. Lacey and Gabe asserted that knitting is part of culture because there is a requirement in us to make things. He suggested that artisans could buy the yarn, clothes, and sweaters but by making them they get more bang for their buck. They get the end product and the satisfaction of making it themselves, the “sheer unadulterated joy” of doing it. These are also reasons why others may become knitters in the future.

Some knitters observed changes over their lifetimes in knitting and the concepts surrounding knitting. According to Fay, knitting used to be a necessity, but now people have more free time and they can do it as a hobby. Lacey found that the only changes over time she noticed were that now there are more materials available for knitters and knitting groups are new. She thought knitting might be coming back because it is not considered old fashioned anymore. Jackie was surprised that it has taken off in the last 30 years. Before it was hard to be able to find yarn stores, but now there are more physical yarn stores and there are many stores on the internet. She thinks that people knit because they like that it is unique and it is not something you could buy at Wal-Mart. Some of these changes indicate an increase in knitting and others may indicate the aspects of knitting which could be prized in the future and help the continuation of the practice.

### Gender Distribution in Knitting

In American culture, knitting is generally stereotyped as “women's work.” Although the groups and festivals I observed had predominantly women in attendance there were also men at the events as there are men in the knitting community. Knitters themselves have differing views about knitting as gendered toward women or open to both genders. My

research reflected the population proportions of the knitting community in that most of the knitters interviewed were women, but a male knitter was also able to share his perspective. Historically there have been both men and women knitters, although some researchers, such as Kokko, (2009), consider it gendered toward women. All of the people in this study, who learned from family members, learned from women family members.

More recently women artisans have used knitting as a way to make a statement about gender with the Pink hats worn at the Women's March in January of 2017. These hats were part of a grassroots movement and meant to represent women's empowerment. They were hand-knitted (and crocheted) square hats made by individuals for themselves and for others. Knitters made hats and sent them to demonstrators in Washington to show support through groups organized on knitting websites. The project was so popular that yarn shops ran out of pink yarn and classes were taught specifically for people to learn to make the pink hat (Shamus 2017). This was a very visible and symbolic demonstration of knitting in the public eye. These hats took symbols attributed to women by society (the color pink and knitting) and embraced them as a way to make a statement about women having a voice.

Some knitters conceded that their craft conformed to the stereotype that knitting is gendered toward women. One knitter described knitting as women's work. She thinks that women have a lot of wait time in certain job positions or when they are doing chores such as laundry. She found that with knitting and spinning she can be doing something in the little bit of time that would otherwise be wasted.

Other knitters disagreed with this concept and thought that knitting was not limited by gender. Daisy has met very talented men knitters and she finds that knitting is not gender-

specific. Valerie has met a few men interested in fiber arts including a father that was knitting at the conference she attended and a man from her church who crochets. Gabe also spoke about men and knitting. He said that about five percent of the knitting community is male. He found that a few women get incensed about a man in the fiber arts group they belong to, but that is only about two percent of women knitters. He thought that ninety-eight percent of female knitters could care less but they often take time to adjust to a male knitter and spinner in the group. In his experiences with the online forum Knitting Paradise, about five percent of the conversations he has are with men and there are about two hundred thousand people on that site. He described the website as a bulletin board where people can post pictures of their work. His percentages of men in knitting communities seemed to accurately describe the percentage of men who attended the events in this study, including the Wren Spin-In and the Black Sheep festival, which both had men in attendance, but were predominately attended by women. It is possible that there are more men who knit that do not take part in gatherings like these or in knitting groups.

There was also evidence that the attitude toward men knitting has changed over time. Today, as Edith found, there are more Unisex patterns while there used to be more gender-specific patterns in the seventies. Currently, there are many men who knit. She found that there are more men designers now. According to Edith, the first well-known male hand knit designer was Kaffe Fassett. There is historical precedent for men knitting as well. In knitting's early history, there were guilds of men knitters. Even in the last century, there were male knitters especially when it came to making necessary items during the war. I had a discussion with a World War I.

Although knitting has been connected to women and attributed to their gender, it is

not an activity limited to women. Women have taken pride in their knitting as a symbol of celebration of their gender when knitting pink hats for the demonstrations on January twenty-first. Women have a lot of influence in the realm of knitting and it is one activity where women are in the majority. However, male knitters are playing a larger and more noticeable role in the knitting community than they have in the past. For the most part, knitters are happy to have people be a part of their fiber arts communities regardless gender. The concept of knitting as gendered toward women could change as more and more men become part of the knitting community and become designers. Whether women or men, ideas about knitting are something strangers can have in common and through that shared ideology, they can connect with new people.

