

Stitching Together A Past To Create A Future:
women, quilting groups and community in rural, southern New Brunswick

By
Danielle Sharp

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Approved: Dr. Sandra Alfoldy, Supervisor

Approved: Dr. Linda Christiansen-Ruffman, Examiner

Approved: Dr. Louise Carbert, Reader

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ABSTRACT

Stitching Together A Past To Create A Future:
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People have been quilting for thousands of years and throughout countless societies. Quilting in a group within the Canadian Maritime provinces has been documented since the 18th Century and has become an intricate and important part of the regional cultural identity and women's culture. Many women from this region either have family members who have engaged in quilting or have engaged in this activity themselves. This thesis explores the importance of group quilting to maintaining the communities within the New Brunswick counties of Kings and Saint John. Based upon twenty individual interviews and many hours of group observation, I show how quilting groups continue to provide a safe space for women to meet, to converse about various community issues, and to formulate plans to address these issues. This engagement via community work is often overlooked by academia and mainstream society, yet is an exceptionally important form of political action as these women are primarily the ones who create and maintain their communities by "getting things done". This thesis demonstrates how women from this part of New Brunswick use the unique women's culture found within the quilting circle to discuss and address issues within the community, thus becoming politically

engaged, resulting in empowered individual identities and highlighting the extensive scope of what it is to be a feminist.

For my Grandmother, Ruby Sharp, and to all
of the women who have guided me in life.

You have inspired me, defined me, and have
reminded me that this world can be more than
what it currently is.

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Although I appreciate everything that everyone has done to help me during this process, I dedicate this thesis project to my Grammy, Ruby Sharp. Without her I would not have reached this point. She has been the one to inspire this project, as a grandmother, as a role model and as a quilter. Thank you and I love you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: AN INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 2: QUILTING CULTURE in LITERATURE.....	28
CHAPTER 3: LOCAL HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES.....	48
CHAPTER 4: SOME CONTEXT.....	67
CHAPTER 5: FEMINISM/IDENTITY.....	72
CHAPTER 6: COMMUNITY.....	88
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUDING REMARKS.....	116
APPENDICES.....	127
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	130

CHAPTER 1: AN INTRODUCTION

"She had always loved quilts, loved the feel of the fabric and the way a quilt could make color blossom over a bed or on a wall. She couldn't see a quilt without thinking of her grandmother and without feeling a painful blend of love and loss."

(Jennifer Chiaverini. The Quilter's Apprentice. 1999, 18.)

Excerpt from "Natural Resources" by Adrienne Rich, 1984
(Rich 1994, 16)

12.

*These things by women saved
are all we have of them*

*or of those dear to them
these ribboned letters, snapshots*

*faithfully glued for years
onto the scrapbook page*

*these scraps, turned into patchwork,
doll-gowns, clean white rags*

*for stanching blood
the bride's tea-yellow handkerchief*

*the child's height penciled on the cellar door
In this cold barn we dream*

*a universe of humble things ---
and without these, no memory*

*no faithfulness, no purpose for the future
no honor to the past*

I grew up with a grandmother who worked the land and quilted. In her living room was a frame with a beautiful quilt spread across it. I was fascinated by the colours and the patterns of the fabric. I remember running my hands across it, feeling each stitch and the various textures.

When her friends came over I watched as they stitched, as they moved their needles carefully through the material. They discussed a variety of issues that I did not really understand at the time, but nevertheless, I continued to listen intently.

After my grandmother's friends would leave, she would sit me down and show me how to quilt properly, with small stitches that ran along the pattern. She would also explain certain parts of the conversation that interested me. She taught me, she developed my love of textiles, of art, and of the people that made these beautiful creations.

I, like my grandmother and her friends, was influenced by the conversations in a small, rural, Maritime quilting circle.

I am writing this thesis because I look back upon my aunts and grandmothers, who were needlework artists, as inspiration, especially my grandmother Ruby Sharp. I speak about quilting not only because it informs my personal history, but because it is part of almost every rural Canadian woman's history. Unfortunately, despite quilting's importance as a textile art, it is absent from much academic literature. Through existing quilting literature, along with interviews collected for this thesis, I will demonstrate how despite the fact that quilting remains an outsider art, quilting groups provide a forum for women-organized community work. Furthermore, I will illustrate how the conversations within quilting groups are underscored by feminist ideology and lead to empowered identities. From this idea, I will reveal how these two attributes are reinforced as the result of a safe space that enables conversations and that provide

women with the environment to discuss, debate and resolve the needs and issues of their communities.

THESIS STATEMENT

"If you have ever sat around a quilting frame with a group of women, you will know that the talk centres not just around homemaking, child-rearing and the latest hot gossip. The topics are frequently serious matters affecting the life and health of the family, community and the country." (Conroy 1976, 86).

When I began this project I asked, "how do the conversations within quilting circles contribute to the development of the identity of women in a rural, Maritime Canadian community?" Following my research I have come to answer my question with a single word: empowerment.

Through my conversations with twenty women who are quilters in Southern New Brunswick, I have come to discover that conversations lead to knowledge-sharing and creation. This exchange of ideas via conversations results in those involved becoming more engaged in group leadership positions or in other community activities. In other words, these women become politically engaged through their work within their community. Furthermore, these conversations and this political involvement are underscored by feminist ideals and principles that provide a sense of empowerment to the endeavours that are undertaken by all group members. Each woman, as we shall see, exemplifies how the conversations in quilting groups enable political engagement, support feminist ideals, and thus permanently change her identities, giving her confidence and therefore empowering her.

In order to examine and deconstruct my investigations in a manner that supports my argument, I will first explore the main topics found in quilting literature: knowledge, feminism and politics, via an extensive literature review. Expanding on these themes has been a challenge given the research methodology employed to collect my data. In other words, the intimate nature of my interviews revealed that a gap exists between scholarly discussions of the impact of feminist theory on quilting and the lived reality of the quilters who participated in my research. Therefore, my goal is make this thesis an approachable piece of literature that almost everyone can read in order to create more discussion on the topic of quilting groups and identity that highlights the voices of those women directly involved.

There are two reasons why I see this project as important. Firstly, there are my personal motivations relating to my lived experiences. Secondly, there is the issue of a lack of scholarly literature on quilting. My literature search surrounding the subject of quilting culture reveals several short-comings in what has been documented. There is little discussion in the literature about quilting groups on how the conversations have historically evolved into movements or other tangible socio-political actions, and into definable parts of women's identities. To expand upon current writing and to better understand my relationship with quilting, I will seek to discover how conversations emerge within the quilting groups and how they develop individual and group identities.

SITUATING THE PERSONAL

As I have grown up with my grandmother situated as a primary role model, quilting has been made an important part of my life. However, as I grew, my respect of the artistic merits of quilting returned and therefore my admiration of the group that created these expression-filled pieces of history. I began, and continue, to reclaim my understanding of the quilting group.

I was sitting on my bed labouring over the idea that I had a thesis to write, yet had no topic. Other thoughts penetrated this process: my grandmother was sick and in the hospital. My hand moved over the quilt she made that covers my bed and I remembered watching her and her friends working away on countless quilts for the Kings County Historical Society. I smiled and I had my idea.

My history has led me to appreciate the importance of rural life. All of my experiences with quilting groups have been in a rural setting as that is where my grandmother lives. Despite knowing of quilting groups in urban areas, I am rooted in a rural environment and therefore see the importance learning more about quilting in these regions.

Furthermore, beginning 2006 until the summer of 2008 I worked as a researcher at the University of New Brunswick, Saint John on the Community-University Research Alliance (CURA) project. My work has directed my attentions to the changing demographics of Saint John, Kings and Charlotte counties and has exposed me to the reality of the decline of rural communities in these regions, thus sparking a feeling of urgency in collecting these stories.

My feelings of urgency for conducting research in these region was compounded by the hospitalization of my grandmother for a life-threatening health condition, which was also a reason for her quilting group's dissipation.

My personal experiences were reinforced following my review of quilting culture literature that revealed a lack in substantive research that qualifies where, in a geographical sense, quilting groups were located. Therefore, since little has been explored in terms of quilting locality, I have decided to use my experiences and thus will direct my focus on quilting in a

rural setting while drawing comparisons from groups in more suburban and urban locations.

Because I have such a close connection to the quilters in this region of New Brunswick and there is a notable lack of quilting culture discussion focused within this region, I have decided to approach my writing in an alternative way to the traditional presentation of a thesis. Firstly, I will convey my thoughts and ideas in a less formal, scholarly language. This concession was made because there is so little literature and I wanted to create something that anyone could enjoy and hopefully learn from. Secondly, my accessible approach has prompted me to embrace my personal history and experiences through the use of a personal narrative. This approach parallels the intimate nature of my connection to the quilters who form the core of this study. Additionally, while the complex relationships among the family and friends who participate in the quilting group may appear to be preventing authentic exchanges of information, it has been these same personal connections that have enabled me to collect the data used for this thesis.

PROBLEMS IN THE LITERATURE

In the academy, quilting groups tend to be examined as platforms for women to express their thoughts and share ideas, with the focus being predominantly on American quilters (Parker and Pollock 1981; Barnett Cash 1995). Furthermore, existing literature on quilting circles approaches the topic from a very generalized perspective. In a book about Nova Scotian quilts, the

authors state that during the nineteenth century, quilting provided women with “strong informal support networks among female relatives and friends. Making quilts was... significant as a community occasion, where women could combine their socializing with productive...activity” (Robson and MacDonald 1995, 19). Aside from this brief focus on how discussion played a role in quilting, Scott Robson and Sharon MacDonald bypass the role of conversations in the expression of women’s identities, as do many other authors.

In contrast, my interviews for this thesis reveal the influence of these groups and the conversations that take place as having an effect on individual and group identities, and enabling me to question how these conversations develop. Any in-depth inquiry about the creation of quilting discussions and their role in developing quilter’s identity is consistently lacking in current literature that looks at quilter identity as one sees it expressed in the works of Parker and Pollock (1981), Elsley (1996), and Carolyn Mazloomi (1998), who show the reader that: “Quilts, in particular, have provided women with outlets for their social and political concerns since the colonial era; they have been used as weapons against a range of societal injustices” (Mazloomi 1998; 92). Nevertheless, these authors do not fully explore how the conversations of quilters redefine one’s identity through empowerment and lead to participation in political activities. Moreover, one should be aware that although I recognize the importance of the quilts as a means of expression, this thesis is not an examination of art history. The result of my social sciences approach is that I

have not focused on the types of quilts produced by the groups, nor have I conducted an analysis of any of the quilts I have encountered during my research.

After I had decided the topic of this thesis, I delved into the archives of various universities, public libraries and museums with the hopes of finding a niche for this thesis; in other words, a flaw or a question left unanswered in the published works. As I went to these places I discovered the literature relating to quilting was sparse and therefore difficult to find. The importance of my project became clear, as there is so little written about quilting and the ideas of quilters.

I was able to find literature dating back to the early twentieth century as well as records of women's political and personal thoughts from the early nineteenth century. The books I found had overtly feminist ideals embedded within the text, while the majority of the journals spoke of daily life in a simplistic fashion. Some of these publications, primarily authored by women such as Lucine Finch (1914), Ruth Finley (1929) and Elizabeth Robertson-Wells (1948), went beyond standardizing patterns and sought to explain the importance of quilting and quilts to women's identities¹. Ruth Finley provides a prime example of this early documented knowledge:

¹ The view of these authors reflect the dominant white perspective of quilting culture. Lucine Finch's 1944 article on Harriet Powers's provides a charged insight into the perspectives of quilting in regards to culture and race. Additionally, more contemporary authors, such as Floris Barnett Cash (1995), have brought to light the important role of African-American/ Canadian quilters to the quilting culture cannon, as these women are often overlooked yet have contributed extensively to the art of quilting through their designs.

This little matter of economics was only one of two primary reasons for masculine dominance. There was the equally influential factor of education. The individual man may not have had a tenth of the sound judgement of his womenfolk, but being of the educated class as education went, he was supposed to have it or so claimed it. Even in the minor instances where comparative wealth afforded women greater ease and culture, few were permitted free expression in the decoration of their homes or in truth their persons. Men ordered the stuffs....

In needlework only did women hold full sway (Finley 1929, 20).

A gap in the literature records there was almost nothing political written again until the 1960s, considered by many activists and scholars to be the beginning of the Second Wave Feminism (Weedon 1999, 1). This is the time period that also saw the beginnings for the theoretical frameworks known as materialist feminism and craft history. The theory of materialist feminism looks at the exclusion of women within art (Delphy 1984), while craft history explains the importance of craft to the art community (Wolff 1993). From that point through to the late 1980s the majority of the writings I discovered, such as those of Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock (1981), Lynne Walker (1988), Lisa Tickner (1988), explored needlework, including quilting, as a means of women's expression. Recent authors such as Gladys-Marie Fry (2003), Janice Weaver (2006), and Janet Floyd (2008) have begun to resurrect academic interest in needlework and quilting. These writers add a new dimension to previous examinations by revealing that the connection between quilting culture and feminist ideals continues to exist and by noting the role of quilting in terms of expressing various identities, specifically those of race and culture.

Based upon these analyses relating to the shortcomings of current literature there are three areas that must be highlighted in order to understand the niche that my work fills. Firstly, the majority of the literature approaches quilting from a distinctly American perspective (Dickerson-Bergen 1894; Webster 1915; Finley 1929; Dewhurst, MacDowell and MacDowell 1979; Parker and Pollock 1981; Parker 1989; Walkley 1994; Barnett Cash 1995; Elsley 1996; Floyd 2008). Robson and MacDonald (1995) are the only recent Canadian contributors to the quilting canon. There is limited information regarding quilting in Maritime Canada (Robson and MacDonald 1995, 19), and there is only one publication exploring quilting as a part of New Brunswick craft history: Alison Crossman's Master of Arts thesis *Framing the Quilt: Historical and Contemporary Quilts of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia* (1999). While Crossman is exceptional in highlighting the material history of quilts in comparison between New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, she does not focus particularly on New Brunswick, group quilting, or quilter identity. From this lack of information we miss the unique perspectives that these women can contribute via their life stories, not only to quilting history in Canada but also to the local history of rural New Brunswick. Early research conducted for this project revealed that the majority of written documentation on needlework situated in the Maritimes, including New Brunswick, explores rug hooking (Fitzpatrick 1999). Nevertheless, personal, lived experience and the exploration of journals from as

far back as the early nineteenth century have shown me the important place quilting continues to occupy within many rural² communities.

Despite historians tracing evidence of quilting in almost every culture dating back hundreds, even thousands, of years (Archer 1994, 11; Floyd 2008, 41; Weaver 2006, 7) the majority of authors have narrowed their view to the United States of America going back to the late colonial period. This large amount of research from an American perspective has been the result of a large effort to maintain a documented history. For those of us who live outside of this geographical placement the lack of Canadian literature is frustrating. In fact one such author, Mary Conroy, who wrote *300 Years of Canada's Quilts* (1976) states on the very first page that she decided to create a book on Canadian quilting because she was angry about such little attention given to quilters in other parts of the world (Conroy 1976, ix). Scott Robson and Sharon MacDonald (1993), and Alison Crossman (1999) must be commended for promoting Maritime-Canadian quilting; nevertheless, a large gap in our knowledge of quilting in this region exists.

Due to the lack of research on the quilt history of rural Maritime Canada and the ways in which identity is created in the quilters belonging to these communities, many of the stories from our mothers, grandmothers and great-grandmothers are being lost to time. My personal connection to quilting and

² Not all of the journals and diaries I examined were written by rural women, although the majority of these writings were from rural women or from women who grew up in rural communities and migrated to urban centers.

quilting circles is something I share with many rural Maritime Canadian women.

Secondly, the material nature of the quilts overshadows the work of the quilters in most writing. I am not trying to mitigate the importance of quilts in the expressing of women's ideas, beliefs and experiences. My point is that the majority of writings, including Parker and Pollock, (1981), Robson and MacDonald (1993), and Weaver (2006), just to name a few, reflect primarily upon the material and not the hands that have pieced and quilted the fabric. In other words, the majority of authors writing about quilting are missing the verbalized thoughts and stories that go into the making of a quilt, thus the development of politically empowered community of women.

Thirdly, quilting literature mentions quilters without having them speak for themselves. For example, although Parker and Pollock (1981) claim that "characteristically, the role of the maker is rendered less significant" (Parker and Pollock 1981, 71) in comparison to the material creation and that "moreover the women are reduced to skilled hands and eyes as if quilt-making bypasses the mind, feeling, thought or intention" (Parker and Pollock 1981, 71) these authors fail to relate the direct stories of the quilters to the reader. Parker and Pollock are not alone and more recent publications continue to overlook the actual voices of quilters. Authors who have claimed that quilting has provided women with a voice, as a means of expressing their feelings and thoughts towards an unjust and

inequitable society, neglect to include the verbal stories passed around the quilting frame.

RESEARCH APPROACH

There is a process to creating a quilt. First, using either a pattern or an original design a quilt top is fashioned. Second, an insulating batting (usually cotton-based) is placed under the top. Third, a simple backing is placed on the other side of the batting. Fourth, these three layers are stretched out via a frame and are quilted together, with the stitches following either a basic or elaborate pattern³. This process of quilting together the layers takes the largest portion of time in making a quilt, especially when done by hand as many of the groups who I met with do. In the course of my research it was this group quilting session that I utilized because quilting requires group members to meet regularly for several hours in order to complete the quilt. As so much time is spent together, these women form close relationships based upon their many conversations on a large variance of topics. Unlike other forms of needlework, such as weaving, these women are situated in a quiet space with little or no noise from machinery, like looms. In terms of other group activities participated in by many women - physical activity classes - there is no prohibition on the occurrence of conversations, thus making quilting groups uniquely sociable. Furthermore, the lack of literature on these discussions, and thus the focus quilting culture history via the created quilt and diary entries, is due to the fact that many of the quilters of the past are no longer alive to verbally share their ideas. The fifth stage is to remove the quilt from the frame and bind the edges, thus producing a final product.

Following my decision to pursue this topic and my realization that there were gaping holes in the literature, I decided to examine the role of quilting groups in the formation of group and individual identities. In this thesis I will show how the group quilting experience defines the self-perceptions of its members and fosters a sense of belonging within the larger community.

³ Quilts can also be "tied". This form of producing quilts is where small segments of yarn are "quilted" and knotted throughout the quilt using a grid-like pattern. This form of "quilting" was not used by any of the groups I visited who engaged in the practice of quilting in a group.

I chose the location of Kings and Saint John Counties in New Brunswick primarily because I have a large network of contacts who, I hoped, would (and who did) assist me in finding quilters and quilting groups to share their stories. I also tapped into the New Brunswick and Kings County Museums as contact resources and as valuable sources of information relating to the historical points of the region. This contact-gathering aspect of my research plan went exactly as I had hoped it would. In fact many of the quilters I met knew my grandmother and via that familial relationship, they knew me.

My grandmother was, to me, always a well-known community figure. When I started my research and mentioned this familial connection, I was not surprised that many of the quilters either knew her personally or had heard of her. Furthermore, this personal and intimate connection with the interviewed quilters has altered my research for this thesis.

