Radical Mundanity: Practicing Politics Through Craft on Instagram

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Abstract

Recent research has examined the use of radical crafting in feminist activism and advocacy, extending the role of craft beyond the domestic sphere. This thesis conducts a case study of public Instagram accounts to understand how craft-based activism is practiced online. Using a semiotic analysis applied to Instagram images, Reels, Lives, captions, and comments, this thesis explores how politics are practiced through community and identity building, and positions future research to continue exploring the opportunities and limitations faced by those participating in digital activism.

Keywords: craftivism, social media, Instagram, intersectionality, semiotic analysis.

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Colourway: a colourway is the colour and colour scheme of a skein of yarn. Small, independent dyers develop their own colour mixtures when dying yarn, and will typically write a recipe to be able to recreate the same colourway for future dye sessions. Colourway names can indicate the colour of the yarn (eg. "Cabbage Patch" for a green yarn). Some dyers create series or "collections" of yarn, typically based on a theme, with multiple colourways within that collection. For example, Adella created multiple colourways inspired by the movie *Black Panther*, for her "Black Panther" collection.

FO: a "Finished Object" that a crafter proudly displays after (most likely) hours and hours of work on a project.

Frog, or frogging: the often-painful process of undoing (most likely) hours and hours of work on a project. Also referred to as "ripping back," this activity is called frogging because you rip it, rip it, rip it (which sounds like ribbit).

Skein: when selling yarn that is not going to be used right away, sellers will typically sell it as a skein, which is a method of twisting the yarn that protects the elasticity for long-term storage. Skeins require some preparation before using, or else it will become a tangled mess.

Stash: a crafter's "stash" is the collection of materials they have to use in a project. Knitters and crocheters have stashes of yarn, while those who spin yarn or needlefelt have stashes of unspun fibre. For example, I do all of these mentioned crafts, so my stash is a ridiculously large collection of both yarn and fibre. We do not stash-shame.

Stitch Marker: stitch markers are tools used during the knitting and crochet process to mark certain sections or progress on a project. When used to mark progress, they can also be referred to as "progress keepers."

WIP: a "work-in-progress" is exactly as it sounds; a project that has been started, but is in the process of being completed. A crafter can have multiple WIPs on the go at the same time. A lingering WIP is a project that has been sitting, neglected, for an undetermined amount of time. For example, that scarf you never finished when you decided to try to knit, before giving up. We do not judge.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Like many people who were isolating due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I dove head-first into hobbies I rarely had time for in the pre-pandemic days. I have always been a creative person; as a child, I was always drawing, painting, or making crafts while other children were playing together outside or competing in sports. When I was twelve years old, a brave elementary school teacher taught us to knit in art class; a short-lived lesson, since pointy needles and immature energetic children do not mix very well. I was fascinated by the process and continued to knit periodically throughout my teenage and university years. When the pandemic hit, there was not much else to do, so I picked up my needles and started knitting ferociously. I joined the Ottawa Knitting Guild and my world was opened up to the fibre arts crafting community.

One of the many nights of social isolation in 2021, I was knitting in my living room while on a Zoom call with the Ottawa Knitting Guild, a local community of knitters who hosted monthly events online during the pandemic (and who continue to host amazing in-person events on a monthly basis). A realization dawned on me: I was the youngest person by at least a decade, on a Zoom call with over 60 other older women in the community, connected through our traditional craft via new digital technology. This dichotomy of young and old, new and traditional piqued my interest. At the same time, conversations about racial justice had been extremely visible on social media platforms, permeating seemingly every facet of life, including the Ottawa knitting community. At one of the meetings, a member spoke of the importance of inclusion, especially on the basis of race and cultural differences, as well as recognizing the privilege we have as White crafters. The Ottawa Knitting Guild's inclusion statement is on the front page of their website and is included in every monthly newsletter:

"The Ottawa Knitting Guild welcomes knitters of all skill levels and from all walks of life. Whatever your race, gender, sexual orientation, religious beliefs (or lack thereof), age, ethnicity, physical ability, size or neurotype, we hope you will join us in sharing our love for this awesome fibre craft."

The more immersed I became in the online knitting community, the more obvious the political and social justice goals of the community became. I did some preliminary research and found that in the summer of 2020, the knitting and larger crafting community on Instagram began acknowledging racial justice issues within the community. Black knitters and business owners became more visible in the online crafting community, and many began calling out issues of white supremacy experiences within the fibre arts network on Instagram (Saxena, 2019; Feldman, 2020; Shugerman, 2021). While research into craft communities has been done, little has accounted for how craft and politics are practiced in a networked online world, which is where I had come to learn about this practice. Some literature addressed the need for an intersectional approach to understanding the fibre arts community (Black, 2017; Literat & Markus, 2020), but few works have been developed from an intersectional lens (Hewett, 2021). Craft research that discussed social media either examined how traditional crafting communities are replicated online (Bratich & Brush, 2011; Farinosi & Fortunati, 2018) or focused on the craft-specific website, Ravelry, which is declining in popularity (Harrison & Ogden, 2019; Basu, 2020). Social media has been shown to facilitate the creation and building of community, rather than just providing a space for replication (Tortajada et al., 2021). Facebook and Twitter heve been used as effective tools for large-scale activism (Wolfsfeld et al., 2013; Gerbaudo, 2015; Maestri & Profanter, 2017), but the potential for small-scale activism, especially on Instagram, has not been explored as much. This thesis combines previous craft literature with current digital activism research to explore how fibre artists continue activist practices within the Instagram community.

Politics and Fibre: A Brief History

When I became involved in the Instagram fibre community in 2021, I found the politics within the community extremely interesting, and began to learn that handicrafts have a long political history. Handicrafts like knitting and needlework are traditionally associated with domestic life and womanhood (Chansky, 2010; Literat & Markus, 2020; Farinosi, 2021), though the practice itself was not specifically gendered until the nineteenth century (Newmeyer, 2008). Contrary to our current understanding of the craft, hand-knitting was dominated by men as an economic practice until the 16th century. Knitting guilds were labour groups created by men to develop the artistic nature of the craft to attract a wealthier clientele (Aspinall, 2015). To join a guild, a man had to train for three years to become an apprentice (Aspinall, 2015). Garments made were sold globally, strengthening Britain's economy. In 1589, the knitting loom was invented, and men flocked to the machine to replace hand-knitting (Bernard, 2014). Hand-knitting was more accessible to individuals, and it became part of the domestic life instead of a main player in the public economy. The invention of the loom made the act of knitting a mundane domestic task rather than an elite practice. Hand-knitting was adopted by women to provide affordable clothing for the family and could be sold to supplement a male-earned household income (Newmeyer, 2008; Rutter, 2019). This association between women's domestic labour and crafting has become ubiquitous, and fibre arts are now seen as a female domain.

In the eighteenth-century, institutional political involvement (like campaigning or running for public office) was improper for women, and so they showed their political support by producing goods for the war. During the American Revolutionary War, a group of women known as the "Daughters of Liberty" formed to ensure American soldiers were being clothed with materials and goods produced without British influence (Macdonald, 1988). Similar efforts were made in World War I and II, when charity knitting for the Red Cross and military garments were essential to the wartime effort (Macdonald, 1988).

Quilting was an important craft during slavery in the United States, serving as a way for Black people to escape their enslavement. Quilts were often produced by enslaved people (both men and women) with motifs that had coded meanings (Fry, 1990; Tobbin & Dobard, 1999). While the meaning of specific motifs are still debated, oral histories tell that these meanings were spread through the work fields with specific instructions on how to escape (Tobin & Dobard, 1999). The motifs in the quilts acted as instructions for when to pack, where and how to flee plantations, and how to avoid capture (Fry, 1990; Tobin & Dobard, 1999). Some quilts also acted as maps, with certain motifs representing geographical landmarks (Fry, 1990). These quilts could be studied by the crafter and by those around them prior to their escape to aid in their journey. Due to the materials used, the heavy-duty use of everyday quilts, and harsh care instructions, few quilts have survived to be studied today.

Similar to quilts, other types of craft were used as communicative devices. Needlepoint and jewelry were created when a loved one passed, to mourn their loss or to memorialize them (Macdonald, 1988; Newmeyer, 2008); this tradition had been adapted to include more overt political messages by early-wave feminists. Appliquéd and embroidered banners were used in marches and protests lobbying for voting rights to be extended to White women (Greer, 2014; Markus, 2019). Suffragettes who were incarcerated for their advocacy often used embroidery to record hunger strikes and other resistance acts, creating a shared legacy and collective identity through craft (Markus, 2019).

Similar to how production of goods could be a political action, boycotting of materials was a common way to protest politics as well. In India, the Swadeshi movement and boycotts were also part of the country's move to independence from Britain during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. In the economic sense, swadeshi refers to the sentiment that, regardless of differences in price and quality, domestic products should be preferred by consumers (Sarkar, 1973). It was considered a man's patriotic duty to champion industries that supported this movement, even if profits were minimal or nonexistent (Sarkar, 1973). This included, but was not limited to, the fabric and garment industries. Hand looms and spinning wheels were re-popularized to support this initiative (Sarkar, 1973; Trivedi, 2007). Additionally,

boycotting British or otherwise imported goods, including cotton, was an important part of the move towards Indian independence (Sarkar, 1973); the swadeshi movement drove India to separate from industrial Britain by attaching a nationalist message to the handmade (Hendricks, 2017). Both men and women in the colonial era in the United States used "homespun" (handspun yarns and handknit garments) to protest British tariffs in the colonies (Macdonald, 1988; Farinosi and Fortunati, 2018); in fact, it became a childhood requirement to learn to knit stockings to wear at home and to sell for income (Macdonald, 1988). In wartime, homespun became essential in the support of wartime efforts.

Women made entry into the textile industry during World Wars I and II, replacing the working-aged men in the factories so they could go off to war (Macdonald, 1988; Hannan & Kranzberg, n.d.). In this capacity, women contributed further to supporting war efforts by manufacturing uniforms on a larger scale; some women even refused to manufacture uniforms for the so-called enemy in an act of defiance. Stories of women wearing the Union Jack or French Tricolour to work, or loading their looms with red, white, and blue fibre when German inspectors came to factories were plentiful in occupied areas in World War II (Macdonald, 1988; Rutter, 2019). On Shetland Island, Scotland, handknitting was a crucial part of the economy, largely regarded as a "woman's work" (Abrams, 2006, p. 154). Here, women were autonomous and independent workers, involving them in social and economic relationships outside the home; their identity as producers was central in female relationships and also gave them a place in the public market (Abrams, 2006). Some nurses also brought fibre crafts into their existing careers; Mary Black was an occupational therapist who used weaving as part of her care (Morton, 2011). Black's work was political not only because it allowed for a woman to engage in paid work in the post-war period, crafting as a therapeutic practice also addressed larger societal issues like poverty and "immorality" by teaching disabled veterans key handiwork skills that could be monetized and would also fight off the ultimate sin of idleness (Morton, 2011). Craft, art, and feminist movements continue to be intertwined, and will be explored in the following chapter.

Research Design

I conducted a small case study of accounts in the fibre arts community on Instagram who are self-identified advocates or activists for a variety of causes within the community. Modern instances of craft-based activism, or "craftivism," have been critiqued as exclusionary, which led me to ensure my research design included members of the fibre arts community historically excluded. My sample of eight public Instagram accounts focused on a range of social justice and political topics, with particular attention paid to accounts run by marginalized community members.

While gaining access to an online community can be challenging for ethnographic research, my entry was facilitated by my belonging in the community prior to conducting my research. I was familiar with the creator network within the fibre arts community on Instagram and was able to seek multiple entry points in order to see the community from multiple points of view.

Influenced by Harold Garfinkel and Erving Goffman's approaches to microanalysis in sociology, I examined the small, everyday moments that these creators decided to capture and share on Instagram over a period of one month (February 2023). Using a semiotic analysis through an intersectional framework, my analysis revealed the meanings behind the posts, captions, Reels, and Lives that creators on Instagram made to understand how politics are practiced through craft on Instagram.

Research Importance

This thesis challenges common critiques identified in the literature regarding crafting and digital activism. By focusing on marginalized creators, I rejected the notion that craft, and by extension craft-based activism, is reserved for White women. While this research is not an exhaustive representation of the crafting community, the accounts I included in my research demonstrate diversity in both identities and political issues represented in the online craft community.

I also challenged the claim that small-scale activism, including digital activism, is ineffective and does not challenge overarching systems of oppression. While there are still challenges when practicing

politics on Instagram, my research shows that crafters are able to make real and meaningful impacts through their crafting process.

This thesis also provides room for future research to expand on these topics. Technology changes rapidly, and the use of digital platforms are a contentious topic in traditional politics. My work focuses on the small-scale effects of craft and lifestyle activism practiced online; there is much more work to be done to understand the impact of this kind of activism on a larger political scale.

Chapter 2

Literature Review and Theoretical Frameworks

The previous chapter demonstrated how craft has been used for political means, especially in terms of production and labour historically, when fibre crafts were done out of a degree of necessity. Craft has continued to be used in politics, especially feminist movements, even now when it is an optional hobby rather than a necessary life skill.

Craft Within Feminist Movements

The value placed on crafts within feminist movements has varied over time. While handicrafts served as a transition from the domestic sphere to the paid workforce for many women during wartime, there is a strong contradiction here as the work of crafters was undervalued. Domestic handicrafts like knitting, crochet, quilting, and weaving were devalued due to the marginalization of crafting spaces, seeing these works as part of the home chores or as a mere hobby rather than "legitimate" work (Black, 2017; Arantes, 2020). In the upper-class, knitting was supposed to happen within the private home and crafted items were never expected to hold monetary value (Arantes, 2020). Handicrafts were easily combined with other household chores due to their portability and their ability to be interrupted, further associating these crafts with the home (Arantes, 2020). The work of crafters also did not fit into the world of fine art. While handicrafts were largely abandoned by second-wave feminists, feminist art historians during this time periods examined why women were historically excluded from Western art history (Markus, 2019). It became clear that the stratification of art above craft stemmed from the difference in where the object was being produced. Fine arts were seen as a public and professional activity, while crafts or domestic arts were privately produced in the home (Markus, 2019). Additionally, a hierarchy of senses contributes to this stratification. According to David Howes, the Western hierarchy of senses places the mind and intellectual work over the body or mechanical work (Alfoldy, 2007). Sight and vision are seen as the noblest sense and touch is the lowest sense, thus fine arts like illustration are valued more

than handicrafts (Alfoldy, 2007; Walsh & Baker, 2017). This hierarchy is reinforced by the racist and classist ways items were deemed to be "art" or not. Since the art world was largely dominated by wealthy, white men, only the work produced by this demographic was considered art (Milner and Moore, 2022). Fibre-based handicrafts were not included in this idea of art.

This association with the domestic sphere and undervaluing of handicrafts meant that many handicrafts were abandoned in practice by many second-wave feminists, exchanging these household practices for a place in the public workforce (Chansky, 2010). Those who continued to practice handicrafts publicly fought to have their work recognized as art, on the same level as the fine arts (Markus, 2019). Much feminist textile art at this time focused on issues and themes related to cisgender women: pregnancy, menstruation, and homemaking (Markus, 2019). Aside from this minority of women who fought to have crafts recognized as a legitimate art form, fibre arts including knitting, crochet, and weaving were once again relegated to the home; it was no longer normal to see someone engaging in fibre crafts in public (Macdonald, 1988; Literat & Markus, 2020). Handicrafts once again became invisible to the public and therefore condemned to the same fate of undervaluation as the rest of private sphere work shouldered by women and mothers. Society had benefitted from the unpaid labour of handicrafts while failing to recognize the value and creativity of the (mostly) women who engaged in this practice.

Third-wave feminists continued the fight for recognition by emphasizing that the activities conducted in the personal and private sphere were political (Chansky, 2010; Farinosi, 2021). During this movement, women fought for handicrafts to be recognized as valuable in and of themselves. This position posited that these products did not need to be created as art with a message to be recognized as equal in value to fine art made by men, but that crafts are empowering and able to be used as a form of political activism (Greer, 2014; Markus, 2019). As Bratich and Brush (2011) frame it, a new domesticity had emerged, where craft had emerged as a way to explore intersectional issues of identity while honouring the traditions and value of the home. Greer (2014) indicates that "craftivism" (craft-based activism) can be mobilized for a variety of causes and issues. Many crafters view their skills as a mechanism to

challenge the unethical consumption of fast fashion and labour practices of the modern textile industry (Bell et al., 2018; Hewett, 2021), reminiscent of the Arts and Crafts movement of the late-1800s. Fat crafters[1] also see handcrafting clothing as a way to reject the mainstream expectation of ideal bodies; this is often an empowering way for those whose bodies are deemed abnormal by capitalist society to regain power over their body (Chansky, 2010; Greer, 2014; Hewett, 2021).

Sarah Corbett, an activist who calls for gentle forms of protest, launched a craftivist project called Canary Craftivists prior to the United Nations Climate Conference COP26 in November 2021. Based in the United Kingdom, the movement prompted crafters to stage crafting gatherings in public to attract media attention and send handmade canaries to Members of Parliament, urging them to advocate for climate action (Craftivist Collective, 2021). Like the canary in the coal mine who alerted miners to toxic air, these canaries were to be a "kind, encouraging warning for Members of Parliament now" regarding the climate crisis (Craftivist Collective, 2021). While some may criticize the method of creating a seemingly useless item in the name of the environment, others praise it as a way for introverted people to get involved in politics when they otherwise might not have (Crafts Council, 2021).

