WEAVING HISTORY: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF QUILTING AND FEMININITY IN 1930s AND 2020s PACIFIC NORTHWEST

by

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This thesis project examines themes of femininity, kinship relations, material tradition, and fiber arts within the broader history of quilting in the Pacific Northwest (PNW). I analyze how female familial relationships, stories and memory, and history are carried on through the long-standing tradition of quilting, as well as the central tenets of womanhood that have historically been represented and expressed through quilt making. Although there are many important differences between the 1930s and the 2020s, modern quilters still share several experiences with 20th century quilters, often simply using updated technology. The project includes a material component to address the techniques, patterns, and styles used in historic quilting. These ideas are of interest to many overlapping groups of people, including women and those in the feminist movement; anyone in the fiber arts community; and those interested in the material culture of the 20th century PNW, including anthropologists studying historical archaeology.

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Table of Contents

List of Figures

Introduction

The power of cloth cannot be denied.

The Definitive Contemporary American Quilt - A Collection

Barbara Steinbaum, 1990

Quilting - the craft of sewing together three layers of fabric to create an insulating blanket - has a long and complex history that is almost as intricate as the various fabrics and patterns used in the craft. The basics of quilting typically include piecing together an often beautifully detailed top out of multiple fabric patterns and colors, then sandwiching a layer of warm, insulating batting between the top and a plainer backing fabric. Finally, the whole assemblage is "quilted" or sewn together through all three layers, frequently in an intricate pattern that itself is a work of art (Orlofsky & Orlofsky, 1974).

Quilting as a practice has been around for thousands of years. The first recorded use of a quilted garment comes from the Egyptian First Dynasty, circa 3400 B.C., in the form of a carved ivory figure wearing a quilted garment, and the earliest surviving archaeological example is a quilted carpet or floor covering believed to have been made between the first century B.C. and the second century A.D. (Orlofsky & Orlofsky, 1974). Throughout history and prehistory, quilted blankets and clothing have been used for insulation, warmth, padding, and more. They are popular as wall hangings and bed coverings, as well as decorations that exhibit the maker's skills in needlework. Marking life milestones and rites of passage, over six thousand patchwork patterns and variations have been created and identified over the years, and each quilt has the potential to become a treasured heirloom or a beloved blanket (Oshins, 1987). Quilts hold stories

and information in their stitches but are frequently dismissed as "women's work," so these important pieces of history are often ignored despite their richness (Kiracofe, 1993). Even today, quilting remains "primarily a woman's art," and many women "can't see the importance of their work" due to its traditional dismissal (Roe, 1983).

This project explores the importance of quilting and brings to light the immaterial aspect of this traditional material art. It uses both literature-based research and recently conducted interviews to contrast quilting trends in the United States between the 1930s and today. The primary trends I examine include knowledge transmission and female familial relationships, both of which have been explored in past literary works and in my interviews (e.g., Higgs & Radosh 2012, Lipsett 1985). Quilting and femininity have been entwined throughout the last several generations, and the art of quilting carries values, opinions, relationships, and memories that deserve acknowledgment and recognition (Kiracofe, 1993).

The questions driving this research are threefold. First, how are female familial relationships represented and carried on via quilting? Second, what are the central tenets of "womanhood" that have traditionally been represented by quilting, and how have those changed from the 1930s to the 2010s-2020s? And finally, what stories, memories, and other valuable pieces of information are transferred through generations via quilts?

Regional Context

In the United States, quilting originated in the late 1700s with the first Euro-American colonial settlers in the east. Several cultures, including the Dutch, brought various forms of quilting with them as they immigrated to the "new land," and quilts grew in popularity as wealth and populations grew in the east, with many household inventories including at least one quilt (Kiracofe, 1993). The increased trade and higher populations of the mid 18th century brought

new textiles and ideas, and by the end of the century America was producing textiles nearly equal in quality to Europe (Orlofsky & Orlofsky, 1974). This allowed women to be less frugal with household fabric scraps and focus more on the decorative and artistic aspects of their quilts. The 1860s-80s included westward migration, and quilting again grew in popularity, with the friendship quilt dominating the period (Kiracofe, 1993). Women would frequently ask each of their friends to make a single block of a friendship quilt that would then be pieced together and taken on the road to remember and treasure those left behind (Lipsett, 1985). Then, with the 1846 patent of the sewing machine, the industrial aspects of sewing and quilting began a significant upward trend, and the time-consuming and collaborative aspects of quilting were dramatically reduced while the decorative and competitive nature came to dominate the art (Orlofsky & Orlofsky, 1974).