I am an insider who is on outside. I have grown up quilting and have been involved within the larger communities, but have not participated in any quilting groups. Yet, it has been between my relationship connections, my abilities in quilting and the amicable nature of the groups I was instantly welcomed. However, it is important to note this nature of the quilting groups that creates personal relationships. I was easily drawn into these relationships.

These relationships have altered this thesis in three ways. First, it enabled the quilters to better open up to me and thus allowed for me to ask spontaneously created questions. Second, this spontaneity resulted in unexpected topics to be brought up, such as ageing. Third, with the advent of unpredicted points of conversation my assumed ideas about the arguments made for this thesis were altered.

Once I had met with all of the quilters I intended to answer specific questions based upon the collected information. Prior to meeting these women I developed these questions steaming from the literature I had read. Furthermore,

following the completion of the process of collecting interviews these questions changed as a result of the stories and knowledge shared with me. These questions, as shown below, had been generated as a result of my initial literature review and my personal experience before I started interviewing.

1) How do these conversations maintain the women's relationships with their community-created environment?

2) Rural life is popularly perceived as being focused on the quotidian (everyday mundane experiences), a perception that has the power to stigmatize the self-concept of those living in rural regions. To dispel this myth of a fatalistic lifestyle, I will question how do quilting conversations move from the day-to-day topics to communicating abstract ideas that result in social activism? Furthermore, how are abstract conversations impacted by identity creation process facilitated by group conversations?

3) How has feminism changed or affected the formation of this quilting space? Is this space still considered to be safe? How has this "safe" space been expressed by the group's identity?

In the process of attempting to answer these questions I encountered unexpected topics of discussion that I initially felt unprepared to handle, in particular the strong influence of religion.

I grew up in a Catholic family. I went to Catechism and I endured all of the rites and rituals that youth must participate in when they are part of the Catholic Church. Furthermore, I was a curious child; I questioned everything. As far back as I remember I have been disenchanted with the Church and have questioned its teachings. Following my Confirmation I completely renounced my association to Catholicism and, generally, organized religious practices: I became a non-believer.

Although, I remain a non-believer and still retain my disenchantment of religious organizations, I have come to have a new appreciation for the sense of community that various religions create and maintain within rural regions.

There were two groups I observed during group quilting sessions and several groups that had members willing to participate as individuals to share their stories. These primary groups were the United Church Women (UCW) from the United Church in Hampton, Kings County⁴ and the quilting group under the Anglican Church Women (ACW) from Upham Parish, King County. I also interviewed the founder of the French Village Quilt Ministry, A. LeBlanc. In the course of my research I also met with members of the Marco Polo Quilting Guild, the Kennebecasis Valley Quilting Guild, and with those belonging to the Portland United Church UCW quilting group and those participating in the Bloomfield Anglican Church ACW quilting group. Finally, I was privileged to meet with a quilter who for many years quilted with the Kings County Historical Society, and who taught me how to sew and how to quilt – this talented artist is my grandmother, Ruby Sharp from the community of Midland in Norton, New Brunswick.

As I have pointed out, much of my work took place in groups that were under the agencies of a religious organization. Therefore, the role of church provided spaces is dominant in relation to group quilting and the conversations that occur during the group as it establishes a space for the activities to take place.

⁴ Although, current studies (by Statistics Canada and by myself and Dr. Robert MacKinnon through research for the CURA (Community-University Research Alliance) at the University of New Brunswick) on the demographics of the Greater Saint John area, which includes municipalities within Saint John, Kings and Charlotte Counties, show Hampton to be suburban, many long-term residents, including myself, see the Hampton community as maintaining its rural appearance.

RECRUITMENT PROCESS

To begin my research I intended to simply go to my contacts within the Greater Saint John academic and quilting communities, get the addresses and/or phone numbers of small quilting groups, then send out letters explaining what this project was about. However, as I began visiting my contacts I realized that simply sending out these letters would not have the desired impact. I was informed that the best way to ask for the contributions of these groups' members was to first go to the group and then present the "recruitment letter" following the end of the meeting. This method worked in a way that I never expected because I had never considered it; almost every group I visited welcomed me and appeared to happily accept sharing their stories and conversations.

Excerpt from my research journal:

As my time with these women draws to a close, I know I'm going to miss their company and their stories. My experiences with them have provided memories that will last a lifetime. I'm happy I took more time from this busy schedule I have set to get to know these ladies.

April 21 2009

Many of the quilters I have met with were not surprised by the lack of women's voices throughout the history of the region and understood their contributions to this thesis are important. Their appreciation of this invisibility of women made them more open to share their stories. Moreover, because I have decided to share my power over this thesis project with these quilters, they had the option to remain anonymous and to have their stories preserved in the New

Brunswick Provincial Archives and at the Kings County Museum. All of the quilters selected to have their interviews preserved and therefore, direct copies of these stories are available at both places.

STORIES

Throughout my information gathering process I met with twenty ladies from various quilting groups through Kings and Saint John County⁵. I attended two of the local guilds monthly meetings, one guild's weekly meeting, four rural quilting groups and one quilt ministry. The average age of the individual women I met with was 70 years old with the oldest two quilters being 88 and the youngest one being 45. The average amount of years spent quilting was 32.47 with the most years spent quilting being 75 and the least amount being 3 months (Appendix A). These quilters were all Caucasian women. Although I did not inquire into the economically defined class of the quilters interviewed, I did ask about geographically-based location and the quilters revealed to me that fifteen resided in demographically rural communities while five lived in the city of Saint John, an urban community. Eighteen of the twenty quilters interviewed for this thesis spoke English as their first language, with the other two women speaking either French or German, although the origins of the interviewed quilters was more varied as several were born outside of the province including three who came from Europe.

⁵ During the time I was visiting these groups no men were actively involved. Furthermore, based upon the interviews no men have participated in these groups in living memory.

I began this project unsure of the groups I would be meeting. After attending some of the monthly guild meetings and inquiring about the existence of small rural groups, I was informed that I should contact churches throughout the region. Initially I had no intentions of visiting churches; however, the only small quilting groups I could find were associated with a church. During this process of searching for a group and having only discovered groups within churches, I have noted the importance of religious institutions to maintaining the existence of rural group quilting in southern New Brunswick.

To collect the information for this project I have both conducted individual interviews and observed and recorded group conversations. I find that this mixture has enabled me to draw comparisons between how the quilters view themselves and how they engage within the group. Individually meeting with each quilter provided the opportunity to ask her about personal thoughts on the activities and conversations of the group and her feelings about being a member of the group. While, on the other hand, participating in the group reveals how the conversations are developed and how individuals participate in these settings. In reflecting upon these group discussions, I was obligated to consider my own engagement.

I refuse to deny my initial lack of experience in conducting interviews, because to do so would be hide the development process of this thesis. When I had begun to write my proposal, thoughts of my how my shyness would impact meeting individually with the quilters forced me to consider how to approach the interview process. The first ideas that I had were to have interviews which had a few basic questions and that allowed the story teller to open up, thus

allowing the conversation to take other avenues that I had not considered and had not anticipated.

My first story-sharing session was with A. LeBlanc who has quilted regularly since 1995. Although we covered the primary questions, my slightly nervous state prohibited much of the planned openness. I left my session feeling frustrated and filled with thoughts of questions that I should have asked – she answered some of these questions throughout group meetings. However, as I journeyed to each interview my confidence grew and therefore my questions expanded and spontaneity occurred during every meeting. This provided new dimensions to the knowledge as I pieced together stories; therefore, taking the project in unexpected directions as anticipated under the theoretical model of grounded theory (Appendix B).

THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

"Language is not limited to words." (Carroll Smith-Rosenburg 1986).

I had the inspiration of my grandmother to develop this project. I had the contributions of the quilters from southern New Brunswick to make this thesis a reality. However, in order to give some structure to the ideas I have collected from various forms of literature and from the stories that have been shared, I had to find a framework. Like the quilting of the three parts of a quilt – the top, the batting and the back – I have needed a frame; a means of stitching together all of my ideas, the previous literature, the history of the region, and the thoughts of the

quilters. In writing this thesis project I have chosen three theories to create my writing-frame: craft history, materialist feminism and grounded theory.

"Women involved in the production of quilts recognized their validity as art." (Dewhurst, MacDowell and MacDowell 1979, 48).

To begin understanding how I have pieced these varying theories together, I shall explain the role of each theory separately then I shall explain how I have used this combination of methodological practices to interpret the issues raised through the stories of the interviewed quilters.

Firstly, craft history is a theoretical framework that is based upon an understanding that within the art community, craft artists have been marginalized and it focuses on the value of their art forms and shows how craft artists are represented within artistic communities (Parker and Pollock, 1981). My choice for using craft history as a theory stemmed from my supervisor, Dr. Sandra Alföldy, who made the initial suggestion. This approach within art history is rarely found in academic literature prior to the 1980s with three notable exceptions: Ruth Finley's 1929 *Old Patchwork Quilts and the Women Who Made Them*; Marie Webster's 1915 piece *Quilts: Their Story and How to Make Them*; and C. Kurt Dewhurst, Betty MacDowell and Marsha MacDowell's 1979 book *Artists in Aprons: Folk Art by American Women*. During the 1980s craft history began to emerge as distinctive academic subject with the publications of Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock's (1981) *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*, Parker's (1989) *The Subversive Stitch*, and the 1988 anthology (eds. Judy Attfield

and Pat Kirkham) *A View From the Interior: Feminism, Women and Design*. For example Dewhurst, MacDowell and MacDowell use craft history to point out that “during the years when American and European painting consisted only of representational styles, quilt artists were already exploring the purely formal elements of color, line, texture, and shape.” (Dewhurst, MacDowell and MacDowell 1979, 48). Despite the varying theoretical approaches taken by craft academics, one perspective that remains constant in the majority of writings is the importance and influence of feminism and feminist art history.

Secondly, I have selected materialist feminism because this theory explores the marginalization of women’s contribution within art and material culture (Delphy 1984). My decision to utilize this theory resulted from my position as a student of Women’s Studies and from a personal experience-based knowledge that the art of quilting (within my selected geographical region) is primarily practiced by women. Materialist feminism explores the relationship between objects and group marginalization. This methodological framework originates from the Marxist idea that industrial capitalism has marginalized artists by reducing artists’ statuses to an isolated and alienated group within “the branches of capitalist production and social organization” (Janet Wolff 1993; 11-12). Furthermore, materialist feminists argue that this marginalization of artists is

compounded with discourses of group (predominately of women⁶) who are marginalized within the art community itself (Delphy 1984; Walker 1988; Hennessy 1993; Schell 2003; Barad 2008). According to Rosemary Hennessy (1993) "material life in the form of human activity sets limits to human understanding: what we do affects what we can understand" (Hennessy 1993; 37) and Christina Walkley (1994) claims that patchwork quilts represent a "metaphorical language" (Walkley 1994; 32). In other words the examination of material culture is intricately connected to our perceptions of the constraints of language via the implications that both material and language have on defining how one understands social relations. Additionally, because craft history is predominately associated with women, the relationship between craft history and materialist feminism is closely linked. This connection between these two theories reaffirms the role of feminism in understanding quilting.

Excerpt from my research journal:

I am new to grounded theory, but I enjoy it. This theory is like drifting down a river because you let your interactions with those you meet guide you as you allow the current to move you along to a new part of river. However, grounded theory, as I am discovering, can also be like the water of the ocean. Each wave is a surprise bringing something new ashore for discovery.

April 2009

Thirdly, I have selected grounded theory to conduct research and analyze the stories shared with me. Grounded theory enables those who are conducting

⁶ Moreover, materialist feminism expands its conceptualization of oppressed groups beyond gender and also includes examinations of artists from various racial, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.

research to develop conclusions without hindrance from other theoretical frameworks. For example the developers of grounded theory, Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, point out that the researcher "trying to discover theory cannot state at the outset of his [/her] research how many groups he [/she] will sample during the entire study; he [/she] can only count up the groups at the end" (Glaser and Strauss 1973, 60). This idea is how I have utilized grounded theory. Since I have stitched together three theories, (craft history, materialist feminism and grounded theory), I have maintained portions of the hypotheses rendered from the first two theories. The introduction of grounded theory has enabled me to follow a direction in collecting stories as defined by the quilters.

Grounded theory was introduced to me by my second-reader Dr. Linda Christiansen-Ruffman, as a means for conducting the group observation and the collection of the quilters' stories, and of analyzing the stories I have collected. Developed in the late 1960s by Glaser and Strauss (*The Discovery of Grounded Theory: strategies for qualitative research*, 1973), grounded theory is a qualitative form of conducting research. In other words, grounded theory and qualitative research utilizes information collected through personal interactions without requiring any one specific method for the collection of the data. On the contrary, grounded theory and qualitative research encourage the researcher to collect and analyze data and to follow all leads until there is a theoretical understanding. They discuss this point as theoretical saturation and have reached the research quota. Furthermore, Glaser and Strauss point out that "saturation can never be

attained by studying one incident in one group. What is gained by studying one group is at most the discovery of some basic categories and a few of their properties. From the study of similar groups...a few more categories and their properties are yielded" (Glaser and Strauss 1973, 61). In other words, from comparing groups or subgroups⁷, the comparer codes the similarities and differences and is from that point able to generate a theory with solid arguments pertaining to the topic.

Conversations within quilting groups impact the women involved by contributing to their ideas and beliefs. The result is the creation of a group that plays an active role within the local community.

Before analyzing how conversations around the quilting circle develop, it is necessary to understand the literary history of the quilt. Chapter Two explores the presence of women, craft and quilting in literary works, from exploring initial writings in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and quilting's importance within feminism and other socio-political actions to perceptions of quilting in popular culture.

Following this summation of the history of craft and quilting, I will, in the third chapter, explore the history of the region, primarily focusing on the history of craft within Kings and Saint John counties. This review of local history is to provide a historical contextualization of the communities I engaged

⁷ In this case, groups and subgroups within the overall quilter community that extends throughout southern New Brunswick.

with, to understand the evolution of specific communities, groups, quilters, and issues that arise and are debated during quilting sessions.

With this completed historical investigation, my fourth chapter will contextualize the quilters involved in the various quilting groups, and the fifth and sixth chapters will analyze quilting conversations, seeking to show how the women participants within this study are empowered from their quilting group experiences and how the groups contribute to the communities where they are set. This analysis will include a discussion on feminism, how these women have been defined by their experiences within the quilting circle, how knowledge is created and shared within the group, and how the group is part of the larger community. All of the questions I have established for myself to answer will be resolved within in this chapter. I will, therefore, demonstrate how the women involved in quilting circles have more empowered identities because of their involvement within the socio-political actions taken by the group within the community. Moreover, in order to understand the revelations made in Chapters Five and Six, we must first know the history of women within craft, craft within art, and art within society.

CHAPTER 2: QUILTING CULTURE in the LITERATURE

"In patchwork it is possible to read the whole story of these women's lives, because patchwork was a universal occupation, creative outlet and metaphorical language." (Walkley 1994, 32).

Quilting is considered to be a means of visually retelling history (Archer 1994; Barnett Cash 1995; Elsley 1996). However, it was not until the nineteenth century that writing about quilting began. Fictional authors like Stephens 1857 *The Quilting Party* or Maritime-Canada's most famous authors of fiction, Lucy Maud Montgomery, who was a quilter herself and who wrote stories about quilts when she was between twelve and fourteen (PEI Government 2007), used quilting as a narrative device. Non-fictional literature about quilting has also impacted our perceptions of quilting, through the documentation of quilting as politically subversive as well as tracing how our understanding of quilting has changed throughout the centuries.

Research on quilting culture tends to come in bursts of interest by the academic community, namely the 1840s, 1890s, 1970s, and 1990s (Floyd 2008). I was not aware of the current re-emergence until I began exploring the literature. From this literature I have learned the position of quilting within the history of craft, and the role of the quilt as an object in influencing the discourses that contribute to the identities of quilters and quilting groups.

Exploring the literature surrounding the quilt can be broken down into four sections. Firstly, there is the role of magazines and the standardization of patterns, which emerged during the Industrial Revolution. These publications have communicated, en masse, quilting practices, therefore redefining local

quilting activities (Walkley 1994, 33). Secondly, books published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The books from this period revealed that there was more to quilting than pretty fabric, that it was a place for women to express themselves in a multiplicity of ways. Thirdly, feminist authors engaged with needlework and quilting and built upon earlier ideas of quilting. Fourthly, popular perceptions of quilting and quilters have influenced society's understanding of what it means to be involved in quilting culture. From these pieces of written text, one is able to easily review the use of quilts and quilting groups as a means of resisting societal norms and recording history in an alternative medium.

MAGAZINES AND PATTERNS

Writing about group culture, including group quilting, began in the early nineteenth century with the advent of magazine publishing, which made standardized patterns easily accessible to the masses. This standardization began in urban areas as these places were the centres of industrialization, and filtered into rural regions, thus impacting rural quilting culture. During the 1840s the United States experienced a "small flurry of stories about the patchwork quilt in popular magazines of the day" (Floyd 2008, 38). From these publications came further writings about quilting in fiction and written records of quilting processes, which formed the understanding of quilting.

The publication of quilting magazines and patterns continue today and have shifted to Internet publications. Not only have these publications

homogenized the practice of quilting, they have also promoted the commercialization of quilting (Barnard, Chambers and Granville 2000, 10). Although the promotion of quilting within consumerist lifestyles has underscored the cultural and materialist expression placed within quilts and quilting, this commercialization has redefined how society understands quilts, quilting and quilters. As Bonnie Slauenwhite⁸, one of the storytellers for this thesis, argues:

Do you know what, I think it's been through marketing. You know, everything's become very commercial. You never use to pick up magazines, I mean you would get a quilting magazine, but all these companies wouldn't be advertising their fabrics. And, I mean, if you've got a company and you're marketing somewhere, something, you have to show people how to use it. So they have people designing and doing quilts. Well why would you put satin in the quilt if you don't make satin? You know, you put in your hundred per cent cotton. You let them know the pluses on using a hundred per cent cotton, and that's it. But if you look at the old quilts, as you say, your grandmother's, you see scrappy quilts, the crazy quilts, there'd be velvet, there's be all sorts of things in it. They have one in at the New Brunswick Museum, and the filling in it, the batting isn't wool, it isn't hundred per cent cotton or whatever, it's old Stanfield's underwear. 'Cause that's what was available. They [the underwear] was made in Nova Scotia. Sometimes people got a hold of them, you know, pieces of the stuff or they had underwear that got a hole in them and they could sew them together, they'd have their big combinations and have big pieces of stuff. Some quilts were made with newspaper inside. (Bonnie Slauenwhite 2009).

EARLY HISTORY

Marie D. Webster's *Quilts: Their Story and How to Make Them*, published in 1915 and Ruth E. Finley's *Old Patchwork Quilts and the Women Who Made Them*,

⁸ All but one of the participants for this project have agreed to use their first names for this project.

published in 1929 are two of the earliest books available on quilting to researchers in the Maritime Provinces. However, more recent quilting authors have shown us that books on quilting culture primarily began in the time of the late Industrial Revolution (the early nineteenth century). Janet Floyd (2008), for instance, explains that “quilt stories have always appeared in bursts, but this group [of writings from the 1840s] marks the first appearance of a significant body of quilt fiction. [Furthermore], [t]o read these early narratives is to find the quilt used as the focus for explorations of the process of constructing history” (Floyd 2008, 38). Although not non-fictional writings, as Floyd argues, stories surrounding quilting culture were another means of women constructing their own history, thus making these writings feminist in their support of women’s knowledges and history.