One famous example of activism based on a crafted object is the AIDS memorial quilt (Greer, 2014). The idea to create a quilt commemorating the thousands of lives lost during the AIDS epidemic in the United States arose from a smaller project in 1985 (The National AIDS Memorial, n.d.). Cleve Jones, a human rights activist, worked with a group of friends to request quilt panels with the names of those who died from AIDS; the Quilt was first displayed on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. in 1987 and included 1,920 panels (The National AIDS Memorial, n.d.). The Quilt became an increasingly popular display and was brought on a national tour in 1988, raising $500,000 USD for AIDS services and organizations (The National AIDS Memorial, n.d.). The Quilt is now over 50,000 panels large, weighing over 54-tons, and is available to be viewed interactively online (The National AIDS Memorial, n.d.). It is

[1] Throughout this thesis, I use the term "fat crafters" to refer to crafters who do not have a thin body shape or are a larger size than Western beauty standards identify as "desirable." The word "fat" is being reclaimed in the community as a positive or neutral descriptor of one's body and identity.

still used over 35 years later as an educational tool on the history of the AIDS epidemic, HIV prevention, and queer history in the United States.

Crafter LJ Roberts discusses their experience viewing the Quilt as a young queer teenager in the 1990s in *Craftivism* (Greer, 2014). They discuss how the Quilt represents more than just the AIDS epidemic, exploring how both craft and queer people (especially those living with HIV) have experienced similar negative stereotypes: the association to femininity in a negative way, as well as "an undesired association with poor, working-class people, oppressed minority populations, people of colour, and Third-World populations" (Greer, 2014, pp. 124). Additionally, Roberts discusses how the AIDS/HIV epidemic can be viewed to understand numerous systems of oppression, like misogyny and sexism, homophobia, transphobia, racism, classism, and more (Greer, 2014, pp. 125). The Quilt represents all of these elements of oppression, challenging these systems by recognizing the lives lost in the epidemic as human and worthy of respect and recognition.

One of the more recent and most popular examples of craftivism was the Pussyhat movement. After Donald Trump's election in 2016 in the United States and his misogynistic comments and policies regarding women, global marches took place to protest his appointment. While temporarily disabled by a serious injury, artist Jayna Zweiman was unable to attend the 2017 Women's March in Washington, DC protesting Trump's inauguration (Pussyhat Project, n.d.). She wanted to do something to participate in the marches without being physically present, while her friend Krista Suh, another crafter, needed a hat to wear to the march she was attending. With the help of Kay Coyle, the owner of a local yarn store, they designed a free hat pattern in pink yarn with cat ears dubbed the Pussyhat (Pussyhat Project, n.d.). These pink hats were made and worn by millions of people who attended 600 rallies worldwide in support of women's rights and empowerment. While the movement has been criticized for being exclusionary to transgender and racialized women (Black, 2017; Markus & Literat, 2020), there is no doubt that it was a critical moment in craft activism history.

Even though Third-Wave feminists fought to make handicrafts visible and valued, the labour and skill required to make something by hand still fails to be recognized in a society based on constant consumption of inexpensive mass production (Newmeyer, 2008; Jakob, 2013; Black, 2017). Many crafters see their practice as resistance to an "always-on" consumer society, while enjoying the benefits of creative expression and relaxing psychological benefits of the crafting process (Newmeyer, 2008; Black, 2017, Hewett, 2021). While craft was traditionally seen as a necessary mode of production to fight off "idleness" demonized by capitalism (Macdonald, 1988), today, the slow practice of handmade production is the antithesis of our capitalist society.

While craft can empower individuals to become aware of social issues and may motivate them to address injustices, the efficacy of "craftivism" is debated. Individual crafters rarely succeed in causing significant disruptions to the unsustainable consumption model we currently have (von Busch, 2019). There is also the criticism that there is no ethical consumption under capitalism (Carrington et al., 2016); in the context of craft, any materials purchased are still produced in an exploitative capitalist system and were most likely still made with environmentally unsustainable or unethical labour practices. This type of "lifestyle activism" where the responsibility to change systems rests on the lifestyle choices of individuals has been criticized for failing to recognize the systemic nature of injustices (Sotirakopoulos, 2016). Without addressing the larger oppressive systems of production and consumption, it is unlikely that crafting as an individual practice will result in global or systemic change. That being said, both Greer (2014) and Harrebye (2016) acknowledge that these types of creative activist movements are not expected to have the same impact as a large-scale, strongly organized movement. Instead, craftivism is meant to create objects that invite questions and conversations around a difficult or contentious topic (Greer, 2014); it is these moments of disruption, rather than movements, that allow for change over time (Harrebye, 2016).

This view of craft and craft activism as an individual action is not an accurate representation, however. While some may think of domestic handicrafts as a solitary endeavour, this review has already

shown that crafting has traditionally been a very social act. Quilting circles were common ways for (mostly) women to socialize prior to being in the paid workforce (Macdonald, 1988; Garber, 2013; Greer, 2014). As opposed to the individual approach to disrupting our capitalist system, collective action is often more successful in making societal changes. Stitch 'n' Bitch, Knit and Natter, or other crafting circles mobilize handicrafts towards political and social justice goals, from community building to active protests (Groeneveld, 2010; Greer, 2014; Black, 2017). Some groups use collaborative spaces to generate goods for charity, supporting their community in a tangible, material way (Garber, 2013); others focus on knowledge sharing and skill building (Jefferies, 2016); many are interested in consciousness-raising of current political and social justice issues (Black, 2017). All methods can be seen understood as participatory politics, carrying on the goals of previous feminist movements through community organization around the practice of craft.

These communal practices have been made much more accessible with the Internet. While emerging digital technologies may seem opposed to traditional, tactile handicrafts, the combination of the two allows for the communal effect of crafting to become far-reaching. Craft activism has grown through the Internet, where community and communication are fostered between crafters (Newmeyer, 2008). This is especially prevalent on the social media site Ravelry, which is dedicated to crafters. Ravelry is a site where crafters can buy and sell patterns, track project process, and track material purchases such as yarn and fibre. It also has a community function by offering different forum boards, usually characterized by a specific theme. Examples include boards specific to a geographic location, viewers of a certain podcast, or patrons of a certain local yarn store. Within these boards, members can start threads to communicate with each other, moderated by those who are administrators of the board. Craft literature has explored how Ravelry has been used as a community building tool for crafters (Markus, 2019) and specifically how crafters practice their politics online in these spaces (Literat & Markus, 2020).

While craft is no longer a necessary life skill, it is a practice that many choose to continue as a hobby and as a vehicle for their politics. Knowing how powerful these digital tools are for political and

social justice-based activism, there is undoubtedly craft activism being practiced on social media sites like Instagram that have not yet been explored fully.

Digital and Lifestyle Activism

Since the beginning of Web 2.0, people have used it as a space to bring people together, innovate, and collaborate.[2] Social media platforms emerged, creating networks of communities that were otherwise inaccessible in the analog or "offline" world. At the same time, consumer electronics became more affordable, Internet connections became widely available, and users became adept at using these services (Anderson, 2016). Most notably, large social media corporations emerged and dominated the market, namely Facebook, Twitter, YouTube (purchased by Google), and Instagram (purchased by Facebook).

Social networks created on and between these platforms are critical in facilitating social processes necessary for resistance and action (Bouvier & Rosenbaum, 2020). These social networking sites have become increasingly popular due to the appearance of a bottom-up approach, allowing average people to contribute to news and events. Social media also increases the capacity for activism by removing or displacing barriers that people may face in traditional "offline" activism, including economic, geographic, and political hinderances (Rodgers & Scobie, 2015).

Facebook has been used for political and social activism, especially in an organizing capacity. Profile pictures and filters that can be applied to profile avatars aid in forming a collective identity (Gerbaudo, 2015) and Facebook Groups allow political activist groups to organize events, allowing for event mobilization. The "Occupy" protests in 2011 (Kavada, 2015) and the Arab Spring uprisings around the same time (Wolfsfeld et al., 2013) relied heavily on social media, Facebook specifically, to organize their protests.

Twitter has also been used in political activism and discourse. The use of hashtags on Twitter allows for actors to find other people or accounts that post content relevant to their interests (Kavada,

[2] While Web 1.0 was a one-way transfer of information between the user fetching data from a website, Web 2.0 refers to the platformization of the Internet, meaning that popular and successful sites are deeply user-driven, shaping and being shaped by the consumer (Ryan, 2010).

2015). Twitter is especially useful for discourse within the public sphere because of the ability to directly reply to a message publicly, whether you are "connected" to the person by following their account or not (Postill & Pink, 2012). This is a key difference between Twitter and Facebook, where the latter connects people when they both consent to an invite, while the former does not have that consent model, making it feel more like a public commons (Postill & Pink, 2012). Campaigns can be directly tied to a hashtag, like in the #sealfie Twitter campaign, allowing followers to connect and interact with related content (Rodgers & Scobie, 2015).

Video technology has been used for activism purposes in many spheres. Tragedy and injustices made visible through video are common ways journalists and activists use social media to raise awareness and promote action (Wessels, 2019). Video-dominant social media platforms like YouTube make this practice accessible to most people. Aside from direct political activism, YouTube has become a site for social transformation and activism. Some examples include transgender activism (Tortajada et al., 2021) and Inuit culture preservation and dissemination (Wachowich & Scobie, 2010) through education and community-building.

Most of the current research on how Instagram is used examines the community and identity-building capacity through the use of hashtags, similar to Twitter. Stanley (2020) explains how Instagram allows for community building through shared interests, rather than replicating real-life connections like Facebook. Davenport (2021) looks at how "influencers," defined as those who use their online positionality to promote certain products or commodities, use the platform. These influencers noted that they felt pressured to comment on political and social events, like the Black Lives Matter movement, due to their increased visibility on the site, but did not necessarily use their platform as an activist channel (Davenport, 2021). The visual nature of Instagram is of particular interest to me; Walsh and Baker (2017) explain that the nature of the photograph has changed from a private, printed affair to a very public and permanent display. The role of the photograph has shifted from one of nostalgia and remembrance (home photo albums, for example) to a tool that transforms the private life into a public affair (Walsh & Baker,

2017). The current digital ecosystem also highly prioritizes visual images and posts, especially on Instagram; posts with visual content often garner more page visits, engagement, and comments than posts without visual media (Saraswati, 2021).

Online spaces have allowed Indigenous collectives to enact political agency; these expressions have been suppressed with violence historically (Carlson & Berglund, 2021). The Idle No More movement started as a response to changes in legislation that would essentially remove legally required environmental protections for most fresh-water bodies in Canada; this movement grew on social media rapidly and allowed for Indigenous voices to be heard across the world (Carlson & Berglund, 2021). Traditional media typically invited Indigenous people in positions of power to speak on behalf of the Indigenous population; social media challenges this hierarchy by allowing diverse and dispersed Indigenous peoples to have a voice (Carlson & Berglund, 2021). This democratizing effect of social media allows communities to speak for themselves on a global stage, challenging the colonial narratives that these communities no longer exist, or exist in silent peace with dominant settler communities. Twitter is commonly used as a public forum for Indigenous activists; the Idle No More movement was visible on this platform, as is the movement raising awareness and demanding action on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two Spirit peoples (#MMIWG), the resistance against the Dakota Access pipeline (#NoDAPL), and education and correction around the importance of the sealing industry to Inuit communities (#Sealfies) (Rodgers & Scobie, 2015; Carlson & Berglund, 2021). Youtube has also been used as a space to teach culture and practice identity for Indigenous peoples (Wachowich & Scobie, 2010; Carlson & Berglund, 2021). These spaces are a fixture in the political landscape, challenging ongoing hierarchies of colonialism and racism in the political sphere.

Similarly, transgender and queer identities flourish in online communities, whereas offline they may not make themselves as visible due to safety concerns (Fotopoulou, 2016; Tortajada et al., 2021). While technology-mediated violence occurs online, many communities still feel like it is a safer space to engage in political action than the offline world. Fileborn (2017) explores how online spaces can offer

justice for victims and survivors of sexual violence that is unavailable through the actual justice system. Victims and survivors of sexual violence can use social networking sites and other online spaces to give voice to their own experiences, see their perpetrators punished or publicly condemned, and circumvent formal criminal legal systems that tend to work against victims and marginalized groups (Fileborn, 2017). This ability to personalize space based on identity and values has shifted the Internet from a disembodied virtual space to a ubiquitous part of social and individual life (Paasonen, 2011).

Scholars who have looked at these online spaces that users can define allow for a space for both individual and collective identity formation (Wachowich & Scobie, 2010; Fotopoulou, 2016; Harrebye, 2016; Kee, 2017, Tortajada et al., 2021). Social networking sites act as a venue where social interactions take place, including interactions that help identity performance (Hogan, 2010). Early digital literature examined how profile images are used in this performance of self; Hogan (2010) relates this practice to Erving Goffman's dramaturgical approach. Goffman explores the idea of a "front stage," a bounded area where activities take place for an audience, or a set of observers (Hogan, 2010). Social networking sites act as a stage in this metaphor, where users can use certain tools like profile images, avatars, and personalized network pages to represent their identity (Hogan, 2010; Papacharissi, 2011). Photographs were commonly used by individuals to convey a personal presence online that textual information does not communicate as well (Papacharissi, 2011). Hogan (2010) clarifies that not all online content is a performance; in Goffman's metaphor, a performance is an ephemeral act whose nature, once recorded, changes. The recorded act is better described as an artifact, since it can be removed from its original context and audience and be displayed to, and experienced by, different observers in a different context (Hogan, 2010). The current environment of social networking sites like Instagram are better understood through Goffman's metaphor if they are understood as an exhibition rather than a stage play (Hogan, 2010). One clear example of this exhibition is through the use of YouTube to document transgender identity experiences (Tortajada et al., 2021). The exhibition of transgender identity within the bounds of

the transgender community on YouTube is indicative of Goffman's front stage: selected stories are portrayed, while parts of the transgender experience are hidden from the audience (Tortajada et al., 2021).

Within this defined online space or exhibition, collective identity can also be developed. A collective identity can be understood as a shared definition produced and experienced by a number of individuals (Kavada, 2015). The understanding of this shared definition within the group is critical for collective identity work, where personal and collective experiences of identities are aligned (McDonald, 2015; Milan, 2015). While Hogan (2010) and Papacharissi (2011) examine the use of profile images for individual identity creation and exhibition, Gerbuado (2015) expands this study to understand how these visual cues can be used to foster a collective identity. As symbolic references with an ability to gain extremely fast and vast popularity (known as "virality"), protest avatars specifically are highly conducive to collective identity production (Gerbuado, 2015). Similar to how badges, flags, and buttons can be signifiers of identification with groups, shared avatars can also bring a sense of belonging to a political community (Gerbuado, 2015).

Collective and individual identity building can be considered a type of lifestyle activism where individuals practice politics on a microscale through everyday lifestyle choices (Portwood-Stacer, 2013). The assumption that actions taking place in the private sphere are just as political as those that take place in the public sphere is not new; the adage "the personal is political" dates back to second-wave feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, and political scholars have moved away from the clear distinction between the public and private spheres. Ulrich Beck (1997) theorized that those studying politics were not looking in the right places. Beck (1997) indicated that with the emergence of individualization and the reduced power of the welfare state, political action happens outside of formal political institutions, in everyday life and the private sphere, which should not be discounted by political scholars (122). Since social media sites are intertwined with everyday life, the Internet is a space that allows for subpolitics to be practiced, whether individuals recognize it as political action or not (Bakardjieva, 2009). Lifestyle

activism is less interested in the effect of the political action or performance, and more focused on the meaning placed on these actions.

Della Porta & Diani (2020) explain that protest is a site of contention with the capacity to mobilize public opinion in order to put pressure on decision makers, which can be achieved through unorthodox forms of action. Many examples of digital activism demonstrate the three logics della Porta & Diani (2020) that make up the modern protest toolkit. These logics are used in any form of action to influence power structures and bring about change. The logic of numbers refers to the power in numbers underlying most forms of action and protest. In traditional, institutional politics, amassing support and maximizing numbers of electors or supporters is critical to obtaining power. This can be achieved on social media platforms by creating content to reach new audiences and cultivating a community and collective identity.

The logic of damage is demonstrated through political violence in the most extreme cases (della Porta & Diani, 2020). Riots or wars cause material damage to win specific battles or obtain media attention. In lifestyle activism, one of the ways damage can be caused is through consumer purchasing power. By choosing what to buy or what not to buy, the consumer can "inflict damage" on the opposing side (Lorenzini & Forno, 2022 at p. 422).

Finally, the logic of bearing witness is a critical part of protest. It allows protesters to demonstrate commitment to a certain objective for the greater good (della Porta & Diani, 2020). Typically, bearing witness is achieved through actions that may pose serious personal risks or costs, for the sake of one's own convictions and values, like participating in civil disobedience. This is done in order to show others that an alternative value or culture is possible, resisting the structures and hierarchies that have become the social norm. This is a powerful tool in lifestyle activism because it returns power to the individual to act on their values and ethics, while empowering others to do the same.

Not everyone agrees that some forms of digital activism, like sharing an image, is a sufficient form of protest. The phenomenon of a shared image that Gerbuado (2015) explores in their article is

highly criticized as a form of "slacktivism" by critical digital scholars (Cabrera et al., 2017; Edrington, 2021). Slacktivism, a digital version of armchair activism, is a critical name for online actions that are viewed as politically ineffective and lazy (Cabrera et al., 2017). Kavada (2015) notes that social media's ability to amass public attention around contentious issues so quickly leads to mobilizations based on shallow commitments. For example, collection of posts made by celebrities on Instagram in support of the Black Lives Matter movement was criticized for oversaturating a hashtag with empty or shallow support, obscuring relevant and meaningful information (Edrington, 2021). This criticism is countered by support for this type of activism; as Cabrera et al. (2017) note, slacktivism is sometimes required for visibility. Consciousness-raising by many ensure visibility for a movement or other activist pursuits; Edrington (2021) notes that slacktivism can expose new audiences to a cause. Activism sometimes relies on the slacktivism of the larger public (Cabrera et al., 2017).

