

**The Quilter Identity:
An Exploration of West Coast Canadian Women's
Lived Experiences**

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Description of Participants

Annie is a retired school teacher who began actively quilting in November 2005. She enjoys quilting because she loves to learn and likes the analytical aspect of constructing a quilt. She is excited for the continual self discovery quilting brings to her.

Avis is a retired nurse who has been quilting for over 30 years. Her quilts have been recognized in a great number of quilt shows, as well as various quilting books, magazines, and on the radio. She likes how quilting is a vehicle of self expression, and how through quilting she can execute a group of ideas into fabric. She feels her quilting career has been a great journey and a lifesaver.

Eliane is a retired university professor who took her first quilting course in January 2002. Her favourite part of quilting is seeing how the quilt comes together and surprises her with each bit of construction she does. She feels lucky that she has the privilege to be able to devote her time to quilting. She loves fabrics.

Daphne is a quilting teacher and pattern maker who runs her own business with a business partner. She has been quilting since 1984. She had made countless patterns, a collection of quilting books, and has had her quilts featured on the cover of quilting magazines. She likes teaching because the people who come to her classes are genuinely interested in learning about quilting. The best part of quilting for Daphne is the construction of the quilt.

Margarete is a quilting teacher and pattern maker who has been quilting since the 1970s. Her quilts have been published in quilting magazines. She enjoys teaching beginner quilters and seeing them develop into quilters. The first pattern she ever made was a stained glass angel, which she says protects her work like a guardian angel. Her favourite part of quilting is the designing process.

Chapter One: Introduction

Most people know little about quilting. Common depictions of quilters involve a tiny elderly lady meticulously working on her hobby with needle and thread in hand. Quilting, however, is more than simply a hobby or a craft. Quilting is a North American subculture, with its own lexicon, hierarchical structure, and commodification system. There are stores dedicated to quilting, large festivals put on with the sole purpose of facilitating quilting needs, and endless pop culture trinkets that parody the quilting world, for example the bumper stickers proclaiming “I’m a quilter, and my house is always in pieces”. Quilting has historically been known as a traditional feminine handicraft. The beginnings of contemporary North American quilting stem from rural settings of communal quilting circles constructing quilts for utilitarian purposes (Ice 1986). There has, however, been a resurgence in the interest in quilting over the past twenty-five years in North America. These “revival quilters” are primarily middle class, urban women who buy new fabrics, use technologically advanced sewing machines, and learn via quilting books and classes. Quilting is constructed by revival quilters as “an expression of individuality and personality, [and] as [a] way in which women consciously [seek] to define themselves” (Woods, 1993, p. 110). In the revival quilting context, women acquire “quilter” as an identity.

This research explores the developmental process of the quilter identity, both within the individual and in the context of the greater quilting culture. The quilting culture is made up of various communities and individuals that embody different aspects of contemporary North American quilting practice. The question I pose is: in what ways do women define and understand their own quilter identity, and how is this identity

influenced by the quilting culture? My interest in quilter identity is personal as well as academic. My parents took ownership of a quilt shop (Satin Moon Quilt Shop) in Victoria, British Columbia in late 2005. Upon visiting their shop I observed some of the interesting dynamics that take place within the quilting world. These dynamics include the development of one's self-identity as a quilter, the internalization of identity as a woman becomes further immersed in the quilting process, and the possible tensions between the individual's values and other quilting groups, communities, and the larger quilting culture. These topics are explored in this paper. In chapter two, I will discuss the relevant literature on quilting. In chapter three, I will examine the development and internalization processes that occur as one adopts the quilter identity. In chapter four, I will discuss how this self-constructed identity is influenced by the quilting community, as well as point out possible tensions that arise with such influence. Finally, in chapter five, I will draw out my final thoughts and conclusions from my research, and suggest areas for further analysis.

Methodology

In order to conduct this exploration, I chose to interview five women from the Vancouver Island area about their experiences as quilters. For organizational purposes, I refer to the women I interviewed as "quilters". As I will discuss in chapter three, however, not every participant is comfortable with donning the "quilter" label. Recruitment for my interviews was done by contacting quilters who expressed interest in being interviewed when I discussed the research project in its preliminary stages, and by placing a recruitment letter (Appendix I) in the Satin Moon Quilt Shop. Four quilters

responded to me as a result of the recruitment letter, and one quilter indicated a desire to participate through a casual conversation I had with her about my research.

The participant demographic was not particularly diverse. All the quilters interviewed were female, middle class, Caucasian, and ranged from approximately 50 to 70 years old, although age was not a question in the interview. The interviews took place in the women's homes. In line with feminist research methodology, the interviews were held in spaces chosen by the participants in order to maximize their comfort in sharing aspects of their lives with me (Acker et. al. 1991). The goal of my interviews was to allow a free-flowing discourse about quilting. Reinharz (1992) asserts that “interviewing offers researchers access to people's ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher”(p. 19). Anderson and Jack (1991) agree that, “[i]n order to learn to listen, we need to attend more to the narrator than to our own agenda” (p. 12). Following this feminist methodology, I explained to each quilter that the goal of the interview was for her to discuss the dimensions of quilting that were important to *her* life, and that her answers were more important than my questions.

The interviews were semi-structured. A list of questions (Appendix II) was asked, but other questions that arose spontaneously throughout the interview were discussed as well. In order to emphasize the importance of the interviewee, my final question, appropriated from Stalp's research (2007), was “is there anything else you would like to talk about with regard to quilting and the quilt community that we haven't touched on?” (p. 30). This question allowed the women to elaborate on previous points or discuss another part of quilting that was not mentioned in my questions. The “formal” interviews lasted about one hour and were followed by an “informal” period during which the

participants showed me some of their quilts and talked about them. The interviews were recorded and then I transcribed the recordings myself. Transcribing my own interviews aligns with the feminist methodological principle of being connected to one's research in a way that underscores the fact that the data is a subjective part of women's lives, and not merely an objective collection of information (Anderson and Jack, 1991). The transcribing allowed for a deeper kind of intimacy with my research by providing me the opportunity to relive the pauses, voice intonations, and trip-ups that occurred during the interviews. The transcribed documents were then analyzed and coded for main points, emerging themes, and connections to the literature.

In the discussion that follows, some of the participants are referred to by pseudonyms and some are referred to by their own names. My original consent forms required my participants to use a pseudonym. After receiving comments from some participants who opposed their anonymity, as well as from a discussion with my supervisor about feminist research practice, I decided to send my participants a second consent form that gave them the option of having their real names used in my paper. Since my research is highlighting a significant aspect of women's lives, I felt it was important to identify the women who I interviewed that wished to have their real names known. As a result of this entire process, I have discovered how these five women define themselves in their lives through their quilting.

Chapter 2: Scholarly Literature

A range of popular and academic literature exists on the topic of quilting. Only recently, however, has the focus of such literature expanded from examining the quilts as cultural and historical objects, to analyzing how quilting affects the creators' lives. Stalp (2006) explains that concentrating on the product rather than the producer is common in mainstream, non-quilting understanding of quilt culture. Stalp asserts that "[t]he focus of many outsiders is *quilt*-based, not *quilter*- or *quilting*-based. In contrast, women who quilted focused far more on the *process* of quilting" (2006, p. 45). Clearly, the maker of the quilt and the quilting culture are as important to research as the quilt itself. These three elements of quilting; the quilter (the person), the quilting (the process), and the quilt (the product) are discussed in quilt scholarship. Utilizing this academic discourse, I explore the process by which quilting becomes a component of personal identity, and the ways in which the quilting culture impacts such identity.

Like other recreational activities, quilting can be a pleasurable pursuit separate from other aspects of the quilter's daily life. In this way, quiltmaking is seen as a form of leisure for revival quilters (Langellier, 1991, 1994; Stalp, 2006, 2007; Weidlich, 1986; Woods, 1993). Women often use quilting to as a way to relax from pressures in their life and fill their free time. Quilting, however, often occupies more time in women's lives than most casual leisure activities. Stalp (2006) appropriates Robert Stebbins' (1996) label of "serious leisure activity"; an activity the individual becomes so engrossed in they create a "subjective career" out of the hobby (Stalp, 2006, p. 106). This subjective career is an avocation that holds significant value in the quilter's life, even though, like other traditional women's work, there is usually no financial reward. An example of subjective

careers, as well as actual careers from quilting, is illustrated in my participants' responses in the following chapters. Quilting can become integrated into every aspect of a quilter's life without necessarily becoming a source of income. Whether serious or casual, quilting provides women with a meaningful form of leisure in their lives.

Leisurely activities, especially group endeavors, often involve the evolution of friendships between people participating in the same hobby. Quilting is an activity that allows for social bonds to form with other quilters (Anderson & Gold, 1991; Cheek & Piercy, 2004; Ice, 1984; Langellier, 1991, 1993, 1994; Stalp, 2001, 2007; Weidlich, 1986; Woods, 1993). Cheek and Piercy (2004) observe in their study of Amish, Appalachian, and Latter Day Saints women that quilting becomes "a way to make or deepen friendships" with other women (p. 31). These friendships help the quilter solidify her identity as an individual quilter and situate her identity within a larger community of quilters and the quilting culture. Such social bonds are usually made through the local quilt guild or through "satellite groups" – small groups of quilters who meet at specified intervals in intimate settings to quilt. Discussion in chapter four, however, will demonstrate how satellite groups can also prove to be a source of stress in quilter's lives.