The two books I was able to collect are exceptionally provocative in their feminist content. Both authors highlighted how quilting provided women with agency in their lives, or, in other words, control in their decision making process, as indicated by the title of Finley’s book: ...*The Women Who Made Them*. Furthermore, the authors demonstrate how this agency was fostered by the space in which the quilting took place and the social networking that occurred during quilting get-togethers: “In fact, it is hard to overestimate the community influence of the quilt. It was the one grand excuse for the forgathering of home-tied women. ... Over the frames, gossip, news, and opinions were exchanged” (Finley 1929, 36 & 37).

Approaching quilting from a feminist perspective is not new, as the various literature on quilting tends to focus on quilting as a form of women's empowerment in many ways, from provoking social activism to the destigmatization of an individual's identity (Dickerson Bergen 1894; Webster 1915; Finley 1929; Dewhurst, MacDowell and MacDowell 1979; Parker and Pollock 1981; Parker 1989; Walkley 1994; Barnett Cash 1995; Elsley 1996; Floyd 2008). According to the authors who have researched early non-fiction literature (Bronner 2002; Parker and Pollock 1981; Walkley 1994), early authors wrote about quilting in a way that foreshadowed the writings of feminist artists from the "Second Wave" of the feminist movement, which did not begin until the mid-1960s (Stryker 2008, 98). Early publications on quilting were later picked up by feminists during the 1970s, thus re-enforcing the role of quilting groups in empowering women within the community.

SECOND WAVE WRITINGS

"Needlework is a pretty occupation for a woman's hands. No governor and no scholar noticed it and the women who made it did not guess that their needles were prophesying the World Revolution." (Wilder Lane 1963, 11&12).

From the late 1970s to the 1990s there were a number of feminist writings that focused on crafts, including quilting, as a means of expression for women, such as Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock (1981). During this period quilting emerged as an academic study along with other textile arts and was reclaimed by the feminist movement through the method of materialist feminism. Authors at this time, including Christine Delphy (1984), tended to look back upon the

writers from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as markers for how quilting, as a material part of history, was used to empower women and thus redefine their identities. Drawing from these works Delphy claims that “materialism is not one possible tool, among others, for oppressed groups; it is the tool precisely in so far as it is the only theory of history for which oppression is the fundamental reality, the point of departure” (Delphy 1984, 159). Moreover, this use of materialist feminism revealed that “some contemporary quilt groups...[view] quilts as political rather than decorative statements” (Elsley 1996, 21). In other words, quilts and more generally craft can be used, as materialist feminism claims, as a means of demonstrating activism related to social oppression and not merely as decorative blankets.

Growth in the recognition of quilting as a political action has dominated current craft history literature via a materialist perspective. Walker, for example, states that the Arts and Crafts Movement “provide[d] an alternative to the commercial system [of art] that excluded women” (Walker 1988 172). In looking at quilting as a means of empowerment there is much reflection on reclaiming and defining the importance of craft and quilting history to the development of current feminist theory from women’s roles within politics to gender roles in anti-oppression activism.

In these Second Wave writings there are those who write about the importance of the quilter and her identity as expressed through her work. Parker and Pollock highlighted how the identities of the quilters have been lost

with the recognition of quilts as pieces of art: "moreover the women are reduced to skilled hands and eyes as if quilt-making bypasses the mind, feeling, thought or intention" (Parker and Pollock 1981, 71). With the application of materialist feminism and craft history methodologies, quilts and quilters have been put under a new light; in other words, it avoids the traditional reduction of quilts to decorative, utilitarian objects and of quilters to individuals without dynamic identities. Beginning in the late 1970s and 1980s, quilting and quilters were seen as being subversive with the understanding of how quilting groups were used to facilitate the American women's suffrage movement (Dewhurst, MacDowell and MacDowell 1979; Parker and Pollock 1981; Delphy 1984; Walker 1988; Tickner 1988; Wolff 1993). Some authors within the canon express the importance of quilter identity more than others. Authors who fail to explain quilter identity include Robson and MacDonald (1993) whose book, *Old Nova Scotian Quilts*, does not fully examine how the relationship between the discussions within quilting bees and those quilters who design the pattern/fabric layout of a quilt is a reflection of identity creation. While non-fiction or scholarly quilt culture authors tend to exclude topics outside their research field, fiction authors are able to explore all aspects of quilting culture including the identities of quilters, making these identities the defining point of the narrative.

NOVELS AND POPULAR PERCEPTIONS

"In fictions, quilts are often narrated as autobiographies or family history. At the same time, insofar as patchwork quilts may be formed from disparate and recycled elements organized into a square, they may be understood as texts that reject history's arrangements from setting out the past in a linear form." (Floyd 2008, 38).

Non-fiction quilting literature of the nineteenth century had a radical impact on how we continue to understand the practice of quilting. Floyd highlights this influence by stating: "Quilting has been embraced as a tradition of determined, even rebellious, response to oppression as well as, in Judy Elsley's (1996) words, 'a journey of self-empowerment' ... This triumphant sense of the quilt as an icon of...women's creativity on the one hand has helped to generate a canon of quilting stories of considerable visibility" (Floyd 2008, 39). However, quilting fiction reflected the importance of quilting to society as well as how women recorded their personal versions of history. Parker and Pollock (1981), Cecilia Macheski (1994) Judy Elsley (1996) and Janet Floyd (2008) all provide an examination of various stories about quilting including "The Patchwork Quilt" (1845) by Annette [pseudo.], "The Quilting Party" (1849) by T.S. Arthur, "A Quilting Bee in Our Village" (1885) by Mary Eleanor Wilkins Freeman, and countless more. They point out that these tales give a "triumphant sense of the quilt as an icon of American women's creativity..., [and] has helped to generate a canon of quilting stories of considerable visibility" (Floyd 2008, 40). The increasing public profile of quilting led to the written documentation of quilting groups.

DESIGNING SPACES

"Dialogic learning makes possible women's transformations...and this is experience for many of us who found a space...where we count." (Butler, Puigvert, Beck-Gershelm and Leberon 2003, 141).

Along with the standardization of patterns, non-fictional writings about quilting from this period enable us to reflect upon history from the perspective of women. Writing from and about nineteenth century quilting highlights the importance of quilting groups for women and the expression of their identities. Throughout the late 1700s and early 1800s "quilting parties were a form of social life" (Robson and MacDonald 1995, 18). However, these groups and parties facilitated more than a place for women to share matters that were considered trivial. These group quilting sessions provide safe spaces (Parker & Pollock 1981, 78; Parker 1989, 11; McInnis-Dittrich 1995; Barnett Cash 1995, 32; Elsley 1996, 54) where women performed their gendered roles, yet were able to speak freely about issues that they were traditionally barred from discussing in public, thus facilitating the idea of the subversive space used during the suffrage movement. Expression of these issues occurred beyond verbal discussion and debate, and were placed directly into the quilts, as materialist feminists point out via well-researched (or famous) quilts such as Harriet Powers's "Bible quilt" (Fry 2003, 85) or in the quilt patch "The Gossips" by Eunice W. Cook (Dewhurst, MacDowell and MacDowell 1979, 48) which depicted a critical level of understanding about how the quilting process could be considered subversive towards masculine politics. Not only can these quilts be read as containing

subversive visual clues, they also reveal how the very crafting of these works represent the abstract, critical nature of the artists who design and create quilts.

The apparently simplistic creation of "domestic art" (Parker and Pollock 1981, 70; Barnett Cash 1995, 32) enabled women to be:

situated...outside of patriarchal authority without appearing to threaten fathers and husbands....[Furthermore], women who had slim hopes of speaking freely within the confines of the most authoritative representative of patriarchy - the church organization - could speak openly to each other in the context of a bee. Whether they were conscious of it or not, the quilting bee gave women an opportunity to speak their stories in a safe environment. (Elsley 1996, 54).

In other words, quilting within a group enables the development of conversations by creating a space that supports variance in discussable topics, which move outside of appropriated normal gender-sanctioned dialogue. Lynne Walker (1988) further highlights this movement of discussed topics: "Women were able to sidestep the restrictive practices enforced by the sexual division of labour in commercial production and found more options, more freedom of expression and, significantly, more financial rewards, through arts and crafts alternative practice" (Walker 1988, 167). Moreover, in the process of sidestepping these restrictions, women utilized their position within society to leverage themselves into masculine-dominated society through churches and home-makers' associations.

An excerpt from my research journal:

Today I spent the day calling churches via the phone numbers I found in the local phone book. I know this is not a good traditional academic way of

approaching my quest to find a quilting group; however, I'm having a hard time expanding from the guilds and I'm not very traditional.

February 15th 2009.

Under the guise of being proper women and only engaging in domestic activities, many women were involved within church and home-makers' quilting groups which enabled women to engage in public community work. However, through the process of maintaining their domestic façade these women were undermining the societal constraints that created the need for such masquerading. During the time (from the early nineteenth to the early twentieth-centuries) when the political views of women were overtly silenced within the patriarchal system, ideas that were considered by mainstream society to be subversive were debated openly by the women belonging to the quilting groups in this era as a part of women's community work.

The early authors of non-fiction quilting literature, Dickerson Bergen (1894), Webster (1915), Finley (1929), and Robertson-Wells, remarked on the importance of quilting spaces provided by churches and homemakers' association. These women were the first to illustrate how quilting is a tool to develop women's identity. As Webster (1915) points out, "quilts occupied a preeminent place in the rural social scheme, and the quilting bees were one of the few social diversions afforded [to women] outside of the church. Much drudgery was lightened by the joyful anticipation of a neighbourhood quilting bee" (Webster 1915, 151). Since 1915 writings on this matter have changed little. In 2001 Halpern, while exploring women on Ontario farms from the early to

mid-twentieth century, claims that "[t]he church sewing and quilting bee, an exclusively female activity, was a welcome (and socially acceptable) distractions from marriage and home life. It also afforded women the opportunity to exchange local news of particular interest to them.... Talk at the bee most often centred on community happenings and homemaking matters, but discussions also tackled political issues of...concern" (Halpern 2001, 61). Quilting within groups continues to be important for the maintenance of healthy, rural societies.

HISTORY

Judy Elsley, through her exploration of the early authors of quilting literature, reveals the feminist and subversive nature of the quilt group experience. In sync with Elsley's revelation, Bernice Archer (1994) argues that "once sewn together, the quilts became greater than their separate parts and demonstrate how women's apparent conformity to the feminine ideal masked their astute political awareness" (Archer 1994, 13). Free from societal constraints women were liberated within these quilting spaces in terms of voicing opinions, developing their identities, and sharing ideas that would be key in the formation of the First (early 1900s) and Second waves of feminism (Tickner 1988, 14).

Since the nineteenth century quilting women have been conditioned by their gendered positions within the status quo; however, they were able to work within that position to express not only their unique identities but their desire for social change. The expansion of "acceptable" dialogue as documented in

literature on quilting has enabled contemporary academics to explore how quilting stories of the past are reflected in the socio-political actions taken by quilters today.

BEYOND THE STITCHES

"As long as people have been making quilts, they have been using them to tell stories, to commemorate important events, and even to tackle social and political issues." (Weaver 2006, 7).

Quilting is, for many people, a group activity; therefore, one should not be surprised to learn that the conversations that occur during frequent meetings result in social and political action. In this section I will highlight how quilting conversations are an opponent to the status quo that restricts and oppresses. Following this explanation, I will illuminate three examples of large-scale socio-political uprisings that have all been fostered through quilting culture.

Superficially, quilts appear to be simply decorative or utilitarian blankets and quilting groups appear to be composed of people, primarily women doing nothing but sewing and sharing 'insignificant' discussions; however, there has been a strong level of resistance associated with quilts and developed within quilting groups. Subversive actions in the process of quilting are reflective of the unique space created in the making of quilts: Elsley refers to this space in relationship to the quilting circle as "a journey of self-empowerment" (Elsley 1996, 4). Moreover, the quilting "bee served to assist each woman in the completion of her quilt, but its greater values lay in the opportunity it afforded women for getting together to exchange news, recipes, home remedies, fabric

scraps and patterns, to discuss political issues and personal problems” (Dewhurst, MacDowell and MacDowell 1979, 47). From these discussions of political issues, there have been three notable uses of quilting and quilting circles that not only empower women and other marginalized people, but which disrupt the linear approach that is taken in recording events.

“For vast numbers of nineteenth century women, their needles became their pens and quilts eminently expressive texts.” (Ferrero, Hedges, and Sibling 1987, 11).

Firstly, documentation from the late 1800s to the early 1900s reveals how quilting has been used for social and political change, concentrating on the women’s suffrage movement in the United States. Floyd states that quilting and stories about quilting were a way for women to create space in the “public sphere” (Floyd 2008, 43). Furthermore, Parker and Pollock provide an example of the social forum that quilting bees facilitated for women. “At one such occasion, for instance, women in Cleveland, Ohio, heard the first speech in support of women’s suffrage made in that state by the later famous feminist campaigner and writer, Susan B. Anthony” (Parker and Pollock 1981, 78).

Secondly, another early record of utilizing quilting as a forum for challenging the status quo was in terms of abolishing slavery, particularly in America. There are many stories surrounding the use of quilting in the struggle against slavery, and Floyd points out that “quilting has been embraced as a tradition of determined, even rebellious, response to oppression” (Floyd 2008,

39). This embrace of quilting as a “rebellious” act against slavery is examined in depth by Floris Barnett Cash (1995), who states that:

Black and White women in the North [part of the United States] used their quilting skills to support moral, political, and reform issues. They held fairs and bazaars to raise funds for the Underground Railroad, anti-slavery newspapers, and female anti-slavery societies. Hand made quilts were popular items at fundraising events for Female Anti-Slavery Societies. African-American women joined interracial organization or formed their own separate societies. (Barnett Cash 1995, 32).

From Barnett Cash one can see how quilting groups opened various anti-oppression conversations, thus revealing the connections that can be made between marginalized groups. Mazlooni and Roderick Kiracofe (1993) speak of one outspoken (American) abolitionist, Sarah Grimké who was quoted as saying: “May the points of our needles prick the slave owners’ conscience” (Kiracofe 1993, 108). Furthermore, Harriet Powers’s widely popularized “Bible quilt” gave one of the first visual voices to black women on record (Finch 1914; Fry 2003). This appliqué quilt depicted stories from the Old and New Testaments, yet interwoven into these stories were references to African oral histories and “proto-feminist” perceptions (Fry 2003, 90). Grimké’s remarks and Powers’s “Bible quilt” illuminate the realization by social activists in the nineteenth century that the craft of quilting could be used to publically express the subversive conversations that occurred within the quilting circle.

These early events carried into the 1960s in the form of the "Freedom Quilting Bee" (Barnett Cash 1995, 37), which sought to end segregation and to establish the recognition of Black women within craft history and within a general perception of history. Barnett Cash explains that:

quilts can be used as a resource in reconstructing the experiences of African American women. They provide a record of their culture and political past. They are important art forms. Yet, until recently, the historical contributions of African American women to craft were virtually dismissed. (Barnett Cash 1995, 30).

Pat Ferrero, Elaine Hedges, and Julie Sibler (1987) initiated this idea when they stated that "quilting bees could...function for black women as they did for white, as invaluable agents of cultural cohesion and group identity" (Ferrero, Hedges, and Sibler 1987, 48). Therefore, not only was quilting used to support ending slavery and racial discrimination, quilting was used to express the identity of Black women and to record their histories.

Thirdly, in a more contemporary light, the NAMES Project is one of the most recent uses of quilting as a subversive, empowering, and consciousness-raising social act that records history. In an "album quilt" (Archer 1994, 13), each piece of patchwork is simply a name that represents an individual who has died of AIDS. Beginning in November 1985, this on-going quilt has raised awareness about the AIDS pandemic. Surrounding the quilt were oral narratives and open discussion that sought to dispel myths about the disease and the people it affected. According to Clive Jones and Jeff Dawson (2000), this quilt and the conversations that went with it introduced society to the importance of

finding a cure to HIV/AIDS. Jones writes about the first display of the NAMES quilts at the National Mall in Washington D.C. on October 11th 1987:

The response to that first display was overwhelming, something I had not imagine or planned for. I'm convinced that every single person who saw the Quilt with their own eyes became an evangelist, telling a few friends who told other, really turning the tide of grassroots support. And certainly the newspaper coverage spread the world. We were on the front page of newspapers around the world, even as far away as New Delhi. (Jones and Dawson 2000, 136 and 137).

Writings about these social movements have revealed the alternative way that quilts and quilting bees enabled not only women, but other marginalized people to express their identities and beliefs. Furthermore, "through their quilts women [and other marginalized groups] became, in fact, not only witnesses to, but active agents in important historical change" (Ferrero, Hedges and Silber 1987, 11). Ferrero, Hedges and Silber's statement is the defining point that connects quilting to materialist feminism. By revealing the utilization of quilting as a record of the experiences of marginalized groups, materialist feminism provides a means to analyzing and reclaiming the importance of quilts within traditionally ignored histories. The acknowledgement of quilting as a means to record and influence history has changed how many academics regard quilting.

"[T]he quilt will not simply tell a story but [will] make plain an event of universal importance." (Fry 2003, 87; interpretation of quotes from Harriet Powers, 1914).

As these three examples demonstrate, women along with other oppressed people have harnessed the power of conversing and visual expression from within the safety of quilting spaces. Both historical and contemporary quilting conversations have noted this activity as a form of identity creation. The examination of these conversations is not new, as literature dating back to the early nineteenth century shows that quilting discussions were the opening dialogues to many social movements. Janet Floyd (2008) notes that “quilt fictions are frequently – and with clear justification – thought of as texts which reflect, if not celebrate, the shared experience of women and the situation of the women artist” (Floyd 2008, 39). Furthermore, Lisa Tickner illustrates how approaching various forms of art from a Materialist Feminist and craft history perspective is accomplished by pointing out how suffragist women worked with women artists to challenge “the question of women’s cultural creativity [that] was constantly raised by their opponents as a reason for denying them the vote” (Tickner 1988, 14). Quilting conversations have been used to reclaim and challenge gendered roles and have broken down barriers and misconceptions about people who fail to adhere to traditional, ‘appropriate’ social engagement. By creating change, those involved in quilting culture empower themselves and others with whom they interact.

“Sometime, even those who aren’t present that day at the quilting group can benefit.... [If] the community knows that one of its members has a problem that may be eased with a friendly phone call, an offer to babysit, a job, a lawyer, a place to rent- the feelings of commitment to each other is reinforced.” (Kavaya and Skemp 2002, 7).

From the exploration of the evolution of the quilting culture canon, we can better understand the components that are defining in quilters' lives. Furthermore, knowing what has happened with quilting in the past can guide us into the future. Before moving forward to see how quilters in southern New Brunswick fit into the scope of the existing literature, we must understand the history of these communities and this geographical region, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Placing these women in a historical context will provide us with a clearer understanding of the discussed community issues.