There are other challenges that must be identified and addressed when studying the use of any digital platform. One of these challenges is access. The Internet has historically been made mainly accessible to men, especially wealthier men, due to available income, the ability to access technology in the workplace, and digital literacy (Kensinger, 2003). While Anderson (2016) suggests that consumer electronics have become more affordable and users have become more adept at using the Internet, digital inequalities still exist, especially along age based and socio-economic divides (Fileborn, 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic did not improve this situation; in fact, the reliance on the Internet increased the digital divide significantly (Lai & Widmar, 2021). The impact caused concern for children reliant on an insufficient digital education system and those with limited economic resources to obtain in-home Internet services (Lai & Windmar, 2021). Additionally, rural income and bandwith issues create a split on a socio-economic line (Lai & Windmar, 2021). This impacts whose voices and presence are missing from digital activism; while some forms of activism from marginalized groups find a home in online spaces, it is still important to understand that this is a privileged position that may be fractioned by this digital divide.

Social Media Logics

After gaining access to these technologies, any participation on social media platforms is governed by the logic of these technologies. The logic of social media closely resembles that of mass media, which can be defined as a set of principles cultivated in and by media institutions that infiltrate every public domain, dominating its organizing structures (van Dijck & Poell, 2013). Van Dijck and Poell (2013) identify programmability as an element critical to understanding social media logic. Programmability refers to the two-way flow of user-generated content in Web 2.0, as well as the ability for site owners to tweak their infrastructure to influence consumer behaviour. The changes in what and who is popular on these platforms shapes and is shaped by decisions made by users and the site owners. Both creators and consumers of content can be steered into different information streams, depending on the goals of the platform and users (van Dijck & Poell, 2013). Noble's (2018) work on algorithmic oppression explores the harms of relying on these logics without understanding how they are created or how they operate. When search engines and other platforms are developed, they typically directly map old media traditions, biases, and practices into the new form of media (Noble, 2018). They perpetuate existing inequalities and harms against marginalized people and communities, and users are not aware because it is hidden from the public view (Noble, 2018). Additionally, since the Internet has traditionally been dominated by wealthy White men, this became the dominant paradigm of the Internet, at least in the United States (Noble, 2018; Saraswati, 2021). Marginalized people are represented against a backdrop of the White male gaze whenever they are visible or present on a platform. Noble (2018) also explains the risk that a capitalist social media logic poses; at the time of Noble's writing, Google's search engine results prioritized results based on popularity and paid advertisements, rather than accuracy or truthfulness. Additionally, Google can also omit certain search results without having to disclose this to the user (Noble, 2018). Most users do not have the digital or algorithmic literacy skills to understand that these results may not be accurate or correct; the results are understood to be trustworthy because of how Google Search has completely monopolized the way people find information (Noble, 2018). Previously,

public institutions like libraries and schools acted as information brokers to the public; now, this power belongs to private multinational companies motivated by capitalist gain (Noble, 2018). While Noble (2018) explores these issues within search engines specifically, the same obscured decision-making is conducted by social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook, deciding what content to promote to users, based at least partly on the company's interests (Wylie, 2019; Zuboff, 2019).

The underlying logic of Instagram is based on these capitalist and neoliberal values, which then shape the digital space. Saraswati (2021) explains that to become popular on Instagram, users must compete with others to have their content seen. This requires users to position themselves as entrepreneurs and pour time, energy, and resources into constantly generating creative content, or else their account will be lost in the sea of creators (Saraswati, 2021). Social media platforms encourage this individuality, the focus on the self, and competitiveness to encourage engagement on the platform. While these spaces can be used to create community as explored, the underlying logic prioritizes individuality in order to profit.

Early digital feminists challenged these neoliberal logics and attempted to emphasize community on these platforms. Since the Internet has favoured the White, male user population (Kensinger, 2003; Noble, 2018; Saraswati, 2021), those who have negative experiences online are usually an "other" in some way. Saraswati (2021) explains that historically marginalized groups rely on difference and being an "Other," or someone whose identity differs from the normal, typical, or ideal group, to be heard and seen in the new media landscape. These groups are the usually targets for harassment and online violence, as they would be targeted offline (Kee, 2017). Digital feminists typically focused on the disadvantages women experienced online, specifically looking at gender-based violence and activism (Kensinger, 2003; Paasonen, 2011; Kee, 2017). Women have also been identified primarily as consumers on the Internet, to be marketed to, rather than understood as creators or citizens (Van Zoonen, 2001). The concept of a feminist Internet emerged, focusing on ideas of collective ownership, distributed power, a politics of

openness, and decentralized knowledge networks, entirely opposite of the neoliberal values that underpin social media networks (Kee, 2017).

The Importance of Intersectionality

A concern that Kensinger (2003) raised about digital feminism was its focus on White, Western women; such a narrow understanding of feminism can harm solidarity efforts in online activism because people with intersecting identities may not see themselves represented and may be unable to relate to the digital feminist movement. Intersectional feminism recognizes the importance of various constructed identities, understanding that these identities influence social interactions. More specifically, intersectional feminism as a critical analysis is interested in how combinations, or intersections of these identities influence social experiences. This theoretical approach recognizes that axes of oppression, including race, gender, age, and ability, do not operate as exclusive categories, but are reciprocal, constructive phenomena that reinforce complex social inequalities (Collins, 2015). The need for an intersectional feminism was identified by Black feminists who noticed that mainstream feminism could not adequately address issues faced by Black women (Collins, 2015). Marginalized voices are needed in feminist studies of technology because they are able to raise the alarm for issues that mainstream White feminists may miss; impacts of surveillance culture (Kee, 2017) and hypersexualization (Noble, 2018) are experienced in an amplified manner for Black women, while queer individuals and communities are targeted for a specific type of gender-based violence that may be missed by the straight community (Fotoloupou, 2016; Tortajada et al., 2021)

Collins (2019) provides six guiding principles of intersectional feminism that will influence my research and analysis: relationality, power, social inequality, social context, complexity, and social justice. Relationality and relational processes are essential to intersectionality because the systems that intersect (race, gender, class, and other systems of power) are created and maintained through relational processes. Power and systems of power create social divisions, and systems of power produce and reproduce unequal outcomes for those whose identities place them lower within social hierarchies.

Analysis of social inequality without an intersectional lens would look at frameworks of inequality as separate entities within society. Intersectionality rejects both of these assumptions, and instead posits the workings of power relations as the cause of these social inequalities. Social context allows us to understand how knowledge is produced within communities, as well as understanding social locations within intersecting systems of power of individuals and groups. Given these previous principles, intersectionality is a complex inquisitive process because it demands examination of layers of interactions and required an understanding of numerous connections across different categories of analysis. Finally, social justice is at the heart of intersectionality. Within an intersectional praxis, social justice demands the redistribution of privilege and opportunities to allow for equality of marginalized groups (Collins, 2015, 2019; Woods et al., 2021). Intersectionality is not only a framework for analysis, but also a call to action to reject binary methods of analysis and recognize justice, freedom, equality, and other ethical concerns as critical goals within scholarship and academia.

Understanding the role of craft in previous economic and social justice political projects provides a foundation for understanding why and how craft activism is practiced today. While handicrafts are a physical task, their communal history lends itself well to adapting to online communities on digital platforms known for their potential identity performance and other activist projects. This knowledge is applied using an intersectional feminist approach to understanding current craft-based activism on Instagram in the following chapters.

Chapter 3

Methods

In order to examine how politics are practiced on Instagram in the fibre arts community, I conducted a case study of eight accounts in the community. A semiotic analysis was applied to the content gathered from these accounts, using an intersectional feminist lens to understand the meaning behind the content created.

Research Site

Understanding why Instagram is a suitable site for communities to form is the first step to exploring how fibre communities practice these politics through this platform. Instagram was chosen as my site of research due to its visual nature, openness, and potential for growth and community building. Instagram was launched in 2010 as a photo editing and sharing platform, with text-based functions limited to comments and captions (Yang, 2021). The specific and clear purpose of sharing photos for the application was appealing and unique among many text-based social media platforms (Yang, 2021). This visual nature of the platform made it especially enticing to artists; in 2022, it was still the most popular platform for visual artists, even though TikTok had exploded with popularity starting in 2020 (Petterson, 2023). Since there is no platform that allows for tactile interaction, the most popular visual platform is the platform of choice for fibre artists.

Instagram is also an open platform, allowing users to interact with any public account they find (and private accounts if they are able to gain access). Instagram's open platform makes it easier for sub-communities to interact with one another than on forum-based sites where the user must know what board they are looking for to join, such as the fiber art dedicated platform Ravelry.[3] Previous research addresses

[3] Despite its sole focus on fiber arts, Ravelry was not chosen as a site to study for a number of reasons: there have been accusations of both political censorship and moderation during President Trump's election campaigns and accusations that the site owners tolerate and promote potentially harmful conservative politics (Basu, 2020), accessibility has been compromised for neurodivergent users (White, 2021), and Instagram's sharing tools are more intuitive than Ravelry's forum and board-based layout.

this concept by exploring the use of hashtags on social media sites to find certain topics or communities to engage with (Chen, 2013; Kavada, 2015; Rodgers & Scobie, 2015; Utekhin, 2017).

In the 13 years since its launch, Instagram has expanded to include video content, messaging capabilities, and the ability to share others' posts within the application. The evolving tools have increased the ability to share and directly engage with others; additionally, the openness of the platform has led to growth and an increase in ability to build community, which is essential for social movements to develop (Bouvier & Rosenbaum, 2020). As demonstrated through the literature, the openness of social media platforms also helps to remove some barriers to community and political participation (Rodgers & Scobie, 2015).

Privacy, Anonymity, and Consent in Social Media Research

When discussing both digital media and social movements, questions of privacy and confidentiality are often raised, due to the quasi-public medium, coupled with the potential for threats of harm and surveillance of those who express controversial opinions. Anonymity online has been shown to have both a positive and negative impact on quality of online discussions (Berg, 2016). Anonymous participants will engage in rude and uncivil behaviour online because there are seemingly fewer consequences than if they engaged in this negative behaviour in person, especially if a topic is sensitive or involves personal values (Berg, 2016). Whereas traditional forms of in-person protest rarely allow for anonymous participation due to the necessary involvement in the public sphere, online forms of protest have more easily allowed for participation without identification. Without knowing the identity of the people engaging in online content, petitions can be circulated online and signed anonymously, and "hacktivism," the act of hacking into sites and obfuscating services for political gain, relies on anonymity to be successful (Earl, 2012).

While anonymity can cause issues with discussion quality online, identification is also valid concern when discussing digital protest, especially in countries with authoritarian governments (Earl, 2012; Uldam, 2018). Journalists, public officials, and activists have spoken out against mass surveillance

that targets certain bodies (Kee, 2017; Uldam, 2018). Technology-mediated violence, like "doxxing," is a reality for many people who post content online (Anderson & Wood, 2021). Doxxing refers to the activity of publishing private information against an individual's wishes, usually with malicious intent (Anderson & Wood, 2021, pp. 205). While the literature on this phenomenon is fairly new, women are more likely to be the victims of this social harm (Anderson & Wood, 2021). Given that the members of the community being studied predominantly identify as women, it is likely that they are aware of this phenomenon and act online accordingly. Even though the people running the accounts I included in my sample choose to identify themselves publicly, it is important to note that they may adjust their behaviour online to mitigate the risk of being "doxxed."

Social media as a quasi-public medium has challenged the traditional understanding of privacy as concept. A historical understanding of privacy relies on the idea of personal property and the ability to control access to said property (Earl, 2012). This understanding of privacy is applicable when online networks are conceptualized as spaces that people have access to; the level of privacy expected depends on the level of access others have to the space. While Earl (2012) focuses more on the former idea of privacy, many digital media scholars conceptualize networks as defined spaces. These online spaces have been studied to understand how they reinforce or stray from the idea of a public and private sphere in classic social and political movement literature. Depending on the parameters of a social network, an online space can be a private area with inclusions managed by the user, or it can be a public forum where, at any given time, millions of people can engage in real time. Maestri and Profanter (2017) explain that some social media sites do act as a type of public commons, especially for groups where the public sphere is not accessible. Social networking sites can be a means for historically silenced groups to engage in overtly political action. Political action is typically more visible and identifiable in the public sphere; though, the literature explored in the previous section shows that action in the private sphere can be political in nature it is not often recognized as "true" political involvement. Women in Saudi Arabia, who

have traditionally been treated as invisible in society, have turned to social networking sites like Facebook to engage in political conversations with their female and male peers (Maestri & Profanter, 2017).

The discussion of what is considered a private versus public space online remains contested, which has implications on the research ethics review process. Some platforms allow a user to determine clear boundaries with private account functions, requiring potential followers to gain permission from an account holder before being able to view their content. Without this feature, it is more difficult to determine when informed consent is required from the owner of the data being collected. Stanley et al. (2015) indicate that personal discourse does not necessarily mean private; while content may include personal stories and experiences, if they occur in a space that is considered public and is accessible without any form of membership, it can be assumed that the data exists in the public domain.

The determination of an online space as private or public impacts the determination of whether informed consent is required from participants. Informed consent relies on a comprehensive understanding of the research project, how data will be collected, and how the data will be used (Stevens et al., 2015). Article 2.2 of the Tri-Council Policy Statement 2 (2022) indicates that informed consent and Research Ethics Board Review is not required when observing public spaces where there could be no reasonable expectation of privacy, and when relying on cyber-material exclusively. Since all data collected were published in the public domain through public social media accounts, there could be no expectation of privacy. This conclusion is further supported by the fact that all accounts included in the sample either had a business or advocacy aspect to their account that required and benefited from public engagement. This exemption from the REB review process was also confirmed by the University of Ottawa's Research Ethics and Integrity Office (personal communication, March 13, 2023).

Similar to in online discussions, anonymity can have benefits and drawbacks within research as well. Anonymity can protect sensitive information, especially if information is collected that would compromise the autonomy and dignity of participants, but it also takes away credit from the content creator (Stevens et al., 2015; Stanley, 2020). Since any information gathered about the content creator

was published on their own page, the risk of gathering sensitive or compromising information was deemed to be low; when compared to the equally compelling ethical consideration of giving due credit to the content creator, especially when using work from underpaid and undervalued marginalized individuals (Bleiweis et al., 2021), I opted to maintain the usernames of the sample accounts throughout this research. Having said that, I did anonymize all comments analyzed. While the creator does not have an expectation of privacy, another user engaging with their content might; for this reason, I maintained confidentiality for all comments collected, whether made from a public or private account.

Research Sample

My sample was composed of eight different accounts as entry points into the community (**Table 1**), compiled using the criterion sampling method (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). The criteria for inclusion for this study were public accounts that identified themselves as an advocate or activist for a specific cause and who had significant community presence, determined by the number of followers at the time of data collection. The accounts I chose were actively posting either daily or weekly in the time period chosen for analysis, with a following of at least 2,000 accounts at the time of data collection. This was to ensure there would be enough activity and interaction between the account holder and other users for analysis. I chose accounts that focus on a range of activist topics and issues, with a particular focus on accounts run by marginalized community members, who all ended up being left-leaning or liberal accounts. I did not include private accounts in this sample. All eight accounts are public, meaning that all content collected from these pages are openly accessible; I checked throughout the collection and analysis period to ensure all accounts remained public. Instagram has also included a paid subscription model, which allows for certain content to be accessible only to a paying audience; these data were not included in my data sample.

Table 1: Accounts included in sample (n=8)

Account	Instagram Biography*	Followers[4]
@bistitchual	Bistitchual Yarn Shop *Shopping & Retail* Toronto's newest queer and trans owned LYS. Open for in store shopping at 266 Jane Street! #bistitchualca 🏳CA🧶 linktr.ee/bistitchual.ca	3118
@disturbingthefleece	Fatimah Custom knitwear She/her. Welcome! I'm a newly relocated Vancouver, BC based knit artist. I design and custom make knitwear for all genders. "You are one of a kind." linktr.ee/DisturbingtheFleece	13.1k
@disyarning	harper bee (they/them) adamently unprofessional, aspiring anti-capitalist knitter, writer, editor, other-things-suffixed-"er" who believes we can do better linktr.ee/Disyarning	8645
@gary_knits_gary_rides	Gary Knits, Gary Rides - Knitter, Crocheter, KAL/CAL Host (*he/him*) *Community* 🧶Host End AIDS Knit/Crochetalongs 🧶Gary Knits, Gary Rides- a craftivism podcast 🏆Knit the 🌈 Purl Award	5251

[4] This inconsistent style (starting with exact numbers and rounding after 10,000 followers) is Instagram's convention.