For the sake of this research, I define the Pacific Northwest (PNW) as Northern California, Oregon, Washington, western Idaho, and Canada. I chose this area because of my longtime interest in it and how I have seen local artists, including quilters, incorporate themes and colors from the PNW in their art. The history of quilting in the PNW has a shorter duration than that in the eastern states due to the linear progression of white settlers - there is simply more early immigration history in the eastern side of the country. Some areas of the country such as Pennsylvania, and populations such as the Amish, have very distinctive quilting styles that an experienced quilter can usually identify. While the PNW has no such distinctive marks, many modern quilters are embracing traditional qualities of the PNW including rain clouds and deep forests, incorporating the color palettes and themes of the area in their work. One artist, Erin Kroeker of Winnipeg, Manitoba, uses nature as an “endless source of inspiration” and names her patterns after her favorite Manitoban parks and places (Kroeker, 2020).

Temporal Context: Quilting in the 1930s

Quilt making grew in popularity once again in the beginning of the 20th century and interest held steady until the 1940s, when the intensity of the trend again waned (Kiracofe, 1993). Leading up to the 1930s, a series of changes rendered the country amazed at its capacity for industry and cultural events. These included mass immigration, race riots, the rise of industrial giants like U.S. Steel and Ford, women's suffrage, and rapid urbanization (Kennedy, 1999). Immigration brought waves of new people from all over the world, each bringing their own ideas, memories, and stories with them to add to the growing mixing pot that was the United States.

When the American Great Depression arrived – a period of economic downturn that began in 1929 and lasted through 1940 – it greatly impacted all aspects of life in the U.S., including familial relationships and the manufacture of material goods. In the United States, industrial production declined by almost half, forcing families to reconsider every aspect of their finances (Temin, 2016). While unemployed men frequently became increasingly idle, women took on the roles of budgeter and distributor, adding to their already-existing roles of mender, mother, wife, cook, and cleaner (Temin, 2016).

Meanwhile, in the Pacific Northwest, the Ku Klux Klan found a foothold in Oregon, dominating politics there for a time, and Jim Crow laws in the South further limited all aspects of life for nonwhite people (Kennedy, 1999). (As mentioned later, the demographics of Oregon today are still largely white – this is one contributing factor.) The farm surpluses of the Pacific Northwest and Midwest starkly contrasted with malnourished children in the east, and as prices plummeted, acres-long family farms were quickly repossessed (Kennedy, 1999). Farming

families struggled to find a place to live and work, and wives and mothers were burdened even further with childcare and family management.

This period of economic frailty and uncertain finances, plus women's new responsibilities, meant that women had a good incentive to utilize every scrap of fabric they could to fashion into a quilt top. Women saved pieces of worn-out shirts and dresses, old dishcloths, and any leftovers from the rare piece of newly purchased fabric, sewing them together in between their other tasks to create a patchwork quilt top. Although often difficult to date without a hand-embroidered signature and date, the quilts of this era can often trace generations of memory - a piece of Dad's old work shirt, a snippet of Sister's flowery church dress in the shape of a heart, a corner of a baby blanket that never had the chance to be used (Kiracofe, 1993). Quilts from the 1930s reflect the frugality and uncertainty of the Great Depression, a period unlike any experienced by the relatively young United States.

Temporal Context: Quilting in the 2010s-2020s

Modern quilters share many characteristics with quilters of the 1930s. Both used scraps of fabric to craft beautifully intricate quilts, and both have had to deal with stereotypes and expectations based on their gender identity and fiber art interests. However, many notable events and changes in the 21st century have altered how quilters approach their craft. The rise of corporate fabric and craft companies, such as Jo-Ann's and Michael's craft stores, have expanded access to quilting materials, allowing the age range of quilters to expand in turn. And, just as the 1930s had a defining event (the Great Depression), the global COVID-19 pandemic of the 2020s influenced fiber artists for years after the pandemic officially began in March of 2020 (*WHO Director-General's Opening Remarks at the Media Briefing on COVID-19 - 11 March 2020*, 2020). With a global shutdown, many United States citizens found their schedules

suddenly wide open, with plenty of time to try new things, including sewing and quilting. I am one of those people, as I learned to sew during the pandemic. However, one must also consider the economic frailty and goods deficit that threatened financial security during the pandemic. International trade nearly halted, and many countries faced a pandemic-triggered recession, including the U.S. (Krstic et al., 2020). In the face of this economic downturn, while many people found themselves engaged in a new craft, some of them needed to practice the same frugality as their 1930s "predecessors," conserving and using every available fabric scrap.