CHAPTER 3: LOCAL HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

Except from my research journal:

New Brunswick is my home. As much as it annoys me off with feelings of being caught in a dead-end, I feel a connection to the land that I cannot explain. Perhaps this connection is the result of knowing that for generations my blood has been part of that land. I can trace most of my family living there back at least eight generations.

Today I took a break from transcribing interviews in order to explore New Brunswick's Eurocentric history so that I can place this project into a historical context. I know that New Brunswick's history extends further, however, quilting does not appear before the 1700s and due to various constraints on me during my research I, unfortunately, did not meet with quilters from Aboriginal origins. As I browsed through the books I found family members I have never met but know and I found the families of friends. Each time I read a name or a story about a familiar place my heart felt comforted as though I was hugged by a loved one. It was then that I truly recognized how deep my love runs for the land that my family has settled on for hundreds of years.

May 23rd 2009

WHY LOCAL HISTORY?

An overview of local history, beginning after the point of European colonization of the land, is vital to understanding the conversations I recorded when meeting with quilting groups and individual quilters. The history of quilts and the culture of quilting as outlined in Chapter Two parallels an understanding of how quilting has played an important part in the empowerment of women and thus as a foundation for the discussion of feminist ideologies and for the staging of socio-political activism. Yet it is rare for local historians to consider quilts, and therefore they exclude the views of women and overlook an important social role of women. My examination of regional history focuses on the voices of women and recognizes the influence of quilting. Traditional historical observations focus on the actions and decisions of men in power. This version of history overlooks

the important roles of women living within the early industrialization period, also part of the Victorian period, and acts in a way that restricts society's perception of women's knowledge. Regarding women in this manner as lesser in comparison to men, parallels the view of quilting as outside art history. What is more knowing the history of the region enables one to understand why certain issues are chosen topics for discussion and how these points of conversation became issues within the community. Knowledge of the region's history with respect to the roles of women and quilting – despite the limited academic literature focusing on the region – will allow us to the place these quilters' stories occupy in the existing written works.

"Women from various cultural origins made quilts during the late 1800s and early 1900s [and continue to do so today]. However, it appears that they learned the basic techniques from British tradition, perhaps introducing cultural preferences for colour or pattern." (Robson & MacDonald 1995, 12-13).

Women have always been politically active in a variety of ways no matter their status within general society and even when not allowed to vote or campaign in elections (Light & Prentice 1980; Conrad 1985; Huskins 1994; Campbell 1994). Furthermore, the roots of quilting run deep in eastern Canada⁹, America and throughout most of the world as we have seen through the research of many authors (Webster 1929; von Guinner 1989; Crossman 1999; Bausum 2001; Kavaya & Skemp 2002; Floyd 2008). The case is the same for the Maritime

⁹ Eastern Canada includes: Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador.

Provinces of Canada¹⁰, for New Brunswick, and specifically for Saint John and Kings counties. In order to fully understand how quilting groups have developed in the region we must first understand the overall socio-political changes that have occurred throughout the centuries within these regions and the influence that women had on these changes and how crafts, such as quilting, facilitated a space for socially subversive discussions to develop.

This thesis is a contribution to the history of Maritime Canada in two ways. The first is to place traditional history in relation to the history of women. In re-writing of these current ways of understanding local history to be more inclusive of women, one is able to get a more complete and accurate picture of the issues that existed throughout the European-originated evolution of the region. As I mentioned in an excerpt from my research journal, I only interviewed women who are considered Caucasian and have ancestry in European states. I did not have the opportunity to speak with quilters of Aboriginal origins; moreover, I was unable to meet with any people of colour who participate in quilting groups. I did not intend to or try to be exclusive in my sampling, but my samplings were limited by time. I am not the first to explore local history in such a way, yet those of us who do so are in a minority. My research adds to the existing historical literature by recording the voices of women involved in quilting groups. Although my sample group was limited, an examination of their

¹⁰ The Maritime Provinces of Canada include: New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. The provinces of Atlantic Canada include: the Maritimes plus Newfoundland and Labrador.

conversations opens up discussion of how quilting can be an invisible socio-political force even to the quilters involved.

My second means of assisting in the re-writing of history is by highlighting the importance of quilting within the region. Quilting has been traditionally overlooked in research focusing on artistic expression and industry in the region.

An excerpt from my research journal:

Today I spent my time cooped up in the warm New Brunswick Museum's Research Library. I poured over journals and swept up the library's collection of quilting and needlework. As the day was drawing to a close and I began to pack up my things, I turned and saw a book on the shelf behind me called Art in New Brunswick (1967). I was so excited! Finally a focus on craft arts within the province!

I opened the book and scanned the chapter listings. Nothing. Then I moved to the index on a quest for New Brunswick quilting. Nothing. I finally skimmed through the book thinking that perhaps there was a mistake. No, there was no mistake. There was absolutely nothing on New Brunswick quilting in the book that declared its focus to be on craft in New Brunswick.

Furthermore, as I continued to peruse the book in hopes that I had perhaps overlooked something, I noticed that, with the usual exception of rug hooking, all of the crafts were predominately male-orientated activities. Women were almost completely excluded as craft artists!

January 14th 2009

Despite the omission of quilts in New Brunswick histories, my research supports the assertion that quilting groups in the region are forms of political action that require as much attention as elections.

LOCAL HISTORY AND WOMEN

If you walk up to almost anyone living in or around Saint John they will proudly proclaim that Saint John was Canada's first incorporated city and the majority of communities are just as old (Acheson 1985, 4). The Royal Charter establishing this fact came from England on May 18th 1785 (Wright and Roy 1987, 5); however, when people now speak of the Saint John area they are referring to the city itself, and the outlying communities of Hampton, Quispamsis, Rothesay, St. Martins and Grand Bay-Westfield¹¹. Three historical influences have defined Saint John and Kings Counties since this time: the Industrial Revolution and the society shifts associated with it, the American Revolution, along with the mass importation of Anglican beliefs; and the steady decline of the city of Saint John as an economic and social hub in North America which has resulted in the contemporary state of the city and surrounding communities. In each of these periods women have played an important role within the Greater Saint John communities as household managers and as a political force. These historical points of change will provide us with an understanding of how the quilting communities within surrounding rural communities have been shaped by shifts in the local society, including changes in politics and the economy.

¹¹ All of these communities (plus the town of Sussex) make up Kings County. The city of Saint John and the village of St. Martin's are within the county of Saint John.
Note: Due to transportation issues I was unable to attend groups in Sussex, St. Martins and Grand Bay-Westfield.

The Early and Later Stages of Industrialization of the Saint John Region

In the late eighteenth century the Greater Saint John communities were on the forefront of industrial innovation and trade in North America as the result of a strong shipbuilding industry (Light & Prentice 1980; Huskins 1994; Robson & MacDonald 1995, 12). Saint John's position as an industrial power was due to the region's proximity to the United States, its sheltered, open port and its large quantity of trees. According to Harold E. Wright and Rob Roy (1987) "seaborne commerce quickly became the mainstay of the local economy. Fish, furs, masts for the Royal Navy, livestock, grains and other foodstuffs were traded, and shipbuilding started to flourish" (Wright and Roy 1987, 8). Women's role during this period of industrial growth was within the household (Crossman 1999, 13). Much of the workforce resided within the boundaries of the city, owners of business and trade lived on the outskirts of the city, in Rothesay. Quispamsis to Sussex and beyond has been primarily agricultural lands. What is more, due to the area's predominance in industrial activities (Samson 1994, 259) and as new technological innovations were introduced and the resulting standardizing of the needlework industry (Shackel 1996, 15; Neary & Shink 2008, 6), the changes experienced by those engaged with needlework were notable.

While the Industrial Revolution, which was at its peak in Britain in the 1840s (Wright and Roy 1987, 7), may have brought about many technological advancements, women's roles within society began to be strictly repressed under the guise of propriety. The importance of contributions made by women within

society, politics and the economy became diminished as society in most of the Western world, including southern New Brunswick entered Victorian attitudes about sex and gender. This point in time saw the introduction of 'separate spheres' in society. Women who were (and remain to be) stereotyped as being delicate and "incapable of sophisticated, abstract thought" (Code 1991, 195) were said to belong to the private/domestic sphere while men resided in the public/political sphere of society (Haydem 1981, 1; Callen 1988, 151; Kirkham 1988, 174; Huskins 1994, 145). For example Parker and Pollock speak of needlework as having enabled women to negotiate these spheres and tells us that needlework "has provided a source of pleasure and power for women, while being indissolubly linked to their powerlessness. Paradoxically, while [needlework] was employed to inculcate femininity in women, it also enabled them to negotiate the constraints of femininity" (Parker and Pollock 1989, 11). The introduction of the concept of public and private spheres in society negated the value of the roles of women; nevertheless, this line of separation was not solid. Women living during the Victorian period of the Industrial Revolution in the Kings and Saint John counties constantly pushed the boundaries of their 'acceptable' social roles.

Although women living in the early part of the Industrial Revolution in southern New Brunswick may not have published books and articles on women's history or on the engagement of women in current affairs, these women wrote in diaries. They also participated in petitions and parades (Light & Prentice 1980;

Huskins 1994; Campbell 1994; Wilson 1996) and occupied respected roles in household maintenance, particularly within the rural regions where physically demanding tasks needed to be preformed:

One diarist, Elizabeth Goudie, recollects her life as a trapper's wife, stating, 'the wife of a trapper...had to live as a man for five months of the year.' While Goudie sees the skills necessary for providing for the family as gendered, she makes it apparent that women were fully capable of performing such duties" (Crossman 1999, 13).

Diaries (also some letters) and records of petitions and parades provide a window into life for women in the Greater Saint John region during the industrialization period. However, it is important to note that these insights are exclusive in their nature, for the women who were able to write diaries, make petitions and organized parades were primarily well educated, of the middle or upper class and are Caucasian (Conrad 1985, 42). Nevertheless, these actions do provide us with some insight into the views and thoughts of women from this era on women's status within society.

In light of my utilization of first hand accounts into lived realities, I review past documentation that highlights the direct experiences of women who lived in the region from the eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries. Margaret Conrad's (1985) article looks at the act of diary keeping by women from 1750 through to 1950 in the Maritimes. Through her work Conrad highlights some of the voices of women from Kings and Saint John counties. Unlike men from the eighteenth, nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries, women had very few outlets for personal expression. One such woman who felt repressed by society

was Mary Coy Morris Bradley (1771-1851) who wrote about her first husband and attempting to find solace within preaching. Frustrated by societal constraints, bounded by the law and by oppressive codes of behaviour, Morris Bradley wrote:

“When I was married to Mr. M., not having much previous acquaintance with his temper and disposition, I expected to receive the greatest marks of attention, kindness, and indulgence from him. But I soon found that, being his wife, I was bound by law to yield obedience to the requirements of my husband; and when he enforced obedience, and showed marks of resentment if his wishes were not met, I was tempted with anger, and felt a spirit of resentment arise in my heart....

‘I had always heard that women had nothing to do in public, respecting religious exercises, and that it was absolutely forbidden in the Scriptures for a woman to pray in public or to have anything to say in the church of God. Under the consideration of those things, I felt much shame and confusion and knew not how to endure it. I said nothing to anyone upon the subject; but I pondered it over in my heart.’” (Mary Coy Morris Bradley as quoted by Conrad 1985, 45 & 46).

Morris Bradley’s words show us that there were women who indeed were capable of and active in expressing their thoughts in feelings in a traditional written manner. However, for those who were unable able to express their thoughts and beliefs in this manner, quilting provided a forum for negotiating this strict social structure. Parallel to this technologically-based social change (the Industrial Revolution) there were a large number of immigrants in the area, specifically the Loyalists who arrived as a result from the end of the American Revolution or War of Independence and who redefined the socio-political structure of the region.

The American Revolution

"Loyalists built their own houses, did their own joiner work, mason work, glazing, and painting... [moreover] women spun, knit, and wove linens and woollen cloth." (Rees 2000, 44).

At the same time as the greater Saint John area began experiencing its early industrial advancement, another change came to the region with the end of the American Revolution and the arrival of approximately fifteen thousand Loyalists from 1776 to 1782 (Frank 1997, 59; Conrad & Hiller 2001, 100). The arrival of these refugees to New Brunswick and its neighbour Nova Scotia brought early British-American-colonialist ideals, religious beliefs, and means of ordering society and politics. According to Ronald Rees (2000) "Loyalists moved into the [Kennebecasis] valley from Saint John, slowly at first because the lower Kennebecasis [region] is too rough for farming, but above Hampton the valley softens into a smiling vale... Today it is one of the few truly pastoral regions of New Brunswick" (Rees 2000, 30). Following the arrival of the Loyalists immigration into the region continued (Soucoup 1997, 75) with thirteen thousand people arriving by 1826 from the entirety of the United Kingdom (Wright & Roy 1987, 8).

This large influx of immigrants included many people who were Irish-Catholics. These people were largely discriminated against and held very little sway in the traditional politics of the region (Murphy 1999, 10; Conrad & Hiller 2001, 105). Therefore, the politics of Saint John and of the surrounding communities were, and remained, based upon Anglican principles and ideals.

Anglicanism was ingrained into the regional politics because of the hardships faced by these immigrants as Rees points out:

For insecure refugees, faith and regular devotions were both a comfort and, by fending off barbarity and the wilderness, a shield. But for planners of the settlement, and particularly for the distant officials in the Colonial Office, the role of the Anglican church [sic] was less that of a shield against the wilderness without than a regulator for controlling the wilderness within. (Rees 2000, 112).

While the wilderness has been tamed, the ties between Anglican beliefs and the socio-political climate of the communities in Kings and Saint John counties remain. Margaret R. Conrad and James K. Hiller (2001) support Rees's statement, claiming that "[i]n the wake of the American Revolution the British government was eager to strengthen the Church of England as a way to bolster the authority of the Crown and reinforce a rigid social structure" (Conrad & Hiller 2001, 103). Because local governmental politics were established this way, Anglicanist ideals are in part maintained within the infrastructure of governmental proceedings. Jack Jedwab (2008) comments on the role of the church in socio-political engagement, yet he does not focus on southern New Brunswick or even on the Maritimes. His work, however, does look at the historical role of religious organizations within Canada in regards to socio-political participation, mainly volunteering. Jedwab claims that "[f]rom Confederation to the middle of the twentieth century, religious communities continued to work closely with provincial authorities in large part because they were responsible for the provision of charitable and philanthropic services" (Jedwab 2008, 28). This has

been the case for the communities of southern New Brunswick, as many charitable activities are based within organized religious communities.

Contemporary Views

In the beginning of this chapter I mentioned my thoughts on Saint John communities being a 'dead-end'. I know from personal experience that I am not alone in having this feeling, for many of my friends and acquaintances agree that our communities can become much more than what they currently are. Once prosperous and considered to be a hub of social, political and primarily economic activity, the greater Saint John area has been in decline since the mid-1800s. By 1860 the 'Golden Age' of shipbuilding was beginning to ebb; however the Great Fire of June 20 1877, which destroyed central Saint John, "gave many businessmen the opportunity to shift their capital from the shipping business to banking, transportation, merchandising and other land-based service industries" (Wright and Roy 1987, 9 and 10). Likewise, "in the 1880s shipping barons in the Maritimes decided to invest their fortunes in railway and manufacturing ventures rather than in a steel and steam-driven merchant marine – a decision that led to a rapid decline in shipbuilding" (Conrad & Hiller 2001, 118). Still, Saint John remained an industrial centre largely dependent on shipping and shipbuilding. Unfortunately, 2003 brought about the complete demise of the shipbuilding industry in Saint John as the shipyard closed forcing the people of the surrounding communities to face rapid change. This, along with the ever-shrinking population (Statistics Canada 2006, Online), forced the Greater Saint

John communities to respond affirmatively through balancing traditional industrial activities with new means of social and economical development. Women in the region have been and remain, part of this change through their involvement in their communities (Conrad & Hiller 2001, 205). As interviewed quilter Miriam Haines illustrates for us that the conversations within the quilting group reach out into the larger community: "Yes. I think we take it back to the community.... I know that I tell things to my daughter, discuss things with her that go on ' cause she knows a lot of people here since she's been teaching for 20-some years" (Miriam Haines 2009).

QUILTING HISTORY

"It is interesting to note that during the years when American and European painting consisted only of representational styles, quilt artists were already exploring the purely formal elements of color, line, texture, and shape." (Dewhurst, MacDowell and MacDowell 1979, 48).

Quilting plays a major role in Kings County and Saint John County, yet the history of quilting in the Maritime Provinces has not been extensively documented. In the process of researching history of quilting I have come across several writings on rug-hooking in the Maritimes, such as Deanne Fitzpatrick's *Hook me a story: the history and method of rug hooking in Atlantic Canada* (1999) and the exclusive book *Arts in New Brunswick* (1967) that failed to mention almost all

needlework crafts except rug hooking. From these two writings we can see that certain types of craft in the region are prized over others¹², such as quilting.

Yet, quilt culture historians from the Maritimes exist. For example Robson and MacDonald's, *Old Nova Scotian Quilts* (1995) explores the visual history of quilting in Nova Scotia. While focused on Nova Scotia, these co-authors reveal insights into quilting in the greater Maritime region: "By the late 1800s in Britain, factory-made goods had become widely available and functional quilt making diminished. However, well after 1900 people in rural areas of Canada and the United States remained dependent on traditional crafts such as quilting because of practical need" (Robson & MacDonald 1995, 12-13). The second book I found that spoke of quilting in the Maritimes was *Canadian Heritage Quilting* (2008) by Karen Neary and Diane Shink, which primarily discussed various traditional patterns, but initially provides a history of quilting culture in Canada with a focus on the Atlantic Provinces:

The quilting tradition has always been strongest in the rural areas of Atlantic Canada. The earliest settlers grew flax in our maritime climate on newly cleared land, and home industries included textile production of linen as well as wool. At this time, before the Industrial Revolution, most of the family's needs were produced at home (Neary & Shink 2008, 5).

¹² In the early 20th century rug hooking was promoted for political reasons and soon became associated with the identity of various communities and thus of regional pride (Fitzpatrick 1999).

The third writing I noted was Alison Crossman's thesis (1999) where she spoke with art curators and a few notable quilters from New Brunswick and Nova Scotia about the history of quilts. Crossman demonstrates how quilting culture in New Brunswick has endured time and socio-political changes by discussing whether it is the case that "a quilt made (c.1769) by Mary Morton on her family's homestead in New Brunswick is one of the oldest surviving quilting in Canada" (Crossman 1999, 11). This discussion also exemplifies the continued importance of quilting as a cultural attribute for New Brunswickers. These authors provide insight into quilting as it has evolved in the Maritime Provinces, including southern New Brunswick.

Quilting in the Counties of Kings and Saint John

*"Life is a patchwork quilt
And each little patch is a day,
Some patches are rosy, happy and bright,
And some are dark and gray."*

(Elizabeth Decoursey Ryan as quoted by Dewhurst, MacDowell and MacDowell 1979, 128).

Due to the shortcomings in quilting literature I approached my research by delving into the New Brunswick Museum and the Kings County Museum's archives and spent much time pouring over diaries and journals from the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries with little success. In the majority of the journals I found, their authors spoke of sewing as Harriet Paisley did:

Saturday, May 21 - Sewing

Wednesday, May 25 - [R]emained in all day sewing....

