

One Stitch at a Time: Piecing Together Communication/Community in Women's Quilting

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Christina M. Kline

University of Wisconsin-Superior

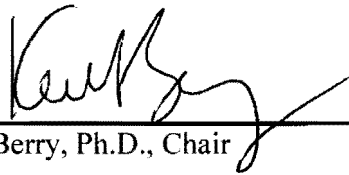
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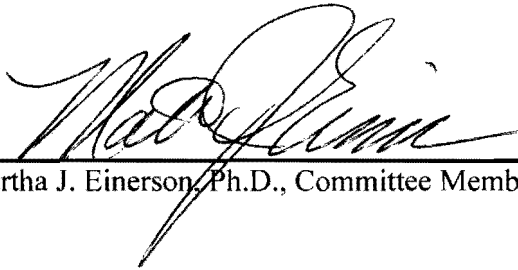
This is to certify that the thesis prepared by Christina Kline has been approved by her committee as satisfactory completion of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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## One Stitch at a Time: Piecing Together Communication/Community in Women's Quilting

### **Abstract**

This thesis is a snapshot of the communicative process that occurs by a group of women who come together on a weekly basis to quilt for charity. Of particular interest are the ways their processes shape community building. It is an ethnographic account conducted through participant observation and interviewing. Framed by Bormann's (1985) Symbolic Convergence Theory, I address the shared reality and consciousness of women working toward a common goal, to show how communication is used to maintain and sustain membership within the context of quilting. I argue that through the use of humor in a comfortable and casual atmosphere, commitment to community, commitment to attendance and charity one group of women quilters demonstrates how Symbolic Convergence Theory can create a unified consciousness.

### **Acknowledgements**

The number of people who, in one way or another helped me get here today are far too numerous to name. However, there are a few who I would like to recognize as having a direct influence on this work.

Thank you to my thesis committee, Drs. Keith Berry, Martha Einerson and Ephraim Nikoi. Your guidance, encouragement, suggestions, wisdom and patience have made this an educational journey worth taking. The dedication you show to your discipline and to your students is inspirational. The University of Wisconsin-Superior is indeed fortunate to have a Communicating Arts Department of this caliber in its campus.

To Dr. Keith Berry in particular, who in my estimation went above and beyond his job and proved that what he does is a vocation, not an occupation.

Also, a special nod to Dr. Martha Einerson for coming up with quilting as a topic about which I might research and write. This suggestion was visionary and I found it captivating.

Thank you also to the women of the quilting group who welcomed me into their fold so instantly and completely. Their warmth, honesty, humor, commitment and love made my fieldwork seem more like a fieldtrip. Besides learning more about communication, I learned how to be a better woman in my community, how to be a better friend and how to give more of myself without expecting anything in return.

### **Dedication**

There are many people to whom I would like to dedicate this thesis.

First, to my husband, who so strongly supported and encouraged me throughout this journey. I wasn't always easy to be around and I am fortunate for his patience. His belief in my ability to complete this process, the emotional support he provided and the time he allowed me to take for myself is what gave me the strength to persevere.

Second, to my children, for helping me to remember every minute of every day, that the ability to love and be loved is just about all that matters.

And finally, to my own parents and sisters, who made me think I could do anything I put my mind to. Especially to my Dad, who taught me strength, conviction and courage by living by those standards himself everyday of his life.

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**Prologue: Coming Apart at the Seams**

*What is that sound? Wait, what? Oh, it's an alarm clock. Is it mine or his? Mine. OK, what time is it. Yeah, Ok, 10 more minutes...*

"Are you getting up?" Randy says. "Yeah, yeah, I'm up." Yawn, groan, stretch.

I hate mornings.

Brushing teeth.

"Mom, I still need help with one Math problem," says Sam, suddenly at the bathroom door.

"I will be down in a few minutes," I respond.

*Shoot, what am I going to wear today? God, I'm so sick of these clothes.*

Descending the stairs.

"Mom, did you wash my practice jersey for football? I need it," Jack says.

"Did you ask me to wash it?" I respond. "If you did ask, then it is in the clean basket or in the dryer, if not, you'll have to wear it dirty."

"Mom can you help me with my Math problem now?" chimes Sam.

"Christina, the kids still need sandwiches and fruit in their lunch bags. I have to go to work. Bye. Oh, and by the way, we need to do some laundry," informs Randy.

*We, right, you mean me...*

*Ok, lunches, right.* "Sam, I'll be there to help you in a minute," I say.

"Mom, I need to get to school early today to work on a group project," says Lily.

*Of course you need to be there early.*

"Ok everyone, let's get to school," I tell them.



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*Damn I forgot lunch for me. Here, I'll just grab an apple. Sam, let's do your Math problem in the car.*

At work.

13 messages on voicemail and 37 emails and 156 advisees. Ok, here we go.

*There's a message from my own graduate advisor, we need to meet. Oh boy, I really need to get working on that Thesis! Yeah, in my FREE time.*

The phone rings....

Time to pick Sam up from school. *Lily has Volleyball practice, but needs a ride home at 6:00 p.m. so she can come home, shower and then I can take her to Figure Skating Practice. I need to talk to her coach about the next competition. Shoot, is there a board meeting tonight? Jack will need dinner later because he is staying after practice to lift weights. I hope he doesn't have a lot of homework. Randy needs to eat dinner early so he can go mow a few lawns. Dinner. What in the world should I make? What's in the fridge?*

"Sam, hurry up and change for Soccer practice. Grab a healthy snack and a water bottle. You can eat dinner and do your homework later," I say as we arrive home and I unlock the door.

Randy home.

"Hey honey, what's for dinner? Did you remember to pay the mortgage?" he asks.

*Sure did, but I hope the bank doesn't cash that check right away...*

Putting in a load of laundry.

"Mom, when you were downstairs doing laundry, the furniture store called to see if you're done with the pillows and valances that you're making for their customer," Sam reports.

*Damn, I need to get that done!*

"Christina, where did you put my car keys?" Randy inquires.

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*Where did "I" put "your" car keys? You're joking right?!*

"I haven't touched your keys, honey," I respond.

"Mom, we have to leave for my practice, I'm going to be late!" Sam exclaims.

Dropping Sam off.

"Mom, I forgot my water bottle!" says Sam.

*REALLY!*

"Ok, I will drive back home and get it. You will need it today because of the heat, but please try to remember it next time?!" I tell him.

Home. Phone ringing.

"Hi, Mrs. Kline, this is Rose from Our Lady of Perpetual Guilt calling to remind you to make a salad for the annual salad bar luncheon this Saturday. Can you drop it off by 8:00 a.m. on Saturday morning," the voice on the other end asks.

*No sleeping in Saturday.*

Getting into bed.

"Mom, can you wash my practice jersey for tomorrow?" asks Jack.

\*\*\*\*\*

This is my life. It is hectic and chaotic, and always full on, all day nearly every day. Fairly often I feel like I am on the edge of a nervous breakdown. I give and give and give my time and my talents to others. I am pulled in several directions and I allow it to be this way. Rarely do I have time for just me. Still, I do not think I am special. I believe many women with circumstances similar to mine feel this way to some degree. How might they/we seek balance amid the chaos? I begin with this narrative because it highlights, for me, what their/our lives are

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filled with, but more what they are not filled with, personal time. I carry these reflections of absence with me as I embark on this study.

## Chapter One: Vintage Quilts

This thesis is the result of an ethnographic fieldwork study conducted to explore how a group of women in a church in middle America, create quilts for charity, communicate as a means of building community and culture.

Quilting has long been a form of folk art that carries the many messages and meanings carefully woven into the stitches and fabric of the piece. Quilting is a method of sewing, using a needle and thread, where two or more layers of fabric and batting are joined together to make a thicker, more padded material. Quilts are often the only physical or historical evidence that reveal facets of the inner lives and creative abilities of many otherwise unknown women (Horton, 2005). Little exists to describe the daily lives of common women in history. We can read about a few women from the past, but the documentation usually describes something they did or said to gain fame. Betsy Ross sewed the first American flag. Florence Nightingale was a nurse. The day-to-day routine of women in history is lost.

Quilts include thoughtful reflections on values, daily activities and beliefs of everyday women. Predominantly a woman's craft, quilts have been used as a form of resistance and protest (Kimokeo-Goes, 2007; Williams, 1994); to help build communities (Kimokeo-Goes, 2007; Ingalls, 2000; Ives, 2004; McDowell, 1997), and as tools for therapy and healing (McLaughlin, 2004; Davies, 2010). They have also served as a means for many generations of women to find commonalities, all the while serving as a functional household necessity providing comfort and warmth. In summary, studies have revealed that groups of quilt makers have often gone to great lengths to practice artistic ingenuity, risk taking, kinship and diversity over the centuries. Let me elaborate.

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In her book about the quilt collection of a woman named Mary Black, Laurel Horton (2005) argues against the idea that quilts in America originated on the frontier as an answer to the need for warmth alone. She contends this is a deeply rooted misconception of our history, and claims the misconception is popular because it supports American ideals of democracy, self-sufficiency and equality, as well as honors the frontier women who worked so hard to survive and make a life in difficult circumstances. Indeed, the quilts in Mary Black's collection came from several generations of women related to Black, none of whom ever ventured onto the frontier, nor lived in an extremely cold climate, where heavy blankets were a necessity. Born and raised in South Carolina, Black saved quilts made by family members before, during and after the Civil War, as well as those she made herself. Before her death, she went through the collection with her daughters and told them the stories of the quilts and their makers. In doing so, she passed down important and meaningful messages about the values, beliefs and history of the women in her family. She spoke about who made these quilts, the reason for their creation and even where some of the fabric came from. In one instance the fabric on a particular quilt was left over from the creation of a favorite dress that the quilt makers often made and wore (Horton, 2005).