Friendships can also form in more public spaces like quilting shops, trade shows, and judged competitive shows (Stalp, 2001; Weidlich, 1986; Woods, 1993). Women from a variety of backgrounds and social settings can come together for the unified purpose of quilting. Such friendships often make up the community that the quilter identifies with, and the friendships influence the quilter's identity. As will be seen in chapter four, friendships also facilitate an introduction into a new aspect of the culture or a new community.

In the literature, as well as in my interviews, women discussed how quilting has been a form of therapy (Anderson, 1998; Freeman, 1989; Hafter, 1982; Ice, 1984; Langellier, 1991, 1994; Weidlich, 1986; Woods, 1993). Through quilting one can metaphorically sew her problems away, or at least focus on the task at hand rather than the conflicts in her life. The act of quilting “facilitates healing – mental, emotional, physical – in a variety of ways: it absorbs emotions, allows quilters to sort out feelings, or provides a focus outside the self particularly through touch, the work of hands” (Langellier, 1991: p. 36). Both in the literature and in the interviews I conducted, quilters expressed how quilting offers solace in their lives. Anderson and Gold (1998) discuss how craftwork, like quilting, can help create “therapeutic connections between family members during emotionally turbulent times”(p. 18). Such release from stress is illustrated in the following chapter’s discussion of individual identity.

Intertwined with the discussion of quilting is the issue of gender (Stalp, 2006, 2001, 2007; Langellier 1991, 1994; Bernick 1994). Quilting is a traditional feminine handicraft situated in historical practice as a form of women’s work. Langellier (1994) contends that “historically, quiltmaking and other needlework were instrumental in constructing femininity and women’s containment in the private sphere” (p. 66). Cultural constructions of appropriate feminine characteristics influence how quilting is practiced. Langellier (1991) views revival quilters as challenging traditional feminine roles by adopting quilting as a form of self expression, but, at the same time, as adhering to gendered characteristics of “submissiveness, selflessness, service, and dependence: a femininity-for-others” (p. 50). This negotiation of femininity will be discussed in chapter four through my participants’ relation to the quilting community.

Revival quilting practice is a self-centred activity (Langellier, 1991; Stalp, 2006; Woods, 1993). The time spent on quilting is time spent away from other obligations. Woods (1993) states that “some women used quilting in an effort to limit their domestic obligations, to structure the limits of those obligations, and to resist the pressures of the social structure” (p. 32). In these ways, quilting challenges traditional ideas of femininity and domesticity. Engaging in a self-centred activity also assists women in developing their identities as quilters, which is elaborated on in chapter three. The importance of quilting as a self-focused event can become a point of tension when aspects of quilting come in to contention with other parts of the self, as demonstrated in chapter four.

The literature reviewed emphasize that quilting provides a creative form of self expression (Anderson and Gold, 1998; Ettinger & Hoffman, 1990; Hafter, 1982; Langellier, 1993, 1994; Murphy, 2003; Perishing, 1993; Shantz, 1997; Stalp, 2001, 2006; Weidlich, 1986; Woods, 1993). Quilters work within a structured framework of rules, but the quilt revival encourages women to negotiate these boundaries. Weidlich (1986) asserts that the creative nature of quilting was not always conscious in quilt culture lexicon. She argues that there has been a change from the rural folk-quilting “belief that quilting was something one took for granted, like housework, to the belief that quilting was a creative endeavor to which one was entitled” (p. 263). This entitlement has been adopted by the quilt revival culture as a justification for quilting. Ice (1984) explains that through this creative outlet the quilter “reinforces her sense of identity and self-worth” (p. 136). The capacity for self expression validates quilting as an aesthetic form in women’s lives. It is this self-expression that drives women to adopt the quilter identity, as seen in

the following chapter. Such self-expression also desires validation, which will be discussed in chapter four in regard to quilting shows.

Quilting revivalists' understanding of this self-expression has resulted in quilting being moved from a craft status to being viewed as a form of art (Bernick, 1994; Freeman, 1989; Ice, 1984; Langellier, 1991; Weidlich, 1986). Quilting is a traditional feminine handicraft, but has been co-opted by the art world and showcased in art exhibits. In western patriarchal culture, "art" is often associated with high culture and has historically been dominated by men, while "craft" holds a lower social status and is frequently connected to women (Langellier, 1994, p. 68). The elevation of quilting to an art form is a source of tension within the quilting world. Stalp (2007) finds "the hierarchical nature of naming and placement of art over craft in the mainstream art world" problematic because of the equalitarian mandate of quilting culture within North America (p. 27). Weidlich (1986), however, argues that the redefinition of quilts as art is an important step in raising the value and status of quilting outside of quilting culture. The conundrum of art versus craft is played out in the quilters' understandings of their activities, and results in a conflict between individuals, as well as between segments of the quilting culture. Langellier (1991) interviewed quilters from Maine about their quilting, and found a "seeming contradiction between their low valuation of art quilts and high valuing of quilting as a creative practice" (p. 34). She concludes that "the quilter's assertion of herself as an artist conflicts with traditional feminine identity as selfless and self-effacing" (Langellier, 1991, p.34). Hence, quilters may not want to be identified as part of the art world that has historically excluded women's crafts, but feel a need to show their craft as a valuable artistic endeavor. This tension also exists when competing in

shows – wanting to showcase their work but not necessarily wanting to align with the competitive art world. Both of these tensions were demonstrated during my interviews, and are unpacked more in the following chapters.

Based on the literature (Bernick, 1994; Freeman, 1989; Ice, 1984; Langellier, 1991; Weidlich, 1986) and my participants' responses, I categorize the quilting styles in tension with each other as “traditional quilters”, “art quilters”, and “contemporary quilters”. Traditional quilters employ techniques and aesthetic design choices that have been used by North American quilters since their adoption of quilting practices. Traditional quilts resemble the popular image of quilts made up of squares and triangles arranged in different geometric patterns. Art quilters utilize methods and composition tactics used in the artistic world. This can include wild textures and colours, as well as an integration of other forms of art media. Contemporary quilters mediate a balance between traditional and art quilting procedures. A contemporary quilt can include traditional techniques with a modern flare, or have an art aspect incorporated into the quilt, like sewing beading onto a quilt, for example. All three types of quilters are found in revival quilting. Traditional quilters find affinity with quilting as a traditional feminine handicraft, while contemporary and art quilters push the boundaries and rules of the craft into new realms of self-expression. Tensions between these three approaches were articulated by the women I interviewed and will be analyzed in the following chapter.

Such categories are most distinctly seen in quilting shows and competitions (Langellier, 1993; Weidlich, 1986; Woods, 1993). Langellier (1993) discusses showing

quilts in a “Show and Tell”¹ environment during satellite group meetings as a “performance event” (p. 128). Although Langellier (1993) does not discuss the different categories of quilting, she elaborates on the significance of showing one’s work and having the work validated by other quilters. Both Weidlich (1986) and Woods (1993) mention exhibiting quilts in quilt shows and at quilt festivals as a substantial part of the greater quilting culture. In chapter four I explore the individual and cultural implications behind not only showing a quilt, but entering a quilt into a competition to be judged.

The previous themes discussed are not mutually exclusive categories in quilter’s lives. Even the division between art and craft is blurred in women’s understanding of their quilting. Through their negotiations with these categories, however, women develop an understanding of themselves as quilters. Each quilter uses a set of concepts with which to develop her understanding of self: these concepts often overlap and intersect with ideas prevalent in quilting culture.

One of the devices I will be using to provide an analytical framework of the adoption of quilter identity is Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia’s (1964) affective domain taxonomy. My participants did not verbalize any sort of classification like Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia’s taxonomy during their interviews. I, however, have chosen to apply the affective taxonomy to my research as a tool to organize and analyze quilters’ identities and experiences: it is neither a static nor an absolute model of analysis. The developmental process conveyed by the taxonomy proved useful in organizing and understanding the self-evolution that occurs in quilter identity.

¹ “show and tell” is a popular event that takes place during group meetings, be it satellite or guild meetings, where a quilter shows her quilt to the other people in the group and briefly discusses some aspect of the quilt, i.e. how it was made, who it is for, etc.

Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia's (1964) affective domain taxonomy is a framework that categorizes how an individual can integrate "interests, attitudes, appreciations, values, and emotional sets or biases" into their self definition (p. 7). This categorization is constructed as a hierarchical structure where the greater evolution of identity integration corresponds with a higher level in the five stages of "internalized continuum" of such interests (Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia, 1964, p. 32). These five stages are classified in ascending internalization as the "Receiving" stage, the "Responding" stage, the "Valuing" stage, the "Organization" stage, and, finally, the "Characterization by a Value or Value Complex" stage. The taxonomy is visually illustrated as a pyramid with the "Receiving" stage representing the foundational bottom of the pyramid, and the "Characterization by Value or Value Complex" stage assuming the highest point at the capstone of the pyramid.