Friday, July 8 - Sewed etc.

(Harriet Paisley [Lambert] 1892, Diary)

Whether simply mending, making an item of clothing or quilting, the meaning of these 'sewings' vanished with the passing of the author. Nevertheless, I did manage to discover two exceptions. The first is from the diary of Mary Pike also referred to as Mrs. Charles Raymond Matthew. She wrote:

"Tuesday [December] 31

Busy sewing in morning. ...Went into see Mrs. F. Robinson about the sewing Society." (Mary Pike 1867, 6)

Mary Pike's words display for us, that women were meeting for needlework sessions in southern New Brunswick during the nineteenth century. Although this sewing society may not have focused specifically on quilting, it is still important to note the engagement of women in a women-only space.

The second exception to the monotonously ambiguous mentions of 'sewing' is important because there is a mention of group quilting, hence we have document, first-account proof that group quilting has been occurring in southern New Brunswick over a hundred years. Genvieve Wetmore from Kings County, New Brunswick wrote:

January 1889

"11 Friday

Quite a large Guild meeting tonight in the Church." (371)

April 1889

"5 Friday

Guild and service at the church tonight." (376)

August 1889

"28 Wednesday

Fine. Aunt Eliza went away by boat. We put a quilt on in the office." (383)

"29 Thursday

Fine. We had a few old people in to help quilt." (383)

Genvieve Wetmore provides us with written documentation that group quilting existed in southern New Brunswick. Furthermore, Wetmore shows us the long established role of the church in hosting quilt groups for her engagement with quilting was set within a church. In opposition to the traditional historical explorations that fail to understand the importance of quilting to history, the authors of journals from the 1800s exemplify how quilting has brought women together into a safe space for centuries. Like the writers discussed in the previous chapter, quilting provided a space for women to meet, learn and engage within society while adhering to the societal norms of appropriate behaviour for women.

CONCLUSION

The dynamic history of the Maritime provinces and particularly Kings and Saint John counties in southern New Brunswick, becomes even more vibrant and intriguing as the perspectives of various people, who have been traditionally excluded from historical investigations, continue to surface. In this section I have shown that this thesis project is another addition to the history of the region by highlighting the voices of the women quilters. Though the insights of women

who lived in local communities we see that since the mid-nineteenth century women have been creating a safe space for conversations via needlework groups. Bonnie Slauenwhite, who shared her voice for this thesis exemplifies how these conversations have continued throughout the generations to focus on the maintenance of the community: "You, you get like what's been the big topic of the week. ... [The conversations are centred on] the concern or the knowledge of the people in the community. You know so and so died, or so and so had a baby or things like that. ... But it's, I think it's a lot that comes to the community and the members of the community" (Bonnie Slauenwhite 2009).

CHAPTER 4: SOME CONTEXT

I could not have created this project without the stories of the women who spoke to me and who welcomed me warmly into their quilting circles.

These next two chapters have been pieced and explained by me, but have been written by the women who shared their stories.

Before I begin to analyze the conversations and my experiences I will provide some background observations that I made about each group. I visited five quilting groups and interviewed nineteen women from these groups¹³ during the course of my research: Upham Anglican Church Women, Hampton United Church Women, the Marco Polo Quilt Guild, Portland United Church Women, and Bloomfield Anglican Church Women and friends. From the women in these groups I gained an in-depth understanding of the roles held by the women and of the importance of the group within the community. In terms of understanding the group dynamic I primarily focused on the Upham Anglican Church Women's group; however, I will not deny that my participation in the other four groups has influenced and informed my understanding on how quilting groups operate internally and engage within the larger community. Due to my participation in many groups and correspondingly, due to the varying perspectives I encountered, we need to understand some basic background information about each group.

First, the Upham Anglican Church Women quilting group is the primary group I focused on and is also the smallest group I met with, as it is predominately attended by Peggy Pollock, Marga Norris, and A. LeBlanc¹⁴. Located in the rural community of Upham, Kings County, this group quilts

¹³ The twentieth woman, my Grandmother, Ruby Sharp, was not involved with any of these groups.

¹⁴ A. LeBlanc also organized a Prayer Quilt Ministry. Although I did attend a brief information session and A. LeBlanc spoke adamantly about this group, I did not include it this contextualization as I only met with one member and did not regularly attend the group.

primarily to raise money to support activities initiated by the Upham Anglican Church. However, the group also works as an unofficial forum for organizing these activities, as well as activities for the other groups in the community that are not directly linked to the church.

Second is the quilting group under the auspices of the Hampton United Church Women. Located within the suburban community of Hampton, Kings County¹⁵, this group was considerably larger than the group in Upham. Through the Hampton group I met with: Lorretta Hanlon, Carmen Walters, Eleanor Kaye, Miriam Haines, Greta McGivery, and Bonnie Slauenwhite. Similar to the Upham group, the ladies belonging to the Hampton group quilt to raise money for their church, while also taking this weekly meeting as an opportunity to make various decisions regarding other church activities. I spent as much time with this group as I did with the Upham group, thus allowing me to note similarities and differences between groups as we shall see in the fifth chapter.

The third group I spent time with is the Thursday weekly meetings of the Marco Polo Quilt Guild located in one of New Brunswick's largest urban centres, the city of Saint John. From this group, I spoke with Daphne Howes, Faith Moar, Sandra Betts, and Lois Edwards. While this group rarely works on group quilting projects, these meetings provide guild members with the opportunity to give and

¹⁵ Hampton is on the fringe of the Greater Saint John area and is still predominately considered rural by members of the community (despite being demographically classed by Statistics Canada as 'suburban') as many farms continue to operate within the town's boundaries.

receive help on various individual projects, and to discuss and organize guild sponsored charity projects. For example, one project the guild asked its members to contribute to was the creation of 'Ouch Pouches' (quilted, pillow-like bags used by women who are going through breast cancer treatment or who have had a mastectomy). These projects unite the individual work done by members in order to contribute to charitable activities, thus creating a sense in members of group inclusiveness.

From Lois of the Marco Polo Guild, I was introduced to my fourth group, the Portland United Church Women's quilting group, which is also located in the city of Saint John, where I met Helen Cobham. This group quilted to earn money for its church, however, also organized other quilting projects to provide directly to community charities. An example of this providing for charity is the initiative of the group to make ten quilts to be placed in the new local Hospice.

The fifth group I met with was the Bloomfield Anglican Church Women and friends' quilting group, which included: Diana Reid, Christina Morrell, Liliane Kyle, Marg Stevens and Cee Pearson. This group originally was just the Bloomfield Anglican Church Women, but after recognizing the benefits of joining together to make the group stronger, the Anglican Women opened up their quilting group to other members of the community (Diana Reid 2009). Although I only met with the Bloomfield Anglican Church Women and friends once, I was informed that this group located in the rural community of Bloomfield, Kings County quilts predominately to raise funds for church organized events;

however, some quilts are made to be provided to organizations such as Hestia House¹⁶.

All of these groups engaged within their communities in varying ways. In the next two chapters I will show how these groups contribute to their communities and how these contributions are vital to women's culture, the empowerment of women, and the existence and maintenance of all communities.

I have, like many students, sat in classrooms, libraries, and through academic discussions. My involvement in these activities has led me to theorize many things, including how those who are not academics interpret feminism and how people come to have and share knowledge. From this theorizing I have come to assume.

Prior to meeting the women I interviewed I made four primary assumptions based upon the literature and on the conversations I had with other academics. Some of these assumptions I discovered were based in fact, yet some of my presumptions were deconstructed completely. Firstly, I believed that the women I met with understood the importance of their conversations as means of sharing a variety of ideas. Secondly, based upon this assumption that there was an understanding of the value of shared thoughts, I assumed that these women recognized the political importance of their engagement within the community. This presumption was further facilitated by the academic literature I read during my research preparations. Thirdly, as I engaged more and more with writings on quilting culture and the politics related to this culture, I came to believe that when posed with the question "would you consider yourself a feminist?" the response would be an automatic 'yes'. Fourthly, my last major assumption was that the women who I met with were knowingly defined by their experiences within their quilting group(s). These four assumptions were made as an academic and were based upon my engagement with quilting culture literature.

When I entered into these groups my assumptions were both confirmed and deconstructed, and ultimately my ideas were transformed by the knowledges shared by these quilting ladies.

¹⁶ Hestia House is an organization that provides shelter for women and children who are escaping an abusive relationship.

CHAPTER 5: FEMINISM/ IDENTITY

Excerpt from the stories of Ruby Sharp:

Ruby: I, yeah I did them by myself. The first quilt I made I made with flour bags.

Danielle: Now why did you choose flour bags?

Ruby: Because you couldn't afford material. But these flour bags were printed colours. ...Yeah. You got your bag of flour, it could be blue or pink and there was flowers on some of them. The material was great! Then you could buy sugar bags, just off white ones. They were used in some of my quilts.

[T]here's two different things. As I said, the tied ones are much warmer because you put a thicker bat in. And so no I don't prefer one to the other at all.

Me: Just depends on how cold you're feeling that night?

Ruby: Well, it depends on if you're in a hurry. If you're a new mother and had three or four kids around then you'd tie up a quilt in a day or two.

(Ruby Sharp 2009).

FEMINISM

"Well because the things that I do are usually just women's things to do, like quilting, but I've done carpenter work, I've done all kinds of things. I helped my husband build this house! And that's not exactly a thing a woman does, but anyway, I did it." (Helen Cobham 2009).

Interpretations of 'feminism' and 'feminist' are complicated. People have widely varying perspectives on what it is to be a feminist and what, in more general terms, is feminism, and these multifaceted perspectives are highlighted in the quilting groups researched. Yet, unlike academic authors (Parker & Pollock 1981; Tickner 1988; Kiracofe 1993) who spoke of quilting groups and the women involved as being overtly feminist, the quilters who shared their voices for this thesis, expressed both an understanding of feminist gains and provided insight into why feminism can remain invisible in society. I asked some of the women interviewed for this project to define feminism and to explain whether or not they would consider themselves to be a feminist. There were three ways in which feminism was expressed by the participants: overtly, tentative, or denied.

Excerpt from my research journal:

*I was transcribing interviews today and encountered one where the woman who spoke to me misinterpreted 'feminism' for 'femininity'¹⁷. Moreover, in between my transcriptions of stories, I picked up Louise I. Carbert's book *Agrarian Feminism* (1995). During her work she encountered the same issue that arose during that one discussion; that is that some "women confused feminism with femininity or femaleness" (Carbert 1995, 135). I at this point I have realized that when I was designing the questions I wanted to ask, I unintentionally corrected a problem that others, such as Carbert, have encountered. The question that I created was: "However you may define it, and please define it, would you consider yourself to*

¹⁷ There was only one woman whom I met that misunderstood what I was referring to as feminism.

be a feminist?" Simply by asking the women to define their understanding of feminism will provide insight into the multiplicity ways that feminism is understood.

June 1 2009

Several of the women were proud to call themselves feminist. Their stories were bold as they highlighted their reasons for accepting the label of 'feminist'.

Sandra Betts spoke of how her struggles in the workplace led to her identify with feminist ideals:

Oh, I've always considered myself a feminist. Up until 1967, I was the typical young mother, young wife who wanted to be everything her husband needed and when we came to Saint John I went to work at the Lancaster Hospital, which was the veterans' hospital. And at the time there was a compulsorily insurance, life insurance that you had to take when you went on staff. But then they would not allow me to designate my beneficiary. Because I was a married woman it would automatically go to my husband, and that put my back up. I did not feel that anybody had the right to tell me, another person, what I could or could not do, and then I became a very strong feminist. And I feel that women were put down for so long, not only through a lot of things like that but I became strong enough that when other things were happening in my life and I was told that my husband had to make the decision: no. My husband does not have to make a decision for me, I make my own decisions. And I felt very strongly about that, and I still do. A woman is a woman in her own right. I am not an appendage. I am part of my husband because I want to be not because owns me. That's my view on feminism. (Sandra Betts 2009)

While Sandra's struggle was in the workplace, Marga explains how she has adopted an overt feminist attitude and beliefs following the passing of her husband:

I find that now when you don't have a husband...you have to fight for things you really want. You have to get upset over some stuff, like

getting the car fixed, getting the furnace fixed. Because you're a woman you can't... do things, so you must be a feminist.

[T]here are men who take advantage, yeah. I get taken advantage of.... Yeah, but mostly when you don't have a husband...you'll get taken advantage of. (Marga Norris 2009).

Liliane provides an overall feeling of discouragement when dealing with men in everyday society:

Yes, in a way. In a way. Yes, because there was too many deceptions with male words to me all around. And I could talk to you for another half hour on that, but I won't. Like, I don't know, we are used as the lower gender, but we are the superior one.

And this is the first time that I was asked this question, and it's truly my belief. I have a good husband, but I've worked all of my life, real hard, to keep things going in my home. My four children, I raised them all, and a lot of my grandchildren too. But maybe it's my fault? There was never any efforts in helping. ... [T]hey [men] think they need that superior feeling of commanding and overpowering of the female. So I'm a feminist. (Liliane Kyle 2009).

Liliane's story resonates as she questions whether or not the oppression she has felt has been her fault because she believes she has not stood up for her rights as a person.

Some of the women associated feminism with their ability to make life choices. For example Daphne explains how for her "feminism is more to do with fighting for the right to be who you are and I was always happiest being out of the work force; you know, I found it stressful being in the work force and got support for staying home, so I guess, you know, I guess it depends on the way you look at feminism" (Daphne Howes 2009). Carmen, Miriam, Loretta, Faith, and Eleanor strengthen this interpretation of self-determination. Carmen tells us

that: "I've always, you know, sort of earned my way and been able to do that. So yeah, if that's what a feminist is?" (Carmen Walters 2009). Furthermore, Miriam adds:

Well I would think I would like women to be treated equally. Earning the same salary for the same type of job. I think we should be respected and I think we should have our, what we chose should be of value as. I think maybe because I have three daughters, maybe that might be why. I think women contribute a great deal to the community. (Miriam Haines 2009).

Loretta's and Faith's responses, while still associating feminism with personal freedoms, stand out because their understanding of feminism means one must overtly challenge society's status. Loretta tells us:

Am I a feminist? I don't think in the true meaning of the word I am. But in a way I am. I'm independent, I still don't mind people opening car doors for me and things like that.... But in the fact that you can go ahead and do your own thing and necessarily not the things that men do, ...I'm into that too." "But now, isn't it funny I don't even know what people really mean by a feminist." "I'm not an out-and-out feminist, I know that, I'm not outward. Just certain ways I think I'm a feminist. Like I nearly always open the door for Lloyd, like going into a store,...if you weren't a feminist you'd expect the man to do that. (Loretta Hanlon 2009).

Faith's response is similar to Loretta's:

In some ways yes and in some ways no. I can't say 'yes I am a feminist' because [I'm] not [in] the extreme feminist movement.... But I do certainly believe that women have their own place in their life. But I don't think that because we are females we should demand extra. Do you understand what I mean? I mean....I expect respect and I expect men to be respected too. I don't expect anymore over and above. (Faith Moar 2009).

For these women feminism has brought about personal independence, yet, as Loretta points out there is no concrete definition of 'feminism'. For Cee, she

does not consider herself to be feminist because of her choice to be a stay-at-home mother:

I wouldn't consider myself to be a feminist. I'm very fortunate to be in a relationship where I truly feel respected and my husband is just as capable of doing anything around the house that other men might find to be of the women variety. You know he's not afraid to cook a meal or do the dishes and I believe in a lot of women's issues. Like I have a daughter who's 23 and a single mom. There's a lot of issues there, you know, that I feel strongly about. But no, I wouldn't out-and-out say, like I'm not a, you know, not a full fledged feminist. No. As I say there are some women's issues I feel very strong about and others not so strong about, maybe it's just the time I was born, the type of mother I had to was a very...she was a mother in every sense of the word and I tried to be that way with my kids. I stayed home with my children; I was one of the lucky ones that was able to. It was a tough decision for my husband and I to make, but I was lucky enough to stay home with my children. (Cee Pearson 2009).

Eleanor highlights a connected point as she reflects on her place in the workforce and why she is unsure if she would classify herself as feminist. Eleanor tells us:

Even though I'm not married. I believe in feminists. I believe we've done a lot for the females. When I first started out [in nursing], women were kept down.... But over the years that I've worked..., I've worked forty-some years,...it has improved, but it could even improve more. I've had arguments about [work]. [Some people] cannot see that a female should be paid the same as a male even though they are doing exactly the same work. And I object to that and I have always objected to it, because I worked with male nurses but in nursing everybody is paid according to what position they had, but that is not the same in business. And I don't know whether you'd call me a feminist or not, but I believe in the rights of women. (Eleanor Kaye 2009).

She then accentuates that she is not really a feminist because she understands feminists to have a lack of civility:

But I don't, you know, I expect men to be polite to women and this sort of thing. But if an older man came onto the bus, I would get up and give him my seat and I see no harm in it. But that's what I mean

some feminists wouldn't. Because I feel that he is having trouble and I'm not having trouble. And, I mean even when I was younger I always felt this way. And I still do because I'm able to stand and this person may not be able to stand or have a cane or something like that. (Eleanor Kaye 2009).

Mainstream society propagates a negative connotation of 'feminism'. To be a feminist is not a positive attribute within certain circles.

The thought that feminism is not something to be proud of or is necessary was something that did come up in one conversation. Lois denied that she was a feminist:

Feminist to me is a very bad term, to call me a feminist. Because I grew up, I played hockey, baseball, soccer, football – I knocked a guy out playing football once when I was about twelve – gymnastics, and swimming.... So where is the feminism in all of that? I played boys' sports better than the boys...and girls' sports than a lot of the girls, and I always was just a person, that I could do what I wanted to do because I live in a country that will allow me to. (Lois Edwards 2009).

Ironically, Lois is a feminist because she sees herself as an equal, which has been the goal of Western feminists. Moreover, Lois's statement is important as she points out the invisibility and negatively constructed ideas of the work feminists have done and continue to do. This invisibility and negative connotations are a reflection of a masculine dominated society continuing to counter the importance of those who seek a world where difference does not mean oppression (Weedon 1999, 12).

All of the women who have shared their stories with me are feminists, whether 'feminism' is understood and proudly proclaimed or whether it is denied. I say this because they have expressed that positive

changes have been made for women, and that change is still needed for women to become genuinely considered and respected as equals in a masculine society.

IDENTITY

"The first thing I will get back is: my grandmother use to make blankets for the beds, is that what you do? And immediately there's this picture of this little old lady in the corner with her quilt frame in front of her stitching away, putting all these little bits and pieces saved fabric back in to make a utility quilt for her home. And I think that's what people generally think as soon as you say 'quilt.' But the way quilting is evolving right now, it's an art form, it's not just utility. As much as I think they're beautiful and everything, traditional quilting does not turn me on. And I mean that's just my personal view because I don't need another blanket, I do need beauty in my life. And making it to me is a pathway to beauty. If I just stood and looked at them, I enjoy them for the moment but the journey of making them is an experience that you'll never lose." (Sandra Betts 2009).