The belief that quilts signify much more than decorative blankets made for warmth is further supported by Jennifer Reeder(n.d.), who asserts that the real value of the American quilt comes from the story it tells and its ability to "pass the fabric and its memory on to future witnesses" who, in turn, will preserve those stories. She sees quilts as having taken on a life as *texts* that describe customs, individual awareness of past events and human relationships. They can reveal loyalties to family, nation, culture, gender and identity. For instance, persons might make a quilt for a wedding or a baby quilt, made to celebrate an important occasion or

One Stitch at a Time: Piecing Together Communication/Community in Women's Quilting relationship. Without these texts being created and handed down, the makers of these quilts might long be forgotten.

In the study of communication, rhetoric is understood as epistemic, a way to *know* about the world through the use and creation of symbols (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008). Rather than just "transmission," we come to understand persons, practices and places through rhetoric. Art, such as quilting, takes on this same power. According to Hans Georg-Gadamer (2004), art evokes strong emotion based on communicators' experiences. In other words, how we experience or interpret art, depends on the experiences of our lives. "Artwork begins in experiences," Gadamer argues, "but rises above them to a universal significance which goes beyond history" (p. xiii). When someone experiences art, no matter how old the work might be, it is experienced immediately, in the here and now. Then each time the piece is viewed, our impression of it can change according to things that have changed in their lives.

The term "visual rhetoric" examines how visual images communicate. Visual communication is an area of study that emphasizes images as rational expressions of cultural meaning (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996), and that is multi-disciplinary and multi-dimensional. Sandra Moriarty (1995) explores the theoretical root of visual communication, existing literature, and responses from other scholars to a survey about theoretical roots. Her work resulted in an evolving and well-recognized body of visual communication theory and literature that crosses a variety of disciplines.

In response to Moriarty's work on visual communication theory, Patsy Watkins (1995) identified six key domains of visual communication theory: cultural, perceptual, symbolic, historical, functional and aesthetic. Watkins (1995) contends that quilts represent aesthetic beauty (aesthetic), but within a context that requires other values like function, for keeping out

One Stitch at a Time: Piecing Together Communication/Community in Women's Quilting the cold (functional). Many early quilts, called *crazy quilts* made use of scraps of fabric, wasting nothing, and representing frugal values and resourcefulness (cultural, historical, symbolic). Even the knowledge of geometry needed to accomplish their assembly can be perceived as an impressive skill for women who largely lacked any formal education (perceptual).

I use these domains to organize the literature review that follows and demonstrate how research illustrates these domains, and to provide a fuller understanding of quilting and its meaningfulness. I also draw on them to better understand the communication among my quilting group in Chapter 2.

## **Literature Review**

### **Quilting as Culture**

The meaning of culture, as it is used here, is as a collection of shared goals, beliefs, attitudes, behaviors and practices that characterize a group of people. The word culture comes from the Latin word *cultura*, which literally means cultivation. Aptly, cultivation often means to grow. So, culture in this sense is the cultivation or growth of shared beliefs, ideas and attitudes.

The value of culture in quilting can be seen in Una Kimokeo-Goes's (2007) work, which explores the history of sewing in Hawaii and the use of quilts as cultural texts. When missionaries first came to the Hawaiian Islands, they found naked or nearly naked native people, a very Un-Christian-like condition, according to the missionaries. As a result, one of their first goals was to teach the natives to sew (the western way with fabric, thread and metal needles), both to clothe them and introduce the women of the islands to what the missionaries considered "civilized" behavior and attire for women.

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The designs and symbols the Hawaiian women put on their quilts, and others they purposefully left off, helped them continue to voice their beliefs through their native identity. For instance, Hawaiians traditionally believe that animals are too restless to be held still on a quilt, and if you sleep under animals, they will give you a restless night (see below). Consequently, animals are never seen on traditional Hawaiian quilts. By purposefully leaving animals off quilts, the Hawaiian women speak to their spiritual and cultural world view. So, while they created these quilts, using the tools and techniques taught to them by the Christian missionaries, they also kept their own cultures alive by choosing to quilt designs, patterns and symbols that were deeply a part of their own spiritual beliefs. Thus, they took an established art form, quilting, and made it their own. Instead of using geometric block patterns on their quilts, they are appliquéed (one piece of fabric is sewn on top of another), because the Hawaiians thought the idea of cutting large pieces of fabric into small pieces of fabric and then sewing them back together was silly. Their quilts often incorporate just a few solid colored fabrics and nearly always include a stylized image of some type of Hawaiian flora or fauna. Hawaiian quilts are recognizable and unique, a new and adapted art form unto themselves.



(Kimoeko-Goes, 2007)



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Another place we can see culture being illustrated and used in quilting is in the Appalachian region of the United States. There the value of culture is represented by the hundreds of barns painted with quilt squares. The idea of painting the side of a barn with a quilt square began in 2001, with Donna Sue Groves, who wanted to honor her mother and her rural heritage, as well as five generations of her family, all who have shared the love of quilting. She never imagined in just one decade, her idea would blossom into a movement that includes over 900 barns in 16 states. Many quilt barns (barns painted with quilt squares) are located along quilt barn trails (roadways connecting one quilt barn to the next), carefully created to give people a reason to come to places in rural America, see the barns, and by doing so, honor quilting and farming, two important aspects of traditional American culture. These quilt barns give farmers the opportunity to get people into the countryside, honor their own families, and share their love for the land.

The quilt squares painted on the side of barns are chosen by the family who owns the respective barns, and are often profoundly personal and culturally significant. For instance, one family chose to decorate their barn with a quilt square called *Mountain Star*, a pattern often used to help guide runaway slaves. This held deep cultural meaning for this family, because the farm was over 100 years old and one of the past owners was a well know abolitionist during the civil war era. Another barn is adorned with a sail boat square. Family legend tells the story of a slave hunter who was shot and buried on the farm during the turbulent time after the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 was passed. The *Sail Boat* square is a pattern indicating a form of transportation to runaway slaves. Several barns are painted with squares from patterns on quilts that have been handed down in families, from mother to daughter or mother to son. Two barns, one owned by a

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father and another owned by a son down the road, are both painted with a *Double T* square signify the owner's last name, which begins with the letter T (Our Ohio-Ohio Quilt Barns).

The barns are often painted by groups of people, rather than by the farmers alone. One barn was painted as a part of a local festival, where anyone could help paint. Others were done by boy scouts, 4-H clubs or senior citizen groups. This grass roots effort helped build community among neighbors who are often live several miles apart and don't see much of one another. The completion of a barn is sometimes followed by a picnic or family reunion. Some barns are lit at night so they can be seen and admired then as well. This movement has built pride for the cultural way of life of the people who live in these communities. One older farmer, who told Groves he had spent his whole life getting up before sunrise to go to work and going back to bed when it was dark, is reported as saying, "Young lady, no one cared about me, but now that I have a quilt barn, everyone wants to know how I am. Thank you (Winnerman, p. 1, 2008)."

### **Quilting as History**

Mary Williams (1994) studied a group of women in American history who used quilting as a means of giving voice to their beliefs, thus, empowering them by giving them a legitimate reason to gather together. The *Crusade Quilt* was created by the Ohio Woman's Christian Temperance Union (OWCTU) in 1873, and served as a visual form of political protest rhetoric (see below). Williams found that at OWCTU quilting meetings, women could connect with other women and build commonalities and a sense of community during their time together. It was also at these gatherings that the women of the OWCTC shared information vital to the

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affairs of the home and their lives in general. Those present discussed politics, religion and other matters generally considered to be outside of the realm of women's concerns.

The very word *crusade* is loaded and powerful. Its definition connotes, for me, ideas like campaign, movement, cause and struggle, as well as even stronger words like battle, fight and war. These women were self-fashioned warriors on a mission to combat the effects of alcohol on families and society.

Williams argued that the *Crusade Quilt* challenged assumptions about femininity. This quilt was made differently from most quilts of its day. The women who made it used sewing machines to stitch the quilt and the fabric they chose to use was coarser than most quilt fabric. She claims this was quite purposeful. The use of machines was not considered a feminine trait, nor was coarseness. The use of machines to stitch the quilt shows a desire to be more efficient and it gave the women the opportunity to spend less time in the private world, and more time in the public sector.

The *Crusade Quilt* itself is also quite sturdy and lacks any delicate detail or frills. Again, Williams claims this is deliberate. She contends that by rejecting frivolity, the makers of this quilt were trying to break out of the feminine, domestic sphere and position themselves in the public domain (Williams, 1994).

The *Crusade Quilt* was signed by more than three thousand Ohio women who used the quilt to speak to their belief and commitment to the cause of temperance. This quilt serves as a powerful petition, particularly in an age when women were denied the right to vote. Thus it demonstrated that the domestic and private activity of quilting had a very public and political relevance. It served more as a historical text than a blanket, a historical political manifesto that speaks to the desires, hopes, beliefs and fears of its makers (Ferrero, Hedges & Silber, 1987).

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Women's Temperance Union Crusade Quilt (New York State Museum)

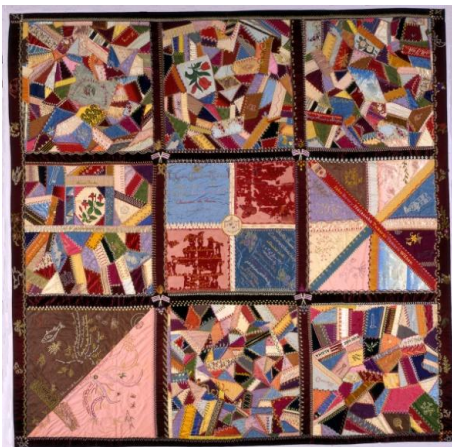
### Quilting as Symbol

Langer's Symbol Theory offers some additional explanation of the importance of symbols. Symbolism is the basis of all human knowing and understanding (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008). Thus, language is not merely a mode of communication, but also a means through which we construct our reality and meaning through the use of symbols. She argues that human logic and our ability to perceive the world and share meaning is wrapped up in symbols that use words and symbols that don't use words. While symbols in the form of language and text give shape and context to a story, it is the visual image that gives form to emotional logic (McLaughlin, 2004). Langer's position, that art gives a logical form to emotional meaning, which is reminiscent of Gadamer (2004), is key to understanding how a quilt, or any other artifact, can potentially serve as a powerful visual story with much deeper meaning than might initially meet the eye and heart.