This taxonomy is applicable to the analysis of quilters because of the concept of internalization present in the framework. Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia (1964) explain internalization as "a process through which values, attitudes, etc., in general are acquired" (p. 30). As quilters become more involved with quilting, they internalize the values and attitudes of quilting practice and quilting culture into their definition of themselves. I argue that such internalization is crucial to understanding why, and in what ways, women find meaning and value in their lives through quilting. Since the taxonomy is constructed around the concept of internalizing a phenomenon like quilting, the classification system compliments an analysis of the individualized process of creating a quilter identity.

The affective taxonomy is also relevant to my research because of the "neutrality" of the organization system (Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia, 1964, p. 43). Krathwohl,

Bloom, and Masia (1964) advocate that “the taxonomic scheme should be broad enough to include objectives from any philosophic orientation, and thus from any culture” (p. 43). I suggest that such openness to all definitions of culture can extend to the quilting culture by looking at the individual construction of one’s identity from within the quilting world. As a result, Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia’s (1964) taxonomy is used as my foundation for formulating a discussion about quilting identity.

I will discuss, in the following chapter, the ways in which the taxonomy can be applied to the accounts shared with me by the participants and how the taxonomy can aid in the understanding of their identity-building processes. First, however, I will discuss two popular systems of classifying quilting identities that are used by the quilters themselves.

Chapter 3: Identity Development of Quilters

Each woman I interviewed shared thoughtful stories about herself in relation to her quilting. The following discussion of these women's experiences is not meant to be read as an overarching generalization of quilting culture; it is simply a synthesis of ideas and themes that emerged from my discussion with five dynamic women. Although these women's experiences do not speak for the entire North American quilting culture, their stories illustrate the ways in which women find value and meaning through quilting, as well as how they view themselves in relation to quilting culture.

In order to frame my participants' experiences and understandings of themselves, I utilize three main systems of organization to categorize the quilting identities of the women I interviewed. The three systems of categorization are: the choice of aesthetic design for their quilts, the skill level of a quilter, and Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia's (1964) taxonomy of internalization as applied to the development of quilter identity.

The aesthetic style of quilting is integral to developing one's identity as a quilter. I have classified three main styles of quilting - traditional, contemporary, and art - to use for this system. As discussed in chapter two, the literature emphasizes a distinction and possible conflict between art and traditional quilting styles (Bernick, 1994; Freeman, 1989; Ice, 1984; Langellier, 1991; Weidlich, 1986). The women I interviewed demonstrated various degrees of awareness regarding the existence of this division. Avis, for example, displayed her high degree of awareness by creating an "art vs. craft" quilt that visually explored these tensions. The quilt depicts silhouettes of women dressed in pioneer attire at the bottom of the quilt helping silhouettes of women in contemporary clothing take letters from the word "craft" at the bottom of the quilt up to the top of the

quilt to make the word “art”. Consistent with revival quilting ideology (Weidlich 1986), Avis’ quilt, as well as all of the women I interviewed, expressed their belief that quilting was an art form. I asked them to define what aesthetic style they identified with and describe the other styles existent in quilting design. Quilting culture appears to emphasize a division between styles, especially in judged shows. Such divisions are an important part of understanding how the individual identifies herself as a quilter. The implications of these divisions on a communal level will be discussed more fully in the following chapter.

A second classification system is based on the quilter’s skill level. I label these levels as beginner, intermediate, and advanced quilter. These three levels of ability were not significantly discussed in my literature, possibly due to the fact that all the quilters analyzed in the literature held an “advanced” status. The skill level organization system is used as a result of my observations of the quilting culture that employ such labels in everyday discourse. All the women I interviewed were well aware of such skill designations. They did not, however, place themselves at specific levels until I asked them to do so. I requested that they define the different classifications of skill levels and then asked them to situate themselves within the identified levels. All of the women consistently described “beginner”, “intermediate”, and “advanced” as the available options of skill level. My participants seemed to endorse this classification system, especially Daphne and Margarete, who use the three-tiered system of ability when teaching and making patterns. It appears to me that a higher level of skill correlates with the greater degree of internalizing the “quilter” identity.

The third and main organization system I employ is Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia's (1964) taxonomy. To my knowledge, the women who spoke with me were not aware of such a system. I use this taxonomy in order to place the other two systems of identity classification within a greater framework of identity development. My participants' classifications of themselves incorporate their levels of ability and their aesthetic design styles into their degree of internalization of the quilter identity. In all three classification systems, I use distinctions between categories to make sense of my participants' quilting experiences. These categorizations are employed for organizational purposes, however, and are not meant to limit the possibilities of other types of aesthetic styles, skill levels, and internalization development systems that could be existent in the construction of quilter identity.

Aesthetic Style

The women I interviewed all had varied definitions and comprehensions of aesthetic styles present in quilting. Although the creation of these themes is partly from the individual women's discussions with me, my participants do not necessarily subscribe to such a classification, or restrict themselves to only one definition of their quilting style.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, tension exists between the art quilt world and the traditional quilt world. Quilting has often been labelled a "handicraft", and until recently, "crafts continue to carry low status among the arts as a whole" (Freeman, 1989, p. 61). Although a wide range of crafts has been embraced by the art community, debate remains as to whether all crafts can be seen as a legitimate forms of art. I would argue that art quilters, consciously or unconsciously, work toward climbing this socially

constructed hierarchy of valuing. The tension between the individual and the community are discussed more in the following chapter.

As a result of my interview with Avis, in addition to the time spent viewing her quilts, I categorize Avis as an art quilter. She also pushes the boundaries of traditional quilt-making, however, by being a member of the fibre arts group and by employing artistic techniques and expressions in her quilts. Avis told me that “I don’t care whether people want to call it art or craft, so long as it gets into all those shows”. Avis’ statements affirm her deep held belief that quilting should be recognized as a form of art by being displayed in art shows as well as quilt shows. Avis also, however, stressed the importance of having traditional quilts stand out as a category of their own in art and quilt shows. She feels that such distinction is an important acknowledgement of quilting’s traditional roots and humble beginnings in recent rural North American history². Avis acknowledged her own preference for creating art quilts when she told me that she likes to “exhibit in the art quilt category now, whether it went to a national show or even the local art show. I’m not interested in exhibiting my traditional work, that’s just for me and my family”. Avis embodies the outward identity of an art quilter who appreciates, but does not prefer, creating traditional-looking quilts. I suggest that as a revival quilter Avis acknowledges the traditional quilting style as a valid form of quilting, but subscribes to the art quilter identity because of the artistic outlet quilting provides.

Eliane placed herself in the art quilt category. One reason she identified herself as such is because she has begun painting on some of the fabrics she uses for her quilts.

Eliane believes quilting has been devalued in society because “it’s a women’s art form. I

² Embroidery and other forms of needlework preceded rural nineteenth century North American quilting, but, since my demographic is western Canadian women, I refer back only to their immediately familiar quilting heritage culture. Please see Woods (1993) p. 43-115 for a discussion of the history of needlework.

think it has as much to do though with its everyday utility. You don't hang it on the wall, you wrap it around you or you lie underneath it. And many of the art forms that have everyday utility are less venerated than those which you keep at a distance". Although Eliane identifies as an art quilter, she also elevates the importance of quilting's "everyday utility" as an aspect to value in quilting. As mentioned in chapter two, the art world has historically dismissed quilts as works of art because of their functional aspect (Bernick, 1994). Eliane has experienced such devaluation in discussions with non-quilters about the quilting process. Eliane told me how she has "heard people say, 'oh I just would never have the patience [to quilt]'. It is not about patience *at all!* Would you say that about a painter doesn't have patience? Of course not". I suggest that Eliane's "art quilter" identity allows her to verbalize the value that she finds in quilting as a "women's art form" to others, and solidifies her understanding of quilting as a meaningful process.

Since Margarete told me that she "like[s] traditional work and techniques, the old techniques" of quilting, I suggest that she can be labelled under the traditional quilter category. Margarete particularly enjoys hand-quilting, which was the only form of sewing practiced in historical rural traditional quilting. Margarete told me that she has heard contemporary quilters refer to hand-quilting as "the 'h' word, like it's a swear word". I would argue that denigrating a style of quilting valued by traditional quilters is an act of devaluing traditional quilter practice. Margarete finds meaning and value in the techniques of the traditional feminine handicraft. Like the women in Ice's (1984) study of a rural Texas traditional quilter's group, Margarete's value of hand quilting also "emphasize[s] the functional aspects which connect quilts to the everyday world" (p. 54). I suggest that for Margarete hand-quilting reasserts the importance of the creator behind

the quilt creation. Therefore, Margarete's traditional quilter style keeps quilting grounded in the actual, tangible process of quilt-making.

Daphne identified her quilting style through a process of elimination. She explained that she is “not traditional in the sense that I only use traditional patterns or traditional blocks, but I wouldn't really put myself in the category of an art quilter because I don't feel I have a real strong art background. But contemporary, yea, that's sort of where I feel I fit”. As a contemporary quilter, Daphne acknowledged the importance the art quilt world has in influencing public opinion of quilting. Daphne told me that although “people are realizing you can do more than just put quilts on beds,” there still exists ignorance towards the reality that “a quilt can be hung on a wall as a piece of art”. My understanding of the contemporary quilter is a woman who is cognizant of the historical devaluing of traditional quilting and appreciates, but does not necessarily understand or identify with, art quilters. Instead, contemporary quilters try to carve out their own definition of self, and hence their quilting style is a blend of both traditional and art techniques and aesthetics. I suggest that in this way of mediating between the two styles, there is less potential for conflict between the contemporary quilter and the art or traditional quilter.