	🚴 AIDS/Lifecyclist All the Links 👇 linktr.ee/garyknitsgaryrides	
@knitboop	Yu Ra (my first name) *she/her/hers* Semi-retired knitwear designer, gamer nerd, notions maker. DM for collabs! @craftivity.club dev 🤖 #BLM, #DefundThePolice, #AccessibilityMatters, #🌈 flow.page/knitboop	12.5k
@knittingtipsy	Chelsea ~ Knitting Tipsy 🛢️🌴🍸 *she/her/hers* *Designer* ~ Size Inclusive Fashion Designer ~ Mental Health and Self Love 🌿 ~ Often tipsy Florida girl who loves to play with 🎾🎾 ~ For lovers of 🌴👜🍾🍸🛢️🥥 linktr.ee/knittingtipsy	12.8k
@lolabeanyarnco	Adella Colvin *(she/her)* *Product/Service* Owner of LolaBean Yarn Co. linktr.ee/lolabeanyarnco	46.4k
@longwayhomestead	Long Way Homestead *she/her* Life as a sheep/fibre farmer, mama, unschooling, wool mill owner, treaty 1 territory MB. Author of Sheep, Shepherd & Land (Anna Hunter she/her) linktr.ee/longwayhomestead	14k

* as of May 6th, 2023

Since this thesis is a case study of the community, it was important to develop a diverse sample, since previous research has focused on predominantly White members of the community. With Black,

Brown, Indigenous, and Melanated People (BBIMP)[5] still fighting for recognition in the fibre arts community (Hewett, 2021; Shugerman, 2021; Mathias, 2022), I made the conscious choice of including Adella Colvin and Fatimah Hinds in my sample. Adella, publishing under the Instagram handle @lolabeanyarnco, started her hand-dyed yarn company in honour of her daughter, Lola, showing her that Black women can be successful entrepreneurs and business owners. Adella is a community builder and advocate, bringing her lived experience as a Black woman into her advocacy for racial justice.[6]

Similarly, Fatimah has built a knitwear and pattern design brand under the handle @disturbingthefleece, where she discusses the importance of understanding intersecting systems of power and oppression, and how they affect members of the fibre arts community. Fatimah has built a following known as the "Fleece Flock" through her educational posts and Live shows, where she discusses a range of social justice issues from an intersectional lens. In addition to racial justice, Fatimah advocates for economic accessibility in the fibre arts community and often critiques capitalism as a system of violence against marginalized people.

While queer activism is not new to the fibre arts community (Greer, 2014; Chaich & Oldham, 2017), recent anti-LGBTQ+ legislation and aggression has solidified the continuing need for advocacy for this community. With NBC News calling 2022 the "worst year" for LGBTQ rights (Lavietes, 2022), many LGBTQ+ fibre artists use their craft and platform to challenge homophobic and transphobic rhetoric. Kelsi and Jon are the shop owners behind @bistitchual, a transgender- and queer-owned local yarn store in Toronto, Canada. They are both advocates for the LGBTQ+ community. While their storefront was closed between January and March 2023 during the data collection period, they still

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[5] Black, Brown, Indigenous, Melanated People (BBIMP) is a term coined by Louiza "Weeze" Doran on Instagram under her account, @accordingtoweeze (October 28, 2020). While Black, Indigenous, People of Colour (BIPOC) is commonly used to discuss melanated people and communities, Doran moves away from this term because "of colour" positions Whiteness as the default, placing non-White people as an "other". Using BBIMP decentres Whiteness (Doran, 2020) and comes from a person within the community.

[6] During the writing of this thesis, Adella removed all content from her Instagram page to protect her family's (especially her children's) privacy. This content was still analysed, though no images or details of her family, besides her husband Jimmy (who is also a public member of the fibre arts community of Instagram), will be shared in the findings.

created content and held virtual events to maintain this community connection. They now share a space with a fabric store and have restarted in-person community events.

As a self-titled craftivist and advocate, Gary incorporates two of his passions in the content he posts on Instagram: cycling and crafting. As @gary_knits_gary_rides, Gary hosts community events like craft-alongs, giveaways, and fundraising opportunities for the AIDS/Lifecycle organization. As a gay man, Gary's support of this organization and participation in the bicycle marathon to raise money to support organizations providing HIV/AIDS health and social services is just one part of his commitment to the LGBTQ+ community. He also educates through his craftivism podcast and is vocal about LGBTQ+ justice projects in the United States, especially about recent anti-transgender legislation being developed.

Harper, a queer, non-binary, transgender pattern designer also incorporates advocacy into their work as a pattern designer, publishing under the handle @disyarning. They often discuss the importance of bringing their sociopolitical beliefs and their craft together, including their anti-capitalist beliefs and queer identity. They are unapologetic about their unconventional designs that include symbols inspired by magic and the occult, which make them stand out in the fibre arts community. In the past, they have collaborated with Kelsi and Jon from @bistitchual, stressing the importance of supporting queer-owned businesses.

Body size and ability have also been identified as issues for advocacy in the fibre arts community. Size inclusivity has been an important topic in the fibre arts community, and the first one I encountered being discussed in detail. The fibre craft design industry has been criticized to exclude plus-sized patterns, idealizing slender bodies (Sato, 2021). Yarn stores have been advised on how to make changes to become a fat-friendly community space (Cieslak, 2020), and designers have discussed how to write more inclusive patterns (Westermann, 2020). Body positive advocates like Chelsea from @knittingtipsy have been vocal about self-love and promoting body positivity. Publishing size inclusive knit and crochet patterns, and promoting other plus-sized community members is part of Chelsea's crafting platform.

Additionally, Chelsea acknowledges and advocates for mental health supports within the community, sharing her lived experience with anxiety and struggles with body image.

Despite handicrafts' historical inclusion in mental health therapy (Corkhill et al., 2014; Mindwell, 2017) as well as in occupational therapy for people with disabilities (Morton, 2011), literature around disabled members of modern crafting communities is lacking. Researchers from the University of Washington examined the technical process of knitting from the perspective of disabled knitters (Gotfrid et al., 2021), but it does not grant insight into the social experiences of disabled crafters in the community. Including Yu Ra's work created under her handle @knitboop in my sample provides a perspective from a queer, disabled crafter. During June, she hosts a Quiet, Queer Craft-Along event for crafters who are queer, introverted, and/or disabled. She acknowledges that many mainstream Pride-centred events in the fibre community are not always welcoming for queer crafters who are not as loud, public, or socially active. Some crafters have challenges interacting in social settings, while others may not have the energy to engage as much or as often as other crafters. Yu Ra often advocates for community builders to consider accessibility when hosting or attending events.

The farming side of the fibre community also seems to be dominated by women, though the data on this is largely lacking. Anna Hunter is a Canadian shepherdess who is passionate about environmental advocacy and promoting the Canadian wool industry. She and her husband own a fibre farm in Manitoba and she posts educational content under the handle @longwayhomestead. Environmental justice has historically been taken on by women-led groups, especially Indigenous women (McGregor et al., 2020). Conservation efforts are largely female dominated, in contrast to male-dominated industrial efforts (Stein, 2004) and water justice is a heavily gendered issue (Sultana, 2018). Restorative fibre farming in Canada also seems to be a female-led cause (Hunter, 2023) even though farming as a whole has been a male-dominated industry in Canada (Hunter, 2021). Sections of the craftivist movement focuses on the slow and deliberate nature of crafting as an anti-capitalist protest; slow and local production of wool is a part of

this slow activism (Hunter, 2023). Anna's Instagram account is part business, where she sells various beneficial wool products, and part educational, sharing the importance of the Canadian wool industry.

Data Collection

Instagram has various tools that can be used for content creation. I collected two types of data for this project: visual and textual data. Visual data was collected in the form of Instagram posts, lives, and reels, relying on screenshots when appropriate and extensive fieldnotes. Instagram Posts are generally static images posted to a user's page, or "grid," often accompanied by a caption and hashtags. These images can be anything from original photographs to text-based infographics that can fit in the pre-determined sized square. While Posts can include videos, this has largely been replaced by the Reels function. Instagram Reels are short-length videos posted to a user's account. This type of content has been favoured by Instagram's algorithm, to compete with the popular short-form video content platform, TikTok (Alexander, 2020). Like Posts, Reels are visible under a separate tab on a user's account. Instagram Lives are videos streamed live, where viewers can interact with the host of the Live through comments, allowing for a dynamic conversation between commenters, and commenters and the host. Instagram Lives are not guaranteed to be saved and uploaded, so not all Lives are available at a later date. While this content can be saved and posted to be rewatched later, this is up to the creator's discretion.

Textual data was collected in the form of captions and comments, which also relied on screenshots for analysis. Captions on Posts, Reels, and posted Live videos can add context to the post and may relay important information that cannot be captured in one image or video. Instagram captions are limited to 2,200 characters, inclusive of emojis and hashtags, however they are shortened after 125 characters, with the option to click "…more" to reveal the rest of the caption.

I took a networked ethnographic approach to my data collection. Early virtual ethnography attempted to replicate the defined boundaries typical in "offline" ethnography, but this approach disregards the networked nature of social media platforms. Instead, networked ethnography examines the "field" or social media platform, the connections between users, the relationship between users and the

platform, and the connections with their offline world (Burrell, 2009). Seeking multiple entry points into the site of interest was a beneficial approach because of the complex interconnected relationships between accounts in a networked environment; this ensures the researcher sees the community from multiple points of view. Cresswell and Cresswell (2018) state that one of the challenges of qualitative research is entry into the community you are studying; while entering public online communities may be easier due to their accessibility, knowing where to start data collection and examination can be daunting due to the seemingly endless amount of data to work with. As a member of the community, I had an understanding of the main actors within the community and their relational ties to other people, which helped me situate my research and access the community in a clear and meaningful way. I used eight accounts as entry points, and examined other users' engagement within this network.

Burrell also notes that while following and observing is part of virtual ethnography, the researcher should be prepared to intercept when they feel it is appropriate or warranted (Burrell, 2009). Since I am an active member of the community I am studying, I continued to participate and interact with my research subjects. After all, it would have looked strange and may have changed the dynamic between myself and my community members if I stopped all interactions for the duration of my observation period. I made it known when interacting with people that I am a student, and most of my close contacts knew that I was conducting research within the community.

A final consideration provided by Burrell is to understand when and where to stop data collection (Burrell, 2009). Completeness is not an attainable goal for qualitative data collection, especially virtual data collection due to the vast amounts of data produced on the internet. Instead of aiming to examine the entire fibre arts community in completeness, I chose to capture a snapshot of the community by examining one month of data. I chose February 2023 because two events take place that could increase the amount of content created (and therefore data available). "Fibruary" is a month-long challenge created by Cecilia Nelson-Hurt (@creativececi) in the fibre arts community throughout February. A prompt for each day is posted and circulated within the community, and members of the community are encouraged

to post a photo each day related to the prompt. February is also Black History Month, which can also increase engagement.

I collected data from these content sources by taking screenshots of static posts, captions, and comments. Videos posted as Reels and/or Lives were captured via field notes that included a detailed description of the video. While taking notes during the posted Lives, I made note of any interactions between the Live host and the viewers. In total, as shown in Table 2, I analyzed 101 static posts, 51 Reels, and 6 Lives. Only one static post used the feature that allows multiple videos in a post (4 videos); the rest were still images (208 images). Seven out of eight accounts used the carousel feature offered by Instagram, allowing them to create one post with multiple images (or, in one instance, videos); similar to Facebook's option of creating a photo album when posting multiple photos.

Table 2 – Content results by account

Account	Posts	Images	Reels	Lives
@bistitchual	9	10	0	0
@disturbingthefleece	8	8	8	1
@disyarning	6	27	0	1
@gary_knits_gary_rides	40	63	6	0
@knitboop	3	7	0	0
@knittingtipsy	9	49	7	2
@lolabeanyarnco*	12	28	30	2
@longwayhomestead	14	16	0	0

* @lolabeanyarnco was the only account to use a static post for multiple videos (4 videos)

Data Analysis

I conducted a semiotic analysis of the data collected to interpret the signs used within the online fibre arts community. My approach to semiotic sociology borrowed concepts from Harold Garfinkle's ethnomethodology and Erving Goffman's dramaturgical society to examine the meaning behind the signs produced in the fibre arts community on Instagram. Both Garfinkle and Goffman's approaches to sociological study take place on a micro-scale, suitable for the case study I conducted. Instead of trying to make generalizations or develop grand theories applicable on a large scale, microanalyses attempt to understand interactions between people and small communities (Heiskala, 2021).

Garfinkel's (1957) ethnomethodology suggests that practical, mundane activities are just as worthy of sociological study as large and extraordinary events. Ethnomethodology assumes that social organization relies on a shared knowledge and understanding of behaviour between the people in a community (Garfinkel, 1957). In order to conduct this type of analysis, social practices must be "observable-and-reportable" (Garfinkel, 1957 at p.1); social media platforms like Instagram makes this part of the researcher's job fairly easy, since actors document these moments and activities by posting and creating content themselves. Garfinkel's position assumes that what is said by an actor is partial and incomplete, and that the researcher's job is to determine what is *actually* being discussed by elaborating on what the actor said (Garfinkel, 1957 at p. 27).

Goffman's (1959) approach to understanding society also values the micro-level, everyday interactions, though he viewed human interaction as a type of performance. Everyone has a role to act out, with common understanding of behaviour between people (Sannicolas, 1997). If someone acts contrary to this commonly understood behaviour, there is often a corrective ritual to address the behaviour (Sannicolas, 1997). Goffman also identified two types of activity during a performance: the expression given, and the expression given off (Goffman, 1959). Both can be studied to understand interactions between people in a community (Goffman, 1959).

A semiotic approach to analysis also occurs on a micro-scale, examining the meanings behind the signs produced in a social interaction (Heiskala, 2021). Semiotic or semiology emerged from the field of linguistics, but expanded into social theory like sociology and psychology. Social semiotics specifically examined the social and cultural meanings behind signs produced through visual, verbal, and aural modes (Cobley & Jansz, 1997). While semioticians from a linguistic background will examine the meanings behind signifiers like words and alphabets, semioticians from social theory backgrounds examine social phenomena like fashion trends and movies to understand the cultural and social meanings behind the signs produced (Cobley & Jansz, 1997).

Visual semiotics stems from cultural studies, where visual texts were seen as a larger part of culture, rather than an independent unit that need only be counted (Aiello, 2006). This social approach to visual semiotic analysis understands that visual texts are produced to perform an action (Aiello, 2006), which lends insight into how creators use Instagram to convey a message, and how these creators think the meaning they place on their visual content is being consumed or experienced by the viewer (Bell, 2011).

I used Instagram posts, captions, and comments as units of analysis and followed Roland Barthes' practice of separating a sign into three messages (Cobley & Jansz, 1997). When analyzing my data, the information I observed was coded as linguistic, denotative, and connotative elements. Linguistic elements are the words contained within a sign and are the element that most viewers are drawn to first, since their meaning is typically the easiest to understand (Cobley & Jansz, 1997). I examined the use of text in the images and captions to understand the meaning behind the sign, which required the least amount of interpretation. Since Instagram emphasizes the production of visual content rather than textual content, I was particularly interested in what role the linguistic elements played for both the content creator and the viewer in their experience on the platform.

The denotative elements examine the "materiality of the signifier" (Suárez-Carballo et al., 2021 at p. 355), namely the way the sign was produced and the literal, identifiable subject of the sign. How a sign

is produced, like the use of space and framing of an image, can affect how a sign is understood by the viewer. Contact between an image and a viewer can be direct (like a photo of a person staring into a camera lens, which can imitate eye contact between the image subject and viewer) or indirect (like a person looking away from a camera lens, allowing for a more detached relation between the image subject and viewer). Similarly, space within a shot can create intimacy (close-up) or distance (far away) between a viewer and an image subject.

Connotative elements refer to what can be inferred or messages that are suggested within a sign, relying on understanding the denotative elements. For example, Barthes' famous analysis of a pasta advertisement identified "freshness" and "Italinicity" as connotative elements, based on the denotative elements of fresh produce and the use of the Italian flag and colours. This is what Garfinkle meant when he said elaboration is required to understand the whole message (Garfinkle, 1957); the denotative elements were what the content creator was saying, while my job as a researcher was to elaborate on these elements to understand what the content creator was *actually* saying.

Subjectivity must be considered when conducting an analysis based on semiotics. First, understanding the message being conveyed by visual means requires a level of decoding on the part of the researcher. When doing so, the researcher will bring their own history, viewpoint, and biases to the decoding process. While this is not necessarily a bad thing, the researcher must be aware of these factors and consider what it means for their findings. As noted, I am a member of the fibre arts community and I bring my knowledge of the community dynamics into my analysis. While I explain how certain conclusions about my data were reached, I do use this pool of knowledge that other people viewing this content who are not part of the community may not have. I also bring my privilege as a White, cisgender woman into this work, which I try to balance by relying on theory and frameworks developed by Black women and queer academics.

Visual semiotics is a tool that relies on existing theories or frameworks (Jewitt & Oyama, 2011). Similar to the researcher influencing the outcomes, the chosen theory or framework used to decode and

understand the images will have an impact on the understood meaning. This is inevitable in any kind of knowledge production, but it is important to consider how these factors will affect the conclusions made. I was conscious of how my reliance on an interdisciplinary feminist theory of knowledge would affect my analysis process; I specifically build on academic work produced by marginalized groups because previous craft literature has not taken this approach. If I used a framework that did not rely on an intersectional lens, I would risk misinterpreting the meaning in the content created by individuals with intersecting identities and experiences, potentially rendering these elements of the community invisible in my research.

Chapter 4

Findings

The data suggests that while craft-based activism is practiced on Instagram, it is different than Greer (2014) and Corbett's (2021) versions of craftivism. The politics observed were practiced through commodity activism and identity building. A semiotic analysis determined that visual denotative elements and the meaning gathered through connotative elements were important in these areas of politics, making Instagram a well-suited platform for this type of activism.

However, linguistic components were still heavily relied upon, even with the primarily-visual nature of Instagram. This analysis revealed that linguistic elements and the meaning gathered through connotative components were used by creators and community members to spotlight important political causes.

"WIPs and Skeins Excite Me": The Presentation of Objects

In most recent activist projects using crafts, like the HIV/AIDS quilt or the Pussyhat Project, a specific crafted item was central to the political message. Within this study, however, crafting itself was the activism. There were no particular finished crafted items that were made in support of any one specific cause. Rather, sharing about the importance of the raw materials, the process of making crafts, and the finished products were meaningful forms of political expressions to the creators.