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Kimokeo-Goes (2007) contends that, while Hawaiian quilts in the 1860's fulfilled many of the protestant missionaries' expectations about appropriate cultural behavior for Christian women, they also served to subtly subvert aspects of the missionary belief system. She notes that quilting and other "women's crafts" allowed women to work collectively to reflect on national and cultural values and offer political challenges. They served as symbols of loyalty to their native identity and community.

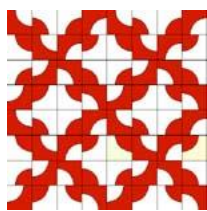
Kimokeo-Goes further conveys how, during her imprisonment, Queen Lili'uokalani of Hawaii spent her days making a quilt (see below) that still today hangs in what was once her home and prison, the former Iolani Palace (now a museum). A devoted Christian and skilled quilter, Lili'uokalani's quilt served as a powerful statement to her people of her devotion to them and their country. It also served as a valuable document declaring who she was and what she believed. The quilt visualized her date of birth, accession, dethronement, arrest, abdication, as well as the names of her supporters and the names of the women who helped her make the quilt. Two Hawaiian flags are sewn into every corner of the center square. Today this quilt is a significant valuable historical text of the lost political identity of the native Hawaiian people (Kimokeo-Goes, 2007).



Lili'uokalani Quilt (Institute of Museum and Library Services)

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Quilts made during the American Civil War also contribute to what we know about the symbolic nature of quilting. The Underground Railroad was a series of safe houses and trails that served as a highway for African American slaves who were hoping to find their way north to freedom. There are those who have documented that quilts served as signals to escaping slaves (see below). Some quilts, which hung outside, under the pretense that they were drying, identified certain homes as "safe." For instance, the *Log Cabin* design, which often has a red square in the center of each pattern block, represents a safe and glowing hearth. Other quilts, like the *Flying Geese* pattern, indicated the best direction to go. The *Monkey Wrench* pattern urged slaves to start preparing for escape, while the *Drunkard's Path* pattern warned against taking a straight path during escape (Ingalls, 2000). These aesthetically pleasing and functional pieces, built for utility as well as sentiment, were a strong symbol for the people who displayed them in plain sight, as well as for the people who saw them displayed and read their hidden messages. They speak about a community of people all working toward the common goals of freedom, human rights, and an end to slavery.



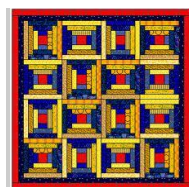
Drunkard's Path



Flying Geese



Monkey Wrench



Log Cabin

All images from (Women Folk: The Art of Quilting)

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In more modern times, women continue to quilt for similar reasons. An American woman named Betty Wood created quilts to speak to her objection of the Iraq war (Quilt Designs). In her quilts, she portrays photographs and military IDs of otherwise faceless and nameless war casualties, surrounded by American flags and coffins (see below). In her own way, Wood both honored the dead and protested the war by creating a symbol of remembrance and a petition of resistance.



A Quilt by Betty Wood (Quilt Designs)

There are other more contemporary quilts used as symbols of remembrance, such as the *Pentagon Quilts*. After the terrorist attacks of "9/11," when the twin towers of the World Trade Center were destroyed and the Pentagon was seriously damaged, many important quilt exhibits were displayed at the Pentagon to commemorate those lost in the tragedy (Davies, 2010).

Another more globally recognized quilt that is now considered a symbol of healing and peace is the AIDS Memorial quilt (see below). The AIDS Memorial quilt originally started in

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1987 as a way of memorializing those who have died as a result of AIDS and, in effect, giving them a public voice when, for a variety of reasons, including those political, doing so was neglected. Every one of the more than 40,000 colorful panels on the quilt commemorates an individual person who has been lost to this disease. Panels continue to be added to the AIDS quilt today. It has taken the form of an ongoing and ever- changing conversation about the disease, the lives that it has taken, and the need for continued research to find a cure.



The AIDS Quilt on display in Washington D. C.  
(The Aids Memorial Quilt: The Names Project Foundation)

### **Quilting as Perception**

Perception is the process by which we experience the world around us. Judith Martin and Thomas Nakayama describe it as the process individuals use to organize and interpret stimuli,



One Stitch at a Time: Piecing Together Communication/Community in Women's Quilting both internal and external, to create a view of the world (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). The way we perceive something can affect all five of our senses and include strong emotional reactions.

The quilts of Hawaii are extremely important texts for Hawaiians. They can be perceived as nonverbal forms of protest and community-building as well as a deeply emotional documentation of their history. Certainly, this idea by Watkins reminds us that each of the values by Watkins interrelate and can be read off of each other. An example of strong perceptual emotion was evidenced after Queen Lili'uokalani was dethroned. At that time, the flying of the Hawaiian flag was illegal. Quilters responded by making quilts that resembled Hawaiian flags. People could show compelling proof of their loyalty in the privacy of their homes, even if public symbols were forbidden. Some quilts were two sided and, if they were used as a bedspread, they could be flipped, a move that depended on which guests might be coming into the home. Sleeping under these quilts was perceived as a symbol of loyalty that entailed keeping the flag close to one's heart, and was a form of private political protest as well (Kimokeo-Goes, 2007).

Another symbol that has strong perceptual implications for many people is the American flag. It is perceived a number of ways by a number of people. While it is not a quilt, the first flag was pieced together by Betsy Ross much the same way the top of a quilt is put together. Today, any image of the stars and stripes tends to stir deep emotions. Some of those reactions are extremely positive, patriotic and loyal; others are hateful, negative and even murderous. One 189 year-old, hand-stitched American flag that hangs in the National Museum of American History, recently underwent a three year, multi-million dollar restoration and relocation. Why? It is because so many people perceive this symbol to be nearly sacred (Kernan, 1999).

A third example that shows perception as a key concept in quilting can be found during the American Civil War. There are those who believe that quilts served as secret messages to

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slaves using the Underground Railroad as a route to freedom. It makes sense that some kinds of messages were secretly being relayed to help these individuals. Yet, there are those in the quilt history community who flatly deny that quilts were used this way. They cite lack of evidence and questionable methodology used in the research of such messages to refute the idea (Ives, 2004). It seems possible that quilts were used this way during the American Civil War. The idea exemplifies how certain patterns on quilts may have been perceived to have hidden meaning for some people.

### **Quilting as Aesthetic**

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, aesthetics, as described in the philosophy of Kant, is related to the science of perception by the senses (Oxford English Dictionary). That is to say that if something is aesthetically pleasing, it is pleasant to the senses. In the most basic way, a quilt is usually intended to be, at the very least, pleasing to look at. To this end, color choice is key.

For more than 200 years, the combination of red and white fabric has been a popular color combination for quilters. Aside from the aesthetic appeal of these colors, the popularity of this color combination was also due to the great colorfastness of a dye known as *Turkey Red*. When this dye was used on cotton, it was far more durable when exposed to washing and light than other less durable or color-fast dyes. This dye was developed from the roots of plants from the madder family and traveled to Europe from the East, where it had been used since antiquity. However, dyes were complicated and expensive to produce. But by 1868, a synthetic version of the dye had become available, enabling American mills to produce the *Turkey Red* cottons at a

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much more reasonable price. As a result, red and white quilts became hugely popular in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the United States (Hart Cottage Quilts).

A woman named Joanna S. Rose, who lives in New York City, spent the better part of her adult life collecting red and white quilts because of their unique beauty (see below). She bought them at yard sales, antique stores, and various auctions. Her collection now includes quilts from three centuries. Interestingly, when her 80th birthday was approaching, Joanna's husband asked her what she would like as a gift. Thinking she had about 70 quilts or so, she told him she would like to see all of her quilts displayed together, in part, so that she could share with New York City. It turned out she had 651 red-and-white quilts, carefully stored in cedar closets, under beds and in cabinets in her home. The result of her birthday wish was an astonishing 6-day exhibit in March, 2011, free to the public and held at the Park Avenue Amory in Manhattan. This venue was the only one big enough to hold the entire collection.

In an article in the New York Times, James Barron tells us that it was Joanna who suggested the title of the exhibition: "Infinite Variety: Three Centuries of Red and White Quilts." "She said the inspiration for the title was from a line in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*:

*Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale  
Her infinite variety...* (Barron, 2011).

The aesthetic value of this collection and exhibit is clear from the incredible amount of press it received as well as the number of people who attended. Mrs. Rose's collection will surely find a place in history for many reasons, not the least of which is its incredible aesthetic beauty.

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Infinite Variety: Three Centuries of Red and White Quilts Exhibit  
(Infinite Variety: Three Centuries of Red and White Quilts)

The quilt barns that originated in Ohio are another way to look at quilting as aesthetic. While these barns have served a number of important cultural purposes, they are also simply beautiful (see below). Quilt barn trails have been established to guide tourists through the countryside, with a painted barn every few miles. The trails have brought many “leaf peepers” into Appalachian Ohio, as well as other areas, particularly in the fall, to see the barns, and leaves, and often stop for lunch and a bit of shopping for locally made and raised goods. These quilt barn trails, often referred to as a “clothesline of quilts,” serves to enhance the beauty of the farms as well as the larger area. They have created a form of cultural and ecological tourism that is fostering economic growth in Appalachian communities that desperately need to create a positive awareness of their culture and geographical location as a travel destination within their state. Partnerships have developed with the Ohio Audubon Society and The Nature Conservancy to increase the reach of the barn trail project. To improve the aesthetic of their farms, farmers often go beyond their barns, and spend time tidying up and larger area to increase its pleasing sight.