Skill Level

Each of the women I interviewed had constructed personalized definitions of their quilting experience. Although the common terminology of “beginner”, “intermediate”, and “advanced” was used with all five quilters, their definition of each level was unique. As well, their placement within the hierarchy was not based on a universal structure;

hence, two women who are on the same level of ability may have identified themselves on different levels, or may have used completely different structures altogether. Avis, Margarete, and Daphne situated themselves at the advanced level. Eliane described herself as an intermediate quilter, while Annie deemed her quilting “slightly better than intermediate”.

Avis defined a beginner as “someone who’s never handled a rotary cutter³ and doesn’t know how to use a sewing machine properly”. Although Eliane and Annie are new to quilting, their previous knowledge of sewing allowed them to bypass the beginner quilter stage. Margarete expanded on Avis’s definition when she told me

I think a beginner quilter, to me, is someone who is just mastering the cutting, the straight sewing, the matching up of corners, and the learning how to layer a quilt and finish it. So I don’t think there is too long time process of being a beginner. Once you have mastered these basics I consider them to be intermediate. I think the time of an intermediate can be very long, maybe forever ... If she [a quilter] does not move on to more difficult things by challenging herself or practicing then she might stay an intermediate quilter all her life, but that’s a decision she made.

Both Eliane and Annie agree with Margarete’s understanding of the transition from intermediate to advanced quilter; the quilter must challenge and push herself to develop in new directions, technically, aesthetically, or both. Each woman, however, conceptualized for herself the amount of challenge and development needed to transition to a higher level of ability. Placing oneself within a defined level of ability, I suggest, is based on the level of internalization of the individual’s quilter identity. Annie and Eliane may be hesitant to assume advanced status because they have not yet completely appropriated the “quilter” label for themselves.

³ A rotary cutter is a sharp, circular blade with a handle that is used by revival quilters to cut fabric.

A Taxonomy of Internalization

The process of coming to embrace the label/identity of “quilter” can be illuminated by using Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia’s (1964) affective taxonomy of internalization. A person enters the taxonomy at the “Receiving” stage. There are three subsections in the “Receiving stage”: *awareness*, *willingness to receive*, and *controlled or selected attention*. In these three subsections the individual interprets the phenomenon or object that they are interacting with. *Awareness* and *willingness to receive* are both “cognitive behaviours” in which the individual acknowledges the quilting world and some of the elements inside of the culture, even if they do not situate themselves inside the quilting world (Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia, 1964, p. 99). The quilters I interviewed displayed characteristics of the “Receiving” stage when they shared with me the stories of how they first became involved in quilting. These women displayed *awareness* of quilting through familiarity with other forms of needlework that they learned from previous generations.

All of the women I interviewed had a sewing background before they became involved in quilting. Eliane began sewing to make fashionable clothes in her 20s using “only Vogue patterns”. Avis told me how she came from “a whole line of needlewomen” and that quilting “was just kind of a natural progression” for her in her handicraft endeavours. Daphne told me she “had been a sewer for a long time, since I was a little girl”. Daphne was also a sewing teacher before she got involved in quilting. I argue that these women’s familiarity with the basic mechanical techniques of sewing, as well as their experience with other needlework craft, aided in their *willingness to receive* the quilting phenomenon into their lives. Since the women I interviewed had already

mastered the basic skills of sewing, which is necessary in quilt-making, I would contend that they are most susceptible in their *willingness to receive* quilting as an activity in their lives. I suggest they are more susceptible than people unfamiliar with sewing because such sewing knowledge decreases the gap of unfamiliarity between their non-quilting life and the world of quilting. The five women's involvement in other handicrafts also increases their *willingness to receive* and their *controlled or selected attention* towards certain stimuli in quilting. I would suggest that, because of these women's previous work with other handicrafts, they had already developed an aesthetic sense of style and preference for their creations which easily transferred over into particular quilting elements, like choice of fabric colours and quilt design layout.

Like other revival quilters mentioned in the literature, the women I interviewed are the first in their families to pursue quilting as a substantial activity in their lives. Weidlich (1986) affirms that "quilting has become popular within middle-class American culture, and its practitioners are no longer rural women who learned from their mothers and grandmothers in the classic model of traditional culture, but rather urban women who learned from books and classes" (p. 1). While some of the women had mothers and grandmothers who made quilts, these predecessors were not defined as "quilters", and did not teach the women I interviewed how to quilt.

It appears to me, however, that the women's quilting relatives did influence the decision to bring quilting into my participants' lives. Daphne, for example, became interested in quilting because her grandmother made a quilt top for her, but passed away before it was completed. Although her grandmother engaged in the quilt-making process, Daphne explained that her grandmother was "only a quilter in the sense that I think it was

a fashionable thing to do among a group of friends of hers at one point, a very small amount of time, because she only ever made three quilts”. I argue that Daphne’s reluctance to identify her grandmother as a quilter is consistent with Stalp’s (2006) contention that aligning one’s identity with quilting takes place when one makes quilting a “subjective career” in her life (p. 197). Although Daphne’s grandmother did not take on quilting as a subjective career, she still played a role in Daphne’s introduction into quilting. The quilt Daphne’s grandmother made for her became Daphne’s source of inspiration for learning how to quilt. After Daphne’s grandmother’s quilt was completed by a Victoria quilting group, Daphne enrolled in a beginner quilting class at the Victoria quilt shop.

Taking group quilting classes and reading instructional quilting books are examples of the second stage of the affective domain taxonomy, “Responding”. This stage is sectioned into *acquiescence in responding*, *willingness to respond*, and *satisfaction in response* subsections. I suggest that the “Responding” stage is apparent in the beginner quilter. I identify Annie and Eliane at this level. Both women have focused their energy on learning how to quilt, whether through classes or through a self-taught approach. Annie had previous experience with making quilted pillows, but the interest did not persist. It was not until late 2005 when Annie entered the Victoria quilt shop and saw all the “gorgeous fabric” that “then *something* got sparked” in her and her interest was revived. In order to nurture this “spark” she read instructional quilting books. Annie told me how “books are my teachers so I write in them *all the time*”. Consistent with Weidlich’s (1986) observations about revival quilters, Annie used books rather than past generations of women to educate herself on proper quilting techniques.

Eliane's involvement in quilting began long before she thought of creating quilts, when she took her then four-year-old daughter to a museum art quilt show. Eliane's daughter was "so obviously impressed by the piecing thing that she made the drawing [that Eliane was showing me]; a heart, obviously a quilted heart, and it says 'I love you' on it. It's very faded, but I guess, you know, sort of that was sort of the beginning of the quilt experience". Her quilt experience was furthered upon her retirement party when she was presented a quilt as a gift. Eliane described how "it was *radiant*. It was the first quilt I had *ever* had. And honestly the first quilt I had ever even thought about". Eliane explained how "she felt something in the quilt", and shared this feeling with other beginner quilters a year later when she took her first quilting class at the Salt Spring Island quilting shop. Both Eliane's and Annie's enthusiastic *acquiescence in responding* made them want to actively seek out quilting as a hobby.

Annie and Eliane also exhibit traits of the *willingness to receive* and *controlled or selected attention* subsections of the "Receiving" stage. Both women *chose* to spend their time and energy on quilting. Annie told me how, when she refers to herself as a quilter, "I get to call *myself* something instead of being something else like a mom or the worker. So there would be a sense of pride in saying 'I'm a quilter'. It's a choice *I've* made that somebody else didn't". Through quilting, Annie is able to "exercise choice and control over one's activities and time" (Langellier, 1991, p. 39). The ability to dedicate her free time to quilting is significant to Annie because she has been able to define herself on *her* terms through her quilting. As a result of this self-chosen activity, these women express "an emotional response, generally of pleasure, zest, or enjoyment" in their quilting (Kratwohl, Bloom, and Masia, 1964, p. 130). Eliane described this pleasure as

the capacity for total absorption I'm not sure I've had since I was a child. Like, you know, I watch my grandchildren who are six and nine, who are *completely* absorbed in what they are doing, whether it be drawing a picture or reading a book. And I can remember that feeling. And it's what, in a sense, you search your whole life to recapture: that complete absorption in the moment. And I think quilting does give me that. And that, to me, feels like a real gift. It is the capacity to go back to, the capacity for concentration that one had as a child which the demands of life prevent later on. No matter how creative the work one does it's still always 'you have to be marching on with it'. Well with this, no, there's not 'I have to go with it'. Just be in the moment.

Eliane's reaction to quilting is not simply an emotional response: it is an avenue for her to be conscious and present in a creative activity. For Elaine, quilting can temporarily block out the other stresses in her life by demanding her complete attention. As mentioned in chapter two, Eliane exhibits the joy in the self-indulgent aspect of quilting. I suggest that quilting provides Elaine pleasure on both a cerebral and an emotional level.

