

This is a pre-print version of Amber Buck and Hannah Bellwoar's "Crafting Online Spaces: Identity & Materiality" published in *Kairos: Rhetoric, Technology, Pedagogy*, 19(3), available at <http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/19.3/interviews/buck-bellwoar>.

Script | Hannah Knitalongs Video

So one of the main things I do on Ravelry, I participate in is knitalongs. Knitalongs are basically in different groups, we'll all be knitting maybe the same pattern together, or a pattern by a particular designer together, or same kind of thing together, so we might all be knitting socks, for example. So I've participated in a lot of these different knitalongs over the six years I've been on Ravelry. Especially when I first joined, I participated in a lot of sock knitalongs, and actually, the way I learned a lot of the things I learned about knitting socks is by participating in these knitalongs, seeing the different patterns, the different techniques people were using to knit different parts of the sock, techniques they were using to cast on, and bind off. Were they knitting the socks starting at the toe, which is called "toe up," or were they knitting them top down, starting at the cuff and going down to the toe? I learned how to do a lot of different kinds of techniques within the sock, patterning, like lace knitting, or cables. These are all kind of technical knitting terms, but a lot of those things, I learned them through different knitalongs I participated in, and I just kind of taught myself how to do them, or sometimes there were tutorials in the patterns I was doing. So I learned a lot of what I know about knitting from knitting socks and from knitalongs. And then since then, I've participated in knitalongs for different podcasts I belong to as well, and within the last year, I started participating in something called "Nerd Wars," which I want to tell you about, especially because it involves a lot of creativity in my writing, so I think it's pretty applicable to this article.

So Nerd Wars is a friendly knitting "competition," but it's not really competitive. It's kind of more like a personal knitting challenge, and you can play on a team, or you can do what they call, you can play as a ninja, but I've always played on a team. You can choose what team you want to play on, what team you would like to sign up for, and then teams represent lots of different "nerderies," so you can choose what you want to participate in. So I started by participating on Team Stargate Command, which was for the TV show *Stargate*. Since then, I've participated on team Iron Throne, for *Game of Thrones*, and also Team Cancelled, for the TV shows that have been cancelled in three seasons or less. And then for the last two tournaments, and I plan to participate in February as well, I've been participating on Team Rangers, for the TV show *Babylon 5*. So each tournament consists of three rounds. In each round, which lasts for a month, there are five knitting challenges, and each challenge involves different nerdy things. And basically, you can choose to knit whatever you want for that challenge, so you could knit socks, you could knit a hat, you could knit whatever you want. The item that you knit doesn't matter, but what does matter is that you tie in whatever you knit into whatever the particular challenge is for, for whatever the prompt is for that particular challenge, and then something related to your nerdery.

So I'm going to give you an example, and I'll show you something that I knit for one of the challenges. So here's a pair of socks that I knit. [*Hannah holds up a pair of multi-colored, striped socks.*] So I knit these socks for one of the challenges. The challenge was about live action role playing (LARPing), so we were supposed to learn some things about live action role-playing,

and we were supposed to write about what LARP character, what our LARP character would wear. The way I did that, the way I tied these socks into that challenge was to talk about this yarn, which is the colors from the holiday *Dia de los Muertos*, and so I said that my LARP character would wear a Day of the Dead mask in LARPing, and that Day of the Dead mask would have similar colors. And then I posted a picture of a Day of the Dead mask that had similar colors in that challenge post and then I also tied this into *Babylon 5* by saying that this project, these socks, also connect to an episode in Season Five called Day of the Dead. So in that way, I was able to tie this project both into the challenge on Nerd Wars and into my nerdery, the team I was playing for, and then you get a certain number of points for each challenge you complete, and those points, they add up all the points for your team and then at the end of the three rounds the team with the most points wins.

So it's fun, it kind of, you know, embraces a lot of the things I like in my life. I love to think about how things that I knit are connected to other things, I mean, even though it's kind of random, and I'm kind of doing this research on my own and making things fit together with the challenge, it's a kind of literate practice and activity I really enjoy. As an English major as an undergraduate, it was kind of a thing I had to do every time I wrote a paper. I mean, I didn't really know that much about literature, so you know, I'd do research and connect these things together, and sometimes the connections felt real, and sometimes they felt kind of creatively made up at that moment, so. So it's something I really enjoy about writing, and I think that's why I keep participating in Nerd Wars.

Also, knitting for Nerd Wars helps me stay motivated to knit. There's a thread on the forum for Team Rangers. I read it almost daily, and I post occasionally to it, and we talk about *Babylon 5*, but we also talk about other stuff. We talk about life stuff; there are other professors in the group. Sometimes I've shared about classes I'm teaching, like, I'm teaching a class called Beyond Grey's Anatomy this semester, which is about medicine and pop culture. I shared that I was teaching that class, and some things from *Babylon 5* that I thought were interesting, and then people gave me suggestions. Actually, several people gave me tons of suggestions of things I could show from Law and Order, and other TV shows, so it's really cool how, you know, the different teammates, my teammates and I, we have overlapping interests and it's nice to feel part of a team, um, it's nice to feel connected to other people on a regular basis, it's a smaller group of people, we have similar interests within this larger Ravelry community so again, it just helps me feel connected.