Meanwhile, political tensions rose to a peak, with the relatively liberal PNW facing more conservative decisions from the top of the legislative and executive chain. Many minority and at-risk groups were increasingly threatened by this polarization, including women, LGBTQ+ people, and racial minority groups (Baker, 2019; *Karnoski v. Trump*, 2018). Thanks to this divide, many fiber artists found themselves expressing their opinions through their craft, sharing thoughts, "votes," and arguments for their chosen political aspect. However, many families were divided along political lines, scrambling traditional kinship relations and leaving millions of people wondering where their familial relationships lay (Bilefsky & Yeginsu, 2020). The resulting general chaos of the COVID-19 pandemic created a mixed space where some people discovered a new art and others simply fought for survival, but all these aspects of life can be seen in the quilts and other art produced during this time.

Anthropological Context & Connections

The main lens through which I examine quilting and femininity is that of kinship relations between women and other women, women and their families, and women and their craft. As defined by Hasty and colleagues (2022), kinship is a sociocultural construction that creates a "network of social and biological relationships between individuals" (Hasty et al.,

2022). Kinship is a universal concept in human societies, allowing humans to interpret socio-biological relationships to create meaning. However, the specific "rules" about kinship (who is related and how closely) vary widely between cultures, and two people who might be considered cousins in one culture might not even be considered related in another (Hasty et al., 2022). Anthropologically speaking, kinship relations allow researchers to determine what kinds of connections people developed and how those connections impacted their lives.

Additionally, shared practices allow people to enter into relationships with others that are built around a certain practice. These practices act as a meaningful way of sharing life experiences, and as Sahlins writes, being kin means your lives are joined and interdependent (Sahlins, 2011). I explore this idea further in my discussion of interviews and interpersonal relations between quilters of the same family, craft circle, or organization.

In the quilting world, the impacts of community and kinship relations are visible in happenings such as quilting bees, crazy quilts, and friendship quilts. Quilting bees became especially popular during the 1800s and lasted for generations. Women gathered from across communities to exchange fabric scraps, work on an important piece such as a bridal or baby quilt together, and bond over their shared interest. One woman might participate in over 25 quilting bees in a single winter (Orlofsky & Orlofsky, 1974). Within this kinship-based community, women would share stories, opinions, and concerns that might be validated or understood by other women in the group. Similarly, "crazy quilts" were often pieced and quilted by many women who each contributed various pieces of fabric to be sewn into a cohesive quilt top (Orlofsky & Orlofsky, 1974). One crazy quilt might represent pieces of a whole community, spanning acres of farmland or an entire neighborhood, all tied together by the handiwork and collaboration of women. Finally, friendship quilts were sentimental, deeply valued quilts that

carried blocks pieced by close friends, often signed, that were then sewn together into a larger quilt to be carried by a woman or young girl moving away from her hometown friends (Lipsett, 1985). Each of these examples shows just how intricate women's relationships around quilting were - a woman might interact not only with herself and her own family, but with the dozens of women across the community and perhaps beyond. Through this pathway, women shared and stitched opinions, history, and stories into the fabric that lay before them.

A final important note is that gender is and has been fluid throughout the span of human life. Having a certain experience or trait does not necessarily mean that a person identifies as a woman or man, an idea which Butler (1999) examines in detail. According to Mari Mikkola's analysis of Butler's arguments, unitary gender notions do not take into account differences amongst women, thus failing to acknowledge ethe complex cultural, social, and political intersections that make up the array of "women" in our world (Mikkola, 2023). Since expressions of masculinity and femininity have changed significantly over generations, defining a "woman" is difficult, thus I use the term "woman" loosely and, for interviewees, only if they identify as such.

Personal Context & Contributions

As someone who identifies as a woman, an anthropologist, and a fiber artist, the materials and ideas of the past fascinate me. I am captivated by the ways women of the past created the same things I make today and how they worked within the societal and economic limits of their time. This thesis is a cumulative project that connects my own passion for fiber arts with my interest in anthropology and history by analyzing the similarities and differences between quilting in the 1930s and quilting today.

The origin of this project lies in my own hobbies and interests. As a fiber artist, I've been sewing, knitting, quilting, and embroidering for years, handling scores of different fabrics and constantly learning new techniques. I've also been exposed to the non-academic "grandma" stereotype, wherein anybody who expresses an interest in these things is often deemed "old-fashioned" or simply called a "grandma." This sparked an interest to learn more about how fiber arts and femininity are connected, especially how they are viewed as so exclusive to each other - in other words, how men are often belittled for having these interests and women are expected to have them, while gender diverse people must frequently battle these expectations based on their gender presentation. Further important acknowledgements of transgender, gender-diverse, and nonbinary people fall into my methods section, as well as a racial diversity acknowledgement.