The quotes above illustrate that Eliane and Annie can also be placed into the third category of affective domain taxonomy: "Valuing". The "Valuing" section is subdivided into *acceptance of a value*, *preference for a value*, and *commitment*. Elaine is moving toward this level of internalization but is not yet comfortable labeling herself a quilter. Eliane expressed how, because of her limited experience with quilting, she felt it is "presumptuous" to call herself a quilter; "it's like reaching beyond who I really am so far [...] I haven't done so much of it that I feel that I can sort of take my place amongst the population called 'quilters'". Eliane believes her quilter identity will develop with her continued creation of quilts and through her interactions with the quilting culture. By this third stage of internalization, Eliane and Annie have ascribed their own worth and meaning to quilting, and have started developing a personal philosophy about the quilting process (Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia, 1964, p. 141).

Both women are “willing to be *identified* with it [quilting], [and] the individual is sufficiently committed to the value to pursue it, to seek it out, to want it” to be part of their lives (Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia, 1964, p. 145). At the “Valuing” stage, quilters start to call themselves “quilters”, a more serious self identification label than “someone who quilts” casually but does not make the activity a part of their identity. Annie believes she is “becoming more of a quilter” as she progresses in her quilting. Annie told me how her process of internalization has

been coming for the last couple of months. I’ll look at my quilts and think “gee, they’re maybe okay”. But if somebody said to me now, “what do you do for a hobby?” I’d say, “I’m a quilter”. That’s a big, heavy distinction, you know? Because it’s not like I’m making a living from it or would ever hope to. But yea, what do I do? I quilt.

Annie acknowledged the loaded meaning behind the term “quilter”. To call oneself a “quilter” is to incorporate cultural norms of characteristics and behaviours ascribed to quilting into one’s own identity. Stalp (2006) suggests that “when women self-identify as quilters, they also take on the externally generated meanings of being a quilter within the social quilting world” (p. 107). Labelling oneself as a “quilter” is to associate with the greater subculture of quilters, and to assimilate this label into their understanding of themselves.

I argue that acknowledging the potential to designate themselves as “quilters” led my participants to express *commitment* towards their quilting. *Commitment* is the third subcategory of the “Valuing” stage. Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia (1964) define the *commitment* of an individual as a “real motivation to act out behaviour to extend the possibility of him [sic] developing it, to deepen his [sic] involvement with it and with the things representing it” (p. 149). Both Annie and Eliane demonstrate that they are

committed to immersing themselves in quilting through their discussion of ongoing and upcoming quilt projects and ideas. They also demonstrate their commitment through their interactions with the quilting community by taking quilting classes, being involved in group charity quilting projects, or simply visiting a quilt shop. Annie does not identify as part of the quilting community yet, but she is still involved by shopping at the Victoria quilt shop on a regular basis. At the “Valuing” stage, quilting can become a “serious leisure activity” - an activity that holds worth and meaning to them more than other hobbies and recreational endeavors (Stebbins, 1996, as cited in Stalp, 2006). At this stage, quilting is no longer simply something these women do during their free time; quilting has become an integral part of who these women *are*.

After quilters have considered their commitment to quilting and the distinction of being labelled a “quilter” they can move on to the fourth level of the affective taxonomy structure of internalization, the “Organization” stage. Both Annie and Eliane have the potential to transition toward the fourth stage if they so desire. I also place Avis at this level of internalization. Avis disclosed that she had been very active in the quilting community for a number of years, taking part in guild meetings, satellite groups, and quilt shows. Although she still quilts avidly, her community participation has decreased. Relating this to the taxonomy of affective domain structure, Avis was at the most enmeshed stage of internalization, the “Characterization by a Value Set” stage, when she was most active in the quilting community and the quilting culture. More recently Avis’ identity has shifted to fulfilling her role as a grandmother, and it would appear that, as a result, “quilter” is no longer her main identity. However, Avis remains at the fourth stage

of the taxonomy because she still continues to quilt without her intense involvement in the community.

The “Organization” stage of internalization is subdivided into the *conceptualization of a value* and the *organization of a value system*. Using Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia’s (1964) explanation of the *conceptualization of a value*, quilting “permits the individual to see how the value relates to those that he [sic] already holds or to new ones that he [sic] is coming to hold” (p. 155). Avis, for example, has made quilts that have dealt with issues of social anxiety and depression, as well as a “war quilt” that she did “about women living in war zones. Because I’m overwhelmed with the thoughts of having to possibly cope with that and with what’s going on with the world”. Both her internal and external concerns are incorporated into her quilting. I would argue that, in effect, Avis’ quilts “become statements about the human will to survive” (Freeman, 1989, p. 73). Avis’ quilt on social anxiety and depression illustrates the personal struggles she has overcome in her life, while her war quilt is an empathetic expression to those who endure military conflict in their lives, as well as a political statement about her opinion of war. As mentioned in the literature discussed in chapter two, Avis’ quilt-making function as a form of therapy for her. Quilting has allowed Avis to create quilts that both express her own emotional state, as well as illustrate the compassion she has for other women enduring stressful lives. Such quilts have provided an avenue for Avis to communicate previously held beliefs and opinions and incorporate them into her quilter identity.

The *conceptualization of a value* is closely related to the *organization of a value system*, where the quilter is able to “bring together a complex of values, possibly disparate values, and to bring these into an ordered relationship with one another”

(Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia, 1964, p. 159). At this subsection quilters not only incorporate their beliefs into their quilting practice, they may also start consciously or subconsciously arranging their beliefs based on their understanding of quilting and the quilting world. Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia (1964) note, however, that an ordered relationship is more of the ideal than of the reality, a reality that they describe as a “dynamic equilibrium” (p. 159). When Avis was most active in quilting, she valued the Victoria guild as a community and valued expanding her personal artistic expression as a quilter. These values came in to contention when she

had made a proposal, or motion, at a [guild] meeting that we join the Association of Pacific Northwest Quilters [APNQ]... I felt that it was time for us to grow as a guild too. Anyways, to make a long story short there was a big outcry and people shouted at each other and I just wanted to crawl into a hole somewhere.

Avis’ previous involvement in the APNQ allowed her to continue her development as a quilt artist and expand her quilting community. Although not intentional, this value overrode Avis’ compliance with the guild’s values, especially the more traditional quilting members, and conflict arose.

When the guild issue commenced, Avis was at the fifth stage of the taxonomy of affective domain, the “Characterization by Value and by Value Complex”. At this final stage the level of internalization is at its highest. Both Margarete and Daphne are at the top of the quilter identity hierarchy because they are professional quilters who teach, make patterns, and compete in quilt shows to varying degrees of intensity, all as a main source of income. Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia (1964) subdivide this stage into a *generalized set* category and a *characterization* category. The *generalized set* is explained as an “internal consistency to the system of attitudes and values” of the quilter (Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia, 1964, p. 166). The quilters’ beliefs are harmonized with

that of their quilting routine and philosophy. This is illustrated with Margarete's explanation of her love for hand-quilting. She told me how

hand-quilting, hand work itself, is very dear to my heart. I just feel that we women should not be trapped by the thought that we have to produce, produce, produce. Everything is quick and easy, and the more quilts you make the better your place in heaven will be. I think [it is better] if you can put your feelings into the quilt and enjoy the quilt process.

I argue that the meditative and aesthetic pleasure of hand-quilting relates directly to Margarete's belief that women should enjoy the creation process of quilt-making and ignore the pressure from North American capitalist ideology that advocates producing as much as possible. Ice (1984) states that taking quilting out of the consumerist realm is significant because it gives quilters the freedom "to construct other networks and to engage in social and symbolic exchanges that might be restricted by the environment and conditions of the marketplace" (p. 230). I would suggest that the emphasis Margarete places on hand quilting aligns with her belief in valuing the process of quilting as an authentic expression of self, as well as her disdain toward the commodification of such a personal process. As well, by valuing hand-quilting, Margarete is paying homage to the traditional beginnings of North American quilting's past.

For these women quilting "objectives are so encompassing that they tend to characterize the individual almost completely", which exemplifies the second subsection of *characterization* (Kratwohl, Bloom, and Masia, 1964, p. 171). Margarete and Daphne identify with different aspects of the quilter identity: they create quilts, they teach quilting, and they produce patterns to be sold and used in other people's quilting creations. Their work as quilters has resulted in winning prize ribbons in quilt shows and competitions, articles being published about them in quilting magazines and books, and has given them

opportunities to interact with other quilters on both a professional and a personal level all over North America. Daphne exhibited this intense characterization of self when she told me about another quilter who used to call the quilting industry “a ‘kitchen table business’, which is one of my personal pet peeves now that I realize that no, we need to be taken seriously. This is not a ‘kitchen table business’. We have to be out there to make money”. Since Daphne and Margarete invest their entire lives in quilting, I argue that devaluing the quilting culture in turn devalues these women’s identities. Diminishing Daphne’s profession to a “kitchen table business” is also telling of the gendered devaluation of quilting that happens in mainstream culture. I suggest that quilting is not viewed as a legitimate business pursuit because of its common understanding as a rural feminine hobby. Although the quilting revival has moved on from this image, non-quilter understandings of the culture often have not.

I suggest that as a result of such devaluation, quilters are protective of their quilting identities. Like Daphne, Margarete fully embraces the quilting identity as an integral part of her definition of self. When asked if anyone else in her family quilts, Margarete responded, “No, just myself. Thank God, nobody interferes! [laugh]”. Since Margarete is the only quilter in her family, I conclude that she has had the liberty to define and participate in quilt-making without competition for such identity with other family members. Margarete, who is at the highest stage of internalization in the taxonomy, identifies the importance of the quilter label as her *own* form of definition that separates her identity from others in her family. At this stage of internalization, “quilter” and the individual are synonymous.