The materials shown throughout these posts indicate that these creators practice politics through mindful and intentional material sourcing. Whether supporting environmental sustainability or local small businesses, the materials used in fibre arts carry significant political meaning.

Creators relied heavily on linguistic elements to convey messages of environmental sustainability, since these considerations were not always clear from the visual post itself. Anna from @longwayhomestead dedicated her social media presence to educating about environmental sustainability and supporting the wool industry in Canada. On February 9th, Anna advertised her wool pellet products

available through her farm shop to garden centers, inviting her followers to learn more about the soil additive:

> "… Next time you are shopping, mention that wool pellets are 'all the rage' in soil amendments and suggest they reach out to us for our wholesale price list! (see the link in profile to answer all your wool pellet questions). #canadianwool #woolpellets #saoilammendment [sic] #slowreleasenitrogen #nowastewool #choosewool" (2023-02-09, @longwayhomestead)

Anna's dedication to the Canadian wool industry led her to write a book titled "Sheep, Shepherd & Land: Stories of Sheep Farmers Reinvigorating Canadian Wool." She relied on linguistic elements in her post on February 21st to relay information about her book launch supporting this project (figure 1).

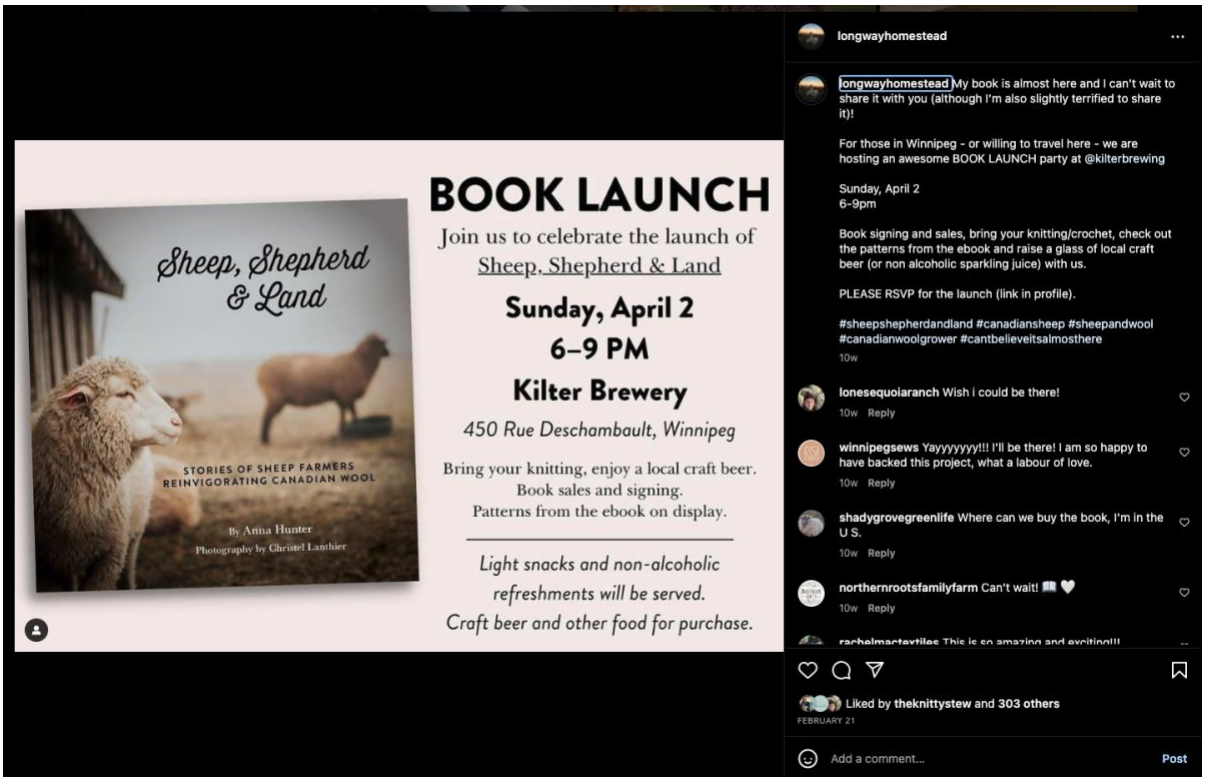

Figure 1 - A graphic providing details about Anna's book launch, 2023-02-21, @longwayhomestead

In their post on February 12th, Jon and Kelsi also indicate the importance of sustainable materials and supporting a queer business using the post caption, writing:

> "Did you know we're the only store in Canada that stocks @purlscoutyarns? Our *only* American yarn, we just couldn't resist a

> queer dyer using ethically and environmentally-friendly yarn with all natural dyes. Best of all, it's all based on Sailor Moon characters!..." (2023-02-12, @bistitchual)

While relying on the linguistic elements to emphasize the importance of environmental sustainability, the denotative elements through Anna's account also suggest a commitment to this cause. The backdrop of most of Anna's images was her farm, adding an environmental context to the posts. The colours in most of these images are neutral colours, an array of beige, green, and white that support the theme of natural or environmental content. Experienced fibre artists would also be able to identify raw or low-processed wool through the denotative elements in her posts from February 1st and 6th (figure 2).

Figure 2 - Images of low processed yarn (left) and wool locks (right), 2023-02-01 and 2023-02-02, @longwayhomestead

These posts emphasize the importance of small, traceable modes of production to certain members of the fibre arts community, which is quite contrary to our current globalized capitalist system. While our modern consumption patterns do not consider where or how products are manufactured, these posts suggest that it is possible to source sustainable products, and that we should care about the sustainability of the products we consume.

In addition to the importance of environmental sustainability, many posts about the materials used in craft practice also highlight small business owners, especially companies that dye and sell yarn and those who write and publish patterns. Whether it was self-promotion of their own yarn or patterns, or in collaboration with other creators, content was shared to bring attention to small businesses within the fibre arts community.

Logos and product labels are important linguistic elements that allow a viewer to identify the businesses content creators choose to support. Gary often posted images of skeins of yarn with logos visible. On February 1st, he posted an image of a project with a Lola Bean Yarn Co. logo visible, highlighting the small business in the caption of the post (figure 3).

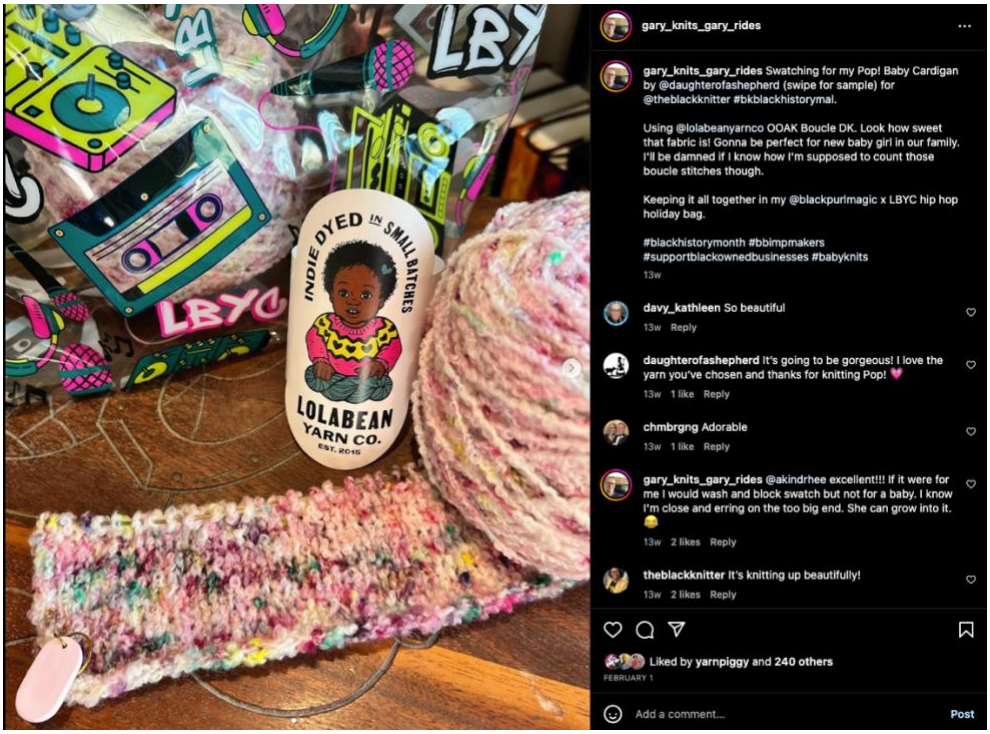

Figure 3 - Gary uses Adella's yarn, ensuring to credit her in the caption, 2023-02-01, @gary_knits_gary_rides

In his post on February 2nd, Gary ensured to include the yarn labels with the company information visible in the images he posted, even when the label was no longer on the yarn (figure 4).

Figure 4 - Gary includes the yarn label in most images of yarn, 2023-02-02, @gary_knits_gary_rides

While logos may be identifiable without the information provided in the caption, the caption was critical when providing information about patterns and designers that are not as easily identifiable. Chelsea used linguistic elements in the caption of her Reels posted on February 21st and 27th to identify the numerous pattern designs and designers that flashed across the Reel:

> "The first prize up for grabs this week is a knit or crochet pattern bundle from some of my favorite designers 😻😻😻. The kit bundle will include patterns from @thelittlewolfknits @oneofakate @is.knit @thechesapeakeneedle @hannahsingleton and @lovelybylee…" (2023-02-27, @knittingtipsy)

Linguistic elements on the Reel itself would not be as helpful due to speedy transitions between frames, and so captions were crucial for viewers to get this information.

In February, Fatimah worked with Elisabeth from @desamourdesigns to create a cowl pattern that could be knit or Tunisian crocheted. While Fatimah used creative denotative elements to advertise the pattern, she relied heavily on captions for her Reel on February 15th and her post on February 22nd to

convey the story of how the design came to be and how the money used from pattern purchases would be used to support a cause in the fibre arts community:

> "…@desamourdesigns had this brilliant idea. She wanted to design a cowl doing the craft that she does, crochet, and have me design the fraternal twin cowl in the craft that I do, knit. So in no time flat we went from drawing board to needles/hook to paper. Introducing the Radikal Cowl ebook. It contains BOTH the knit version and the Tunisian crochet version in one pdf with a lovely history lesson from Elisabeth as the introduction. Until the end of March 50% of the proceeds will go to the @radiclethreads Go Fund Me. Once you purchase the pattern you will receive a code to allow you to purchase a yarn kit from @lolabeanyarnco that includes @serendipitouswool yarn…" (2023-02-22)

Creators also had similar denotative elements within their content. In her Reel series "Yarn Snacks," Fatimah discussed qualities of different skeins of yarn; on February 6th, she showcased a skein of yarn by the Black woman-owned company Essence of Autumn, discussing the colourway and how the yarn could be used in different types of projects. On February 8th, Gary posted an image of a pile of over 10 skeins of yarn for the Fibruary prompt of the day, "color" (figure 5). All of the skeins of yarn in the image were from indie yarn dyers, showing Gary's support for the various companies in the fibre community. Adella also showcased many skeins of her own yarn, as well as yarn created by Shobha from @serendipitouswool and Kelly from @fashionschooldropout or other dyers in the community (figure 6).

Figure 5 - Gary's response to the Fibruary prompt "Color," 2023-02-08, @gary_knits_gary_rides

Figure 6 - Adella showing support for other yarn dyeing businesses, 2023-02-01 and 2023-02-15, @lolabeanyarnco

In content where yarn was not the subject of the image, patterns or magazines were also captured. For example, on February 28th, Gary shared an image of him using a book (*Knit 2 Socks in 1*) by community member Safiyyah Talley from @drunkknitter to knit a sock. Chelsea showed a number of pattern designs in her Reel posted on February 27th as part of her community make-along event. As shown below in figure 7, both Fatimah and Adella posted about the Radikal Cowl pattern to support the Radicle Threads publication.

Figure 7 - Fatimah (left) and Adella (right) shared the Radikal Cowls patterns, 2023-02-22 (left) and 2023-02-15 (right), @disturbingthefleece and @lolabeanyarnco

Harper also released a new pattern in February, sharing information about this pattern in their Live on February 12th with two community members involved in the pattern writing and testing process. During the Live, Harper spoke largely about how to be a successful garment knitter, explaining which parts of the body to measure and adjust while knitting and how to choose a pattern based on certain skills, while their two guests discuss how fun and exciting Harper's patterns are to knit. While the Live itself was not promoting Harper's new pattern, the conversation was heavily geared towards discussing the positive aspects of the product.

When looking at Bistitchual and Anna Hunter's content, environmental traceability is important to crafters. The textile industry has many environmental concerns, like microplastics and carbon

emissions (Le, 2020; Centobelli et al., 2022, Maiti, 2024), so choosing environmentally sustainable yarns is an act of protest against the current production system. Similar to traceability for environmental reasons, these posts also show that consumers can choose materials to support small creators, rather than only supporting large corporations. Interestingly, most accounts who posted about other creators in the community also owned their own business or sold their own products; while there was some self-promotion, there was also instances of competing companies or designers supporting each other, which is rarely seen in our competitive capitalist market.

Creators also showed the projects they were making with their chosen materials. Most of our products, especially in the fast fashion industry, are made by anonymous workers in a factory; consumers typically do not have a role in the production process of the items they consume. In this study, both the finished product and the process of making were important to these creators.

The act itself of "making", regardless of the materials, is political. Making items, especially clothing, requires time, skill, and patience that are largely incompatible with capitalist modes of production. Throughout February, Gary brought his followers along on his journey of knitting a baby cardigan, which he started on February 1st and provided updates on throughout the month, responding to a February prompt on Feb 9th and sharing a photo of himself knitting on the project in public on February 10th (figure 8).

Figure 8 - Image of Gary knitting on a project in public, 2023-02-10, @gary_knits_gary_rides

The denotative elements of the five posts Gary created featuring this cardigan show the slow process of crafting, even for small items like baby clothing. The cardigan does gradually become longer, but the slow pace of handcrafting is emphasized when the viewer realizes that the item is not finished by the end of the month (which can be assumed because Gary often posts images of his finished projects, but there was no image of the cardigan in this dataset).

While crafting in general is a slow process, the linguistic elements in the post caption also indicate that there were some obstacles faced when working on this project. On February 10th, Gary posted another image of the project, requesting assistance in the following caption:

> Sweater knitters, help… Do I:
> A) Rip it out go down a needle size and redo- it is only 2-3 hours of knitting done.
> B) Go down a needle size now, do the four rows and immediately split
> C) Go down a needle now, do the 4 rows + a couple of stockinette and then split
>
> Thoughts? (2023-02-10, @gary_knits_gary_rides

"Only" 2-3 hours of work implies that this is a relatively small amount of labour within fibre crafts, which may seem absurd to those outside the community. In the comments, many crafters advised him to sacrifice the 2-3 hours of work, sharing in the sentiment that this is a relatively little amount of time to spend on a project.

The process required for handicrafts was also made visible by some people crafting in public spaces. While knitting in public was once expected behaviour to fight off idleness (Macdonald, 1988), only Chelsea and Gary documented this act on Instagram. On February 26th, Chelsea shared photos of her beach day with her husband.

Figure 9 - Two images of Chelsea spending time on the beach with her knitting project, 2023-02-26, @knittingtipsy

The denotative elements of the first image made it clear that this is a work in progress: the project was on a pair of knitting needles, with a stitch marker on the right-hand side of her work. Crafters would understand this as showing the progress made on her project: a stitch marker is sometimes placed where you last left off, so the crafter can track how much progress is made in each crafting session. The second image shows that she was relaxing in beach chair, happily working on the project. The linguistic elements in the caption of this post also provide insight into the process of crafting; in this case, Chelsea shared that she was making up a new design as she knit, explaining how relaxing the process is. Similar to Gary, she noted that she may have to rip out part of the project, but that she would not mind redoing the work, since she enjoyed it so much.

Gary shared two images of him knitting in public: at a concert on February 10th and on an airplane on February 27th (figures 8 and 10).

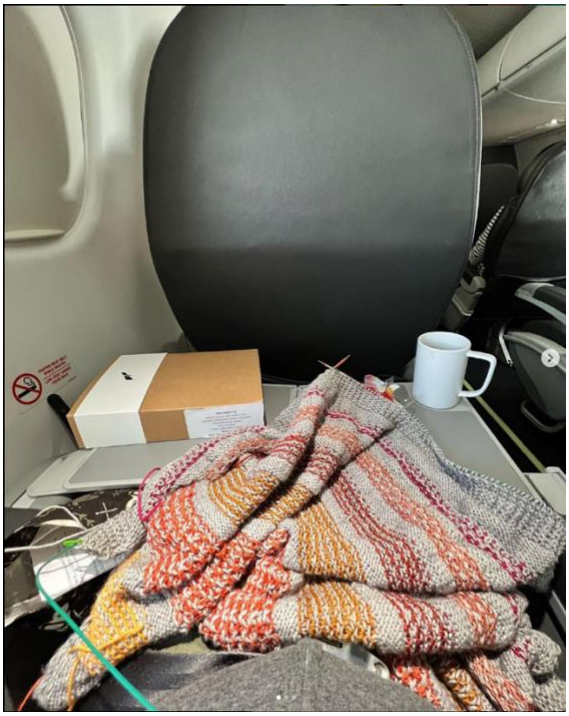

Figure 10 - Gary knitting on an airplane, 2023-02-27, @gary_knits_gary_rides

Most knitters who see these images would be able to relate to Gary's perspective as a knitter who put their project down in their lap to snap a photo. Given the time that goes into a project, it is inevitable that a work-in-progress will be interrupted; Gary notes this using linguistic elements in the captions of both posts:

> "Brought my #bkblackhistorymal project (Pop! Baby Cardi in @lolabeanyarnco) to the old folks concert this morning at @laphil… #nevernotknitting #laphil" (2023-02-10, @gary_knits_gary_rides)

> "… I know it will seem odd to some, but I usually find flights very relaxing. Long stretches of uninterrupted knitting, reading, music time are the best… #travelknitting #travelknitter…" (2023-02-27, @gary_knits_gary_rides)

Neither Chelsea nor Gary seemed to be bothered by knitting in public, making it seem like a natural occurrence for any committed crafter.