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(Our Ohio-Ohio Quilt Barns)

### **Quilting as Function**

The most obvious function of a quilt is its use as a blanket, to keep out the cold. As a quilt provides warmth, it can also provide comfort, consolation and security. What makes quilting so interesting, when examined from the vantage point of communication, is the other functions it can serve.

Building a quilt can serve as a builder of communities. Janet Berlo (2001), a writer and quilt scholar, believes the act of quilting as a group provides women with the opportunity to get together and find time away from the challenges they face in everyday life. She suggests that quilting was (is) also a pastime women used to deal with sometimes difficult situations, like divorce or death. The cutting of fabric and repositioning of pieces allows women to creatively reconfigure and deal with uncontrollable events in their lives (Berlo, 2001). By having greater control over one aspect in their lives can help these women therapeutically deal with situations where they lack greater control. The result of this cathartic process is a tightly woven network of women, who support one another in their daily struggles and who have established a bond of lasting friendship. It also happens to result in a beautiful and useful quilt, which can provide comfort and warmth for the recipient.

The quilt barns of the Appalachians also have served as builders of communities. They have brought communities together, accomplished large scale painting projects, and provided a resurgence of pride in the agrarian American lifestyle. They have created enough interest to bring people from all over the world just to see the painted barns.

The *Crusade Quilt* functioned to build solidarity within the community of women's temperance, but it also functioned as a form of resistance and protest to the problem of drinking in the 1800's. The Hawaiian quilts also functioned as a form of protest and resistance.

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Quilts can connect families to their heritage through the confines of time by becoming representations of who they are and what is important to them. This function is evident in the quilts of Mary Black, as described above.

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My study joins this ongoing and fascinating conversation on quilting in a number of specific ways. I enter the conversation as a student of communication, and so draw on what we know about the power of communication, symbolism and meaning to contribute to existing scholarship. Also, while much research pertaining to historical quilting communication exists, there is room and need for further examination. Opportunities for observation of present-day quilting groups, and as studied in places that might not otherwise be of interest are worthy of inspection. Next, quilting is enjoying a resurgence of interest with women in the United States (source(s)?), which makes this project particularly timely. This new popularity offers a unique chance to thoroughly observe and participate first-hand in a quilting community, to see how the women in it are making meaning and how it is significant in their lives. By adding current evidence and insights to the existing historical research, I hope to add relevance to the current understanding of communication and the meaning it creates for groups of women who come together to work on a shared goal. By adding the voices of ordinary women sewing together for the purpose of goodwill, I hope to highlight common communication themes that occur today, just as they have for centuries. In turn, I hope to show that quilting groups are just as important as they ever were in helping us understand the way people use communication to create meaning, culture and community. How this work is accomplished is complex and, therefore, in need of a fitting theoretical guide.

### **Symbolic Convergence Theory**

Interpretive qualitative research strives to understand the way people interpret, understand and make meaning of the experiences in their world (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). In this study, I use this form of research to learn how people use communication in their everyday lives within the confines of a quilting group to create significance and meaningfulness. I more specifically describe my focus below.

This study explores communication by drawing on Ernest Bormann's (1985) Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT). Bormann's approach explains a fantasy-theme method of rhetorical analysis, which refers to the stories and realities created and exchanged by groups who come to share a common symbolic vision. When that occurs, they form a rhetorical community bound by a common symbol. According to Bormann, "The basic communicative dynamic of the theory is the sharing of group fantasies which brings about symbolic convergence for the participants" (Bormann, p. 4). Thus, SCT revolves around the position that groups create shared realities through interaction. This aptly describes what can happen to any group of women who gather to make quilts. Quilting allows women to work collectively, to reflect on cultural and national values and to offer political challenges among a myriad of other things. Together they go through a unique process of converging on the processes of making quilts, and of those topics of conversations that come to be throughout their processes (related or not to quilting itself).

Bormann uses "fantasy" to describe the "creative and imaginative interpretation of events that fulfills a psychological or rhetorical need" (Bormann, p. 5). Something as simple as an inside joke, or, in Bormann's words, a "dramatizing message" (p. 5), whose meaning is only understood by those in the group, is a basic example of a fantasy at work. He suggests nearly every group that comes together again and again over time creates these shared realities. Think,



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for instance, about your family. Nearly every family shares a memory of a time they all remember, and with one word or phrase, they can bring back this memory for the group. When one or more people are *in* on the joke or fantasy, research has shown they react by expressing a variety of emotions. Laughter, tears, and anger are examples of some of the emotions that dramatizing messages can bring forth. These connections, or shared realities, can bind groups together and give meaning and positive regard to their union.

Recent studies have used Symbolic Convergence Theory to explain communication in unique groups. In her article about a coven of women, Christee Lesch (1994) describes a group of women who use consciousness-sharing communication to strengthen their bonds as a group. Lesch defines small groups as "sites of symbolic activities where group member define and enact their sense of self and their group (p. 57). She contends that symbolic convergence occurs when symbolic words that group members use lean toward and overlap one another. The convergence, or shared consciousness, is achieved when members share and build on stories about themselves and their group. John Stone (2002) uses Symbolic Convergence Theory to determine how newly enrolled graduate students justify their choice of schools.

I join these and other studies that find value in using SCT to better understand communication, because this approach helps us understand how groups of people can find meaning through the use of communication. That is to say, SCT can help us isolate and focus on communication, symbolism and the power of interaction. In the case of this particular study, SCT allows us to look at the deep and lasting impact that communication can have within the context of a quilting group.

## Method

My project uses ethnography which Goodall (2000) describes as a written account of culture, where culture is the creation and utilization of everyday life, made into meaningful order. The way I used method was through direct observation, interviews and actual participation on my part, in the act of quilting (participant observation) to better understand this group culturally, through communication. Ethnography gives this project, and thus the topic of quilting, a focus on local understanding and allows voices to be heard.

My participant observation process entailed identifying minute details of what, at first glance, might be considered unimportant or common forms of interaction. It assumes that upon further inspection, that meaning is constructed through these interactions. In fact, Goodall tells us that, indeed, it is these everyday performances that are the "evidence of a culture's imprint and the product of an organization's and individual's meanings" (p. 78). By actually participating in and with the culture then, observers can become intimately aware of, and, in some cases, even adopt for themselves, the meaning of a given cultural group.

Ethics must be considered and accounted for in any study. In mine, the fact that participants are being observed by me and asked to share their feelings and opinions by responding to questions that will later be reported on in a publicly available document, is a risk and a significant act of faith.

As suggested above, ethnographers of this sort are speaking for others, which carries great weight. Linda Alcoff (1991) addresses this complex issue by contending that we must consider very carefully the effects our words, where they go and what they do there. In other words, once we say something, or write something down, we are implicating the lives of those represented, those about (for) whom we are speaking. How can our words be hurtful? The fact

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Lisa Tillman-Healy (2003) argues that "radical reciprocity" can help to with this ethical issue. Radical reciprocity means we change our mindsets from "studying *them* to studying *us*" (p. 735). By doing so, we can use our privileged positions as scholars to strengthen the position of the communities we research. She calls this the "ethic of friendship" (p. 736) and encourages us to extend this relationship to our readers as well by engaging them on multiple levels that may encourage more responsible and active citizenship.

In an effort to act ethically as an ethnographic researcher, I have used Alcoff and Tillman-Healy as guides. This study takes into consideration, my social location, that of an educated, white, middle class woman, as it compares to that of the women in my study group. I will make every effort to write about them in a way that will be not only about them, but about me as one of them as well. In turn, knowing that my words, in effect, speak for them, I will consider thoughtfully whether or not my words have the potential to cause harm.

This study was conducted over the course of eleven weeks during the summer of 2011. I digitally recorded the conversation at each field work session and took fieldnotes as well. As a participant observer, the recording device was often resting in the middle of a quilt while the quilters and I were busily stitching around it. Later, I listened to each recording and made additional notes, identifying particular moments of significance to be used in this analysis.

**Plan of Study**

Chapter Two, "To Quilt or Not to Quilt," is my ethnographic account of the quilting group of my study. I describe the participants and additional ways I carried myself in the field, and follow with specific cultural themes drawn from my experiences and participants' interactions and interview responses. I offer this as a local cultural instance of the general phenomenon of quilting. In Chapter Three, "The Final Stitches," I further examine the topic of quilting, with my ethnographic account in mind. I also consider the greater overall relevance of this work and the limitations of this study. In the Epilogue, "Wrapping up with the Finished Quilt," I give my final thoughts thanks and musings on this long but worthwhile, I daresay life-changing journey.

## **CHAPTER TWO: To Quilt or not to Quilt**

In this chapter I will introduce the women of the quilting group with whom I did my ethnographic fieldwork. . As much as possible, I foreground their voices to show who they are and how they interact. I understand that the conversations and stories I choose to highlight are only part of the whole, and, in turn, they could be read as reflecting my voice just as much as theirs (Alcoff, 1991). Nevertheless, I draw on these excerpts to develop communication themes, which I propose demonstrate cultural patterns of symbolic convergence among the group. I do my best to describe each context to help the reader experience and appreciate the fuller event.

### **Participants**

My ethnography stems from fieldwork that took place over the course of the summer months of 2011, although my interest and close study of the topic has spanned the last several years. My focus is on the interactions among twelve women of quilting group that meet at a local church, from 8:30 am to 12:00 p.m., once a week on Wednesdays. The group has been together in one form or another for nearly thirty years. The women in the group (more fully described below) vary in age from 60 to 84. Most are retired from working outside of the home. Most of the women are Catholic but one is Lutheran, and another is Evangelical Protestant. They are all either still married or had been married before the death of their spouses. They are all of European descent.