Through conversations that impact knowledge, through community outreach that empowers those involved, and through the varying perspectives on feminism, the individual identities of the women involved in quilting groups are influenced and are redefined. In order to approach this discussion I inquired about their thoughts on how the conversations have affected how each woman perceives herself and how the conversations have assisted in approaching various life changes. Through this previous question I noted that there was an identity associated with the group and an artistic identity. The group associated identity was expressed by all of the quilters and underscored how the group has supported them. The artistic identity, which was primarily individually based, was only expressed by two of the interviewed quilters. Finally, I asked, why did each woman join the group? Since this section is defined by these three points, I

shall begin with how these women perceive themselves in relation to their quilting conversation experiences and will then move on to why these women joined their group(s), which will lead us into exploring how these women via their quilting groups create and ensure a healthy community.

The knowledge sharing and the empowering nature of the group enables the women involved to approach life changes with an educated understanding and to engage in various situations with a strengthened confidence.

Dealing with the changes that occur regularly, and sometimes dramatically, in life can be difficult. Death, familial issues, and the body's natural progression towards maturity are tough topics almost everyone has to encounter. Sandra Betts tells us: "I don't think I'm ageing. I think my body is deteriorating. But I'm growing younger inside." (Sandra Betts 2009). As the subject in this thesis demonstrates having some sort of supportive social network, such as a quilting group, softens these changes and struggles. On the process of grieving, Faith tells us that:

Well it helped me through my grieving process to start with. It got me to meet...it was a whole new facet of my life because I had been nurse in my other life, and then a mother, then a wife. And so it got me started on something new, so it got me over the grieving process, but it's also enabled me to meet a whole lot of new friends and to have something extra to do at home when I am alone. Something I've really enjoyed doing. I have things to do when I am home. (Faith Moar 2009).

Death and family are central conversations around the quilting frame. Another staple are the discussions on the ageing process, which is not surprising as almost all of the women involved in this research are aged fifty or older. When

asked about how quilting helped to navigate the events that come along with maturing, all of the quilters enthusiastically responded with positive statements.

Marg told of how the conversations help maintain one's mind:

I like to think that it's a good mental exercise. You know, like trying patterns and trying to get ideas and keeping active and talking to people about doing things and it's probably sitting a lot. I can't, I find coming and sitting all day, like I'd probably be more apt to do half a day, I like to be more active. A few hours, then do something else.

And I worked in mental health at the time and I called it my mental health group and I kind of see this is invaluable for people who need some support at different times and everybody kind of, there's no lot of talk about it but people just instinctively help that person out; their sensitive to where they're at, kind of inconspicuously help people deal with their lives, but that's the big thing. (Marg Stevens 2009).

As did A. LeBlanc who explained how having people over for a quilting group improves her mood:

I've always felt good about myself. But, like you're human so there are days that, you know, you're kind of down or bored or whatever. You can always call on some of these people or if on Monday, 'ah, I don't feel good,' but Tuesday you go quilting with the group up in Upham and you feel good. Or if you are doing a prayer quilt and people are coming in to tie, then it just makes you feel better to think that you've accomplished something. (A. LeBlanc 2009).

Eleanor approached this conversation from a medical professional's position, yet retained the same line of thought as Marg and A. LeBlanc:

Well I think the more you do, the better you are. And I think all the women that come out to go quilting, I think they all feel much better because they've been out socializing, and socializing is really, it keeps your brain active so we're all trying to keep away from the Alzheimer's. Anyway, I think we do better and you know that anybody that's active they do a lot better. (Eleanor Kaye 2009).

Additionally Loretta finds that the group helps her cope with the emotional aspects of her growing physical restrictions:

I would imagine it has, because that's where you discuss your aches and pains quite a lot is at the quilting. And other people have the same thing. Of course I'm here only 81, I'm getting very, very arthritic. Yeah I think it does, you know you've seen me not be able to get up out of a chair very easily, and they don't make a big thing about it. ... So you know, it probably is helping me, 'cause nobody's making a big fuss over it, which is what you don't want. If I can't get up out of a chair quickly, well then I just can't get up quickly. So that part's really good.

Yeah, I definitely would say that it does. If you're just going to sit back and talk about or moan about your troubles, but if you get out in a group you sort of forget about them. (Loretta Hanlon 2009).

Having the tools, such as a committed social support system (in other words, friends and family), to tackle negative emotions enables these women to become stronger. They are able to gain confidence in themselves as they move forward in life as Sandra Betts illustrates:

"I had no idea where I fit in the quilting group when I first started out. I tried traditional quilting and it's not for me. Then I started doing odd things; the art quilts and everybody sort of looked askance at me but I think now it's become quite acceptable. More and more people are trying different things and I think I'm beginning to make sort of a niche for myself here. People, sort of, don't look askance at me as much as they use to." (Sandra Betts 2009).

Many women spoke of how their confidence grew by becoming engaged with their group(s).

Peggy: I used to be so shy.

Me: Shy?

Peggy: I wouldn't even let my husband let me out with the car when I was in Saint John because I was afraid I'd get lost.

Me: So it [joining the quilting group] gave you confidence?

Peggy: Yeah! Maybe too much sometimes; I think I shouldn't say some of the things.
(Peggy Pollock 2009).

What is interesting in this interview with Peggy is that she believes that the confidence she has gained through the quilting group is not appropriate for women. This interpretation highlights how negative connotations of women's conversations have filtered in daily society and how these negative connotations act to silence women. Similar to Peggy, Miriam believes quilting group enabled her to improve her self-confidence:

Miriam: Well I'm more outgoing. I was very shy when I first came here.

Me: Really?

Miriam: Surprising?

They gave me a lot of confidence and I think it was just such a wonderful group. And they always...if you have a problem they all have ideas of how to help you with it. And I just find that I've gained a lot of confidence with it. (Miriam Haines 2009).

Daphne tells us how teaching others helped her confidence:

You actually can build, or I feel I've built my confidence because people will come to me for information and I was trained as a teacher, not that I spent a lot of time doing it, but I kind of enjoy the thrill that you see on people's faces when you teach them something and it's like 'Oh! I should have been able to figure that out. Gee that's really cool.' Builds self confidence, I guess. (Daphne Howes 2009).

As for the importance of the conversations in building self-confidence,

Daphne argues:

I think that they build bonds and they build strength of relationships and that kind of thing. I feel like these people...these people took me through the loss of my husband and they were a real strength for me, like they all pulled together. They just were really good to me through that time and I feel they're all my friends. (Daphne Howes 2009).

Faith refers to how the perspectives of others have helped her develop her self-expression:

Well I guess it's given me confidence in a different field that I maybe didn't have it in. And it's brought out a gift in me that as far as an artistic approach that I didn't have before, or that I didn't know was there before. And I came out, especially with the... I like traditional quilting but I also like the artistic part and creating new quilts. (Faith Moar 2009).

The group-gained confidence can be buoyed more by an individual's artistic identity. As Bonnie's confidence increased as a result of her willingness to try different techniques in her quilting:

I think that it builds your confidence. Because well I was mentioning about the quilt that I made and I chose colours that I wouldn't normally use, and as I made this quilt. They were, it was a sampler it was all different. And I have it and David's interested in it and said "Oh that's nice" and I thought I knew what I was going to have when I was finished, but it was all in my head. So when I finally got them all together and the top was all sewn, I put it up on our bed. He came home and went into the bedroom and was like "*Gasp* Wow! Do I ever like that!" I didn't think it would look like the way it does, and it's like "Yes!"

But... many people they've got a comfort zone that they just like to piece, they like just to appliqué or they like only to quilt. Or some people like to try a bit of everything. And they, ah, they haven't built up the confidence for whatever reasons to go and try something else. So that it has been a huge confidence builder. (Bonnie Slauenwhite 2009).

Fibre artist, Sandra echoes Bonnie's idea that quilting is more than combining pieces of cotton:

But I do my bit and the thing is when I do my things I'm doing them inside me. It's not...I can't follow a pattern, a pattern drives me foolish. I have to figure it out for myself; do what I need to do. If the fabric tells me it needs to be something or go in a certain way that's the way it's going. And I don't aim for perfection, I really aim for excellence if I can, but not perfection. Perfection to me is neurotic, but excellence, oh yeah. I would love to be known as an excellent art quilter. (Sandra Betts 2009).

The artistic identity of these two quilters is somewhat separate from the group associated identities displayed by the majority of the quilters, nevertheless, these artistic identities can be informed via the group through the sharing of knowledge in conversations.

When I asked the women, "why did you join the group", the responses were varied (although all mentioned to some extent that it was because they enjoyed needlework). Helen said that she joined: "Because it's nice... that's the only contact [I have] with a group of women. I don't...I didn't do sports or anything like that so, and I love to quilt, I always have, so I joined the quilting group in any church I went to" (Helen Cobham 2009). Diana joined because of needing contact as well:

Oh definitely. Yes. When we moved from Manitoba in September 1997, as I said I didn't know anybody. My husband has relatives here, but that's not the same thing as having your own friends or own family. And we got here on the 27th of September and the first Tuesday of October I went to the KV Guild meeting with a hundred-twenty people I've never met, but it was my way of making contacts in the community. I went there so I could talk to somebody about something that was familiar that would then take into other spheres. And then I

volunteered to be Membership Chair there, so again, it was my way of reaching out. I've always been involved in the community where ever I've lived, but I volunteered and did that and was on different committees. (Diana Reid 2009).

Cee's reason was one of the most moving: as she explains:

Actually I had no motives. I was talked into it. I also belong to the Pickwauket Lions Club and another of our members was a widowed lady and she already belonged to this group, but she quilted at home as well. This was how she dealt with losing, you know, her husband and being alone. And she was doing a project to donate, it was a quilt for the Lions to raffle off and I guess she had done it the year before and really struggled with it on her own so this next year she asked for some help. I kind of liked her, she was a very jovial kind of person so I put up my hand and said sure, you know, I will. Little did I know it was kind of like the spider luring you into the web because, you know, she opened up the whole world of quilting for me and really she opened up that essence of, oh it's just so much more than, it's just that friendship, that connection, you know. It's a really enjoyable experience from every level you can think of. And anyway we had a little friendship blossom, you know, as we quilted together and within a few months she had me talked into attending this group, which she had been involved in for a year and they thoroughly... you know, I thought I was going to have to pass this rigid test and prove my ability so I was really nervous, you know. Really, really nervous about coming out but she assured me that 'no no they're a great bunch, they're a great bunch.' And sure, you know, that's exactly the way it was. I've been here ever since. (Cee Pearson 2009).

While it appears that each woman had different reasons for joining their group(s), the root of each motive is the connection to community and to fellow women. When one becomes part of a community, her involvement in that group changes her, because she is influenced by those around her. A result of this influence is that she change her self perception as Loretta shows us:

I don't think it has that much, I can't, you know, see that it has. But, you know, you're dedicated to the group, that's for sure. I try my

best not to miss Tuesday mornings. Oh, I was trying to make a doctors appointment this morning and she said, 'how about Tuesday morning?' And I said, 'that's quilting.' And she knew I quilted so, 'uh oh, can't get in the quilting.' Sometimes you have to, but.... But I don't think it's changed me that much. (Loretta Hanlon 2009).

Belonging to quilting group(s) has influenced the way those involved perceive themselves.

CONCLUSION

A quilter's identity is defined by her experiences in the groups, especially the conversations. This sharing of knowledge enables those involved to create a social network that provides support during the difficult periods experienced throughout life. Furthermore, this social networking enables women to gain confidence via the responses provided to the discussed topic, thus empowering their self-perceived individual identities.

Since beginning this project I recognized the importance of community in terms of influencing a person's identities. Yet as I began editing this thesis, I started to realize that a person's identities are intricately linked with one's community, and therefore, it is the discovery of how communities are developed and care for that highlights the importance of quilting groups and the women involved in these groups.

CHAPTER 6: COMMUNITY

I remember vividly my first visits to each group. I was exhilarated, nervous, and completely disappointed. When I had done my initial research, I was informed by the literature, repeatedly, that these groups were where the roots of feminism are and that all the conversations were politically charged. I mentioned earlier in this project that I grew up with quilting in my life, so I knew that these groups were highly engaged with community affairs. However, as I sat around each quilt at each group for the first time, eager to experience these overt discussions of community politics, I heard nothing that sated my expectations. I heard nothing feminist, nothing political, nothing but interesting ways to maintain the elastic in underwear and other seemingly trivial discussions. I walked out of those first meetings still feeling happy that I was welcome in the group, but very disappointed with the content of the conversations.

My work on this project has fundamentally rocked my understanding of what communities are and what is political. I have discovered that there is a general need to expand our ideas on how we as individuals engage in politics. This expansion enables us to re-evaluate the importance of our roles within our communities as well as teaching us to fully appreciate the complimentary roles that our neighbours play. In expanding my perceptions on community and politics I examined two points that are essential in the understanding community: how quilting space enables women's socio-political actions and how the gifting economy underscores women's culture and politics in quilting circles while noting how locality impacts the form of community work. From these two points we can see how the women involved in quilting groups use their conversations to create and maintain their communities, and come into the scope of feminism.

Communities are groups of families and individuals who work together to support each other. These collectives require trust and compassion between

members of the community in order to be created and to be maintained. Trust and compassion are developed through communications, such as the ones established via conversations. Although, these conversations can occur anywhere, it is through structured opportunities to meet each other (Christiansen-Ruffman 1976, 32; Christiansen-Ruffman 2001, 23) that allows for people to join the community and remain connected, thus adding to the community dynamic. Opportunities are facilitated by spaces that are open and accessible to community members.

MAKING A SPACE FOR QUILTING

The first meeting I went to was in a church basement at the Hampton United Church. Similarly, the Portland United Church group was located in a place connected to their church that was utilized in a similar way to the basement in the Hampton church. Following my introduction to the Hampton group, I attended my second meeting in Upham in one of the quilter's home. Although through the Anglican Church, the group recognized that in order to be sustainable from a financial perspective, meetings would have to be held in someone's home during the cold winter months. Moving the quilting session in the winter to avoid high heating costs guarantees the group's continuance by conserving the budget; this practice was also used within the Bloomfield group. The third space I entered was located in a community centre; I only entered this space within the large urban, guild. Nevertheless, all of the spaces provided an environment where people could meet, relax and talk. I soon got over my shyness.

"My way of looking at religion, is doing something for somebody else. That was how I was brought up" (Helen Cobham 2009).

Quilting group spaces have been selected because these spaces are a central meeting point within the community; either a church or a community centre. From the establishment of a physical gathering space, the introduction of

an organized group, such as a quilting group, redefines the environment of the space ensuring feelings of comfort and safety amongst members. Furthermore, once the group has created this environment and is visible within the community it can be relocated to another space, such as a home, should issues arise that require this movement, for example, relocating the group during winter when heating is required. Cee Pearson provides an illustration of how this movement can occur: "They were working at the hall, the Bloomfield Hall. This was during the fall season, I think, because of heating and everything we moved to Claire's before it usually...before Christmas and she provides the fire up here and a nice warm room to quilt in downstairs" (Cee Pearson 2009). The Bloomfield group has been established for many years so this annual change in the physical location does not radically disrupt the space created by the quilters. Spaces often have to be moved in order to sustain the group. The homes I visited became the central physical space in the community for the group to meet. The result of this movement of the group's physical location to a home resulted in the transformation of the home to a communal space.

I was surprised when I was told that the Upham quilting group met at a home. My first thought was "I'm not ready to enter someone's home." When I arrived at Peggy Pollock's place I was cheerfully greeted and informed that I need not knock; I should just enter and join everyone else downstairs. Even after being part of the group for weeks I still did not feel completely comfortable with doing this.

Of the five groups I spent time with, four of these were associated with a religious institution. Religious spaces tend to be regarded among many feminists

solely as proprietors of patriarchal social norms and therefore do not support the feminist goal of gender equity. However, historical accounts, as we have seen in the writings of Kiracofe (1993), Mazlooni (1998), and Fry (2003) have revealed to us that many quilting groups have been connected to churches and yet feminist-oriented conversations have notably taken place within the overall church space. As many quilting groups in southern New Brunswick continue to be part of churches, it is important to make the distinction between the church as an institution and the spaces created within the church for the community.

I am not religious. Therefore, discovering I would be entering quilting groups with close ties to churches, made me uncomfortable. Yet as I entered the places where the quilting took place, I realized that the church simply provided the space and that the activities and conversations were driven by the women in the group, who transformed the environment of the space to be empowering to women.

Church halls and basements have been prime locations for quilting groups because of the church's central location within the community. The history of the region has shown us that churches were some of the first official buildings erected in the province. These institutions were introduced as a form of authoritative control over the people within the communities as Rees explained in his discussion on the establishment of the Anglican Church to maintain order in new European settlements (Rees 2000, 112), which was mentioned in Chapter Three. However, as the church was and continues to be the central part of the community, the community uses the church building as a meeting place to discuss community issues.

In most cases church halls are almost completely separate from the institutional church, as these halls exist on a separate budget and are ran by community members as a communal gathering place. Church halls and basements are places where activities are organized to provide meeting opportunities. By ensuring that the church as a whole is supported means that community activities are able to continue. The mutual relationship between the church and the community means that quilting groups take great interest in the well being of the church in which they are situated. Loretta provides highlights this relationship for us:

But, you know, I think the church realizes that we make a lot of decisions and do a lot of work. And I know that this last couple of years they've been showing their appreciation so much more, you know, by making notices in the bulletin and saying thanks to the group of quilters, things like that, which is.... So yeah, they really know that, you know, it's a group that...well they think of the church, you know, there's no doubt about that.

Oh, my soul! Oh what would we do without those conversations, huh? That group plans, well you hear us talking about the tea, getting ready for the tea, there are representatives, there's three units of the UCW, like I told you and there's a representative from each of the groups in the quilting groups. And honestly we make most of the decisions going on. It's unbelievable the discussions that go on. (Loretta Hanlon 2009).

The physical space is established in a central location within the community. As the community develops the environment of the space through various groups, the conception of the space for community engagement can be physically moved so long as it is deemed necessary for reasons of continuing the central location and of the groups that are part of that location. The environment created

within the space by quilting groups is one that is governed by women, as there continues to be the generalized perception that quilting is an art for women only. Using this gender-based assumption, women have been able to maintain a unique women's culture within the spaces used for quilting groups.

I entered five quilting circles while gathering the information for this thesis. I noticed that upon entering the space there is a sense of personal freedom when you are sharing the room with other women and no men.

Quilting groups within southern New Brunswick communities are very much women's spaces. The environment created by the group allows for women to be open with each other and enables expressive conversations because, although it is verbalized as not being so, these spaces are women-only. Cee expresses her emotional response to entering the quilting circle, which provides insight to the dynamic of quilting groups as women-only spaces:

not a physical thing, it's just something that envelops you as you step into this house or even the hall, which is, definitely is not as comfortable as being in C.'s home. Like coming to C.'s is like going to grandma's to me. I shouldn't say that; going to mother's. But that's the feeling, you know you're coming here and you know that everybody's going to be happy to see you and you're happy to see them, and it's really something to look forward to. (Cee Pearson 2009).