My research will be useful and interesting for fiber artists and anthropologists looking into the past for historical data regarding quilting techniques, styles, and stories.
It will also contribute to our modern understanding of quilting techniques and traditions, female societal and familial roles within the fiber arts community, and how women and fiber artists are viewed by society.

Materials and Methods

This project brings together data from multiple sources, including a literature review, interviews with PNW quilters, and the creation of a quilt that I sewed myself. The literature review focused largely on the history of quilting, particularly in the 1930s, and the techniques, styles, opinions, and communities that were expressed and shared via these works. Interviews focused on more modern experiences, specifically how female quilters today both carry traditions that have been in practice for decades and forge their own paths in the quilting world. Creating the quilt itself informed my understanding of the quilting process and allowed me to create a piece of art that represents both modern and 1930s-era quilting and femininity.

Interviews

The interview portion of my project began with submitting a proposal to the International Review Board and obtaining approval to conduct interviews. I searched online for PNW quilting groups and from there contacted organizations and individuals that I identified as "eligible" for these interviews. To be eligible, interviewees had to identify as women, live in the PNW for a significant portion of their life, and have at least five years of experience with quilting. Initially, I wanted to interview older women who may have more experience with quilting, but I ended up interviewing three peers that are like myself in age (20-25), in addition to the older women I talked with. In several of my first interviews, the interviewees referred family members, friends, and associates that they thought might like to participate as well, which is how I found most of my later interviewees. Referred to as the "snowball" sampling method, this allowed me to easily expand my circle of interviewees (Parker et al., 2019).

Each participant was monetarily compensated for their time in the amount of $25 per person. Interviews were not more than one hour each and were recorded using either my personal smartphone or my personal laptop.

I conducted seven interviews with women from across Oregon, asking them about their experience with both fiber arts and quilting, as well as their experiences being a female fiber artist. I used the following questions as a baseline, following the lead of the interviewee in what we talked about (this is a formal, open-ended, and semi-structured interview style).

1. What is your experience with fiber arts?
2. Which fiber arts have you worked with? When did you begin each of them? How did you learn?
3. What is your experience with quilting specifically?
4. When did you begin, and how did you learn? If you were taught, who taught you?
5. Do you have experience identifying different types of quilts? Do you know many quilt/block pattern names and styles?
6. What is your view on quilting and feminism or womanhood?
7. Are the two inherently tied together in your life?
8. Was quilting presented as a matrilineal tradition in your life?
9. Have you experienced any stereotyping because you are a female-identifying fiber artist/quilter?
10. Do you have experience selling or having to value your own work? What was that like?

I transcribed the interviews using several different AI transcription services, including Otter AI, and edited them while listening to the recording to make sure they were accurate. These transcriptions are stored on my personal laptop.

Each person provided valuable information that I explore in my discussion section. I pulled some direct quotes from interviews, while other ideas are paraphrased. No matter the

format, though, each piece of information from the interviewees is shared alongside an explanation of who they are, their quilting background, and how their experiences relate to my research questions.

Sewing a Quilt

Materials

To generally replicate the frugality of 1930s women, I chose to largely use materials and tools I already owned. I sewed every piece on my Singer brand heavy-duty sewing machine, using several spools of white all-purpose cotton thread and standard needles. The cotton fabric prints I used were mostly scraps and remnants from previous projects, with the goal of using cloth from my stash rather than purchasing new fabric. A standard iron and ironing board were staples in making sure each piece lay flat, and I used standard fabric scissors, rotary cutter, ruler, and cutting mat to measure and cut each piece. Pencils and paper were used to transfer the PDF templates from my laptop to blank printer paper, using the templates provided in the Farmer's Wife 1930s Quilt book by Laurie Aaron Hird (Hird, 2015).

Choosing a quilt style

Deciding on what style of quilt to make was one of the most difficult aspects of this project. I first discussed it with my second reader, Joan Spencer, president of the Northwest Quilters Association, who guided me in the right direction by suggesting I look at sampler quilts. A sampler quilt is a specific kind of quilt that is created to display several different skills, blocks, or styles, rather than using one repeated block throughout the quilt. I later discovered Hird's *Farmer's Wife* sampler quilt book and promptly chose to recreate the quilt following the book's guidance since it outlined precisely the style and type of quilt I wanted to create: a sampler quilt

that pays homage to 1930s quilting women and used known blocks and patterns. Using already-owned fabric was a conscious choice - I wanted to use fabric I already owned, broadly replicating the frugality of 1930s women who saved every fabric scrap to be used in a quilt. I also saved every usable scrap from this quilt construction to be used in another quilt in the future.