I identified the group by asking my friends and acquaintances if they knew of any quilting groups that met in churches. Several of these friends mentioned this group, so I placed a call to the church, and asked for the name and phone number of potential contact from the group. I approached that member with a phone call and asked her if she thought her group would be

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willing to participate in the study and allow me to join them for the summer. She thought it would be fine, and was happy to introduce me at the first meeting I attended, and explain to her friends what my intentions were.

The city in which this group meets has a population of approximately 27,000 people. It is in the upper Midwestern United States, is situated on a great lake, and is the home to one university, one technical college, and one High School. In 2010, the median age is 37, 92% of the population is white and the median household income is \$40,383.00. Largely, it is a blue collar, somewhat rural community surrounded by beautiful forests. It is within minutes of a neighboring state with a larger city of approximately 80,000 people. There are two more universities and a number of community colleges and high schools in this city.

I informed all of the participants of the goals of the study and the methods I would use. Informed consent was required and obtained from each participant. All interviews were conducted privately and individually during quilting sessions. All of the quilting sessions and the interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed for accuracy. Pseudonyms for all of the participants were chosen and used in this work to protect their identity. (This study was approved by my institution's Institutional Review Board, #675.)

### **The Quilters**

Jane is the matriarch and founder of the group. She is 84 years of age and Catholic. Jane's mother died when she was young, but she remembers being taught how to quilt by her. Jane is humorous, outspoken, generous and patient. She was the first person I contacted about doing this fieldwork, and made me feel welcomed right away.

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Laverne has been quilting with this group for 16 years, identifies as German, French, Scotch and Lutheran. She also quilts with another group closer to her home and likes to attend quilting weekends with her adult daughter. She is a young looking 76 years of age, and I found her to be energetic and friendly.

Anne is 60 years of age, and Catholic. She has been quilting most of her adult life and quilts with this and another group of women. She is described by the others as having the "eagle eye" of the group. As a result, she is the person who looks finished quilts over to make sure nothing has been missed, or there are no mistakes, before the quilt is considered finished. Anne also does other charitable work outside of quilting like sewing blankets for Project Linus and making bags for Beads for Courage. I will describe these projects in more detail later.

Ellen is Anne's mother-in-law. She is 81 years of age, and Catholic. Ellen seems quieter than some of the others in the group, so I didn't get to know her quite as well. Still, I found her to be committed to the group since, she rarely missed a Wednesday. She was always willing to answer my questions.

Angela is a 62 years of age, Catholic woman who first came to the group 4 ½ years ago, after she retired, and at the urging of her husband. I never asked her why he urged her to join, but she seemed glad he did. She has a large vegetable garden and often arrived on Wednesday with an arm load of fresh vegetables to share. She also has a great sense of humor. She told one or two hilarious stories during this summer that I will never forget.

Renee is 72 years of age, and identifies as a Christian woman with a "Heinz 57" ethnic background. By this she means she is a little bit of many different ethnic backgrounds. She is an accomplished quilter of 28 years. She is outspoken and humorous as well as generous and

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talented at sewing. When I was looking for a group to join, more than one person mentioned her name as someone to call.

Renee's sister is Marci, who started quilting with the group after she retired about six and one-half years ago. She used to work down the street at a restaurant, and often joined the quilting group for coffee during that time. She is Catholic and attends mass every morning. Marci claims not to be a very good quilter, and prefers to hand stitch the quilts together. Hand stitching refers to the act of using a needle and thread to sew the top of the quilt to the bottom or back of the quilt, with a piece of batting in between the layers. This is done by hand, as opposed to using a sewing machine. Marci always makes the coffee and sets the table with cups and napkins for coffee break.

Pam is 64, identifies as a Scandinavian Evangelical Protestant. She worked in a fabric store for 23 years and, after she retired, asked if she could join the group. Comments from others, along with my own observation in the field would suggest Pam has a great eye for patterns, color and design and often picks the patterns for the next quilt. I found Pam to be energetic, kind and pleasant to be around. She spoke often and proudly about her grandchildren. One funny anecdote she told was about her grandson, who, upon asking for what Pam's compost pile was, responded, "Wow Grandma, you even make your own dirt!"

Crystal is a retired nurse in her late 60's and is also a very talented seamstress. She prefers doing most of her work at the sewing machine. She has a sharp wit and a great outlook on life. Her son and daughter-in-law recently had a baby and Crystal enjoyed sharing pictures and stories about the baby's progress.

Sue is the Parish Nurse. In addition, she is a yoga instructor and has facilitated a women's breast cancer support group for 20 years. She is very youthful looking for her 64 years



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of age, married and has adult children. She is at the church at least once a month, sometimes twice a month. She meets mostly with women who have taken care of others all of their lives, but don't know much about nurturing themselves; thus, she focuses a lot on overall wellness with them (e.g., exercise, nutrition). She also reviews their medication with them. She sits in the room right next to the one the quilting group uses and, during coffee break time, joins the quilters for coffee, treats and fellowship—I should say, femalanship.

All of these women were present nearly every Wednesday that I was with the group, which suggests, to me, significant interest and dedication—to the process and each other. All of them also graciously and patiently answered my interview questions. There were a few other women whom I had the opportunity to meet once or twice, but I was unable to interview them for this study. Nonetheless, those women also contributed to the overall experience and observations of this study.

### **And so the quilting begins**

Daily mass ends at the Catholic Church where the group meets at 8:30 a.m., and the women who attend mass go directly to the quilting room afterward to begin quilting. Those that don't attend mass arrive shortly thereafter. There are two quilts stretched out on racks (large wooden frames that hold the quilt top, bottom and batting together so they can be sewn together), in the process of being quilting. Two sewing machines are stationed at two tables, and are used to stitch pieces of fabric together to create quilt tops. As long as the room isn't needed in the summer, the supplies and work are just left where they are and the room is closed when the group is not there. In the fall, when religious education classes begin again, the tables and quilts are moved to the edges of the room. There is a small storage cabinet in the corner, two large

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work tables, a coat rack and a chalkboard. The chalkboard usually has an inspirational phrase of some kind on it. One day is said, "A day patched with quilting seldom unravels." Another day it read, "You can bury a lot of troubles digging in dirt." This quilting group has been meeting here for about twenty four years and the original founder, Jane, is still a very active part of the group.

When the women arrive, they put down their purses and baked goods for the coffee break, if they brought any. They say "hello" and promptly sit down to pick up where they left off last week. Each woman has a specific task they prefer to do. Some always sit at the sewing machines and cut and sew together pieces of fabric. Others prefer to only to hand stitch the quilts together on the racks. Decisions about what kind of pattern to make for the next quilt are not really discussed or voted on. Instead, as a matter of practice, someone finds an appealing pattern somewhere, has an idea or sees a quilt elsewhere, and they begin collecting pieces of fabric in the colors they would like to use and off they go. Once the women at the machines have created a top piece for a quilt, it is turned over to the other women, those who prefer hand sewing for assembly.

The supplies for the quilts are nearly all donated. They received thread, pre-cut squares of fabric, uncut fabric, quilting books, and any other type of supply they might be able to use. Sometimes the donated items come from people cleaning out their own sewing rooms, or by families of older or deceased individuals cleaning out homes. Sometimes one of the members will come across a good sale and buy fabric and supplies and give them to the group. During my time with the group, I don't remember a day when there was not some donated item that had just arrived, for the group to look at and figure out what to do with it. If they cannot use it, they pass it on to another quilting group who can.

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While each of the communication themes that I identify in this project are distinct, the set of themes are interconnected and can inform each other in various ways. For instance, the ideas about humor among the women, in *Patterns*, *Pardon the Pun*, define one of their ways of communicating, but their humor can also be seen as shaping communication in *Quilting is not the Point*, and *Quilting on Wednesdays in Non-negotiable*.

### **Patterns, Pardon the Pun**

There is a unique and unavoidable pattern of humor pervading the quilting group. The women are always joking with one another and laughing. The humor in the room helps to create a casual and comfortable atmosphere as well. This humorous and casual atmosphere serves as a break in the week for these women and gives them the opportunity to relax and unwind while they quilt.

Certain members have established themselves as the jokesters and laughter is often heard coming from the quilting room. Angela is one of the funny ones. She swears (with a glint in her eye) that she does not actually come on Wednesdays by choice, but rather comes because "my husband forced me to join." I recall one day with the women when she told a hilarious and true story about the family guinea pig that had been struck ill. Her family, and particularly the children, loved the animal so much that they tried to save it by bringing it to the veterinarian. The decision was made to perform surgery, which, indeed, saved the pet. When Angela asked the doctor how many guinea pigs he had operated on, the answer was, "One, counting this one." Her timing in the way she told this and other stories were always perfect and added to the humor and light feeling with the group.

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Angela always shows up to the group just in time for the coffee break. The first time I met Angela, Jane introduced her and kidded to me that she only comes for the coffee, after having been in a bar “drinking something else.” It turned out, while Angela did indeed come to the group from a bar, she was really drinking coffee there, and she also did quilt after the coffee break at the church was over.

Crystal is another card. Once when I asked her if she still worked outside of the home, she said, “Yes, I only have one more scab on my chest left to heal and then I can go back to topless dancing.” This self-deprecating style of humor was common among all of the women, a way of communicating that shows they are all secure enough with themselves and their place in the larger group to make fun and not take things too seriously. Absent were any hurt feelings or interactions that would suggest that a particular line of humor was off-putting or inappropriate. Together, they recognized the humor and understand its place within their interactions.

Outside of these humorous moments, communication within the group is very casual and comfortable as well. Unlike other groups of people, who tend to greet one another with hugs, the members of this group come in and pretty much get right to work. Of course, they express verbal greetings, like “good morning,” or “hello ladies,” but they tend to get to the task of quilting right away. Although I have never asked them why this pattern of interacting might occur, I suspect it might be a result of their northern European backgrounds that they prefer not to waste too much time.

Once in a while, someone brings in another craft project they have recently completed to show to their friends in the group. They typically enjoy complimenting one another and asking questions about how certain aspects of the piece were completed. This interaction suggests they feel that the other women in the group can really appreciate the work they do and understand the

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amount of time and attention to detail these kinds of projects take to accomplish. It also indicates how comfortable they are with one another.