History has shown that women are often excluded from mainstream politics and that throughout Western culture there have been activities deemed appropriate for women, such as quilting. The result of these two historical factors has been the establishment of spaces by women for women to promote women's political action through supporting their neighbours. By providing a space that is

by women for women, quilting groups create a group dynamic that allows women to feel secure in expressing themselves. Cee, for example, continues on her thoughts about the quilting group space when she remarks on her feelings towards being a women-only quilting group: "it's very special to belong to this group of women. (Cee Pearson 2009). This feeling of belonging, results in closer connections between group members, thus making the group more resilient. Moreover, it is this same feeling that is based in trust and compassion that results in making the group, as a whole, a stronger force within their community.

The making of women's spaces is done through connecting women members of a community to each other. Quilting circles enable this connection to be made. Marg tells us how in order to fully connect a diversifying community it was "the Anglican Church Women that basically started it and they adopted everybody in the community into the group, or anybody that wants to come" (Marg Stevens 2009). By expanding their group to include people outside of the church, the Bloomfield group is but one example of how quilting groups recognize changes within their community and addresses those changes.

Spaces are made so community members are able to easily meet with each other and to discuss matters relating to the wellbeing of the community. As I mentioned at the start of this chapter, when I first met with these groups I did not see how their discussions were political. Because I could not make the connection how the conversations were political, I also did not see the role of the space in sharing news.

These spaces allow for conversations, which results in the formation of plans to address community related matters. Peggy Pollock puts the group understanding of the conversations simply: "People are people. Whatever they're interested in that day, I guess. Or something they've heard in the community, anybody dies, anybody getting married, anybody, you know. Just whatever's going on in the community... and here at the ACW [Anglican Church Women]" (Peggy Pollock 2009). As does my grandmother, who says that the conversation "depends on who's there quilting and what you've got to tell. If it's a joke or something to do with community" (Ruby Sharp 2009). Marga, along with Peggy, expanded upon Peggy's initial comment on the group conversations:

...just interesting. You hear the news; it's just like a newspaper. I don't read the newspaper.

[Peggy Pollock: You hear who's dead, who's gonna be....]

Yeah, otherwise you wouldn't know about it.

[Peggy Pollock: Who's moving, who's sick....]

(Marga Norris 2009; Peggy Pollock 2009).

In getting things done within the community, these women use their spaces to plan based on ongoing local current events. In planning these women are politically engaged. Yet, they are participating in a unique way that is contrary to mainstream politics as these spaces are based on compassion, the conversations that transpire are of a loving nature. A. LeBlanc expresses this:

Whatever happens to be going on that day. Let's see, talk about if there's somebody that's sick, you know, inquires about how that person is doing. Not in a nosy way, but in a caring way. We talk about recipes, we talk about fabrics, we talk about everyday life. We talk about what's going on outside our little group, what activities have happened or are going to happen next week. (A. LeBlanc 2009).

For these groups love is essential as it leads in the formation of a space for women by women, which is used for caring for their community. Additionally, it is this same loving, compassionate nature that allows the group to continue on by being passed to the (grand)daughters of the group members as well as to new community members.

I remember spending a couple of weeks during my summer vacations at my grandmother's home when I was growing up. I spoke of this annual event earlier in this thesis, and of the influence she had in my life as she taught me how to sew. What I didn't realize when I first recorded that story was that during those summer visits I was being introduced to a space for women-only and that I am one of many daughters and granddaughters who now carry the responsibility of ensuring that these types of spaces are remembered and carried through to future generations of women.

Many of the quilters who I met had introduced either their daughters or granddaughters to quilting. For example, the two quilts that were being worked on by the Hampton group when I was there were pieced by Miriam Haines's two daughters. Another illumination of this passing on women's culture to (grand)daughters was shown to me at the Marco Polo Guild's annual quilt show, where a division for young quilters was established. Helen Cobham, proudly spoke of teaching her great-granddaughter how to quilt:

my great-granddaughter is seven years old and she wants to quilt. And every time she's in she'll say, 'Grammie, can I go and quilt?'

Well I haven't got a quilt in now, but she quilted on that one. Now I had to take it out, but after all she's only seven, but she wants to learn to quilt and some day when she gets a little bit older, I will make sure that she does come quilt. She quilts in every quilt that I make. (Helen Cobham 2009).

Additionally, Loretta contributed a reflection on how her mother taught her how to quilt, which tells us that the handing down of quilting culture has been going on for many years:

My mother quilted, yes. She quilted...I started quilting, you see, when I was a teenager during...it was during the war [World War II], and they use to - I don't know whether you've heard this or not - they use to take flour bags and dye them and make quilts for the Red Cross. So that's where I got my start, you see, quilting on those....

I just think of some of the people that have been there for years, and now that they're gone, you know. But they've got their name down as being part of the group. (Loretta Hanlon 2009).

In order to maintain these women's cultural spaces, those women who are currently involved must be diligently responsible in passing on the traditions of these quilting groups.

In passing on these groups to younger generations, the girls who are taught about this part of women culture¹⁸, become politically aware and learn about how to actively and effectively engage with their communities. I speak of this from my personal experiences as the granddaughter of a quilter; however,

¹⁸ Within the literature on quilting culture one can see (as explained in Chapter Two) how this aspect of women's culture can be found throughout various cultural and socio-economic groups of individuals. However, this thesis has focused on Caucasian women of who the majority are Anglophones.

when I spoke to Christina Morrell I discovered that other girls, like Christina's daughter are also being taught to navigate community involved via quilting:

I asked my daughter if she wanted to be in the interview because she quilts. And she's 14 and she goes, 'no.' She looks at quilts as a means-to-an-end, because her first quilt was a whole cloth white quilt. At the age of 11 and it was called that, but we actually cut it up into 18 blocks. And each block she had to draw a design on and all the borders she had to draw the designs on, sewed it all back together and quilted it. Mind you I helped and my husband's aunt helped, but she sold that quilt for money for a horse, which she now has. Sold it for \$1200 at the KV quilt show. So the next quilt she made was for a teacher. She did a jean quilt, to learn how to sew straight. And the next quilt she made for a girlfriend because she liked one of the quilts we had. Again, it was a patch quilt with squares and sewing straight and tied it. So and she likes to come when she has a Monday off to the meeting with us because she loves the ladies and she loves to listen to them, and they all treat her really nice and she loves the lunch. So there's the side from a 14 year old. But like I say any quilting she has done has been, 'Oh, you know, Mme. Murphy, I'd like to make her a quilt for the end of the year, she was one of my favourite teachers' Or, 'my girlfriend really likes this quilt, I think I'll make her one for her birthday.' So she's, she is doing a block-a-month that I'm doing from one of the quilt stores in Quispam[sis] and so she's learning... (Christina Morrell 2009).

Furthermore, by becoming part of the group and in turn women's culture at an early age, these girls absorb lessons of empowerment from being accepted within the inclusive nature of the group.

Although these spaces¹⁹ are most often passed from familial generation to generation, the prominent role of the group in the community allows for new quilters to join and become the next generation of women who will maintain this aspect of women's culture. For example Christina did not grow up with quilting

¹⁹ This conceptualization of 'space' refers to the maintained existence, role and presentation of the group within the community.

in her life, yet after moving to a rural community she became part of a small group and then later became a member of the Bloomfield group. In doing so she was admitted into a group of women and reflects upon what she has learned from the group:

They [the discussions] are so wide ranged and it's all based on the diversity of the people sitting around the frame. You know, if you had a younger group we'd all be talking about our kids, right, and their school problems... but, we don't. So I'm sitting there without any grandchildren, the only one without grandchildren, everybody else has grandchildren around the quilt. You know, L. just had a grandchild and B. just had two, and I feel left out. 'Cause I'm at the age, still talking with my friends about raising teenagers and they're talking about grandchildren. So the conversations are so wide; however, they are just a wealth of information on raising teenagers because they've been there and done it. You know, [S]o anything I say, talk about or comment about, they, 'oh, don't worry...', you know, been there. [I]t's nice to hear all that. Yeah it is. And you look at some of the ladies who are in their seventies and eighties and you think the things they went through with their children would be so different from what I go through now, because of the changing times, but they're not. [I]t's amazing to see that. Yeah, it gives you a wider perspective on what's happening in your life. When you can talk with people with a different age range and there's not many places I would get that opportunity to do. (Christina Morrell 2009).

The women who have been part of quilting groups in southern New Brunswick communities are teachers, historians and politicians. These women create spaces that evoke feelings of safety in expressing one's self and from this security and corresponding empowerment, these women show other women how to take pride in one's community and in turn how the community can be a support when needed.

These spaces maintain healthy communities in that they provide a place for women to meet and to address community issues. As Cee, who spent sixteen years in a rural Kings County community, points out to us, belonging to a quilting group:

Makes me feel connected to the community I live in. My children have grown up now so I don't have that contact, you know, through school and through joining this group... you hear of things that are going on. And it really is all volunteer work, it's not just, you know, it's not anything else, it's, you know, events that go on at the hall where help is needed to set up, you know, so I mean, I'd like to think of myself as the kind of person, you know, as all these ladies are that you can call and say 'I need a hand with this' and they'll be there, you know. And I think it gives you that feeling that if you are ever in a situation yourself or you maybe, you know, can call somebody. (Cee Pearson 2009).

Having a physical space allows for quilting groups to establish an environment that is prime for situating quilting conversations in women's culture by passing the unique women's culture expressed by the group onto (grand)daughters and new community members, the group will ensure its continued existence as an important part of the region.

Half way through my involvement in the quilting groups I became more aware that the conversations had the political depth and overtness that I had initially been looking for. These conversations were hidden in the act of simply sharing news, and were invisible to me because I had been taught by society that these discussions were not political.

POLITICS

Although I have learned throughout various experiences, including this thesis, that political participation can be found in every part of our daily lives, I occasionally find myself returning to limited, traditional views. For example, the idea that engagement in politics is done primarily through accessing electoral and governmental systems. We must reconceive this mainstream notion of politics in order to highlight how government is merely one way to be active politically. In changing these opinions we are able to understand how the women interviewed for my thesis are consistently politically engaged through tangible actions taken as the result of the quilting group conversations.

The conversations within quilting groups are political. News about the community is shared and debate ensues followed by a perceptible reaction. The women who are part of these activities have consequentially defined a unique women's political culture. These women have also expertly learned how to negotiate everyday, patriarchal society by sharing their gained ideas with people outside of the group and by providing some of their work to the government services as a form of community maintenance. Bonnie reveals to us:

It's the same as any group. So much of the chatter of what's happening in the community goes on, who is well, who isn't well, who's building a house, what happened when somebody's house burned down, or you know, many different things like that. If you go years back some of the ladies from Bloomfield and myself and there were a few from other places. We got together and we made quilts and made smaller ones and that donated them to the RCMP and they have in the cars and for you know if there was something

that you know, a child or whatever, it was just a blanket or if there had been a house fire, at times, as well. (Bonnie Slauenwhite 2009).

While this negotiation of traditional official community services is done by all of the groups these groups are reflections of women's politics and are often overlooked by conventional society.

In Chapters Two and Three I spoke about how women have been trying to enter into traditional forms of politics, from gaining the vote to being able to have legal status in order to make decisions independent of their male relations. I do not deny the importance of these activities in promoting sexual and gender equality. On the other hand, this project has shown how women can be political outside of the traditional forms of Western politics: first, through planning and second, through gifting.

When a group plans a community activity or responds to an issue through planning a relief event, the group is being political. In conjunction with the conversations, planning is a form of political contribution because it is both an action and a reaction to current happenings. In a conversation at the Upham group the women, predominately Marga, discuss how to help a young woman within the community:

And then she's trying to build that place for the wedding and I'm telling you, nobody - her husband doesn't even help her. I feel so sorry sometimes. I've been saying, 'I'll go over and help you paint, or help you put the plywood up, because I could do it. (Upham ACW April 17 2009).

In this case I did not find out if the group helped the woman under discussion, although, the women often brought topics to the quilt frame to be discussed and then dealt with the issue individually. In this conversation Marga demonstrates how women's politics are often based on concern for family, friends and community. A. LeBlanc complements Marga by explaining how around the quilt frame, "you learn about your community. It's a learning experience outside of quilting. People get to know you and you become friends" (A. LeBlanc 2009). An essential part of the politics of planning is the motivation behind those charged shared ideas. I mentioned that it is trust and compassion that creates a community and that it is this idea of compassion that is the driving force behind the quilting group and its corresponding reactionary conversations. In other words, quilting groups are active in the maintenance and promotion of a gift economy.

The gift economy is the process of giving something to address an issue without expecting something in return. For example, many groups provided to charities without being directly asked for a donation or provided ideas in order to tackle other various issues, such has been the case for the Upham quilters:

Peggy: I said to the ACW [mumbled], at the annual meeting, that they would have to have a meal of some kind, make some money. But I just can't do it.

A. LeBlanc: Well you don't have many people.

Peggy: No and you have to ask those people, and those people are the ones that work with the, you know, annual supper that they have.

(Upham ACW March 31 2009).

Modern Western society relies on this form of economy, in that one of the most essential forms of gifting is parenting and caring, yet continuously ignores gifting and perpetuates an exchange economy. Genevieve Vaughan (2007) stresses the differences between this part of women's politics and mainstream politics, noting that "the exchange economy fosters competition while the gift economy fosters cooperation" (Vaughan 2007, 5). The gift economy was practiced in every group I met with, through either charity or direct community work. Unfortunately, this form of political engagement is denounced within mainstream society by being ignored, taken for granted, or, as was the case for the women who I interviewed, made to be insignificant.

Well one thing about it, a lot of people say, 'oh, you gossip.' I say, 'no, we don't gossip.' I never heard any gossip there yet. [W]e talk about people who are sick, people that we know. But a lot of people think that when women get together, that you know. I don't know if they really think it or if they just say it, like, 'you've just been gossiping' or something, I don't know. (Greta McGivery 2009).

The work women do is often ignored or taken for granted by society. At the beginning of this chapter I spoke about when I initially met with the groups, I could not see how the work of the members was political. This inability of mine, although not acceptable, was the product of my exposure to a society that devalues the importance of women. Although women's political work is generally ignored or taken for granted, because 'women are doing what women are suppose to do,' the women who I interviewed expressed an interesting

reaction in the process internalizing how their conversations (and therefore their work) was disregarded by society.

I asked about their thoughts on their conversations and informed that there is no gossip within the group. For example, Lois Edwards informed me that:

In the group I'm with there's very little vicious gossip. I don't think I've ever heard anything bad said about anyone. Regardless of, you know, somebody's name might be mentioned, you may yourself know something about that person but with the group that you're in it's, 'okay. I'm know this about them, but I'm not a gossip monger that I'm going to spread it and tell these ladies... well she is so-and-so.' We're not that kind of group. (Lois Edwards 2009).

Additionally, Eleanor told me:

I think we all enjoy it and we have conversation but we don't gossip, you know, we talk about everything but you never hear anybody gossip about anybody, you know. Which is wonderful, because you know yourself you can go some place and somebody will want to gossip and I don't like gossip. But we never have it and that's what really makes it nice because everybody can only say positive things, very seldom you hear anything negative. (Eleanor Kaye 2009).

Despite the internalization of society's dismissive view on the conversations that occur within these groups, these women recognize that their discussions and activities are important as they are supportive to the community as a whole. Loretta provides us with an instance of how women reject the assumptions used to make their work invisible:

But the discussions...everything about health issues to news issues, everything imaginable. That's the part I like about it, you know, you find out all the news and it's not a gossip-y group. ... Maybe quilting groups don't do that? Because that's what people think you do, is just get together and talk about people. There's never anything like that done.

Me: There's an assumption of maliciousness?

Loretta: Yes. Anything that is done is always on the good side, you know. And if there's anything disastrous involving people, I don't think the topic's ever brought up. You know, if it's something bad. I don't think people ever mention it. Maybe Hampton doesn't have very much of that stuff? (Loretta Hanlon 2009).

Bonnie follows Loretta's idea:

But you get, there's so many dynamics that are involved, you know in the whole thing and when somebody isn't well you and they're there,... they just sort of draw strength from the group. And the group becomes sensitive as to what they [the individual] do need and what they don't need.... (Bonnie Slauenwhite 2009).

As we can see with these discussions, the application of the negative concept of 'gossip' is used as a silencing mechanism to the conversations expressed within the group. Nevertheless, these women disregard such responses to make their work invisible as following each declaration that they did not gossip, they highlighted that their conversations were done to be supportive and out of compassion for fellow community members. This supportiveness, or community work, takes on two forms; either charity based community work or direct response community work.

THE SUBTLE DIVIDE: URBAN AND RURAL COMMUNITY WORK

It's volunteer work so you do good, right? You do good. Making little quilts for fire victims and people that lose their home, like you know, other than fire, violence, mother and children go to a home and they receive a quilt from Sussex too. At Sussex there's a quilt for every little one that goes into Hestia House, which is good. (Liliane Kyle 2009).

We do quilts for charity, some of them, I suppose the better quilts, the group gets paid, the ACW gets paid so much money. People bring quilts in, get them quilted and the money goes to the ACW. And then other tops that we do, like that one that C. showed you... we do things like that for quilts for Food Bank and some such. For example, I had done a quilt

top that I'm donating to the Food Bank for a raffle. And this group will quilt it. (Marg Stevens 2009).

The differences between quilting groups in urban, suburban and rural settings in terms of the women's political engagement was subtle, yet a distinction can be made between the forms of participatory community. Charity and direct community work are both means for women to engage in their communities. These forms of work can easily be blended, as has happened in the more suburban groups. No matter the form of community work the basic principle of women's politics was always there, compassion towards others by way of the practice of gifting.

At the urban Marco Polo Guild I encountered charity as the principle form of community work. When considering the matter of charity community work Daphne who lives in Saint John shared her perceptions on the topic of quilting groups being important contributors to the larger locale by focusing on projects to donate to charitable organizations:

[T]here have been...like one person will have a connection over here that you don't have but somebody else has a connection over there that you don't have and they bring it in and all of a sudden you're involved in things like...we did do quilts for babies, they had a...it was...I forget what the group was but it was like single mothers that had new babies, we did quilts for them. And then we did the cushions for the ladies with cancer, which is, you know, that's a strong thing in a group of ladies that are our age you run into that and so it gets brought in and once you're attention is drawn to it then it's like we should do something about that. But our group is not...it's not one of our mandates to do a lot for our...our premise is suppose to be to promote quilting and we do promote quilting but we don't do as much charity work, I guess, as we could. But then

again it falls to the small group to do it and we get tired of it. So, you know, we probably should do more.... (Daphne Howes 2009).

Daphne confirms that many times quilters do not fully appreciate their contributions to their community. This is another way of internalizing society's neutral perception of the work women engage in. Unlike Daphne, Faith sees how charitable contributions from the Guild are a form of community work.

I think it's wonderful the way we can participate in the community. By doing things. And actually the mandate of our guild is to promote quilting, but I think it is also to help the community. But before when we were stationed out of the Y[M/YWCA], when we gave our money to the Y, which we still give them some. But if we get, it's not all give on our side, it's take too because they provide the space for us, just like they did at the Y. So we gain from it, but we give back into it what we can and we have, I don't know whether you've heard us talk about it because we haven't...I don't think we've been asked this year, but they've asked us before to do small quilts for the mothers and baby programme for mother who go for classes.