Conclusion

Quilter identity is constructed based on a combination of three categorization systems. The distinction of art versus traditional quilting is contingent on beliefs and values held by the individual quilter. As previously demonstrated, however, such distinctions are not explicit. These distinctions are influenced by the quilting community's understandings of the different aesthetic styles of quilting. As seen with Avis' experience, these beliefs can be challenged when interacting with other quilters in the same community who hold different beliefs. Quilters also define their skill levels based on their own understanding of the levels as well as on cultural notions of what the levels entail. Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia's (1964) taxonomy was applied to understand how self identity develops in relation to one's quilting practice. While the individual categorizes and understands herself in relation to her quilting, she negotiates her identity through her involvement in the greater quilting culture. Such interactions take place within quilting communities. The quilting culture is made up of a diverse range of groups and relationships to other quilters. As we will see in the following chapter, each quilter's interaction with quilting culture varies in approach, intensity, and outcome. The next chapter will explore how the quilters' identities influence, and are influenced by, their interactions with the larger quilting culture.

Chapter 4: The Quilting Community

This chapter is an exploration into how women's quilter identities are influenced and/or established based on their interactions with various quilting communities. I suggest that the quilting community can both reinforce and challenge the individual's construction of her identity. Such challenges come into play when the individual's identity conflicts with other values or worldviews existent in the community. This potential tension can take place between individuals, between an individual and a specific aspect of the community, between different segments within the community, or between cultural values and actual practiced behaviour. While some tensions are resolved or negotiated, others are never openly addressed. I discovered three main areas of potential conflict through my interviews that I label as: the definitions of the quilting community, quilter authority in the culture, and competing in quilt or art shows. I argue that there is a gendered dimension integrated into these three main tensions. Cultural values dictate that the quilting community is an egalitarian space within which women can interact, and quilters are implicitly encouraged to embody feminine characteristics that support this egalitarian ideal. It appears to me that these values suppress the outward expression of tensions, and can even contribute to a denial of such tensions. I suggest these cultural pressures effect how the individual interprets her quilter identity.

Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia (1964) also discuss tensions that can exist between the individual and her culture. They claim that their affective taxonomy of internalization "provides equally for the development of both conformity and nonconformity [to the culture], as either role pervades individual behaviour" (Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia 1964, p. 29). Their taxonomic system applied to the phenomenon of quilting highlights

the constantly shifting interactions between the individual and the greater quilting community. Each of the women I interviewed described fluctuating degrees of interaction with the quilting community, and proved to be both an intermediary and a creator of the quilting culture. Through their interactions the definition of their communities, the authority roles they communicate or embody, and their opinions on competitions are solidified.

Defining the Quilting Community

The definition of “quilting community” apparently changes based on a quilter’s perception of her level of involvement in the quilting groups that surrounded her. In turn, such definitions shape the amount of influence the community’s values has on the individual’s understanding of her quilter identity. Quilters’ definitions of their communities are important because the definitions allow them to identify their social networks and support systems. These definitions also allude to which communities have the most influence on their understanding of and relation to the quilting world. By identifying and discussing their communities of influence, I suggest that quilters are actively constructing and placing their identity within the larger quilting cultural framework.

All the women I interviewed defined the quilting guild in part, if not all, of their understanding of the “quilting community”. The exception was Eliane, who lives on Salt Spring Island where the guild is “very, very small” and relatively informal. The quilting guild in Victoria, however, is made up of 600 members and is quite active. Margarete, Daphne, and Annie are all members of the guild. Avis was a guild participant for the

majority of her quilting career, but she stopped attending after the APNQ incident. In addition to the guild, some of the women I interviewed are or were involved in satellite groups.

Daphne is the most immersed in various quilting communities: she is an active member of the guild, participates in, organizes, and oversees on-line quilting groups, and belongs to two satellite groups. Daphne is also involved in the business community with other quilting merchants, and with the professional community with other quilt teachers. Daphne's multi-community involvements correlate with the various aspects of her identity as a quilter. Both the creative and the business aspects of Daphne's identity have corresponding groups with which she interacts and with whom her identities can be validated. Ice (1984) states that "through the social work of quilting, the individual reinforces her sense of identity and self-worth" (p. 135-136). It was clear to me that Daphne's identity is strengthened through her social communities that support and perpetuate her identities. Daphne told me about the overwhelming emotions she experienced when she won her first "ribbon for best use of colour, and I just burst into tears. I couldn't believe it! To me it was like, 'wow, someone really appreciates what I do and someone understands what I do' ". The recognition from the competitive quilting community confirmed and reified Daphne's identification as a competent, legitimate quilter. Such validation also reinforced her place within the competitive quilting community. As a result of this process, Daphne has come to define her quilting communities as spaces that substantiate her quilter identity.

Eliane construed the quilting community as a space in which individuals interact through the common understanding of quilting. Eliane described the quilting community

as “a community of people who are very supportive of each other in that, where we intersect. For many others I don’t know their politics, I don’t know the circumstances of their family’s lives, many of them, but at the place where we intersect it is so supportive. What I like about the community is you take a person where she is”. For Eliane, the quilting community is a non-judgemental place where women can be quilters and have no need to perform any of their other identities. Weidlich (1986) found comments like Eliane's to be a common characteristic of revival quilters. Weidlich (1986) states that “[t]he point of reference in the realm of the quilt revival are the same from quilter to quilter, regardless of the quilters' personal situation” (p. 52). I suggest that, through Eliane’s experiences, she co-opts cultural values of quilt space as an autonomous place. Although Eliane does not take on the identity of “quilter”, she does find a common bond with other quilters who may have different life experiences and ideological stances. Quilting can also operate on a separate sphere from Eliane’s other identities, which I suggest allows for a closer degree of egalitarianism by eliminating discussion of possibly contentious topics. In Eliane’s experience, possibly conflicting viewpoints are less important when the common interest of quilting is discussed, and a harmonious situation occurs in quilting spaces. As a result, Eliane described feeling united with her fellow (or sister) quilters, regardless of their varying, diverse and perhaps incompatible identities beyond quilting.

Margarete’s definition of the quilting community is consistent with Eliane’s understanding of the community as a place for people of common interests to come together. Margarete stated that

the quilting community, I think, are those people who connect because they like to do the same thing. And honestly I found that quilters are very kind people. I

have not been cheated by quilters. I have not had bad experiences; they are helpful, they are warm people.

Margarete expressed stereotypical characteristics of quilters as friendly, approachable, non-threatening women. However, like Avis, Margarete also experienced a negative situation in the quilting community. Margarete told me that “a quilt that I had thought of, somebody else picked up on it and then she quickly made a copy and won the first prize with that quilt. It doesn’t hurt; it’s still in my memory, but it doesn’t hurt anymore”. This is a breach of the informal quilting cultural norms of supportiveness of other quilters. Margarete’s experience is an example of tension between individual ideals and actual practices. In theory, Margarete affirms the cultural value of the quilting community being egalitarian and supportive. In practice, however, she has had those values violated by another quilter.

Margarete’s incident also illustrates individuals conflicting with each other. Margarete greatly values her skills as a quilt designer and incorporates these skills into her identity as a quilter. Hence, it could be argued that stealing Margarete’s designs was analogous to stealing part of her identity. I suggest that the quilter who stole Margarete’s design held different values than Margarete – namely, that using someone else’s quilt design was not a problem. It would appear, however, that cultural and gendered values of cooperation and non-conflict override Margarete’s experience of betrayal and discourage her from defining any aspect of quilting culture in a negative light.

As a result of her intense involvement in various quilting communities, Margarete embodies multiple quilting identities. Margarete, however, reported experiencing conflict between her quilting community involvement and the other responsibilities in her life. As discussed in chapter two, satellite groups provide a space for bonding with other

women. As the following quote demonstrates, however, such groups can cause conflict as well. Margarete explained to me that she used to host a bimonthly

satellite group, and we always met at my place, which was not a good idea. It was a good idea for a long time. We met twice a month, at the time my kids were small. So it was good when we met at my place. But then later on when we decided we would meet every week, and it still was at my place. But then I realized the others all have their choice to say, “well, I’m coming today or I’m not coming today”, not even telling you they’re not coming. But I *had* to be there every week, so I decided to change that and we moved it. So it wasn’t really a community, it was more like they were all coming to me.

Margarete’s particular involvement in her satellite group was beneficial when her children were young, but developed into an invasion on her choice to separate her familial and quilting spheres, and impeded her ability to choose the degree of her involvement in meetings. Ice (1984) describes a similar tension in her study of a community of Texas quilters. Ice observes that “the individual quiltmaker operates within a private, domestic context where her personal aesthetic takes precedence; in the more public context of the club’s work, an individual surrenders some of her personal autonomy to meet the requirements of an egalitarian context” (p. 105). Margarete sacrificed “personal autonomy” while serving as host to her satellite group, but eventually found that particular niche of the quilting community too intrusive for her domestic-based identity which required a level of privacy.