## **Chapter 8: Conclusion:**

This study has examined the culture of knitters and of craft communities and the way that artisans transfer their knowledge to others. The ideology of knitters is also examined in order to discover if the craft is disappearing or growing. These elements were investigated by asking craftspeople questions about their experiences and how they learned to knit, if they teach others and if they ply their craft in public. The culture of knitting communities was examined by attending craft groups and festivals and discussing them. More insight into how knitters communicate was gained by studying how knitters use patterns and where they find them. The ideology of knitters was explored by inquiring why they knit. The results show that knitting is not disappearing in Oregon because there are more fiber festivals and knitting groups than there were thirty years ago, according to the artisans interviewed who witnessed the growth. In many ways, the knitting community is more interconnected than ever before. Knitters have been able to continue their craft into modern times and expand the information available on the subject through several methods including teaching others to knit, creating craft circles, interacting with the public, creating new patterns, and sharing them with others through mediums such as websites. The reasons people knit have evolved along with the means that artisans use to communicate.

One reason knitting has continued in today's society and the most likely reason knitting will continue into the future is that there are many more opportunities to learn to knit. Learning to knit in person at craft groups, classes, festivals, or through friends and family, is the easiest way to learn the craft thoroughly. The benefits of learning an activity directly could be applied to other cultural activities which people want to keep intact. Knitters are generous with their knowledge and eager to interest more people in their craft.



When they knit in public, they expose more people to the craft and they are able to interact with strangers around that topic. The availability of knitting books, online videos and knitting forums also disseminates the knowledge artisans need to complete their craft.

Artisans create growth and keep knitting from being a stagnant culture by learning new skills and inventing new patterns. Although there are a few knitters who prefer to only make the same things they have always done and carry on the tradition of their family with the things they make, many knitters are interested in learning how to make new articles of clothing and new combinations of stitches. Artisans are able to communicate their designs and learn to make new objects through patterns, which can take many forms. The way knitters use the patterns can vary as they insert more or less of their own creativity and the influence of others into the process. In this way, they help the knitting community to change rather than remaining stagnant.

The culture of craft circles encourages the growth of knitting by welcoming everyone who knits regardless of ability. Historically, the creation of knitting groups occurred during periods when knitting was common (Strawn 2007). Another aspect of modern knitting communities was that craftspeople could work on their own crafts in different ways. Although group members were not taught by the same source and they engage in their craft using different methods, they still influence each other in the designs they choose or the techniques they use for certain projects. Knitters, therefore, can have several influences in their knitting, the current groups they belong to, the patterns they find, the people that taught them originally, past groups they belonged to, and their own creativity. Craftspeople can be influenced by others in the larger crafting community at festivals. Festivals facilitate learning new crafts, such as knitting and spinning, because all of the materials are available

and vendors and other artisans are willing to teach people crafts informally, or in classes and workshops. Craft communities are themselves knitted together by the connections people make through a shared interest and similar perspectives on their craft as well as the unguarded conversations which happen in those settings.

Handcrafters argue that the same reasons knitting is relevant for them are the reasons other people enjoy the craft. Many of the knitters who were interviewed suggested that other people find the creative and meditative aspects of their craft enhance their lives as well. Knitting is engaging and it allows people to continue to explore an activity throughout their lives. Artisans can be proud of the unique objects they make with their own hands. In Oregon especially, the idea of making things from unprocessed fibers from animals has caught on as an exciting way to be creative and more involved in the entire process. Crafters also enjoy feeling productive during downtime. Furthermore, creating objects with yarn and fiber is so much a part of some crafts people's lives that it is part of their identity. Both men and women appreciate knitting and both participate in it, although more women knit in groups than men. This could change as men are becoming a more evident presence in the knitting community by attending knitting groups and festivals and designing more patterns.

In some ways, the concept of knitting being a historical activity and a modern one contributed to part of its interest. Instead of dying out because of technological advances, including the use of computers, the knitting community is able to utilize the internet through sites like Ravelry. The use of websites strengthens the knitting community by facilitating communication between knitters, distributing patterns, and being a place where knitters can discuss certain aspects of knitting. In addition, artisans use the internet to inform people about physical groups and festivals so that knitters can share ideas in person.

Knitting is important because it is an example of an activity that could have disappeared because it was considered “antiquated” except that it found ways of growing and additional reasons to continue into our modern age. Knitting can act as a legacy for artisans. When handcrafters give handmade objects to family or friends it can be a visual statement of their impact on others lives and handcrafted items may be passed on from one generation to the next. For some craftspeople, their knitting is part of their identity and integral to their lives. As I listened to the people I interviewed, I realized that I was not only learning about their experiences knitting, but also the way it entwined with their life stories.

## **References Cited**

### About

World Wide Knit in Public Day. <http://www.wwkipday.com/about>, accessed February 17, 2017.