How does a PDF template become a finished block?

For this explanation, I use "Block 1," the details of which are hypothetical and simplified for the sake of a general audience's understanding. Block 1 would start on the computer PDF as a template, accessed through Hird's book website. I sized the screen to match a piece of 8.5" x 11" paper and traced each template piece onto blank paper, then cut out each paper template piece and chose a suitable fabric combination for each block, considering how the pieces and patterns would look and interact. I then cut out the designated number of pieces from each fabric - for example, 4 pieces of template 1A with white fabric, eight pieces of 1B with pink fabric, and one piece of 1C with purple fabric - and lay them out on a flat surface in the pattern outlined in the book. Next, I would sew each piece together on my machine in a specific pre-planned order, using a "chain stitching" technique where I do not break the thread between pieces, creating a chain of stitched-together "pairs" that are easily cut apart to separate into individual pieces. Each seam was ironed flat, pressing it towards the darker fabric to prevent darker patterns showing up behind a lighter fabric. Piece by piece, section by section, each 6" x 6" square was assembled and pressed flat. Each block took approximately 40 minutes from PDF to finished block, with variation based on the complexity of each pattern and the number of fabric pieces for each square, which ranged from nine to 82.

Figure 1: Block 18, “Carol,” cut out and ready to sew.

Figure 2: Block 18 finished and pressed.

Although I chose every fabric from a limited selection of cottons that I already owned, every single block of the 99 I used is different, with template pieces and fabrics that are unique

to each block. Since there were only 99 block patterns available in Hird's book, I decided to make all of them, choosing particular colors or patterns for some blocks and using simple coordinating colors for others (Hird, 2015). One example of this choice is Block 67, "Mrs. Brown," which also happens to be my grandmother's name. I chose colors and patterns I thought she might have liked for that block. Similarly, I chose some of my favorite fabrics for Block 80, "Patricia," which is my full name. Block 49 is called "Katherine," my sister's name, and includes colors that remind me of her. These blocks connect me to the women and history around me and incorporate them all in one large piece that represents both personal contributions and larger connections to womanhood and quilting.

Completing the quilt top

Each individual block was next sewn to two triangles of white print fabric, then these oddly shaped pieces were sewn together to create a column of on-point squares with the empty spaces filled by white fabric. Odd-numbered columns must have a split square in order to offset the design. Each of nine columns was sewn to the next, creating a large block of 99 squares in an offset pattern. Finally, a border fabric was sewn all the way around the edge of this large block, creating a cohesive image that contains each block and plentiful white space.

Figure 3: The completed quilt top.

Finishing the process

Since a quilt needs three layers - a top, a middle batting, and a backing - I also needed to determine what thickness of batting (this affects the weight and warmth of the quilt) and color of backing I wanted for my quilt. I completed the quilt top (pictured above) on my own, then purchased and pieced large swaths of a pinkish coral colored cotton for the backing. The batting was bought and integrated into the quilt at Piece by Piece Fabrics of Eugene, who did the actual

quilting for me. Since my sewing machine is relatively small, I am limited in what I can do in terms of quilting - for instance, I can only do straight lines - while this company uses a large, long-arm quilter to create intricate swirling designs. I chose to use this local, friendly shop to finish this quilt with the fittingly beautiful stitching I believe it deserved. This process involved bringing my quilt top and backing to the shop, choosing a thread color and quilting design, then entrusting the rest of the work to Piece by Piece until they returned it to me a few weeks later so I could add the binding and complete the quilt. After machine-sewing the binding to the front edges of the quilt, I wrapped it around to the back and hand-stitched the remaining seam in a traditional binding method.

Figure 4: An example of a long-arm quilting machine (*Baby Lock Coronet Longarm Quilting Machine & Frame*, n.d.).

Figure 5: My personal Singer-brand sewing machine.