Overall, the atmosphere in the room is social and task oriented. As a whole, the women are very welcoming, so much so that, when I first joined the group, it only took a few visits for me to feel very at home to the point of feeling like a real member. In fact, I am pretty certain that if I asked to join them full time, they would be delighted.

A vivid moment underscoring the welcoming aspect of the group occurred one day when the group was looking through some donated items. When they came upon a pile of books, they considered whether or not they should give them to the local library for their annual book sale/fundraiser. As they were discussing this idea, they decided to take a vote. After a few members cast their verbal votes, Jane turned to me and said, "Christina, what is your vote?" I was a bit surprised by this to the point where I couldn't actually answer right away, which is unusual for me. Later it occurred to me how powerful the question was. It was evidence that I had been accepted as a member of the group, that my voice was just as important as theirs, and this gesture of inclusion was enacted communicatively. But I do not think I was special in this instance. I believe this groups treats everyone in their midst with this kind of respect, acceptance and welcoming.

There is also a feeling of casualness in the room. By this I mean that while they are always working toward to goal of finishing a quilt, they do not seem to be in a hurry or stressed out about getting the quilts done. They are relaxed and seem interested in fully experiencing the process of quilting, conversing, laughing and being together.

**Quilting "is not the Point"**

This next theme builds on the last one and reinforces the reasons this group comes together week after week. While their time together on Wednesdays is to quilt, making quilts is secondary to their desire to be together and support one another through friendship. While laughing and feeling comfortable is essential, reasons for quilting together are deeper. For my first two weeks with the group, I solely listened and took notes. However, soon Jane asked if I would like to join in on the quilting. I agreed to help, but also told her that, while I knew how to quilt, I wasn't very good at it. Jane's response was, "That's O.K. Some of us are downright lousy quilters. It doesn't matter how good you are. That's not the point." So, I accepted her offer and joined the stitching. They were thrilled, and so was I, for it was precisely that, "the point," as she put it, about which I was more interested in learning. What was the point?

When I asked Sue, the Parish Nurse, to describe the quilting group, she said, "That's why I think the quilting group is really nice, because even though the end product [the quilt] is for the community, it's time for them to connect with each other. The communion of women is very important." The word communion is rich with meaning.

For many people, the word communion specifically refers to a sacred Christian sacrament. I believe the women in this quilting group actually do consider their time together sacred, in the religious and non-religious sense. The fact that they are Christian women, who meet to quilt together in a church, for me, reinforces this idea. My time with this community allowed me to see and understand their strong belief in God and the powerful commitment they have to serve others. On the other hand, as the themes of this account suggest, in a non-religious sense, something special, i.e., something sacred, occurs within the space of their time together. It

One Stitch at a Time: Piecing Together Communication/Community in Women's Quilting is a powerful union. Through her work with breast cancer patients, Sue said she has found research showing a higher incidence of survival rates with women who belong to support groups.

So many women are so busy working hard at jobs and being upwardly mobile today, that they have lost touch with the support that they need from their women friends. I hear about this over and over in my yoga classes as well as in my support groups. They are thirsty for community.

She went on to say,

Being together with others, that's community. Whether it's in a third world country, where they are pounding grain, or weaving mats, it's the community, it's the quilting group. That's what women do. That's what women need. It doesn't matter where in the world you are. Community is there.

Here, Sue describes how the women in this community are similar to women in other communities all over the world. It doesn't matter why they come together. What matters is that they do it. They come together to be together and to be there for one another. Their time together is about more than the task they are completing. It's about doing it together and building camaraderie and sisterhood. That's the point.

The ways in which group activities extend beyond the actual quilts appear in other ways as well. Occasionally the women in the quilting group talk about the actual quilts they are working on, but most of the conversation is about other things. When I asked Angela what the communication was like in this group, she described their conversation this way.

We talk about quilting of course, but we also exchange recipes, stories about our grandchildren, we show pictures of our families, bring in other crafts that we've done. We also discuss the good and bad about our husbands. We share

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laughter, and at times, sadness. Many problems have been resolved here at our quilting group. These ladies are a joy to be around. It's a good, free therapy session.

For Angela, this is the point of the group and she isn't the only person who refers to the communication in the group as providing therapy. Anne calls it "my therapy" and claims, "These are great women to be around." Renee says, "It's good for the soul" and "what a support group!" Pam shared a humorous pun, "Quilters are good comforters."

More than one of the women also used the word "fellowship" to describe their time together. Ellen says she gets "a family feeling" when she is with the group. Marci adds, "It keeps me going."

One of the most common inside jokes with this group is that they all really come on Wednesdays for the coffee and home baked goodies, not for the quilting. In fact, when I asked participants for their favorite part of the group, the most common response was, "For the coffee and treats!" Of course it is always said with a sly smile or smirk, which underscores for me importance of humor to the quilters. And while they were sort of joking, my time with this community prompts me to believe that indeed, the coffee break time is just as important as the time spent quilting. It is just an extension of the "therapy" session. It is another instance in which the women of the group can get what they need from one another, how communication is powerful in this cultural context, and how the essence of this group extends beyond the physical quilts.

An additional and, much starker example of the kind of support these women give to one another is illustrated by a story Renee told me of one of their members, Rose, who died over the winter. Renee describes her as someone with a sharp wit, who always provided humor for the



One Stitch at a Time: Piecing Together Communication/Community in Women's Quilting group. It is astonishing to me that Rose still had a sense of humor at all after some of the things that happened to her in her life. She lost her first husband on Christmas Eve in a car accident when her children were still very small. According to Renee, she did a great job raising her kids and eventually married again. Rose's second husband eventually succumbed to Alzheimer's disease, and she took to upon herself to care for him by herself in their home.

One Wednesday during this time, Rose arrived to the quilting meeting and sat down in a slump, totally exhausted. She shared with her friends the struggles she had been enduring as a result of caring for her husband. As Rose told of her troubles, she wept. Renee said the group "did the only thing we could do for her at that moment. We all wept with her." That's support.

That's the point.

What is clear here, to me, is that all of these women are indeed using their time together to fulfill their desire for connectedness, community and meaning. This shared reality within their culture is a strong current that, as demonstrated through their interactions, they feel and believe in steadfastly. The support they give and get back in return is fundamentally important to them and because of it they are committed to the group and make every effort to be there each Wednesday. This commitment to show up every week is the next theme I will identify.

### **Quilting on Wednesdays is Non-negotiable**

I have previously indicated that this quilting group considers their time together sacred. One of the themes that became clear during my time in the field is how devoted they are to the Wednesday morning meeting. They are resolute about showing up each week to be together. Three different occasions underscore this commitment.

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One day Renee came to the group with guests, a couple from out of our town who had been staying with her and her husband. She brought them along to introduce them to her quilting friends, and show them the work the group does. The couple visited for a short time, as the quilting continued, and then left to go do some sight-seeing. Renee stayed to quilt. I found it interesting that, even with guests in her home, whom she seldom sees, Renee refused to cancel her Wednesday morning engagement to quilt.

Another, more compelling event occurred with Crystal. Crystal is a retired nurse who is an immensely talented seamstress. She provides much of the group's humor. She loves one liner's and always has a quick and funny comeback ready for any remark.

One day, Crystal came to quilting having just had a port installed in her chest. She announced to her fellow quilters the prior week (after I had left for the day) that she had breast cancer and would be receiving chemo-therapy within two weeks. When I learned of the news, I was shocked by her calmness and matter-of-fact attitude with regard to this recent diagnosis. She said she found it hard to tell people, not wanting to put a damper on otherwise enjoyable conversation. Her outlook was remarkably positive and she was determined to get through the treatment process without getting sick. Rather than trying hard to avoid the subject that day, it was the main topic of conversation. All of the women in the group discussed Crystal's cancer openly and shared encouraging stories of family and friends who had overcome their turn with the disease.

The very next week, after her first chemotherapy treatment, Crystal came to the Wednesday gathering looking considerably weakened. She did her best to maintain an upbeat and pleasant mood. Still, she looked like she felt awful. She had lost much of her color and looked a bit gray. Her hair had already begun to fall out and she was wearing a colorful scarf on

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her head. She said she felt a lot better than she had a day or two after the first chemotherapy treatment, but she was clearly still recovering.

She also brought a friend along, who had come to stay with her and support and help to her and her husband during this time. It would have been so much easier for Crystal to stay home on this Wednesday to rest and continue her recovery, but she didn't. Instead, she came, she sewed together fabric squares at one of the sewing machines, she talked about her chemotherapy, and she took her mind off of how badly she felt for a while. Most importantly, she got support, love and friendship from her quilting friends. A little cancer wasn't going to keep her from spending time with her quilting group.

A third experience offers an intriguing contrast to the smooth-flowing, seemingly conflict-free quilting context, and relates to Elizabeth's attendance. Jane describes Elizabeth a member of the quilting group who came and enjoyed quilting for many years. Over time, Elizabeth came less and less, and now she has not been there at all for a long time. This is a small town, so the women in the group still see her around town. Once, when Jane asked Elizabeth why she doesn't come to quilting anymore, she reportedly answered that her husband has her doing too much and she does not have time to come. Jane and the other members of the group have interpreted this to mean that Elizabeth's husband won't LET her come.

This is a very strong group of women, thus, their reactions were not at all positive. They are beyond disgusted with her, or, for that matter, anyone else who would allow their husband to dictate what they can and cannot do. When asked by Jane if she would like to go out to lunch sometime, the women reportedly responded, "Sure, there are still some things my husband lets me do."

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When Jane told the group about this exchange, Renee quipped about the husband, saying, "We could put a contract out on him; I know some people."

I asked if they were sure the woman was not just using her husband as an excuse not to come. Marci responded, "No, she likes being here, she sought us out. We didn't go looking for her, she came here."