### Appadurai, Arjun

1986 *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.

### Barnhart, Clarence, and Jess Stein

1963 *The American college dictionary*. New York: Random House. 538, 675.

### Black Sheep Gathering

Black Sheep Gathering. <http://www.blacksheepgathering.org>. accessed March 22, 2017.

### Black Sheep Gathering - the Movie

2009 Black Sheep Gathering. [http://blacksheepgathering.org/BSG\\_the\\_movie.html](http://blacksheepgathering.org/BSG_the_movie.html), accessed February 16, 2017.

### Bohne, Matthew.

*Shadow Knitting Pattern* Image, 2006. Accessed March 20, 2017.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Shadowknitpattern.gif>

### Bush, Nancy

2012 *Folk Socks: The History and Techniques of Handknitted Footwear*, Updated Edition. Interweave Press, LLC.

### Fiber Arts and Yarn Show

Black Sheep Gathering. <http://blacksheepgathering.org/fiberarts.html>, accessed March 6, 2017

Jenkins, David

2003 The Cambridge History of Western Textiles. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.

Kokko, Sirpa

2009 Learning Practices Of Femininity Through Gendered Craft Education In Finland. *Gender & Education* 21(6): 721-734. *Academic Search Premier*.

Kooler, Donna

2004 Donna Kooler's Encyclopedia of Knitting. Little Rock, Arkansas: Leisure Arts.

Maidment, Jane and Selma Macfarlane

2011 Older Women and Craft: Extending Educational Horizons in Considering Wellbeing. *Social Work Education*. 30(6):700–711. Web.

Mendoza-Denton, Norma

2008 Homegirls: Language and Cultural Practices among Latina Youth Gangs. Malden, Montana: Blackwell.

Minar, Jill

2001 Motor Skills and the Learning Process: The Conservation of Cordage Final Twist Direction in Communities of Practice. *Journal of Anthropological Research* 57(4): 381–405. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3631352>, accessed January 30, 2017.

Moore, Jerry

2012 Visions of Culture: An Introduction to Anthropological Theories and Theorists. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Plymouth, UK: AltaMira.

Robson, Deborah

2007 "Knitting and the Handspinning Revival" In *Knitting America: A Glorious Heritage from Warm Socks to High Art*, by Susan Strawn, Ch. 11. Minneapolis: Voyageur.

Ruland, Gillian

2010 *Stitching Together: An Exploration of Women's Sociality Through an Urban Knitting Group*. Theses, Department of Anthropology, Georgia State University.

Rutt, Richard

1987 *A History of Handknitting*. Loveland, Colorado: Interweave.

Shamus, Kristen

January 14, 2017 Pussyhat Project is sweeping nation ahead of the Women's March on Washington. USA Today. Detroit Free Press.

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2017/01/14/pink-cat-ear-hats-sweeping-nation-ahead-womens-march/96584374>, accessed February 28, 2017.

Strawn, Susan

2007 *Knitting America: A Glorious Heritage from Warm Socks to High Art*. Minneapolis: Voyageur.

Turnau, Irena

1982 *Knitting Craft in Europe from the Thirteenth to the Eighteenth Century*. The Bulletin of the Needle and Bobbin Club. 65: 20-42.

Wool, Mohair and Alpaca Show and Sale

Black Sheep Gathering. [http://blacksheepgathering.org/wool\\_mohair\\_show.html](http://blacksheepgathering.org/wool_mohair_show.html), accessed March 6, 2017.



## **Appendices**

### Interview Questions

1. Do you live in a rural or urban setting?
2. How Many Years have you been knitting?
3. How did you learn to knit?
4. Do you knit by yourself or with a group? or both?
5. When and where do you knit? (In your home, work, on the bus etc.) Do you knit in public places other than a knitting group?
  - a) How do others react to you knitting?
6. How do you decide which project you are going to work on next?
7. If you use patterns, where do you get them? Do you get them from books, the internet, or directly from the designer?
8. Do you use the pattern as template or basis for ideas rather than following it precisely?
9. What do you do with the items you make? Do you know what you will do with the item when you start the project?
10. What kind of materials do you use?
11. Why do you knit? What drives you to make knitted items rather than buying them?
12. Why do you think knitting is still part of our culture?
13. What is your forte in knitting? If you could write a book or teach a class in knitting what skills would you teach?
14. What do you do if you make a mistake?