Results

Literature review results

Although much of my literature research was based on historical quilting, the information I gathered allowed me to form a comprehensive picture of quilting in the 1930s and compare it to my understanding of modern quilting. The data was largely qualitative and included many different aspects of quilting, traditions, and womanhood. From a few select books, including N. Roe's *The Quilt: New Directions for an American Tradition*, I gathered information about the progression of quilting from a necessary good to a decorative work of art and how different quilts can be created with various materials (Roe, 1983). Other works describe the growth and changes seen in the realm of quilting as an art form, including how different cultures and social groups influenced the craft (Orlofsky & Orlofsky, 1974). Finally, many of the books and articles I researched included detailed information about the intertwined role of women and quilting throughout the last several decades (Higgs & Radosh, 2012; Macheski, 1994).

Interview results

I interviewed a total of seven quilting women of the PNW. They all identified as white and female and have lived in the PNW for a significant portion of their lives (at least half their life, since interviewees ranged in age from their 20s to their 70s). Each interview took a maximum of one hour, with the shortest interview lasting about 15 minutes, and each interviewee was monetarily compensated ($25/hour/person) for their time.

These interviews provided a meaningful overview of quilting by women in the PNW in the 2020s. Although the sample size was limited, each interview garnered a wealth of information about how modern quilters form their ideas, piece their quilts, and display or sell

them. Together with my literature review, the interviews allowed me to piece together an image of quilting in the modern world compared with quilting in the 1930s.

Compared to quilters in the 1930s, women who quilt today face similar struggles and form similar bonds, simply working with updated technology: sewing machines have vastly improved, corporate craft stores allow wider access to materials, and the era of the Internet provides a means of mass global communication between artists. Women still bond with each other, though, and with their craft. My interviews shed light on these topics and highlighted the importance of community and cooperation within the quilting world.

Quilt results

The final quilt measures approximately 94" by 77", roughly equivalent to a queen-size blanket. It includes the intricate top, a medium-loft batting, and a plain coral-colored backing that are all quilted together. The edges are bound with a maroon cotton. One block took me approximately 40 minutes (measured on one medium-complexity block) from PDF to completed block, which adds up to a little more than 65 hours for only the blocks. Importantly, the size and number of pieces in each of the 99 blocks varied significantly. Some blocks had only nine pieces, while the most complex one had 82 pieces to cut and sew together. The triangles, squares, and other shapes that make up the blocks varied in size as well, from a significant 1/9th of the block to a tiny 1/27th of a block. When I include the time to piece each column together and sew the backing and binding, I estimate an additional 15-20 hours for a total estimate of 80-85 hours. This does not include the time spent quilting the blanket, which was done by Piece by Piece Fabrics of Eugene and took a little over two weeks from the time I gave them the quilt top to the time they returned it to me. After just under 90 hours, the completed quilt represents weeks of experience, patience, and learning new skills.

Discussion

Interpretation of data

Despite Oregon's demographics, there are many diverse people who could have been interviewed to contribute to this project. However, the snowball sampling method – using recommendations from the initial interviewees to find additional interviewees – resulted in a limited demographic pool of interviewees who all identify as while women. Future studies would benefit from including a more socially and culturally diverse sample of quilters.

Familial relationships

The first research question that I examined deals with how female familial relationships are represented and carried on through quilts and quilting traditions. As discussed previously, kinship relations in this context include relationships between women and their families, women and other contemporary women, and women to other generation of women. Kinship considers how people are connected to each other through time and space, via what conduits, and how those relations form the fabric of society.

My literature informed the answer to this first question, and I discovered many examples of how women in the 1930s - particularly those who lived in more rural areas - partook in various quilting events that helped maintain their relationships with other women and with their own families. Although typically dismissed as simply a "women's art" (Roe, 1983), these women participated in quilting bees and weekly sewing circles, crafted crazy quilts and friendship quilts with their loved ones, and sewed into their quilts pieces of fabric worn and used by every family member (Orlofsky & Orlofsky, 1974). One can examine an old quilt and see

how a woman might have expressed her opinions or shown her love for her family and community.

Furthermore, these quilting communities were not simply a means to produce materials. They served as a community forum to express multitudes of opinions and discuss familial and local matters. As Elizabeth Higgs and Polly Radosh write of the exchanging of materials, techniques, and opinions, "The cultural value of the exchange outweighs the economic value of the quilt" (Higgs & Radosh, 2012). Rather than creating a work of art to be valued and sold, perhaps to represent the value of the woman who made it, the emphasis of quilting in the 1930s was placed on the community and relationships formed and maintained through the art itself.