This instance is an example of the quilting community clashing with a non-quilter realm. The quilting community values a space to perform their activity, but the home realm, which usually operates outside of the community realm, finds tension in providing such space. I suggest that, as a result of this conflict, Margarete dropped the satellite group from her definition of community. I find this significant in terms of the ways in which she relates to the rest of the community: not as an equal player, but as a

knowledgeable quilter in a position of authority in which the community comes to *her* and not the other way around. Her position of authority will be discussed in the next section.

Both Margarete and Avis' stories are evidence of tensions existing between cultural values and individual experiences. Margarete and Avis have both had negative experiences in their quilting communities. However, they do not discount the importance of the communities in their lives. I argue that this is because of socially constructed gender characteristics of female compliancy. Consistent with mainstream constructions of femininity, conflict should be suppressed in order to maintain group equilibrium. Such gendered principles are coupled with the belief that the quilting culture values inclusiveness, equality, and cooperation. The conviction that quilting, and the quilting community, are supposed to mitigate other social differences is strong enough in the culture to reinforce to women that the community is important in their lives. There is the cultural belief that there is no judgment, and that everyone is on equal playing ground, and so quilters subscribe to this belief and actively defend their culture even in the face of contradictions like Margarete and Daphne's negative experiences. Margarete and Daphne, however, occupy positions of quilter authority, in which they have a certain level of precedence over other quilters based on knowledge, position in the community, or skill level. Such authority, ironically, helps solidify cultural ideals of equality.

Quilter Authority

When a quilter reaches the fourth or fifth level on the internalization taxonomy, she appears to have the option of commanding varying degrees of authority over the quilting community. Such authority can come in various forms, for example, quilt shop owners who provide products to the customer, the executive members in the guild who run guild meetings and events, or the quilting professionals who convey their knowledge of quilting through instructional classes, seminars, and books. These authoritative positions may seem to conflict with cultural ideas of equality. These positions, however, are part of what make up the quilting community and, I argue, contribute to the overall sense of cultural inclusiveness.

Avis' relationships with quilt authority figures have resulted in a source of creative inspiration for Avis' quiltmaking. A quilting teacher involved with APNQ left a memorable impression on Avis because she “kind of set me free as far as doing what I want to do. And the crazier it was the better she liked it”. Avis' teacher used her authority status to help cultivate Avis' creativity. Avis' teacher also guided her to push the boundaries on quilting techniques and aesthetics. Avis' interaction with this quilting authority resulted in a development and expansion of her own quilter identity. I suggest that, in a sense, Avis' quilting teacher used her authority status to appropriate cultural values of equality by pushing Avis' boundaries to advance to the next level of quilting, therefore making Avis closer to her equal. Avis' relationship with her mentor illustrates an aspect of quilting culture positively affecting the individual by providing an exploration and development of her definition of self.

Professional quilters Margarete and Daphne both feel accepted in the local quilting community because other quilters come to them for quilting advice. Nelson

(2005) states that “participating in advice-giving and advice-receiving rituals establish cultural identities in terms of authority” (p. 95). Margarete and Daphne’s authoritative identities as quilt teachers and quilt experts are nurtured through the local quilting community’s continued requests for their knowledge. I would argue that, by acting as advice-givers, Daphne and Margarete solidify their roles as experts in the quilting community. Daphne, however, does not feel recognized as an expert among the national Canadian Quilter’s Association (CQA). She told me how she felt “there were certain situations where I didn’t really feel that they [the CQA] really cared or accepted me or my business as an entity”. Daphne told me, however, that she has not been proactive in trying to become more accepted. I would suggest that Daphne's resistance to pursuing acceptance with the CQA is because the association deviated from the quilting culture ideology of inclusiveness. While Daphne and her business partner are “accepted in the U.S. as good teachers and well respected”, their own Canadian association has breached cultural norms and left Daphne feeling alienated. In Daphne's experience, part of the culture has influenced her negatively by failing to affirm her identity as a professional quilter and hence her expert status. The United States quilting culture, however, has embraced Daphne's and her business partner's endeavors and authority statuses. As a result, she includes the American culture in her definition of quilting communities.

Daphne's experiences at her yearly pilgrimage to the International Quilt Festival in Houston, a large and important festival in the quilting world, resulted in her befriending other quilters. Daphne became acquainted with a quilter who co-resides in Victoria and Houston. This friendship has proven to be beneficial both personally and professionally. Daphne's friend has provided Daphne and her business partner with help

and advice each time they attend the International Quilt Festival. Daphne emphasized the importance of this friendship by explaining that “I think without having her there, I think we would have been really scared. We probably would have never done it ... here we are from little old Vancouver Island going to the big city of Houston [laugh]”. In this situation, Daphne and her business partner undertake the role of advice-receivers when in an unfamiliar quilting community. I suggest that assuming a passive identity in Houston does not conflict with their authoritative roles as advice-givers because they are separated from their primary, regional communities in which they undertake such dominant statuses. This venture also resulted in Daphne temporarily suspending her authority status in order to become integrated into the festival world. As a result, Daphne’s friend accepted a role of authority in the festival situation.

The definitive example of intense cultural/individual interactions with quilters takes place during large quilting events like the International Quilting Festival in Houston, and Quilt Market, a massive trade show for the quilting world held annually in different locations across the United States. “Market”, as it is known, is a heightened, intensified version of everyday happenings in quilting communities whereby the individual can temporarily experience many of the various aspects of quilting culture in one condensed space. Likewise, authority roles may be significantly heightened or decreased. Weidlich’s (1986) study of Texas quilters observed that “festival attendees form a temporary community” (p. 40). Quilting events of this magnitude permit for a provisional formation of a quilting community. I believe that such festivals allow for this creation because the focus of the event is an incorporated part of each participant’s identity. As a result, the excitement and willingness to share with others constructs a

temporary community. During such festivals some authoritative roles are subordinated, as in Daphne's case, while others are heightened, as in the case of the celebrity quilter.

Celebrity quilters are women (and a few men) who have made a name for themselves in the quilting world, and are often admired and revered by other quilters. During festivals like Market, their authoritative status is significantly heightened and exaggerated. Daphne explained that her greatest excitement at Market was being able to see the big names in quilting, which she explained was "like going to a rock concert and seeing the real rock stars, it was just like that for me seeing some of the real quilt stars". I would argue that quilt celebrities embody and significantly influence the trends, values, and ideologies of North American quilting culture. Quilt celebrities' important authoritative status in quilt culture can translate into a meaningful experience for the individual who attends these events and can visit with such cultural icons. The celebrity quilter's elevated status is maintained throughout Market by star-struck observers like Daphne. At the same time, Market breaks down the hierarchical boundaries of fame through the casual interactions event participants have with the quilting stars. As seen with the local communities, big quilting events also emphasize cultural ideals of inclusiveness and equality among their participants in informal settings. Although this is not the case – clearly quilt celebrities operate in a realm above the "normal" quilter – I suggest the cultural value of equality overrides the actual behaviours of quilt celebrity elevation, and therefore such an elevation of their authoritative status is permitted without conflict.

Shows and Competitions

Conflict does arise when discussing one's authority status in relation to showing or competing in quilt shows. Quilt shows are a popular way for a variety of quilters to display their work to other quilters and to the general public. Often within these shows are quilting competitions. In the formalized space of competitions quilts are judged in a number of different categories and are awarded ribbons accordingly. Weidlich (1986) identifies "two different axes [that] are operating in these different systems of judging: contemporary vs. traditional with regard to design concepts, and technical aspects vs. artistic aspects in regard to total quilting execution" (p. 61). A viewers' choice award is included in the judging. Such competitions take place at all levels of quilting communities, from local quilt shows to international festivals. Quilters can choose to have their quilts judged, but there is also the popular option of exhibiting one's quilt without formal judgment. These competitions underscore tensions between cultural values and actual behaviours, between cultural segments, and between the individual and the culture. Cultural values of inclusiveness are challenged by the competitiveness and hierarchical judgment of quilt competitions. Quilt competitions, however, are also a valuable aspect of revival quilting culture. It seems, then, that it is up to the individual to decide to align with one value or the other, or to claim alignment with one while simultaneously performing the other.

The women I interviewed had differing opinions on competing in quilt shows. Margarete claimed to value most the "Viewers Choice" ribbons she has received. She stated that "I put quilts into judged shows because I want to enjoy the process of making the quilt and I don't get a better compliment than the public". I would suggest that the validation from the general public is important because it demonstrates that Margarete's

creations are accepted by more than just the quilting culture. Margarete told me that “I’m not hunting for prizes, so I don’t really care about that. I don’t want to be part of all that, I just want the joy!”. For Margarete, participating in quilt shows provides validation in and of itself. However, there is something deeper happening with Margarete’s statement. She *does* choose to compete in shows rather than merely exhibit her work. But it is not culturally appropriate in quilting culture, a women’s culture that is based on feminine characteristics, to claim a desire for competitiveness.