Renee added, "She's a delight."

Marci then said, "Maybe she don't know how to threaten. Joe Di Vorcer (local divorce lawyer known for getting big settlements) maybe can have a talk with her. Say, honey can I get a deal for you! You don't need him!"

Renee said, "That's probably why he doesn't want her here. We give out too much information!" I interpret this to mean that Renee thought Elizabeth's husband was afraid of what the group would tell her.

Jan added, "At my house, that [not allowing me to do what I want to do] would not be grounds for divorce, it would be grounds for murder!"

The group discussed how perhaps the woman's husband thought coming to quilt represented being too liberated. Crystal said, "Coming to a church on Wednesday mornings to sew for charity is not too liberated."

All three of these instances in culture, for me, underscore the commitment these women display to the quilting group. They come when they have guests and they come when they are ill, and they have don't understand why someone does not come without a really good reason. To really understand and know this group is to understand the devotion they have to the group and what the group means. This dimension of their culture is a part of what defines who they are and what they believe to be important.

### **Quilting for Charity**

The final theme is rooted in this group's belief in the importance of giving. All of the quilts the group makes, which amount to about twenty five per year, are given away. Individuals who are suffering with illness, churches, hospitals, children's homes or parochial schools trying to raise money, receive them. Anyone who asks and has a good cause can get one. They are quite clear about the charity aspect of their work. One day members told me a story about a woman who fell in love with one of the quilts they had made and offered to buy it. They absolutely would not allow it. It was to be given away, not sold.

I experienced this group's generosity on a personal level. I have three children who have all attended a parochial school up to 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Two of my children have graduated, but I still have one child there and, like most parochial schools, there are always fundraisers in which to participate. One of the largest fundraisers at our school is an annual dinner auction. One day, while we were quilting, I asked Jane if she thought the group would ever be interested in donating a quilt to the school's dinner auction. She stopped what she was doing, looked me squarely in the eyes and said, "of course, we would love to!" Then she said, "Marci, take her down to the Miracle Closet and let her pick out a quilt for the school."

There is closet down the hall that the group uses to store completed quilts, larger pieces of fabric, bolts of batting (the stuffing in between the top and bottom of a quilt) and other supplies. All of the fabric is sorted by color. This is known collectively among group members as the Miracle Closet, because the group has a sense that anytime they want or need some kind of supply, or a special color of fabric to help complete one of their quilts, they can go in there to look and they always find what they need. On my very first day with the group, I was given a grand tour that included the Miracle Closet, complete with an explanation of its name. It was

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instantly clear that this was a piece of their shared reality. It is a physical manifestation of that relation, which puts into focus their belief that the work they do for others is good work, arguably even sacred work in the service of God, and because of the charitable nature of it, they don't often find themselves in need of supplies to do their charitable work. This harkens back to the storage closet's name. They believe they do not want for supplies, because God provides for them as a result of the sacredness of their work.

The quilters believe their charitable work gets rewarded in other ways as well. One day, Jane announced, "You know how we have given so many quilts to the hospital auxiliary? Well, my Grandson just got a scholarship from them. See? What goes around comes around."

One day, during the coffee break, there was a little complaining about a woman in the church who is always trying to raise money for various organizations, but who, in their opinion, lacks the ability to organize the delivery of the funds or items raised. They see the items collected still in the church, long after the collection has occurred, still not delivered to the intended recipients. Sometimes, the charity is for people in other countries or other people with no connection to the church. They find this bothersome.

At one point Sue stood up and closed the door to discuss something in confidence. She had been told that morning of the struggles of the church secretary. This woman works part time at the church in the mornings, and then at another job later in the day. She is an adult woman who lives with her mother, and earlier in the year, they had lost their home due to foreclosure. Today the woman was worried about losing her car and was struggling to even afford to put gas into it to come to work. Sue suggested it was time to stop worrying about people in need that we know and start helping our own. She asked for ideas of ways we could help the secretary right now.

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Instantly, the group decided we could all would chip in some money to buy a gift card to be used at the grocery store later that day. In minutes, there was nearly \$100.00 on the table. Then, we each committed to bring some non-perishable food items the following Wednesday to put in a gift basket for her.

There are other forms of charity relevant here as well. Anne sews bead bags for kids with cancer through a program called Beads of Bravery. Each time a child suffering from cancer has a chemotherapy treatment, they get a white bead; hair loss earns a brown bead; radiation treatments earn a glow-in the dark bead; an ambulance ride equals a magenta bead and completing the entire treatment earns a purple heart bead. Other opportunities to add beads to the bag exist for different milestones that the children reach. Once treatments are completed, the child can make a necklace and wear it as a badge of honor, courage and bravery (Beads of Courage – Arts in Medicine for Children with Serious Illness.)

Anne also quilts baby quilts on her own for the Project Linus. This initiative is an effort to provide comfort, warmth, love and a sense of security to children who are traumatized, seriously ill, or otherwise in need. I know from experience what this can mean to a child (Project Linus National Headquarters).

The charitable theme of my group continued to be demonstrated when I interviewed the women and asked what quilting in this group meant to them. Their answers were similar.

Laverne said, "I enjoy making quilts to be given away. I hope to share a talent for a good cause." Anne added that the message that she hopes her work conveys is "Love, to someone who appreciates my work." Jane said, "I enjoy using my talents to help someone with the quilts we make." Ellen continued, "People that have been ill or experienced a tragedy receive a quilt and you know it gives them some comfort."

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The participant's voices here suggest how this group creates meaning for themselves through charitable work. Their actions support the idea of what many believe it means to be a woman. Traditionally, women have been seen as the caretakers and nurturers, the ones who provide comfort, support and warmth. A better word than caretaker in this context might be giver. In this particular sense, women give birth, give love and friendship, give support and they give of themselves, and seemingly at every opportunity. The culture of this quilting group has been cultivated to be one filled with care, compassion, empathy and love. Their shared reality, the meaning of their lives as women, centers on giving. They give together, and thus, receive together.

I have aimed to demonstrate in this chapter a number of complex and engaging cultural patterns stemming from my fieldwork with this dynamic quilting group. They use humor to foster a casual, comfortable atmosphere in their group; come together, not just to quilt, but to be a support group for one another; do their level best as individuals to be there, with the rest of the group, every Wednesday; and work through a goal to give comfort and warmth through the quilts to others in need.



### CHAPTER THREE: Final Stitches

#### **Sewing it all together**

The process of immersing myself in the field for this project has enabled me to reflect extensively on the various ways this particular group of women jointly communicate and live as a community within the context of quilting for charity. The idea of “community” here points to shared ways of interacting and shared understandings of those ways. This sharing demonstrates an impressive collective consciousness among these women who, although diverse in their own ways, are united in terms of their causes—to make and donate quilts as charity, and the relational benefits that come about as a result of this work. The central symbols through which this consciousness was made and sustained are based on a commitment to the quilting process and the ways communication relates to the process.

In this chapter, I offer additional and brief reflections related to the ethnographic themes as a way to revisit Symbolic Convergence Theory, conclusions concerning quilting with respect to the literature, and some remaining questions of this study.

Humor in a casual, comfortable environment was my first theme. By ensuring that their time together was fun and relaxed, the group members defined themselves and the group. They have established an identity that has served to maintain longevity for the group. Making the atmosphere in the group enjoyable works to fulfill the members need to keep a consistent membership. It also provides members with a predictable experience when they are together. By making membership attractive and interesting in this way insures the group will continue.

Another possibility consistent with Symbolic Convergence Theory revealed itself when Jane made it clear that quilting wasn't the point of the group. With those simple words, she brought to light one of the group's key shared realities. They are all clearly conscious of the fact

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that quilting is just a medium they use to come together so they can establish and maintain community. In this community, they provide one another with support, love, and sisterhood. The effect of the strong community is reminiscent of the previous theme in that it also keeps the group attractive and interesting to members. Many of the women used the words "therapy" and "support group" to describe their group and what it gives them, an aspect that applies to this theme, the previous theme and the next theme as well.

Next, the non-negotiability of the Wednesday meeting is another example of this group's faithfulness to their time together. They all share in this commitment and it is strong enough that outsiders might even question why they attend meetings under certain circumstances. Frankly, I am pretty sure I would skip attending a meeting, if I were feeling awful as a result of chemotherapy treatment. I am amazed that Crystal chose to come anyway. Yet, perhaps we should not be surprised, given the cultural dynamics at play here. Given how these women work, it's likely she had a need to balance her punishing treatment with some nurturing community among her quilting sisters (perhaps a need that was not able to be fulfilled elsewhere, including at home). While I was able to observe and identify a supportive environment among the quilters, I never had a need to fully experience it and, thus, don't share that same dedication to the culture that the members so clearly feel and exhibit. However, through this shared cultural performance, they show how their time together on Wednesdays has become a necessity. Community together is nearly as essential as food and water. It fulfills them. It keeps them coming and provides them with what they want and need.

Finally, the centrality of charity to the quilters, while it does not directly address the atmosphere among the quilters, does speak to the values and principles of the women. They all come from a place of privilege in one way or another. I don't mean to say they are financially

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wealthy necessarily, but rather, they are all in a position to give to those whom they feel are less fortunate than they are. Remember, we were easily able to come up with one hundred dollars for the grocery gift card. This coupled with the belief that they have a duty to help those less fortunate than themselves, in part due to their faith in God, drives them to participate in a culture of giving. With the shared communicative process that must occur to work together to a common goal, in this case to create a quilt to give away, this group displays for us convergence or symbolic communication.

Symbolic Convergence Theory offers a wonderful framework to apply to instances of group communication to identify the shared realities of the participants. The possibility for the commitment to commonality is always there, and SCT is a helpful lens that we can use to figure out how a basic activity, like quilting can be so powerful.