When examining this phenomenon in modern times, I turn to my interviewees, many of whom share their quilting experience with the women in their family. Jozie Garner and Ellie Lane are both students at the University of Oregon and are my peers in several classes. They also both quilt regularly, identify as women, and agreed to be interviewed. Lane and her mother were both interviewed as well, and the family connection is evident. Lane's babysitter, mother, and all the women on both sides of the family were involved in quilting, and her aunt encouraged Lane directly: "My aunt… said it was a rite of passage when we were six to make our own quilts" (E. Lane, personal communication, February 2, 2024). Similarly, Jozie Garner was introduced to fiber arts at a young age, beginning her quilting journey a few years ago when a family relative passed, and Garner inherited a large amount of various kinds of fiber. She has ties to family in Germany and closer to home, both of whom encouraged her in her quilting, knitting, and sewing (J. Garner, personal communication, January 29, 2024).

Both Garner and Lane learned from their mothers and have continued the family tradition into their generation. Other quilters, like the mother-daughter pair Judy and Angelia Peterson,

share the experience of quilting as a cooperative work: Angelia, a photographer, takes stunning photos that her mother Judy uses as inspiration and a guide for each quilt, sometimes printing delicate details of the photographs directly onto fabric (J. Peterson & A. Peterson, personal communication, February 13, 2024). As a mother-daughter team, they share a history of art. Quilting has "always been there" for Judy, and though Angelia is familiar with the skills required for quilting, she expressed her preference for the photographic elements (J. Peterson & A. Peterson, personal communication, February 13, 2024). This duo shared over an hour of memories during our communications, describing how quilting has brought them through so many adventures together.

Although each of these interviewees experience quilting in a different sense, they are all connected to the craft and to various family and community members via the tradition of quilting. It is this connection to fellow women that strengthens their bond with the art and with each other.

Tenets of womanhood

Another question I posed and researched explores the central tenets of "womanhood" that are traditionally represented by fiber arts, specifically quilting, and how those have changed from the 1930s to the 2010s-2020s. As N. Roe writes, "Historical quilts [are seen as] documents detailing the intellectual and emotional responses of artists at another time to different sets of social, political, and cultural stimuli" (Roe, 1983, p. 6). Although women in the 1930s had a very different set of rights and responsibilities than many women in the PNW today, quilting was and remains a means of expressing one's opinions and thoughts. In the 1930s, this was the primary method for women to voice their thoughts, especially in rural areas where activist events like rallies and community meetings were not accessible.

Today, many women find a duality in the traditional role that women play in quilting. Growing up, Jozie Garner faced a complex relationship with gender, complicated by her knowledge of sewing and how fiber arts have been closely intertwined in the lives of each of her female family members. Learning basic skills, like threading a needle or mending a shirt, was expected of her, while her older brother remained ignorant of many of these techniques by virtue of *not* being a woman (J. Garner, personal communication, January 29, 2024). While Garner did not necessarily express certain tenets that were expected of her in her quilting journey, she shared many of these examples of skills and knowledge that she was expected to grasp at a young age, revealing that a basic understanding of fiber arts is still one of the underlying values of womanhood today.

Mary Lane, Ellie Lane's mother, was also one of my interviewees and shared more about what was expected of her as a quilter throughout her years of experience. She was brought up sewing scraps together for her mother, and while gender is not a significant consideration for her, quilting has been a matrilineal tradition (M. Lane, personal communication, January 30, 2024). This creates an implicit underlying acceptance of quilting as "woman's domain" and something that carries value based on the depth of the maker's understanding of it. So, while quilting is not necessarily a carrier of character values of womanhood today, women are still regarded as the presiders over the craft and expected to understand certain basic tenets of the fiber arts world.

Stories and history

Finally, I explored how stories, memories, and other valuable pieces of information are transferred across generations via quilts. Beginning with the background information I found in various pieces of literature, I formed a solid impression of how many aspects of quilting can transfer not only knowledge, but stories and history. Similarly to its ability to carry on female

familial relationships, quilting can contain memories, stories, history, and more, all in a tactile form that can be revisited many times over again.

Quilting has been the basis of many stories, both fiction and nonfiction, with several tales being entirely built around quilting, femininity, and community. One such piece is Cecilia Macheski's *Quilt Stories*, which is a collection of fiction stories based on various types of quilts, including the Bride's Quilt and Old Maid's Ramble, which respectively focus on stories of love and community, and on the wisdom and knowledge that come with aging (Macheski, 1994).

Higgs and Radosh also write about the importance of the matrilineal tradition of passing along stories via quilting. They describe the individuality of each quilt that is bestowed by the quilter, who draws significance from the materials, design, and arrangement of fabrics and patterns (Higgs & Radosh, 2012). They add, "Women know these connections and often relay them as family stories that accompany the quilts… as quilts are passed to succeeding generations, the stories are re-told in oral tradition, generation to generation" (Higgs & Radosh, 2012). As evidenced by both the existing literature and my own interviews, quilters pass stories and history through their stitches, transforming experience into material memory.