Daphne enjoys competing because “having something hanging there is just a real feather in your cap to have done that – to make an effort, to follow the rules, do a good job, have it stand out amongst the competition”. Daphne perceives competitions as a space where all the work that she put in to the quilt can be recognized by others in the community. Like Margarete, she claimed that she does not compete “for the money or the prestige, that’s for sure”. Both women asserted that they do not compete for rewards of ribbons, cash prizes, and elevated status. They both, however, actively submit their quilts into juried shows. I contend that their reluctance to express a desire for achieving awards can be linked to the culturally-based construction of their identities as quilters. According to the values of the revival quilting culture, one makes a quilt either because it is for someone else or because it is an exercise in personal creative expression. Gendered cultural values of modesty and non-competitiveness in women can conflict with an individual woman’s desire to have her work validated above other pieces as the best of its kind. Appearing to make a quilt simply to put in a competition with the hope of winning is viewed as deviant from feminine characteristics that quilters are repeatedly told to embody through cultural messages and quilting culture ideology. As well, claiming to

create a quilt simply to use for competition seems to devalue the personal meaning that goes in to a quilt, reducing it to a competitive object. Quilting cultural value asserts that to quilt is not a means to an end; the “means” of creating a quilt is a validating process, or “end”, in and of itself.

Eliane believes that the competitive aspect of quilting diverges from her own convictions as a quilter. Eliane entered a quilt into a quilt show, but realized that the other quilters in her community,

are not people I want to be competing with. Whether anybody wins or loses is not the point of it. The point is I don't feel in competition with anybody. And, you know, people say, “well, that sort of raises the standards higher, and makes for a community of higher aesthetic standards.” Perhaps, but that's just not what I'm interested in. Because I feel it is a most communal endeavor, cooperative endeavour.

Eliane applied her belief of equality within quilt culture to her quilting practice by choosing not to continue entering judged shows. The “communal endeavor” of quilting is a value Eliane incorporates into her self definition as a quilter. Eliane’s stance on quilt competitions is aligned with quilting cultural values of equality and inclusiveness, although as seen above the actual practiced reality is highly competitive.

Conclusion

Possible areas of tension in quilting arise in defining the quilting community, embodying a position of authority, and using quilts to compete. By defining the quilting community, women either find the community to strengthen their quilter identity, as in Eliane’s case, or reject the community because it compromises their own sense of self, as seen with Margarete and her satellite group. It seems that a fairly major conflict needs to take place before a quilter divorces herself from an aspect of the community, as seen with

Avis. Overall, in spite of minor conflicts, these women hold fast to their idea of the community as inclusive. I suggest this attests to the positive power of a community. As well, these women's identities are enmeshed with the community, and to divorce themselves from the community would be to lose part of their identities.

Embodying a position of authority seems not to be a place of much tension. Both celebrity quilters and professional quilting teachers use their status to embrace an authoritative identity without conflicting with egalitarian cultural values because, I argue, they are role models and guides for all the "other" quilters – the bulk of the quilt culture. In order to keep the culture alive, one needs to have experts to convey their interpretation of, and knowledge about, the culture to others who are entering it. Authority figures also act as gatekeepers into new or undiscovered aspects of quilting culture. Annie described such an instance with a friend whom she met and who was already a quilter. They ritually visit the Victoria quilt shop on a weekly basis and talk about quilting. Annie's friend assumes an authority role by facilitating her introduction into the quilting world, but does so in an egalitarian nature. As friends, teachers, and quilting celebrities, I suggest that forms of quilting authority help to further develop individual and cultural quilting identities.

The tension involved in competing in shows is a gendered tension. Quilting is not only a traditional *feminine* handicraft, the majority of the participants are *women*. Therefore gendered characteristics like non-competitiveness, modesty, and selflessness are emphasized as acceptable behaviour for the individual. However, these women operate in a society that thrives on individual expressiveness and competition. So, it may not be culturally appropriate for women to want to compete, but it is nonetheless a reality

that these women pursue. They negotiate such tension by entering the shows but claiming that they do so for individualistic validation rather than competitive purposes. In this way both cultural and individual values and needs are met. In all three areas of community interaction that I have identified, an ebb and flow between the individual quilter and the quilting culture takes place. The community allows for an expansion of individual quilter identity that can align with or contest cultural beliefs. As a result, community involvement significantly influences women's constructions and understandings of their identities as quilters.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Areas for Further Research

This paper is only a glimpse into the fascinating lives of the five quilters I interviewed. Many of the topics brought up during the interviews had to be set aside, for the time being, in order to narrow my discussion for this paper. However, a few of these subjects should be mentioned as suggested areas for future research. The majority of the women I interviewed, with the exception of Annie, have made gift quilts and have participated in charity quilt-making events. Gift and charity quilts were also discussed in the literature (Hafter, 1982; Cheek, & Piercy, 2004; Ice, 1984; Langellier, 1991, 1994; Roberts, 1994; Stalp, 2001; Weidlich, 1986; Woods, 1993). Both of these topics could be explored in terms of how making quilts for others exemplify feminine characteristics of creating and giving to others. Gift and charity quilt-making events are also an important part of quilting culture, and can lend to the discussion of positive cultural ideals.

Distinctly feminist issues also arose from my interviews, and were hinted at in the literature (Langellier, 1991; Stalp, 2001). One issue resonates with Virginia Woolf's call for a room of one's own. Woolf (1929) argues that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (p. 4). I found that Woolf's two requests for enabling the creative process can be applicable to quilting. Revival quilting is an expensive hobby that demands a considerable amount of space. All the women I interviewed had a separate space in which to work and the financial means to afford quilting as a hobby. Some women even credited their successful quilting endeavors either to their quilting space or to their financial situation. A beneficial analysis would be to

explore how Woolf's assertions factor into the success of revival quilters' activities. As well, quilting can be framed as a third wave feminist endeavor. Through quilting, women are actively creating their own culture, and can use their creation as a message for political or social change. Some of the women I interviewed expressed that they found quilting to be a feminist pursuit. The implications of these creations, and how they affect the individual quilter, is a possible topic for further study.

Conclusion and Final Thoughts

Quilters construct their identities on two separate, intersecting planes. The first plane consists of the individual internalization of quilter identity. This internalization is based on skill level, style choice, and level of involvement in quilting. As the individual moves up the internalization pyramid, these distinctions become more refined and more clearly articulated. Stalp (2001) concurs that "women who quilt build layers of distinctive identities that become centre points of their lives" (p. 5). A sort of snowballing process takes place: once the individual accepts that quilting will be part of her life, the activity consumes more and more of their time. As a result, the quilter becomes more invested in her activity and integrates aspects of quilting into her self definition.

As the quilter moves through the internalization process, she intersects with another plane: the quilting community. In the community individual identity development is encouraged, stunted, or altered based on the individual quilter's experiences and interactions within the larger culture. Connected to the community is the enactment of the gendered implications in quiltmaking. Feminine values implicit in the quilting culture pervade various aspects of the community, from dictating appropriate behaviours when

competing, to implementing uniform definitions of the quilting community's egalitarian ideals. Through the gendered culture of quiltmaking, the individual situates herself in communities that she finds align with her quilting philosophy.

The complex intersection of individual and communal operates under the framework of revival quilting ideology. By way of such individual and communal definitions, experiences, and interpretations, women find quilting to be meaningful and valuable in their lives. As a result, quilting can be seen as a powerful force in the construction of a woman's self definition and in her understanding of her place in a community. Through such constructions, quilters find meaning and value in their lives.

Appendix I: Recruitment Letter

Hello! My name is Camille Stengel and I'm the daughter of Brenda and Gordon, who own the Satin Moon quilt shop. I'm in my final year of my undergraduate degree at the University of Calgary in Alberta, and am writing an Honours thesis on quilters. The goal of my research is to listen to quilters' experiences in the quilting community. I find the quilting community fascinating and wonderful, and would like to learn more about it. I may be taking a quilting class or two with you, but don't worry, nothing specific about you or anyone in the class will make it into my research paper. I will also be conducting interviews, lasting about an hour, with people who would be interested in talking with me. In the interview I will ask questions about such things as how and why you became interesting in quilting, your involvement in the quilting community, and your experiences in the quilting community. I would also love to see anything you've quilted if you would like to share it with me, especially something you have made that holds a lot of meaning for you. If you're interested in participating in my research or would like any further information about my project you can email me at camillemays@yahoo.com. You can also call me collect at 403-837-2554. If you prefer, you can leave your contact information at the shop and it will be forwarded to me. Happy quilting!-

Appendix II: Interview Guide

Background

- How did you first become interested in quilting?
- How long have you been a quilter?
- When did you start calling yourself “a quilter” rather than someone who quilts? Do you remember why this distinction was made?
- What do you like quilting?
- Is there anything you dislike about quilting?

Community

- What is the quilting community?
- Do you feel like you belong?
- Are you involved in the quilting community? How so?
- Do you have contact with other quilters? What sort of contact? Is this contact valuable to you?
- Tell me a memorable, positive, or affirming experience as a result of being part of the quilting community.
- Have you ever had a negative or alienating experience in the quilting community?

Categories

- Are there different styles of quilting? What are they?
- What style of quilter do you identify as? Why? How would you characterize yourself as a quilter?
- What is your opinion of the other categories of quilting you described?
- When does one transition from a beginner quilter to an intermediate or expert quilter? Was that a conscious transition you made?

Meaning/Value

- Do you have a family? How do they feel about your quilting?
- Are there differences in your quilt making process between a quilt being made as a gift versus a quilt to be shown in public and/or sold?
- Have you ever taught quilting to others? How is that experience? What do you like/dislike about teaching others to quilt?
- What meaning do you attach to your quilts?
- Has quilting and identifying as a quilter changed your life? How / in what ways?

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