In Chapter One, I highlight Berlo's (2001) position that quilting can offer women the opportunity to feel a bit more in control of their lives through the manipulation of fabric squares in the process of creating a quilt. This idea was brought to life by Crystal as she struggled with her cancer treatments. She had little control over her cancer, but through her quilting, she could channel some of the powerlessness she felt and turn it into control, by being in command of her quilting process.

Also in Chapter One, I bring to light Watkins (1995) six domains of visual communication. I show how the historical quilting in Hawaii and the quilt barns of Ohio underscored the cultural domain. The women in my study have a culture of their own as well. They purposely choose only to work with cotton fabric for reasons all their own. They feel strongly that their quilts be user friendly and are able to stand up to machine washing and drying. By using only one kind of fabric, they demonstrate a belief that their quilts should be sturdy, user

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friendly and functional. They are blankets intended to give warmth and comfort. While they are beautiful, they are not too delicate to be for display only.

The belief that their quilts should be used to provide comfort and warmth speaks to another cultural aspect of this group of women. They are caregivers. They all have children whom they have carefully raised. They have all taken care of a husband at one time or another. They care for each other when the need arises, and then, during their time together, they create quilts for people they generally never meet, to provide solace, care, concern and love. Caretaking is a deeply embedded cultural conviction for them and they show it even in their craft making hobbies. Rita took this belief a step further by participating in Beads for Courage and Project Linus. Care giving is embedded so deeply in this culture, members are compelled to do it.

While this study adds relevance to existing research, it offers something unique as well. I highlight the collective consciousness of one particular quilting group and show how they are distinct in their approach to working together toward a common goal. The process they choose to use is exclusively theirs.

### **Remaining Questions**

Within the realm of research, additional questions always remain. This endeavor is no exception.

This study highlights an ethnographic account within the context of one quilting group. I chose to use Symbolic Convergence Theory as a lens with which to interpret the communicative process at work within my group. However, it is clear that this study would have been equally powerful if it had been an examination in feminist theory.

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One of the characteristics of the study of feminist theory is an effort to identify the intricate, everyday details of the lives of women, the nature of their lived experiences and social roles. This study most certainly looks in that direction and offers a glimpse of some of the detailed lived experiences of a certain group of women. I see this as an opportunity to add to the ongoing feminist conversation.

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It became clear to me during my time with this charitable group that for them, the communicative process sustains them. It nourishes them. It is something they look forward to every week. Marci said it most clearly when she said, "It keeps me going." To be together to talk, to listen, to laugh and to cry; is all about communication. It is through communication that they build community and it is the community that brings them together week after week. Therefore, it is the communication that sustains them.

My goal with this study was to explore the communicative process within the context of a quilting group. I offer a glimpse of how one group of women use communication to build and maintain community. In doing so, I hope to have shown how important, I daresay vital, communication is in our lives. Without it, we are alone. With it, many of our needs can be fulfilled, and we can find life sustaining meaning.

### **Epilogue: Wrapping up in the Finished Quilt**

While I was writing this thesis, my Dad was diagnosed with cancer. It has been a devastating blow to my family as he is well loved man and we are not quite ready to lose him. With mortality front and center on my mind, I couldn't help but think about the meaning of life.

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Why are we here, what does this all mean? Why am I working so hard to write this study? Is it worth it?

This year was also the tenth anniversary year of the "9-11" terrorist attacks. As a result, there were many programs on television memorializing the event. I watched a program that highlighted a group of people, mostly firefighters, but at least one civilian, who were in one of the Twin Towers when it collapsed, and by some miracle, they survived. In describing what went through their minds when the collapse occurred, more than one of them said they thought about what they *had not* done yet, what they still wanted to accomplish.

I could not help but bring these two events back to the context of this study. I still have not quite discovered the meaning *of* life, but I have decided that a life worth living is one with meaning *in* it. And how do we find meaning?

It has been my genuine privilege to have had the opportunity to involve myself with the women of the quilting group highlighted in this document. They welcomed me into their fold, openly shared their feelings and opinions with me, and helped me see how important it is for women to have one another to share support and love. They have moved me to begin more deeply, reflecting on how I live and communicate as a woman. They taught me that meaning can be found in community.

One of the most powerful personal lessons drawn from this experience has been that I need more community of women in my life. For me, this study offered a reminder of the importance of femalship. There are groups of women in my life who provide me with the kind of community experienced by the women in the quilting group. Yet lately I have been far too busy to pursue time with them. I emerge from this process now knowing I must make time. To be a more balanced person, I for one, need the kind of love, support and sisterhood only other

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women can provide. At the same time, I need to look for meaning where it already exists, but where I have been too busy to notice.

As evidenced by my Prologue, which, for me, is a real and typical day, I am a busy and usually exhausted married woman with children. Several years ago, I was complaining to an older, more seasoned and experienced mother about how sick and tired I was of hearing "Mom, Mom, Mom" every five minutes and living this kind of busy, chaotic day. Her response is seared in my memory. She took a deep sigh, looked me in the eye and said, "I would give almost anything to have one more day like that." I experience this moment in incredibly powerful ways, as it serves as a reminder, for me and other women, that we also can find meaning in our everyday experiences with my children, husband, extended family and friends. I just need to pause a moment, recognize and relish these instances for the treasures they hold. Of course, it's never that easy, life is complicated. But at least now I am a bit more equipped to try.

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## **Appendix I**

### **Consent for Research Study**

#### **Piecing Together Communication, Identity and Community One Stitch at a Time**

You are invited to be a participant in a research study focusing on communication within a quilting context. The study will include fieldwork observations by the researcher over a twelve week period, over the course of the summer, approximately once a week. You are being asked to participate in this study because of your affiliation with your quilting group. The researcher asks that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate.

This study will be conducted by Christina Kline, a graduate student in the Department of Communicating Arts at the University of Wisconsin-Superior and is being supervised by Dr. Keith Berry, Associate Professor, Department of Communicating Arts, University of Wisconsin-Superior.

#### **Background Information**

The purpose of this ethnographic study is to better understand quilting, communication among quilters and the importance of this practice.

#### **Procedures**

If you consent to participate in this study, you can expect the following:

1. The researcher will take extensive fieldwork notes and voice recordings during the completion of this project and may utilize specific examples and quotations from these fieldwork sessions while completing proper documentation of her findings. The researcher will attribute these specific examples and quotations to appropriate neutral pseudonyms in order to maintain individual privacy and confidentiality.
2. Open-ended interviews will also be conducted by the researcher following the completion of fieldwork. These interviews will be informal and conversational in style and will also be electronically recorded. Interviewees will be selected based upon fieldwork observations made by the researcher. Responses to interviews will then be transcribed by the researcher and participant quotations may be utilized in the completion of this study.

#### **Risks and Benefits of the Study**

The benefits to participating in this study include gaining a better understanding of communicative processes, both verbal and non-verbal, within quilting contexts. Participation in the study will also help individuals gain a better overall perspective on how communication is related to group identity.

There are minimal risks to participating in this research study. Specific quotations and examples may be used in documentation of this study. As a result, although unlikely, there is a chance that

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someone who is acquainted with you may be able to identify you through your quotations despite the use of pseudonyms by the researcher. The researcher will make every effort to maintain confidentiality throughout the completion of this study.

### **Compensation**

There will be no compensation for participation in this study.

### **Confidentiality**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any applicable report that may be published or presented, the researcher will not include any information that will make it likely to identify specific individuals. Responses to questionnaires and interviews will be kept strictly confidential. Fieldwork notes, questionnaires and interview responses will be kept in sealed envelopes kept by the researcher at her residence and will be destroyed following the completion of this study.

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may end participation in the study at any time and all information regarding the individual in question will be disregarded and/or destroyed immediately upon termination of participation.

### **Contacts and Questions**

The researcher conducting this study is Christina Kline. You may ask questions now. If you have questions at a later time, you may direct them to me via email at [ckline@uwsuper.edu](mailto:ckline@uwsuper.edu) and/or telephone at (218) 591-6587. You may also contact Dr. Keith Berry, Department of Communicative Arts, supervising faculty member, by email at [kberry@uwsuper.edu](mailto:kberry@uwsuper.edu) and/or telephone at (715) 394-8319. If you have any questions about your treatment as a research subject, you may contact Jim Miller, Coordinator of the Institutional Review Board for Protection of Human Subjects at [jmiller@uwsuper.edu](mailto:jmiller@uwsuper.edu) or (715) 394-8396.

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records

**Appendix II**  
**Statement of Consent**

I have read the above information and understand I am under no obligation to take part in this research project. I also understand that I may terminate participation in this study at any time. I give consent to participate in this study.

Participant's name printed \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

This research project has been approved by the UW-Superior Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, protocol # 675

Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

### **Appendix III**

#### **Demographic Questionnaire**

This questionnaire will help provide background for my project, and help me understand more about you as a quilter and quilting generally. Please complete and bring it to our interview. Be as specific and detailed as possible. If more space is needed, feel free to use the other side of this paper. Let me know if you have any questions. Thank you very much for your cooperation.

#### Demographics:

1. What is your age or date of birth?
2. Male or Female?
3. Racial/ethnic background?
4. Religious background?
5. Other background you'd like to share?

#### Quilting:

6. How long have you been quilting?
7. Do you quilt elsewhere, outside of this group? If so, with whom? How often?
8. Who taught you to quilt?
9. How did you come to join this group?
10. Why do you quilt with this group?
11. What is your favorite part of quilting with this group?
12. What is your least favorite part of quilting with this group?

**Appendix IV**  
**Research Questionnaire**

1. How long have you been quilting? How did you learn?
2. How does your group decide to make a new quilt?
3. How does your group decide on a pattern?
4. How did you come to join this group? How long ago?
5. What is your role in the group?
6. What is the communication like for this group?
7. What do you hope to gain from the group?
8. What does quilting mean to you?
9. What messages do you hope to convey with your quilts?
10. What does it mean to you to quilt with others? What are the benefits?
11. In what ways do group members communicate about quilting? What slang is common to your group?