After putting in the time and effort to learn craft skills, find suitable materials, and successfully make an item, creators captured the finished object in images, Reels, and Lives to share. Most of Harper's

content over the month of February was focused on the knitted garments they and other crafters in the community made based on their patterns. On February 14th and 16th, Harper created carousel posts with eight images each, all except one showcasing their new sweater design. Fifteen people tested this knitting pattern, so each of these sweaters is slightly different due to yarn choice and diverse body shapes and sizes. Since the goal of these images was to display this sweater, denotative elements like lighting, colour, and staging appeared thoughtfully considered and planned. While most showed the front of the sweater, one creatively used a mirror to display the back details while another stood against a neutral back drop making the sweater the focus of the image (figure 11).

Figure 11 - Harper's test knitters pose differently to show different angles of the sweater, 2023-02-16, @disyarning

Chelsea advertised her YouTube series called "Show Us Your Knits," which invited her followers to share their favourite handmade wardrobe items (figure 12). Linguistic elements were used on the image itself to invite makers to share their own finished objects, and in the caption to provide details on the project she was modeling. She identified the yarns she used, as well as the small business designer who wrote the pattern for the project. The caption also explained the purpose and content of the YouTube series, which is to invite any maker (despite only "knits" identified in the name) of handmade clothing to share their projects, including crocheters and other crafters.

Figure 12 - Chelsea invites her viewers to share their handmade wardrobe items, 2023-02-10, @knittingtipsy

Encouraging others to share their own finished projects challenges a common critique of craft activism: that the items produced in a craftivist project often have no function besides awareness-building for a cause. Within the #SlowFashion movement, which can be considered a craft-activism movement, the items are produced thoughtfully and purposefully. Many crafters who make their own garments and accessories show them being used in candid situations. Anna and Gary show warm knits like hats and shawls when outside (figure 13), and Fatimah posted a Reel to explain how "pre-heating" your knits makes them warmer and even more functional on February 7th.

Figure 13- Anna (left) and Gary (right) wear their knits to stay warm, 2023-02-20 and 2023-02-05, @longwayhomestead and @gary_knits_gary_rides

Chelsea, on the other hand, showed fibre craft projects more suitable for a warmer climate, like breezy tops and swimwear (figure 14). This type of education and sharing within the #SlowFashion part of the fibre community shows a more functional side of craft-based activism than movements of the past. Sharing these material objects through visual means creates areas where other community members can engage through comments and share their own projects. Whether encouraging community members to make ethical and conscious choices with their buying power, or encouraging them to be part of the slow fashion movement, these creators continue the tradition of craft-based activism through community efforts.

Figure 14 - Chelsea shows functional warm-weather knits, 2023-02-07 and 2023-02-08, @knittingtipsy

"I Am a Creative": Presentation of Self and Identity

Behind every object created and displayed is a crafter and their experiences. Though the content of images and Reels were (unsurprisingly) curated around fibre and crafting, most (n=6) accounts posted content of themselves and other people (and pets) in their lives. While Kelsi and Jon from Bistitchual and Yu Ra focused on fibre and lifestyle content and did not post images of themselves, all other accounts did. Similar to how Gary and Chelsea made the process of crafting visible through their posts, important politics about self and identity were made visible through the content posted. While White people, especially White women or femme-presenting people were still highly represented in this dataset, Adella and Fatimah regularly posted content of themselves, challenging the idea that fibre crafts are only for White women (Hewett, 2021). On February 1st, the Fibruary prompt was "Hello, It's Me," inviting participants to introduce themselves in a post. Adella posted a Reel with 12 images of herself, in a variety of poses and settings (figure 15).

Figure 15 - Adella, a Black woman, wearing a graphic t-shirt, bright yellow headphones, and her natural hair, 2023-02-01, @lolabeanyarnco

Denotative elements can be identified throughout the Reel to provide insight into Adella's personality. Throughout the 12 images, three photos tied her to the fibre community, where she was wearing handknit items or displaying her yarn. The rest of the photos showed different parts of her life, like her graphic tees and nods to 1980's pop culture and music, as well as her natural afro-style hair and braids, honouring her Black hair. Connotatively, this Reel shows Adella as a proud, multi-faceted Black woman, which is supported by the linguistic elements in the caption, detailing herself as:

> My name is Adella Colvin and I am one of the baddest muthafuckas on the planet. I'd love to say that I am joking, but I am not. Ask your friends about me…
> I am an Aquarius. I do not enjoy long walks on the beach, spicy foods or avocados…
> Okay, seriously…
> I am a wife.
> I am a mother.
> I am a daughter.
> I am a sister.
> I am a small business owner.
> I am a creative.
> Above all of these things though, I am an unapologetic Black woman.
> (2023-02-01, @lolabeanyarnco)

Adella also used her crafting work to express her personal interests. On February 9th, she posted an image of one of the yarns she offers in her shop (figure 18). Linguistic elements in the caption indicate that this colourway is named "A City So Nice, They Named It Twice," in reference to New York City. While not indicated in this post, Adella has previously shared with her followers that she grew up New York City. Sayings like "a city so nice, they named it twice" or similar variations have also been used in song lyrics by various musicians. By using this name, Adella shared and expressed her identity and interests, like her hometown and her love for music, through her products.

Figure 16 - Adella named this colourway after New York, New York, where she was raised, 2023-02-09, @lolabeanyarnco

While not as explicit as Adella, Fatimah also posted many Reels and images of herself, making herself visible as a Black woman in the fibre arts community. She also discussed the experience as a Black pattern designer in her Live on February 16th, with her long-time friend Barbara. Barbara, a White woman, hosts a YouTube series highlighting small pattern designers and had recently posted a video about Fatimah's patterns. Denotative elements in the Live situate Fatimah as a designer, such as her beanie and cardigan that she designed and knit herself. But through the conversation with Barbara, Fatimah explains how Black creators are still marginalized in the community, and that art and craft cannot develop and move forward if we keep seeing the same people modeling items, designing patterns, and being invited to large events like Vogue Knitting Live. Even though there are a number of BBIMP designers and creatives in the community like Fatimah and Adella, the loudest and dominant White voices continue to shape the fibre community and culture. Fatimah and Barbara also discuss body size and body diversity extensively. Fatimah's patterns are unisex and highly adjustable, so they can be made and worn by all body types; this is not the case for many pattern designs, and Barbara explains that as a plus-sized woman, knitting socks has always been a challenge because most patterns do not take large calf sizes into account.

Harper, Fatimah, and Chelsea address body size and acceptance in a variety of posts. In Harper's Live on February 12th, they discussed size inclusivity and adaptability in pattern design and writing. While Harper appears as a thin person, they still discuss the technical skills required to adjust and adapt patterns to fit different body sizes and shapes. In the discussion, their guest Heather explains that the industry standard of choosing a sweater size based on bust measurements does not take into account body differences; expecting the bust to be the largest part of the body disregards bodies with no breasts, large bellies, broad shoulders, and hip measurements. Harper's posts on February 14th and 16th show their commitment to body inclusivity: within their group of knitters who tested their pattern, many were plus-sized and able to knit and wear the garment. By choosing to have the first image of each carousel a plus-sized person, they purposefully chose to have these individuals highlighted on their Instagram page.

In addition to the Live with Barbara where they discuss issues with pattern size inclusivity, Fatimah also posted an image of Rihanna after Superbowl Sunday (figure 17). The purpose of the post is not identifiable through denotative elements alone; a viewer can recognize that it is an image of Rihanna, but it appears to have no connection to the fibre arts community until the linguistic elements of the caption are examined. Fatimah brings attention to how Rihanna was body-shamed during her performance at the half-time show of the Superbowl, noting:

> …This post is an invitation. If you watched the Super Bowl halftime show (yes, one of the teams has a racist name/logo/etc) then you may have gotten to see postpartum Rihanna. Her body looked different than you may remember it. She had a baby a few months ago. America and European beauty standards and racism hate Black women. It hates women and all birthing people at large. We've seen plenty of evidence of this. Because of that, some people will be expecting a 'snap back' (a misogynist term- referring to quickly going back to looking like your life altering, body altering event of pregnancy and birth never happened) from Rihanna. There's some fat phobia thrown in there too but there are others who can speak to that with expertise. Here's the invitation. I invite you to resist treating that human, birthing person like an object of desire. Opt out of mocking the soft middle, the jiggle. Refuse to join in the jokes and body shaming. I'm not a fan, more a casual listener of her music, but I love Black women. We all deserve respect. And honestly, being mean doesn't make *anything* better for women and folks with uteruses. I invite you to be kind. (2023-02-12, @disturbingthefleece)

Connotatively, we can gather that there is still body shaming, fat shaming, and body-focused misogynistic behaviour in the fibre arts community.

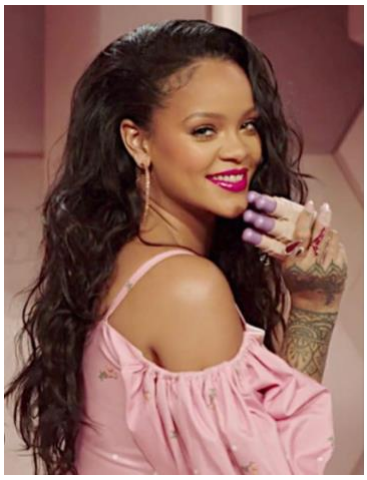

Figure 17 - Fatimah posted an image of singer Rihanna after her Superbowl halftime performance, 2023-02-12, @disturbingthefleece

Chelsea challenges these negative attitudes by promoting shameless self-love. Eight of her posts and Reels specifically discussed the importance of self-acceptance and body positivity, most of which had revealing photos of her body. Instead of hiding parts of her body that may seem undesirable by mainstream body standards, Chelsea models in lingerie, bikinis, and crop tops to show that all bodies are deserving of love and belong in the fibre community (figure 18).

Figure 18 - Chelsea models in lingerie (2023-02-01), a bikini (2023-02-04) and a crop top (2023-02-14) for body positivity, @knittingtipsy

In the first image, Chelsea was wearing revealing lingerie with a big smile on her face. The heart-shaped cupcakes added a quite literal element to the message of self-love. In the second image, she posed in the water wearing a hand-knit bikini, showing her belly and curves. Even though she may not have the body shape and size deemed "desirable" by mainstream beauty standards, she shamelessly reveals her body anyway. In the third image, she wore a hand-knit crop top that leaves her belly and cleavage exposed. The caption on the post explained that she created this shirt as her annual Valentine's Day gift to herself:

> 🌴❤️‍🩹💋Loving myself first. This outfit and cocktail second. Everything else third 😉💋❤️‍🩹🌴… I'm celebrating this day of love with some new Valentine's Day creations, y'all!!!! 🫦🥰💋🥕. I made myself another #BelliniBirthdayBralette , with a few Valentine's Day mods and I'm just in love 🥰🥰🥰🥰. (2023-02-14, @knittingtipsy)

Using the following caption in her post on February 8th, she describes how she has struggled with her body image, but with work and the support of her community, she has been able to accept herself:

> I've always been the bigger friend in most of my friend groups. I'm 5'10", curvy, and I like food 🤷‍♀️ 😂 I can remember, in years past, begging friends to delete photos where I didn't like how I looked or offering to be the photographer so I wouldn't have to be in the picture. I'd try to diet before trips and events and if I didn't reach a goal weight or fit into a dress I wanted to wear/take, I'd berate myself and be convinced I didn't deserve to go … I won't say I'm completely immune from those types of thoughts now. Self love and body acceptance is not a linear journey and I've only been practicing for a few years now. I know that years ago, I would have deleted these photos because all I'd be able to see is how much bigger I was than my friends. But what I see now?? I see 3 badass, tipsy, adventurous babes enjoying the hell outta life. I see my 2 friends who were SO excited to model my handmades, who told me how creative and talented I was, cheered me on, and made me feel so welcome and safe. I see 3 women of various sizes and all 3 are beautiful 💞 💞 (2023-02-08, @knittingtipsy)

On February 17th, Chelsea posted a Reel in a crop top and a crochet skirt, showing her belly when her arms were lifted. She mouthed the words that were in the audio and added text to the video, indicating, "You know what the secret to confidence is? Not caring" after which, she flipped the camera off. The meaning is clear from the Reel itself, but she added additional context in the caption:

> … Stop giving a flying fart what others think!!!! Not everyone is going to think you're the bees' knees, and that's ok! They're wrong, and that's okay 😉. If YOU like you, that's all that matters 💞 💞 💞 (2023-02-17, @knittingtipsy)

Additionally, she advertised a new video on YouTube discussing self-love and confidence. This strong acceptance of body and femininity challenge existing fatphobic and negative body-related attitudes that exist in the community.

Sharing the "Back Stage"

In Goffman's dramaturgy, the "front stage" are the expected behaviours and attitudes acted out, consciously or by habit. In this dataset, fibre and craft-related items and the self seem to belong on the front stage; they are expected and common across all accounts. However, there were instances of the "back stage" becoming visible, either by choice or by disruption.

Yu Ra and Gary shared posts that brought more personal details to the front stage. Yu Ra's first post in February included a photo of moving boxes in a crowded room, with two spinning wheels visible,

but the topic was not necessarily craft related. Later in the month she posted a "photo dump," referring to a collection of images not necessarily related to each other, that again showed parts of her life outside of crafting. In both posts, she used the caption to explain her absences from posting on Instagram (the first due to a house move, the second due to her disability). She did not provide much context as to why the photos were chosen, but it provides her followers an intimate look into her personal life.

Gary also shared images that showed parts of his personal life. On February 5th, he posted a carousel with eight images outlining his "Sunday Funday" in response to a February prompt. While most images featured Gary wearing his knits, it also showed him at a coffee shop and dinner with friends, on a walk with a dog, a building with a rainbow over it, and a supermarket aisle (figure 19). The images document what seems like a regular Sunday, with some knitting content sprinkled through. The caption is used to explain his whereabouts and provide additional context to the images.

Figure 19 - Gary shares pictures from his "Sunday Funday" that are not immediately fibre-related, 2023-02-05, @gary_knits_gary_rides

While some glimpses into the backstage were intentionally shared, elements of the backstage were often disruptive when observed on a Live. Near the end of Harper's Live on February 12th, Heather's daughter starts to yell and interrupts the conversation. During Adella's Live on February 17th, her guest Kayla is often interrupted by her dog playing in the background, requiring her to explain the noises coming from under her table. Near the end of the Live, Adella's husband Jimmy slowly sticks his head in the frame of the camera behind Adella, scaring her when she sees him on the screen. She jokingly chastises him when he apologizes while laughing, explaining that he did not want to interrupt while she was "on a roll" discussing important matters (to which Adella humorously responds, "You don't think that was an interruption?) These disruptive instances contradict the otherwise thoughtfully curated content posted by these accounts.

Through the use of linguistic, denotative, and connotative elements, these creators build and promote their own identities, showing the power of identity-based politics within their community. While

these identities are curated on and through Instagram, the peeks into their personal lives creates a more authentic experience online.

We're Not "Just Knitting": The Presentation of Political and Social Justice Causes

Finally, many creators also discussed specific political causes, both offline events and interactions happening within the fibre arts community. These often prompted conversations and interactions in the comments that show both tolerance and ignorance within the community. Linguistic elements were relied upon heavily to have these conversations, and revealed the often-hidden emotional labour that is required of marginalized people in activism.