These pieces of history are not only available when analyzing an old quilt, but especially through speaking with the maker or owner about its history and creation. Each woman I interviewed explained how every one of their quilts holds some importance for them, and how some of them express political, social, and other opinions, or simply capture elements of their world. For instance, Joan Spencer once set a challenge for herself to make a quilt block every day for 30 days, simply to practice capturing the world around her and "playing with fabrics" (J. Spencer, personal communication, February 6, 2024). As the current president of the Northwest Quilters Association and a longtime quilter, Spencer frequently finds herself in a position to

share knowledge and skills, and these encounters often lead to more than simply a lesson. She shared many of these stories and memories of friends, family members, and strangers that have impacted her life in various ways, revealing the depth and complexity of memory and history that can be carried on through something as innocuous as quilting (J. Spencer, personal communication, February 6, 2024).

One such story is her "Covid Chronicles" quilt (see Figure 6), which represents a weekly devotion to recording life during the Covid-19 pandemic, beginning in March 2020 and ending 56 weeks later in April 2021. Every Wednesday, Joan wrote about her experiences of the week, attaching the writing to a strip of seven pieces of fabric that she chose to represent the week. She then copied a scripture verse from the Bible that related to those experiences, and added Covid deaths and cases from the world, the U.S., and Oregon, collecting her data from The Oregonian newspaper. In an email correspondence, Joan shared how re-reading all these pieces at the completion of the project impacted her, saying that she "was impacted by the tremendous changes and challenges that we faced, from fires and ice storms to the conflicting information about the Covid shots and political uproar we went through" (J. Spencer, personal communication, February 6, 2024). Alongside the hardship and challenges of the time, Joan's "Covid Chronicles" illustrates how one person made it through using art and creativity. The stories and history that are preserved in just one piece of art reveal the importance of documenting these events in unconventional ways to preserve the information for generations to come.

Figure 6: Joan Spencer showing her “Covid Chronicles” quilt.

Reflections

One of the most significant experiences I will take into my life moving forward is the work that goes into creating such a massive, detailed quilt. This was by far the most intricate and largest piece I have ever created, and there were some problems that went along with it that are valuable to remember in any future works. For example, the book I based my work on (Hird’s *The Farmer’s Wife 1930s Sampler Quilt*) had some inconsistencies in measurements and numbers that made it difficult to trust the given dimensions and fabric requirements. My quilt turned out to be a different size than the one estimated in the book, and therefore my backing

fabric was not quite large enough to accommodate it and I had to remove the maroon border (which is shown still attached in Figure 3 under the section "Completing the Quilt Top") to account for the size difference. Encountering issues like this allowed me to work under pressure and adapt quickly to unexpected challenges, skills that I will most certainly value in any of my future work.

This thesis is by far the largest research project I have ever completed. Although I've completed many research projects during my undergraduate career, this project expanded my understanding of the University of Oregon library systems and pushed me to explore more resources than I have ever considered before. I checked out physical copies of books, viewed videos online, and took notes on several articles that are only published in online journals.

Finally, my experience with interviewing was limited before diving into this project. I had completed less than a half-dozen "official" interviews and was initially uncertain how to go about IRB approval for my thesis interviews. However, going through that process was deeply educational and allowed me to expand my understanding of that system and how to properly account for human research. Using the "snowball" method of finding interviewees was also a new experience, but a useful and insightful one. Every interviewee I talked with had at least one other quilter to recommend that I contact. This encouraged a kind of community building that I have never experienced before.

Next steps

Moving forward, there are several personal experiences that I will partake in that feature my quilt. It will be displayed at the University of Oregon Undergraduate Research Symposium in May 2024, submitted for both the Clark Honors College and Anthropology department honors achievements, and included in award and job applications.

In terms of research, there are many avenues that could be explored in the future. Most importantly, any future research in this area should strive to include a broader diversity of quilters. Ongoing exploration into quilters that incorporate PNW themes into their work should also be considered. Application of feminist and kinship theory would also contribute a more thorough historical and anthropological perspective to this work. Finally, historical work would be beneficial in creating a more comprehensive and detailed understanding of historical quilting in the PNW. This work might include interviewing descendants of Western pioneers, who might still hold stories or quilts from previous generations; and exploring museums and collections that might house historical quilts, including speaking with curators or owners to learn about the history and stories within those quilts.

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