### Charts How they Learned

	How they learned	What age started	How long knitting	Picked it back up again
Abbey				
Barbara	Grandmother taught	20's		15 years ago
Daisy	Grandmother taught	Younger than 10	60 years	
Edith	Mother	8		Taught by friend when pregnant with firstborn
Fay	Grandmother taught	4 or 5		When in nursing training
Gabe	Wife		45 years	
Haley	Mom taught her crochet			
Ida	Grandmother taught	9		10 years ago through Ravelry
Jackie			Whole life	
Karen	From magazines, a friend and classes	When in college		
Lacey	Grandmother taught	A child		
Mabel	School teacher	3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	42 years	
Natalie	From people in a yarn shop		20 years	
Octavia	Crochet from mother and grandmother	A child		2.5 years her friend helps her
Paige	A class in Colorado		22 years	
Rachel	Mother	A child		5 years ago when taught by a friend
Sabrina	Mother and school	four or five	85 years	
Tabitha	Grandmother taught her and school			
Valerie	Friend and a class taught knitting			

### Recipients of Knitted Items

	What happens to knitting			
	They wear it	give it away	donate it	sells it
Abbey	Yes	yes		used to
Daisy		yes		
Jackie	Yes	yes		
Karen	Yes	family	yes	
Lacey		friends and family	yes	yes
Mabel	Yes	family and friends	yes	
Octavia	household objects	friends and family		
Rachel	Yes	family		

## Glossary

**Angora:** Rabbit fur combed from rabbits and spun to be used for fiber arts. It is very soft and fuzzy.

**Aran Knitting:** Cabled patterns.

**Blocking:** Stretching fabric while it is drying in order to give it a more defined shape.

**Design/ Project:** a specific form for a specific object.

**Cables:** braids in the knitted fabric created by moving stitches over or under other stitches.

**Cast-on:** to make the first row of knitting by creating the first series of loops on the knitting needles.

**Charts:** Patterns are sometimes written as charts especially for color-work or cables. In the chart each stitch is represented by a square with a color or a symbol.

**Continental knitting or Picking:** holding the yarn in the left hand and “picking” it up with the needle in the right hand.

**Decreasing or Decreases:** combining stitches so that there are fewer stitches in the next row to make the fabric of the object smaller in that section. Decreases are also used to create stitch patterns for designs in the fabric.

**(Drop) Spindle:** A tool used for spinning by hand which often consist of a stick to spin the fiber onto and a weighted end. The fiber is twisted between the spindle and the hand which it hangs from by the fiber.

**English Knitting or Throwing:** holding the yarn in the right hand and wrapping it around the needle in the right hand. In this style the right hand draws the yarn around the needle to create the loop.

**Fiber(s):** in this study more often natural fibers. The basic structure of the things spun into yarn. Hair like strands which are spun into yarn which can be made of many different materials, generally in this study made from natural sources especially animal hair, but possibly including bamboo or silk.

**Interlace knitting: (Entrelac knitting)** a form of knitting where the final product appears to be woven squares of knitted fabric.

**Knit stitch:** The right hand needle is inserted into the front of the loop so the needles point to the back of the fabric and the yarn is wrapped around the needle to create a flat stitch which is more often the front of the fabric. The abbreviation for this stitch found in patterns is k.

**Magic Loop Knitting:** Knitting small circumference items such as socks with a single cable needle (the type of needle with two points and a wire between) rather than a set of straight smaller double pointed needles.

**NwRSA:** North West Regional Spinners Association, the overarching organization many fiber arts guilds belong to in Oregon and the rest of the North West.

**Pattern:** the instructions to make a specific design or project written out with directions for each stitch.

**Plying:** Combining multiple strands of spun fiber into yarn.

**Purl stitch:** The right hand needle is inserted into the front of the loop so the needles point to the front of the fabric and the yarn is wrapped around the needle to create a bumpy stitch which is more often the back of fabric. The abbreviation for this stitch found in patterns is p.

**Shadow knitting:** A type of pattern that uses purl stitches and multiple colored yarns to create images.

**Skein:** Also called a **hank**. A very long length of yarn wrapped around something so that it is in a series of loops that can be handled without unraveling. This is normally the way yarn is found when bought or sold.

**Skein Winder:** Tool or set of tools which helps crafters to wind tangled yarn into loose skeins or large skeins into balls which unwind from the center

**Stitches:** the wraps around the needle done in different ways to create certain effects.

**Stitch Pattern:** is the exact representation of stitches needed to create a certain effect such as lace.

**Swatches:** A knitted square of fabric created in order to determine how many stitches are in an inch of fabric to see if the needle size needs to be adjusted in order for the object to be the same size as the pattern.

**Tension:** how tightly or loosely the yarn is wrapped around the needle. The tension can be different depending on the knitter.

**Test Knitting:** Following a new pattern to find any errors or confusing directions to create the object the designer intended.

**Variegated Yarn:** yarn with stripes of one color after another.

**Yarn over:** a stitch made by wrapping the yarn around the needle without inserting the needle into a stitch first. The abbreviation found in knitting patterns is yo.