Fatimah posted an image on February 1st of her (Black) hands, wearing fingerless gloves, holding a mug (figure 20). These denotative elements do not say much about the purpose of the post, but the linguistic elements do. The text on the image notes that this is a "Wednesday Learning" post, with Fatimah's DisturbingTheFleece logo in the bottom corner. Wednesday Learning is a series Fatimah hosts to discuss difficult topics from an intersectional perspective. The text on the image indicates that this Wednesday Learning would be different due to the emotional labour required to discuss Tyre Nichols. February 1st marked the funeral day for Nichols, a 29-year-old Black man who was beaten to death by Memphis police officers on January 7th, 2023 (Sainz, 2023). The post caption notes that to discuss Nichols, Fatimah would have to discuss white supremacy and the impact it has on the value of Black lives and the policing system; to do that, as a Black woman, would take "too great" of an emotional toll:

> I had planned to talk about Tyre Nichols today. Today he was buried. But, the emotional cost is too great. The conversation would require a dive into how wh!t3 supremacy impacts the psyche of all involved. It would require an acknowledgement of how the low value of Black life is taught to us all. And how our system of policing begun as a way to return enslaved persons to their abusers. It's a long and painful conversation. And for what? To be here again tomorrow? The anxiety of even considering the discussion is very heavy… (2023-02-01, @disturbingthefleece)

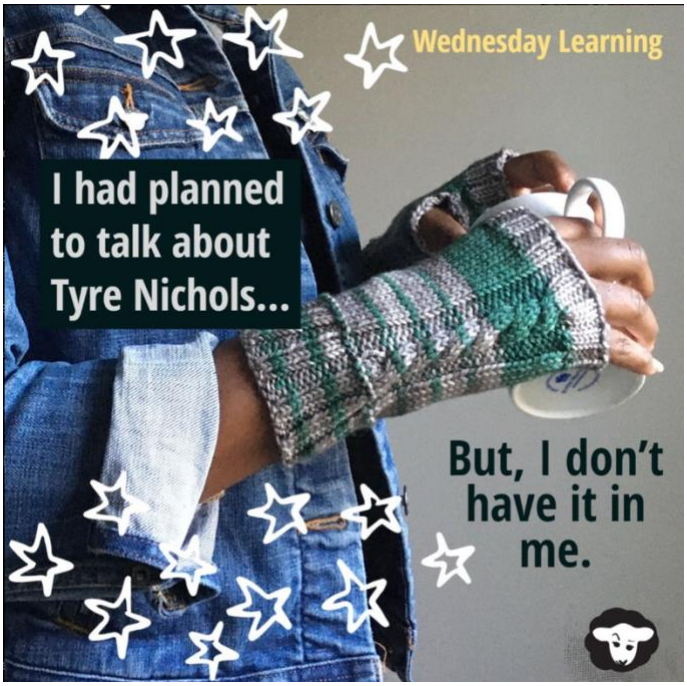

Figure 20 - Fatimah shares a Wednesday Learning graphic, using linguistic elements to explain the topic, 2023-02-01, @disturbingthefleece

Instead of focusing on pain, she notes her love for the Black community and asks for respect in the comments. Comments included support for Fatimah and the Black community, displays of guilt and shame, and other Black members sharing their feelings:

> @gary_knits_gary_rides: ❤️ Listened to the service today. It was simultaneously heartbreaking and enraging.
> @disturbingthefleece (reply): I absolutely could not. But, I appreciate others being present to honor him.
> [commenter]: I keep looking for the right words to say, however, I'm beginning to think there are no "right" words. Please know that you have my love and support, not just today but always.
> [commenter] The boundary is needed. To say this has been an extremely heavy week is an understatement. ❤️
> @disturbingthefleece (reply): right. And not much out of the fiber community about it. I guess we're just knitting.
> [commenter] I'm so sorry. I'm just so sorry. There's nothing I can say other than that. I'm appalled. I'm horrified. I'm saddened beyond measure. That's so inadequate. I appreciate your POV. Thank you. ❤️
> [commenter] Can't watch. Can't talk.
> @disturbingthefleece (reply): sending you love and peace

Adella hosts an initiative throughout the year called "Cause of the Quarter," where she fundraises for a different organization or cause. She promotes these causes through content posted on her page, to garner

support from her followers. In February, Adella chose to support Radicle Threads for the quarter, a BBIMP-owned and published digital and physical lifestyle and crafting magazine that spotlights marginalized individuals and businesses (Radicle Threads, n.d.). On February 16th, Adella hosted a Live where she discussed the fundraiser and how to show support. Adella discussed the importance of supporting small BBIMP-owned businesses, especially monetarily. The Radicle Threads magazine is so revolutionary because it focuses on Black and Brown creativity and joy, instead of Black trauma that floods the news. She goes on to share three instances when she experienced racial microaggressions as a Black business owner and emphasized the importance of taking up space and creating a path for future creatives to follow.

Adella continued this conversation the next day, in her Live on February 17th when she was joined by Kayla, a Black creator in the community and an employee ("Marketing Magpie") with the yarn store @magpiefibers. Adella revealed her frustration with the lack of support in fundraisers centered around Black or BBIMP-causes and calls out hypocrisy in the community of White creators or businesses who say they support BBIMP, but do not put the resources needed to support causes or issues when they arise. Kayla notes that the small businesses and marginalized individuals with less time and fewer resources end up working harder to get exposure. Adella also notes that while the algorithm works against Black creators, other content she posts receives engagement, so it seems like a choice that people are not sharing or supporting the Radicle Threads cause. She reiterates the importance of the magazine and explains that they were the first and only magazine who reached out to her for a collaboration, and paid her for her labour.

There is a lengthy history that links craft and LGBTQ+ activism, and Gary continued this throughout the entire month of February. In his response to the Fibruary prompt on February 1st, Gary also posted a Reel with various images of himself bicycling and posing with knitwear. Similar to Adella, he also used the caption to explain his background as a gay man, crafter, and activist, noting his participation in the AIDS Lifecycle fundraiser, hosting his End AIDS Craftalong community events, his

Destash4Good initiative, and his craftivism podcast on YouTube. Also on February 1st, the Destash4Good initiative went live, which he announced via a Reel.

In the crafting community, the supplies a crafter gathers is referred to as a "stash", usually in reference to yarn (for knitting and crochet) or fibre (for spinning or needle-felting). When a crafter "destashes," they donate or sell materials that they no longer want (often in order to make room for new purchases). Destash4Good collected yarn from Gary's followers stashes to sell in order to raise money for the AIDS Lifecycle fundraiser; a win-win-win scenario where followers were able to declutter, while others were able to make new purchases. All proceeds from the sale (after shipping and administrative fees) were donated towards the fundraiser as indicated in Gary's Reel posted on February 1st.

Gary also advertised his community make-along events, encouraging crafters to crochet or knit along with others in the community to raise awareness and funds for the AIDS Lifecycle fundraiser. Throughout the event, those who posted content with the associated hashtags were entered into a giveaway. On February 2nd, Gary posted an image of the three skeins of yarn that three crafters won as a prize for participating. This enticing prize would most likely encourage more crafters to participate in the event, thereby increasing its reach.

On February 12th, Yu Ra posted an image sparking a heated discussion about ableism in the fibre arts community (figure 21). Vogue Knitting is the leading magazine and publication in the knitting design field; the company hosts an annual event called Knitting Live! (VKL), where crafters can shop and support vendors, take classes and attend lectures, and network with other crafters (Vogue Knitting, n.d.). The event was hosted in New York City from February 9th to 12th, 2023. Yu Ra's image uses text to introduce the topic of the post: her thoughts on the event and the community's attitude towards disabled people. The VKL event was a large, indoor, in-person event, and photos coming out of the event showed that few people wore masks, despite COVID-19 still being prevalent and causing long-term disability in many people. Yu Ra notes that this is not the first time she has spoken out about this issue in the

community; in the fall of 2022, she made a post with the same message about a different fibre event known as Rhinebeck.

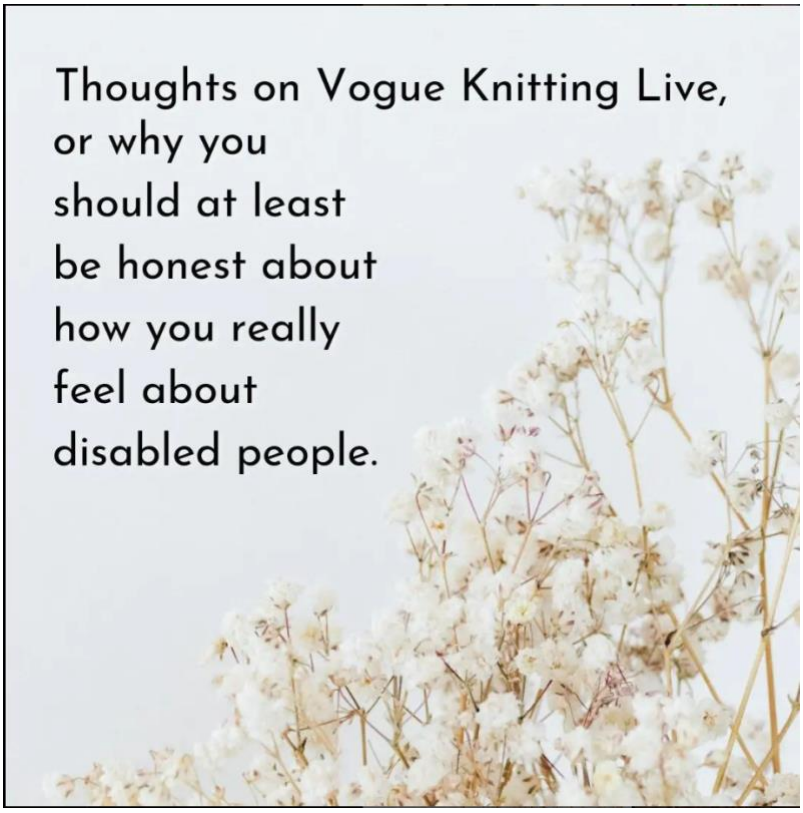

Figure 21 - Yu Ra uses linguistic elements in her image and caption to discuss ableism in the fibre community, 2023-02-12, @knitboop

Yu Ra notes that the same people who shared her concerns in the fall of 2022 around the Rhinebeck event were the ones unmasked at VKL in February 2023, calling out the hypocrisy of supposed "allies." She indicates that the emotional toll of having to repeat the same message is great:

> So. @VogueKnitLive was this weekend. And I (along with many others) experienced the same disheartening sense of déjà vu seeing photo after photo of unmasked faces, without a thought to the still-ongoing pandemic. Three months after making my Rhinebeck post, I'm having to make the same damn post again […] After more than three years of trying to convince people to give a shit about other people and do the bare minimum of wearing a mask, I'm burned out and sick of sounding like a broken record. Disabled people deserve to be included in spaces, PERIOD […] (2023-02-12, @knitboop)

The comments made by other community members on these posts range from supportive of Yu Ra and her struggles as a disabled woman, to others accusing her of acting morally superior and policing

people's actions. Since Yu Ra noted that she was burned out from her advocacy, many other community members stepped in to address the questions or ableist comments on the post:

> [commenter 1] Disclaimer: I was not at VKL, I'm fully vaccinated and boosted, and I wear a mask in public places. But at what point, if any, does it become ok for people not to wear masks? Covid is unfortunately not going anywhere; whatever chance we had at eradicating it is gone. US deaths have been fairly consistent since around April 2022, without a winter spike since then, and are significantly lower than any previous peak. Covid is absolutely still a problem, but without institutional support – which has now been lost for both mask and vaccine mandates – individual actions aren't going to have a huge effect on that fact. At what point does it stop being the "still-ongoing pandemic" and just start being "life as we know it now"? I promise I'm not trying to be an asshole with this question. I'm just trying to get a sense of where we go from here.
>
> [commenter 2] (replying to commenter 1): unfortunately "life as we know it" needs to include masks. If individual actions are all we have, why not make the simple effort? Deaths may be significantly lower, but how many of us still lost loved ones? A life is a life, even within that "lower" statistic. Covid is still too unpredictable to consider the pandemic as being behind us. 😢

This interaction began with commenter 1 pushing back on Yu Ra's demand that masks continue to be worn indoors, to make spaces more accessible for disabled people. The commenter indicated that they followed COVID-19 precautions, like getting vaccinated and wearing masks, but that without institutional supports, individual actions do not have a big impact to the rates of COVID-19 related deaths. Commenter 2 pushed back, supporting Yu Ra's points regarding the regular use of masks. This respectful interaction suggested that the post was a safe space for those with potentially opposing views to engage in meaningful dialogue with each other.

> [commenter 3] (replying to commenter 1): we don't.
> When COVID gets to the point that it is similar to the flu (actually similar rather then [sic] "it's just like the flu") then we are out of it. Till then we aren't.
> And long term masks should be encouraged for large events during flu season. I know a lot of people who have been wearing masks in public for years due to being immunocompromised. Maybe that should be the norm and they shouldn't be politicized.

After further discussion between community members replying to commenter 1, commenter 3 pushed back, supporting Yu Ra's position. They suggested that there is no "going back" to a status quo that does

not include masks. Commenter 3 further claimed that wearing masks should not be political, but instead should be considered the "norm" to support immunocompromised people.

> [commenter 4] Once again, the morally superior feel that they are in a position where they can educate us mere stupid mortals. The tone of your post is quite arrogant. I totally respect people's decisions if they want to wear a mask, for whatever reason (medical, personal…). I don't need to know, and I don't ask: for me it is enough to know that it is their choice and I respect it. I also expect the same degree of respect towards people who don't want/need to wear a mask anymore. Dividing people into good/ bad is something kids usually do in primary school, but when you grow up you realise there are a lot of levels in between and you just don't know the reasons behind everybody's choices. All that is needed is the will to respect each other without the morally superior speech to blame to other about their choices. If you are not comfortable going to public spaces still without a mask (for any reason), you are free not to go, nobody is pushing you or anybody else to go. If somebody has a serious medical condition, it would be foolish to go to a crowded event, doesn't matter if there are masks being worn or not. Please let people live without blaming them and making them feel guilty!!! When are the moral lessons gonna stop? 🙄
>
> [commenter 5] (reply): when people stop dying from a preventable virus the lessons will stop. and also only someone who consistently sits on the fence will say there's no such thing as good or bad. a lot of our issues persist because of ignorance like this.

Commenter 4 also engaged with Yu Ra's post, though in an adversarial manner. This individual accused Yu Ra, and by extension the people who agreed with her, of being "morally superior" when advocating for masks to be worn. They positioned the topic of wearing masks as an individual choice and suggested that those who cannot access public spaces without a mask need not go. Numerous other people replied to commenter 4, informing them that this was an ableist opinion because it expressly excludes disabled people from participating freely in society. Commenter 5 shown above indicated that the "moral lessons" commenter 4 complained about would only stop after people take steps to prevent avoidable deaths. Contrary to the interactions observed between commenters 1, 2, and 3, this dialogue was much more contentious, with commenter 4 doubling down on their view and calling Yu Ra's supporters "social warriors" in separate comments. The discussions continued to be divisive, with one side supporting Yu Ra's position to ensure public spaces are accessible for disabled people against commenter 4's position that masking is a choice, and those not comfortable with unmasked people in public should stay home.

The dialogue throughout the comments section clearly indicated that there is a continued need for disability activism to challenge ableist thoughts and actions in the fibre arts community.

The findings presented in this chapter support my claim that the craft-based activism practiced on Instagram is based on commodity, community, and identity, rather than crafted items observed in previous craftivism projects. The tools offered by Instagram, including posts, Reels, and Lives allowed creators to share their experiences throughout the crafting process and within the fibre arts community through a variety of creative content. The comment function allowed for supportive and contentious dialogue, providing a suitable digital space for political discussions and actions to take place. My findings also explored how intersectional and marginalized identities influenced the activism practiced in this space, and highlighted challenges that certain individuals and communities faced while navigating this platform.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The results demonstrated in chapter four indicate that Instagram is a suitable platform to practice craft-based lifestyle activism. While previous craftivist projects focused on creating specific items symbolizing a political cause, like the Pussyhat Project or Canary Craftivists, crafters on Instagram practice their politics through everyday choices and consumption. Lifestyle activism, including the sharing of images and content online that is typically criticized as "slacktivism" proved to be a legitimate form of protest, according to the three logics of modern protest identified by della Porta & Diani (2020), even for those who faced challenges due to the neoliberal principles of the Instagram platform. Finally, this thesis uncovered an overarching protest against capitalism through the crafting process. By reclaiming the power of production through their craft, the individuals in this study rejected the alienation from the labour process caused by capitalistic modes of production, strengthening and empowering the individual.

The Impact of Neoliberal Principles

Some creators faced barriers in their experience on Instagram due to the underlying neoliberal principles governing the platform. Neoliberalism is an ideology that promotes individualism, consumerism, and transferring social and economic responsibility onto individuals rather than states (Monbiot & Hutchison, 2024). This logic is ubiquitous and shapes most, if not all institutions in our globalized world, including in the social media platforms we use, leading to potentially biased algorithms that shape one's digital experience. As described by Noble (2018), mainstream content is prioritized and advertised to audiences more. In the crafting community, marginalized creators are still displayed on the White, thin-bodied backdrop of the community. Harper explains this during their Live on February 12th when promoting their new, size inclusive pattern, explaining how size inclusivity is still not the standard in the craft pattern world. Most old knitting patterns in magazines or books gave very basic instructions,

without giving guidance on how to shape or modify the fit of the body, making it only suitable for certain, "standard" body types. It is hard for patterns that actually take different body shapes and sizes into account to gain traction in the community because they seem more complex compared to the standard, basic patterns suitable for thinner people with a limited size range. By going on a Live and discussing with their technical editor, Harper promotes their size-inclusive sweater, challenging the standard pattern design approach in the community.

Noble (2018) specifically focused on how algorithms are biased against Black women specifically, which Adella addressed in both of her Lives. She discussed how creators have to play "tricks" on the Instagram algorithm to gain traction in the community, and that any engagement, including "likes", shares, and comments, is positive. She also voiced her frustration over the engagement trends on her page. While fundraising for the Radicle Threads magazine, Adella noted that images and posts of her yarn, family, or funny images garnered a lot of engagement, but posts asking the community to support a BBIMP woman-owned business did not. Adella attributes this to apathy in the community, though Noble's work suggests that it may also be due to the biases in the algorithm on Instagram, where posts supporting or empowering BBIMP, especially Black, women are not promoted as much, and do not reach a large audience.

While some content observed in this study emphasized community and collaboration, the majority of posts were still focused on the individual behind the account. This demonstrates Saraswati's (2021) theory of the neoliberal self(ie). Saraswati developed the concept of the neoliberal self(ie) gaze to understand the current digital experience, where "competing (and at times, cooperating) political ideologies…technological apparatuses… and digital platforms collude and collide" (Saraswati, 2021 at p. 3). The neoliberal self(ie) is a practice that centres the self and is constructed for a specific audience.

In this study, the individuals I observed participated in this neoliberal self(ie), where the majority of posts focused on the individual. Self-branding and promotion of content is critical to one's visibility on Instagram (Saraswati, 2021). Many of the denotative elements of the content studied demonstrated a level

of curation, in order to communicate a specific message or goal. This process established the creator as an entrepreneurial neoliberal subject by using Instagram and its tools as a means of production for their message (Saraswati, 2021). This also aligns with Goffman's idea of the dramaturgical performance, where the content posted can be viewed as the front stage. Images like Anna's and Gary's selfies, or Adella's staging of yarn, were specifically curated for display and interaction. Thought and care went into the denotative elements, including the use of colour and framing, to attract the audience's limited attention for engagement.

Alternatively, whenever the backstage became public, it brought an element of authenticity to the forefront which is sometimes missing in the curated content of the neoliberal self(ie). In Fatimah's Live on February 16th, the conversation ends up completely off the topic of knitting, with Fatimah and Barb discussing Korean pop music, current television shows, and Fatimah's move from Atlanta, Georgia to Vancouver, Canada. These discussions on topics outside of knitting or craft content lets the audience in on parts of the personal, backstage of someone's life. Adella directly discusses this concept during her Live on February 17th, where her husband interrupted the conversation and mentioning things that would be discussed "behind the scenes," or in other words, outside of her Live. These glimpses into the backstage demonstrate how there is thought and intention put into the content created and demonstrated on the front stage.

The frequency at which certain creators posted content also fueled the neoliberal self(ie) and influenced the digital experience. Accounts with higher numbers of followers, like Gary and Adella, posted much more frequently than others. Most of their posts included numerous images, or transitions for Reels, which take time and effort to produce. This is necessary due to the logics of Instagram, which rely on constant production of content in order to reach one's audience. The underlying algorithm prioritizes accounts that post consistently, frequently, and with a diverse type of posts (Samual, 2023), which is necessary for exposure to new and existing audiences online. Just like how capitalism thrives on overproduction and consumption, so too do social media habits. This poses a challenge for small

businesses and small creators because, just like capitalist systems, it is an unsustainable model to continue long-term due to the energy it takes to constantly produce. This is an interesting juxtaposition to the slow and deliberate nature of crafting; it would be interesting to examine whether the fast-paced online environment influences a crafter's mindset when creating, and whether they feel the need to constantly produce crafted items to "keep up" with the community online.

Legitimate Protest through Lifestyle Activism

Despite the challenges creators faced with the platform, being positioned within this neoliberal self(ie) allowed creators to effectively practice lifestyle politics. The lifestyle activism observed were legitimate forms of protest, incorporating all three logics of protest as articulated by della Porta & Diani (2020). In traditional institutional politics, the logic of numbers is demonstrated through the number of supporters of a party, or the number of votes. On Instagram, having a high follower count is beneficial because it means a greater chance of content being seen and consumed. Additionally, engagement on posts in the form of likes and comments make a post more likely to be seen by the wider community, not just those following the account. Commenting on posts was observed as a method of gathering numbers to show support for a specific cause. Fatimah's post about Tyre Nichols offered a space for numerous community members to gather and show support. By using the post's caption to express her feelings and to critique certain institutions, like the police force in the United States, Fatimah invites her community to be seen in the comment section. Some of these comments added to the dialogue, and many were purely to show support for Fatimah's message in large numbers. While these comments did not actively further the conversation, they were a way to visibly see the numbers behind the message and get a sense of a supportive community.

Another example of a positive show of numbers was Adella's post promoting the doll line by CreativeSoul Photography. In collaboration with Disney, this all-Black princess doll line was celebrated by Adella and her followers, which was shown through the numerous positive comments made. Similar to Fatimah's post, the comment section was used to continue the dialogue from the post caption, and as a

show of support through simple emojis or exclamation marks. This support goes beyond just amassing numbers: it demonstrates community building, which Lorenzini & Forno (2022) indicate as a critical part of practicing lifestyle activism.

However, high numbers of followers did not automatically mean political messages would be received or acted on. During her Lives on February 16th and 17th, Adella discussed hoe her call for financial support in promoting the Radikal Cowl collaboration had gone largely unanswered by her followers. She discussed how disappointing it was to see projects that celebrate Black joy like the Radicle Threads magazine be underfunded, or fundraising campaigns ignored. She compared this to other quarterly fundraising campaigns she hosted and noted that this campaign for two fellow Black creatives was doing significantly worse than campaigns that did not feature BBIMP people or causes. Even if individuals could not donate monetarily, Adella noted that her followers could have shared the message through their own accounts to raise awareness, which even that was not being done. While her community seemed to show up in the comment section of some posts to show support, high numbers of followers did not always guarantee engagement with important political activities.

The logic of damage was also present through consumer activism. The current model of production and consumption has negative environmental, economic, and social impacts (Centobelli et al., 2022) that were challenged by members in the fibre community. I observed three groups where purchasing power was used in this study: when promoting sustainable wool, when challenging fast-fashion, and when advocating for BBIMP support in the community.

Anna from Longway Homestead focused on showcasing Canadian grown and manufactured wool products, to challenge environmental concerns within the fibre community. Environmental concerns have been addressed through previous craftivist projects (Selvedge, 2021) with a focus on raising awareness and calling on politicians to take actions. Anna's activism returns the power to the consumer by presenting sustainable options to crafters an raising awareness of the struggles with the wool industry in Canada. She also advertised her book, in which she explores the practices of wool farming across Canada,

with the goal of reinvigorating the struggling wool industry. These values were also observed in posts from Bistitchual, who also advertised sustainable and ethically sourced wool. They note that it is the only American yarn they carry, demonstrating a balance of their values between supporting Canadian companies and supporting ethically sources sustainable products. By carrying and advertising this yarn, they give their shoppers options in how to use their purchasing power to support different causes.

Damage is also caused to the existing capitalist system by challenging fast fashion with slow fashion. Fast fashion is characterized by speed and novelty, where large retailers develop, produce, and replace clothing items at a rapid pace (Centobelli et al., 2022). Due to the low value placed on these items, they are seen as "almost disposable" by consumers (Centobelli et al., 2022 at p. 2). This has enormous impacts to the environment, both through production and disposal of inexpensive, low-quality items. Consumers purchase more due to the low-quality and in order to keep up with changing trends (Centobelli et al., 2022). I observed crafters challenging this model by creating their own clothing, rejecting alienation from the labour process and clothing product. Creating clothing for oneself is a powerful act against the current model of production and consumption because it allows individuals to make items to fit their bodies and items that will last, returning the power of production to the individual. Due to the amount of time, effort, and skill that goes into creating a garment, handmade clothing is not seen as disposable. There is also great pride in wearing something made by hand, as demonstrated through Chelsea's campaign to "Show Us Your Knits." These elements require a shift in mindset, challenging the default model of production based on speed and novelty.

The last way damage was caused to the existing model of production was through promotion and support of peripheral designers and companies. The mainstream fibre arts community has been critiqued for excluding certain people and communities, including BBIMP designers. Gary posted a number of photos showing off LolaBeanYarnCo yarn, showing support for Adella in his posts. Gary also shows himself knitting a project with the yarn, going beyond just sharing a friend's business, but also showing

that purchasing her yarn is a worthy investment to make. In this mindset, being a good consumer equals "doing good" in commodity activism.

Instagram allows others to bear witness to political action by allowing, and encouraging, the sharing of everyday moments at any given time. By politicizing everyday actions, power is returned to the individual to act on their values and ethics, and empower others to do the same. Sharing and developing personal identity was seen to be an important part of everyday lives in this study, especially for those with intersecting identities on the periphery. Chelsea positioned herself as a plus-sized crafter, supporting the body positive movement, even though she does not meet the typical beauty standards that women are held to on the Internet. She embraces and celebrates all parts of her body, even parts that would be seen as unattractive, and encourages her followers to do the same. By doing so, she creates an inclusive and positive community, where her followers feel free to share their experiences and struggles to find support.

In her Live on February 16th, Adella discussed the importance of Black visibility in the fibre community and the role she has as a successful Black businesswoman. She shared a number of stories where her logo of her Black daughter was altered when ordering products for her store, where White-owned businesses lightened Lola's skin tone to make it easier to print or be visible on enamel pins. When challenged, Adella's concerns were dismissed. She also discussed how a woman at a printing store argued with her when she tried to make photocopies of her trademarked logo, explaining that she needed the business owner's approval, assuming that there was no way that Adella, a Black woman, owned the business. There is importance in promoting BBIMP businesses, because they are still heavily marginalized and face barriers that White people do not.

Not all experiences of sharing and demonstrating values were positively received. Della Porta & Diani explain that bearing witness in typical political action means putting oneself in harm's way, or taking violent action to get a message across. This type of contention was seen in the comments on Yu Ra's post about disabled people being excluded from the fibre arts community. By voicing her concerns about the lack of public health measures being taken at a live knitting event, Yu Ra opened herself up to a

number of people attacking her position. Even after a similar event occurred less than six months before, people within the fibre community dismissed Yu Ra's concerns, and argued that their individual freedoms were more important than the safety precautions she discussed. While bearing witness can result in support from followers and positive experiences, it can also invite dissidents to challenge these positions and views.

A major critique of practicing lifestyle politics in this neoliberal ecosystem is that the responsibility for change is pushed onto the individual, rather than states or governments. Although many have argued that individuals practicing politics through lifestyle activism may have small-scale effects and fail to challenge the overarching systems of oppression, my findings suggest the contrary. In fact, there is clear evidence of empowered individuals rejecting capitalism and the alienation caused by capitalist systems of production.

Rejecting Alienation, Rejecting Capitalism

Karl Marx (1963 [1844]) identified four types of alienation that workers experience under capitalism: alienation from the labour process, alienation from the product, alienation from other workers, and alienation from the self. Because workers have no control or ownership over how they will do their work necessary for their survival, they are alienated from the labour process. People must work for wages to survive, and do not always have a choice in when or how they work, which is evident in the existing textile and fast fashion industry (Centobelli et al., 2022). The current fast fashion model underpays factory workers by centering production in countries with weak labour laws, and creates an immense amount of carbon emissions and waste by encouraging overconsumption of low-quality products (Le, 2020; Centobelli et al., 2022). By taking the power of production into their own hands, quite literally, the crafters observed in this study are connected to their labour process by making decisions at every point of the process. They choose the materials, like using Anna's natural fibres, or Adella's hand-dyed yarn. They also choose the pattern, whether it be from queer creators like Harper or size inclusive patterns featured by Chelsea. Most importantly, they choose how and when to work on an item, whether it be at

home, when attending a concert like Gary, or at the beach like Chelsea. This ability to choose when and how to participate in the manual work reconnects the crafter to the labour process.

By connecting to the labour process, crafters also connect to the items being made. Marx (1963) articulates that the worker becomes alienated from the labour product because of the disconnection from the labour process, resulting in the worker having an apathetic relationship with the items they are producing. In the fast fashion and textile industry, the pace of production is rapid, encouraging fast turnover in order to achieve quick profits (Centobelli et al., 2022). The worker has no relationship with these products because they are mass produced with the intention of being replaced quickly with the next new item. Crafters are inherently connected to their crafted products not only because of the time, effort, and skill they put into the item, but also because they were able to make decisions throughout the labour process that resulted in the object. These decisions allow a crafter to make an item that they are happy with, instead of settling for pre-made items. It also allows the creator to restart at any time, like Gary contemplated when knitting a baby cardigan he was not entirely satisfied with. Crafters are able to customize their product to fit their bodies and styles, and these choices mean the items they make are not alien objects.

The community cultivated by the creators and facilitated through the functions offered by Instagram allowed for the rejection of alienation from other workers. Similar to Saraswatie's idea of the neoliberal self(ie), Marx explains that under capitalism, workers must compete with each other to maximize their own success, alienating themselves from other workers (Marx, 1963). Under capitalist modes of production, workers do not rely on each other. By reclaiming the labour process and product, this mode of production allows crafters to reconnect with their fellow workers. Not only do crafters choose to interact with each other for the social aspect, but also because there is a level of dependence on each other through the crafting process. Whether someone is looking for advice on how to proceed with a project, or learn a new technique or skill, crafters depend on reciprocity to be successful in their own production process. This was observed when Gary asked for advice on the baby cardigan he was not

satisfied with; he asked for the community's expertise on how to proceed. When explaining how LolaBeanYarnCo came to be, Adella indicates that she began dying yarn partly because she felt uncomfortable and unwelcome in yarn stores as a Black woman. By reclaiming this process, she was able to cultivate a community of yarn lovers who depend on her to produce and supply her high quality products. She also relies on her customers to use her yarn in their process, and speak to the quality, to help other crafters understand why they should use her products in their craft. Harper explains that developing new skills and learning from other creators, whether in person or through YouTube tutorials, is essential for learning new patterns and becoming a more advanced and experienced knitter.

This reconnection with fellow workers was also demonstrated in the comment section of Yu Ra's post regarding ableism in the craft community. When Commenter 4 dismisses Yu Ra's concerns and experiences as a disabled person in the crafting community, a number of individuals showed up to defend Yu Ra. These crafters showed a commitment to Yu Ra, even though it was not necessary. Yu Ra indicated that it took a mental toll to respond to these ignorant or rude comments, so her community members took on part of that labour to defend her position and advocate for disabled community members. Under capitalism, this altruistic behaviour does not exist, because workers are expected to act with their own self-interests in mind. By rejecting alienation from other workers, the crafting community relies on a level of reciprocity for success in their own production endeavours.

Finally, crafting and creating content on social media is a clear rejection of alienation from the self, which Marx explains occurs due to the loss of control over the creative and productive process, and alienation from each other (Marx, 1963). The ownership over the labour process and product is a critical step in rejecting self-alienation.

While these creators are still working within the confines of a capitalist society, they have managed to take back part of the creative and productive process through their craft. By connecting with each other in the craft community and by creating a product exactly as envisioned, crafters are able to experience joy through the production process. The crafting process also allowed the worker to explore

and express their personal identity through their craft. Adella loudly claims her identity as a Black woman, mother, and wife through her business, because she is able to make choices in production that support her interests and identity. When dying yarn, Adella is able to choose colours and names that are representative of her, like naming a colourway “City So Nice, They Named It Twice” after a song. Having the creative freedom to make these choices allows Adella to express parts of her identity, like her music choices.

Craft also allows one to become more connected with their physical body as well when creating and claiming ownership over wearable garments and accessories. Harper explained the importance of being intimately familiar with your body shape and size in their Live on February 12th. This allows a crafter to create clothing that fits their body, including the ability to modify the process to achieve the best fit. When Chelsea encourages her followers to wear their knitted garments and share on Instagram, this expressly includes all bodies and their differences. By doing the same through her own crafting process, she is able to celebrate her plus-sized body.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This thesis started with a simple thought four years ago in my living room, while on a Zoom call with the Ottawa Knitting Guild. I marveled at how amazing it was that dozens of women could take part in a traditional handicraft together, despite a global pandemic, thanks to digital technologies. Once I realized that handicrafts had a long political history closely associated with feminist action, I decided to merge my hobby with my academic interest in digital communities and activism, examining how craft activism was practiced on Instagram, a visuals-based social networking site.

One of the first critiques I encountered of craft-based activism was that craft-based activism was exclusionary, especially for non-White crafters. The stereotype that knitting is for old, White ladies, combined with the hostility BBIMP makers experience in the community support this critique. By intentionally shaping my research design to include creators with intersecting marginalized identities, I show that craft activism can be practiced by anyone and everyone. I do not claim that the crafting community is without its flaws; my findings showed that racism and ableism are still present in the community. However, craft activism itself is practiced by a diverse group of people.

Digital and lifestyle activism have been criticized for being lazy or ineffective due to the small-scale impacts these types of protest have. By conducting a small-scale semiotic analysis on the content created by fibre artists, I was able to conclude that some critiques about activism practiced on digital platforms are valid. Digital scholars like Noble (2018) and Saraswati (2021) explored how the neoliberal logics of social networking sites affect our use and experience on these platforms, and some marginalized crafters expressed their experience of biased algorithms. These underlying principles negatively impacted the experience for some users on the platform, shaping the experience and impact of activism practiced in this space.

However, my findings challenge the common critiques that lifestyle and craft-based activism are ineffective methods of protest. Crafters can practice politics through commodity activism, supporting businesses and individuals with their purchasing power, based on their own ethics and beliefs. Whether promoting or purchasing specific products to support sustainable environmental practices, queer community members, and Black female-owned businesses, I argued that lifestyle activism has legitimate and powerful protest methods that can be practiced on Instagram. Lifestyle activism also includes actions taken to develop and promote self and community identity. This has been studied previously by digital scholars, with a focus on the reflection of "offline" political events online, including the #IdleNoMore and Occupy movements. In this study, crafters used Instagram as a tool to develop and promote their own marginalized identities and cultivated their own supportive digital communities. While Saraswatie may position this through the idea of the neoliberal self(ie) as a constructed, almost narcissistic self, I argue that this allows crafters to reject alienation from the labour process, and reclaim the self under our capitalist system. The entire crafting process and community cultivated on Instagram demonstrates a strong rejection of alienation under capitalism, as articulated by Karl Marx. By seizing ownership over the labour process and products, and reconnecting with other workers and the self, these crafters demonstrate a powerful resistance to capitalism.

Lifestyle activism empowers individuals by making protest and resistance accessible to every individual. It allows us to embody our personal ethics and values through choices that we make. It can challenge underlying systems of oppression, and while the impact may be small, it will still make a difference. There are many avenues that future research can develop on, including applying this analysis to other political communities online. There is also an interesting juxtaposing relationship that can be explored between the slow process of crafting on a platform that favours fast and constant content. New tools have been developed and offered on Instagram since the time of writing like subscription-based models, which have potential for closer community building on the platform. Digital technology advances faster than research, leaving a rich world of possibilities for future academics to explore. While we may

not be able to undo oppressive systems like capitalism and neoliberalism overnight, crafters can and do make a difference, one stitch at a time.

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