Breast cancer bags. Ouch Pouches they're called. And so it definitely, we can spread it out into the community. And I don't think we partook as a guild in this, but they asked, what was that for, something in Moncton, and that was to give people pot holders or something as they had done something, I've forgotten what it was. So the word gets out. (Faith Moar 2009).

Because Saint John is considerably larger than the other communities in New Brunswick and because groups such as the guild are massive in comparison to the other groups²⁰, adjustments had to be made to the way in which community work was engaged in. Therefore, the group ensures its inclusion within the community by providing support to various other organizations through charity work within the city of Saint John. Similar to its smaller and more

²⁰ The Marco Polo Guild has over one hundred members.

rural counterparts, the Marco Polo Guild retains a place in women's culture as this group promotes gifting and is overall a women-only space.

For smaller quilting groups in more urban or suburban regions or for a larger rural group, like the one in Bloomfield, a combination of charity and direct community work occurs. Bonnie provides us with an example of this blending as she compares the Hampton group to the group in Bloomfield:

It [the conversation topics] does very much revolve around well around the UCW [United Church Women] Guild. Because there is someone I think from almost everyone of the guilds there. And so they can have an unofficial meeting. You know when they're quilting. So it's good like that but there is an awful lot of community chatter that goes on. You know, an awful lot and you get to know who's related to who or, it's like, "Oh I'm glad I didn't say about someone's terrible dog that's running around the community because it belongs to that person's son's dog or whatever." So, well, you know you get a lot of other things there and they get together every once in awhile and they'll go out to lunch at Holly's²¹, and things like that. So it tumbles out of just the hall itself too.

[T]hat's really the only reason that they get together to quilt. To and they quilt those that other people had made. You know, so, there's not the getting together to make the quilt. Because so and so isn't well. Now you would have found the Bloomfield [Anglican Church Women] group very interesting because the one lady that coordinates most of it. I'd say they quilt in her house all winter, so it's a big thing. The other women got together and made a surprise quilt for her because all that she does. (Bonnie Slauenwhite 2009).

In addition, Christina adds to Bonnie's discussion on the Bloomfield group, and includes her involvement in the Sussex Valley Quilting Guild²², when she tells us:

²¹ Holly's is a local restaurant.

²² I was unable to visit this Guild due to various constraints; primarily not having access to transportation when this group met.

Well with the Sussex group I guess that the only thing I would relate that to would be, you know, we did quilts for fire victims. So if there's been some fires or whatever, then we have to get some quilts together, I mean that would be our community action, wouldn't it?

So that would be something in the community that would be happening and we respond by doing quilts for them. Also the same for we do them for transition house and the RCMP. You know, when there's a need, also having a member with cancer pass away, we do a cancer... a quilt...well we did a pillow for that member. So yeah, things happening sometimes cause us to do something, and it does happen in both groups. (Christina Morrell 2009).

These two accounts show how a blending of forms of community work occurs within the suburban and larger rural quilting groups. However, this blending also happens in the smaller urban groups.

Lois and Helen Cobham highlight how smaller urban groups engage with the community in a similar way to the suburban and large rural groups. Lois tells how her church quilting group provides both money for the church and quilts for in-need community members:

[T]his kind of a side piece, Hospice is building a place or getting a place ready, and we are going to try to put a handmade quilt on every bed. So that Log Cabin one it's gone to the church. I took it home to border it. It's going to the church to be one of the quilts that's going to be on one of the beds. I have another one already in there. Helen has three or four to go. We haven't got them quilted yet, but the tops are ready to be quilted and we're filling up our little closet. When the ones that are on the rack now, come off, I suspect that one of the Hospice ones will gone on.

But we quilt at our group to make some money. We don't charge big fees in order to do it. For the hours that we put in, I think we may get paid a cent an hour, but for this project we're not going to get any money at all. We're donating our time and some of us, like Helen and the couple that I've done to get the tops in there, use up a bunch of

scrap fabric one way or another and hopefully we'll have ten quilts when we're finished. (Lois Edwards 2009).

Helen adds to Lois's observations, advancing her group's combination of direct and charity community work:

[M]ost of the others have belonged to Portland always, and that is their life, what they do in the church. So it doesn't influence my life quite as much as the others, but I was not brought up in the United Church. I was brought up Presbyterian and it's a bit different. But I like the minister and it's nice there, they're all...they talk about what they do in their church and everything.

Right now I am just using up scraps, I find that when I'm finished quilting my scraps would all be thrown out.... So right now when I approach at the quilting group to see if they would be interested in making quilts for the new Hospice. That's going to open in Saint John, maybe next year, it'll open, and they're gonna have ten beds. So I said, 'Don't you think it would be nice to make quilts for all these beds?' If a person's going to die, which in Hospice you're put there because you're going to die, and wouldn't it be nice to die under a quilt. That's my way of looking at it.

So we're going to make.... I've made three tops now, and I have three more partly done and Lois has one finished and she's going to make another one, so that pretty well... we'll only have maybe two or so more and we'll have our ten. Well then we have to quilt them all, you see. But we're not getting quilts to do from the community so in order to keep our group going we have to have quilts to quilt. So we're going to quilt ones for Hospice. (Helen Cobham 2009).

While charity community work provides to other organizations within the community, many of the quilt group members are directly involved in these other groups. Direct community work is done most often in small rural quilting groups as many of the members are also involved in the various other organizations, as can be noted in this discussion with Marga Norris:

Marga Norris: "That's just it. Too many [groups]. Back to Basics, and the WI. This is ACW isn't it?

[Peggy Pollock: Yes.]

I didn't join it because I'm in too many [groups].

Me: You're a busy lady.

Marga Norris: And sometimes I use to be on the vestry, but I quit that because it's just getting too many meetings and such.

[Peggy: There's only so many hours in the day.]

I can't get my own stuff done any more. Because every day is taken with something."

(Marga Norris's individual interview with Peggy Pollock and myself 2009).

The conversations engaged in by the women in the quilting group extends far beyond topics of quilting, as quilting groups are essential forums for addressing issues within the larger community. Furthermore, many of the quilters are also part of various other groups and organizations within their communities. Because the involvement of these women is extensive the conversations within the quilting group meeting broadens to attend to the needs of the other groups. This was constantly the case within the Upham group, as this exchange highlights:

A. LeBlanc: That would be a good fundraiser. You know, you could have quilts, but there are people that paint, there are people that do other crafts and you could have a small [flea market], even at the WI hall. And charge to get in, and even have a little luncheon or something.

Marga: That actually sounds good, we need to have something in case we run out of money. ... I must talk to [person] about that. It sounds interesting, but I don't know.

A. LeBlanc: See there's the ACW [Anglican Church Women], there's the WI [Women's Institute], there's the Rec Hall, there's just so many groups. How can people catch up with them all?

...

Marga: Well isn't that those...youth group? Don't they have that - what is it? - some kind of a play, isn't it? And the people they, just donate and it goes to the church?

A. LeBlanc: What? You mean this Sunday?

Marga: Yeah.

A. LeBlanc: It's a coffee house. But no, it doesn't go to the church, it goes to the hall. The money goes to the hall.

(April 21 2009).

The conversations within the rural quilting group may focus on other organizations; however, unlike the urban and more suburban groups the women within the Upham group engage directly with their community not just by providing to another organization but by being directly linked with the other groups. A. LeBlanc distinguishes:

"That wouldn't happen in a... big city. That's what happens in a rural community, because I guess people care for people, you know....And the people that do it, I think that they're benefiting too.... And it's not a job, none of this is a job." (A. LeBlanc 2009).

CONCLUSION

You know, all the people.... Mostly what's happened. I mean there's other people in the community I still don't know, but mostly the people in church, I know them so you hear something about them, so that's kind of interesting. ... Yeah. You find out a lot about the community. It's really interesting. (Marga Norris 2009).

As my time ended with these groups, I came to realize that a quilting group can not be a stand-alone group, because the involvement of members within the community is so profoundly vital. Quilting groups are essential to the community where they are located. These groups and the women who belong to them are not only part of the fabric and they are the stitches holding the community together. Their thoughts, discussions and actions are what creates and maintains any community as compassion drives these women to address issues and needs promptly and directly.

At first, when I initially met with these women I could not see how their groups were important to the community or how their work is political. However, as I became more involved, I realized that community was all around me. I also gained perspective on how I have always been a part of this way of living. I grew up with my grandmother, being an important and influential aspect in my life, and without ever realizing it (at least until now) my grandmother brought me into this unique part of women's culture by introducing me to quilting and by letting me sit around the quilt frame with her friends. Growing up and watching her involvement within the community, is what spurred my interest in becoming involved in mine. The lessons she has taught me and which have been reinforced through my work on this project reminded me that for a community to be and to be maintained we must work together collectively, and society must recognize the importance of women in creating the compassion that is the key to building all social relationships.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUDING REMARKS

"And it's reviving the things our grandmother use to make, it was lost for a while. Nobody bothered with quilts." (Liliane Kyle 2009).

I started this project wanting to know how the conversations that occurred during group quilting sessions defined the women who engaged in them. I wanted to know who these women were and how they contributed to local politics and history; therefore, I began my research by asking: "how do the conversations within quilting circles contribute to the development of the identity of women in a rural, Maritime Canadian community?" After almost five months of travelling around southern New Brunswick's Kings and Saint John counties attending guild meetings and quilting circles in several homes, church basements and halls, and meeting the women who engage in group quilting, I found that communities and identities re-enforce each other and discovered my answer: the women who belong to the quilting group take the physical space and make it welcoming, by ensuring a feeling of safety where women can feel comfortable expressing their ideas, and accepting and connecting members of the community. With the establishment of this safe space created by women, for women, the group works as an important part of the community by providing opportunities for all women community members (new and old) to make connections with each other. These connections are created by conversations that bond community members through trust and compassion, and as a result of these relationships, this safe space is maintained by the same conversations. Furthermore, having a

place where issues and needs can be freely discussed and openly debated allows the women belonging to the group to directly address those matters.

The literature surrounding quilting culture, the history of the region, and the ties between feminism, identities, and the exploration of women and community all contributed to the formation of this thesis. Before I summarize the main arguments drawn from the interviews, it is important to review what the literature has shown us in terms of where this research fits in to academia.

The limited literature on quilting culture informed how I went about preparing for this project and for collecting the stories of the quilters. My research was based on three theories craft history, materialist feminism and grounded theory - approaches that defined how this project developed and thus what results emerged. Craft history directed me to looking at how craft is generally excluded as an art form, while materialist feminism underscored the omission of women within artistic communities. Finally, grounded theory provided me with the tools to interview and engage with the quilters and to analyze our group and individual conversations.

Although the amount of literature was limited, the writings I was able to draw upon revealed how quilting, quilting culture and women have been recorded and understood throughout history. From magazines to movements of civic discontent, quilting culture has infiltrated all aspects of literature and thus life. From early magazines that promoted the standardization of patterns and traditions, we see how even the topic of quilting could be used as a forum for

women sharing ideas. Furthermore, early non-fictional books on quilting underscored how quilting culture has promoted feminism and its ideals, which as we have seen remains a strong attribute of these organizations. Literature's strong association of quilting and feminist ideals makes it a natural part of Second Wave feminism. Indeed, as we have seen, much of the authored works linking feminism to quilting were written starting in the late 1970s. Although many of the early non-fiction writings are from the later half of the twentieth century prior to the time when this quilting culture was popular in fiction, if not in academic study. Fictional stories recorded how events transpired in and around quilting circles from as far back as the early 1800s. Janet Floyd (2008) has examined these early fictions and notes that these writings are not just entertainment but are also insights into the history of women's groups and the safe spaces that were formed. From quilting in popular culture I looked at how the spaces have been used and designed by quilting groups as forums for the promotion of women's expression. Through Women's Institutes, churches and other associations, women continue what was started centuries ago in early quilting groups and develop groups that promote anti-oppressive gender and social ideals while maintaining a guise of keeping up the social status quo. The socio-political movements and the challenges to traditional societal norms that have emerged from quilting groups was the last section in my review of the literature. For generations the forums opened by the conversations surrounding a quilt frame have enabled groups of people, particularly women, to mobilize against discrimination and various forms

of oppression. Therefore, literature's various interpretations of quilting culture, informed my understanding of this topic and how my subject fits into the existing research and popular cultural material.

While the literature review establishes a niche for this thesis within the writings on quilting culture, I mentioned that we can not fully understand the stories recorded within this text without knowledge of local history. The Maritime Provinces, New Brunswick and more specifically the communities belonging to Kings and Saint John counties have a vibrant and extensive history. The first was regarding women in the history of the narrowly defined region of my research. I looked at historical literature from the late 1700s that centred on the roles of women since the region's early industrial period. Writings from women living throughout this time and writings from historians examining the roles of women in the development of the region have shown us that despite the apparently restrictive gender-specific social behaviours expected of women, women throughout the communities were engaged with community and traditional politics. Secondly, I looked at the role of quilting circles within the history of the region, observing how women have been quilting in groups since the early days of European settlement, yet quilting has been continually omitted from discussions of art and craft in New Brunswick. Both of these reflections on local history contextualize the conversations that I have recorded, showing how women of European origins from the area have been politically engaged since Canada's early days, and this engagement has been supported by participation in

quilting groups as these groups are of great importance to the creation and maintenance of communities.

Based on this examination of quilting culture literature and regional history, along with my many personal experiences, I approached my analysis of the collected interviews with the understanding that these women were in some way practicing feminists and were politically active; although, it took some time within the groups to understand that these assumptions were correct.

This thesis has shown that the women who are part of these quilting groups are practicing feminists. Not only because the majority of those interviewed accept feminist principles (both overtly and inadvertently), but because these women are leaders within their communities. This leadership and empowerment emerged as the majority of women who shared their stories for this thesis spoke of their various roles within and outside of their group(s) in relation to how their involvement in a quilting group provided the opportunity to take on those positions. Through their participation with their quilting groups, they are exposed to conversations that are often the initiation and planning stage to activities that support their communities. Simply by being involved in discussions and planning, these women gained a sense of empowerment through contributing to their communities.

Quilting groups provide a way for women to become confident with who they are as individuals and with who they are as community members. The group provides a space for women to express their views and work together to

make decisions. The fact that the group provides a forum for open expression and the ability to be an active part of organizing something that helps others, evokes feelings of empowerment, thus strengthening an individual's self-perception. This feeling of empowerment, in the case of this thesis, reveals the interconnected nature of feminism and women's identities to community.

Communities are created through compassion, trust and communication. Communication is supported and encouraged via the establishment of a safe space where group members are provided with a place to openly express their thoughts and ideas. As the quilters who were interviewed for this thesis have shown us these spaces are uniquely women's spaces as the spaces have been established by women for women to meet and talk. The creation of women dominated spaces, such as the space provided within the quilting group, is important because the conversations it enables creates and maintains the community by addressing vital issues that are related to community sustainability. Furthermore, this space is protected and continued, as many of the quilters explained about only bringing their daughters and granddaughters into the circle. By only allowing women into these spaces, women can ensure that the group dynamic is not changed, thus detracting from the feelings of security and negatively impacting this aspect of women's culture and politics.

Women's politics and women's political engagement is (generally) either negatively perceived, ignored or taken for granted within mainstream society. This occurs because women's political work is regarded as simply addressing

daily issues and problems that are not large enough to be considered political action. In this thesis I have illustrated that the work done by these women is made invisible through associating the conversations with the destructively defined concept of 'gossip.' Nevertheless, despite the attempt to make their work invisible, the women involved in these quilting groups recognize their work as valid and essential for fostering the relationships between community members. Through addressing these matters of community maintenance, such as providing to a charity or supporting a family who lost everything to a fire, the women within the quilting groups 'get things done' (Christiansen-Ruffman 2001, 23) thus strengthening communal bonds between neighbours. Another reason that the work of these women is often disregarded as important is because it is done without an exchange. In other words, it is gifting. And when one gives without asking for anything in return, especially if it is expected or assumed that one should give, then that expectation makes the importance of the work invisible. The women interviewed for this thesis revealed that they often give without ever asking for anything in return.

For the women I met with, I noted that there was a subtle demographic distinction in the type of community work that they engaged in. For the urban group, the Marco Polo Guild, the work was primarily directed to assisting other organized charities not connected to the group, but in which the group had a vested interest, such as breast cancer. In the suburban group of Hampton, the expanded rural group in Bloomfield, and the small, urban Portland group, there

tends to be a mixture of charity and direct community work. Finally, in the small, rural Upham group, the work done by the group is directly for the community as the members are connected to the other main groups within the community. No matter the form community work takes, this work has provided these women, the women before them, and will provide women to come with a forum for unhindered expression and direct engagement within their neighbourhoods.

The empowerment that the women gain through their involvement within the group is a contribution to feminism as the primary goal of all forms of feminism, is to ensure women have an equal voice within a patriarchal society. Although I did encounter this in the literature, it took time to reconnect myself with this part of my identity and therefore, it was not until I began editing this paper that I realized that feminism is not just a challenge to our patriarchal, mainstream society by trying to position women within male-dominated institutions, feminism also offers the hope of a society completely unlike the one in which we currently live - society filled with cooperation instead of competition.

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

As we draw to the end of this thesis, I am especially reflective on a few topics covered throughout this paper. Firstly, having communal spaces is exceptionally important as these places assist in creating and maintaining of community by offering a centralized physical space for the community to meet and for groups' to be created that in turn maintains not only the space but the

entire community by providing opportunities for new members to meet and old members to reconnect.

Secondly, the conversations that are engaged within quilting groups are a form of political action. The women belonging to these groups are enabled by the safe space that allows for open discussion and debate that results in planning and the maintaining of a healthy community. The importance of these groups political work can no longer be ignored as they are the answer for contemporary issues surrounding the decline of rural regions within Canada and show us how to make everyone's community a better place.

Thirdly, this research aims to broaden the general idea of what feminism is and the scope it reaches. Understanding how feminism is everywhere and in many forms helps promote sexual and gender equality by making the invisible visible. By recognizing all contributions by women as important we can work to change the status quo of mainstream society, not only by trying to fit into it, but by reinventing it.

Excerpt from my research journal:

I went to the archives today. This time I was interested in the journals, diaries, and letters by women from the area. Although there was some, I left feeling disappointed. Where were all these writings I have been told existed? Yes, I know that literacy remained elusive for many during the eighteenth, nineteenth and even early twentieth centuries. But there were tonnes of authored pieces by men. Where were our grandmothers' thoughts, ideas, feelings and beliefs? This cannot remain the case. Women must be better recorded in the history books.

By documenting the present we will not fade into history as many of our grandmothers have, and we will be able to share our thoughts and beliefs with

those who we may never meet. We will be able to better stress the important roles of women within our communities.

January 23rd 2009

Personal experience has informed me that general society sees group quilting as a dying practice, and I was initially one of them. This is not the case. I now see quilting groups as evolving, not dying, and although many members are lost each year, many more join. Although quilting may no longer be a rite of passage for young women to enter into active roles within their community, group quilting is still a passageway for women to become involved within their community. This form of women's cultural and political engagement remains important as quilting in groups, specifically in southern New Brunswick, continues to be a regular experience for many women. The future of quilting is uncertain in terms of where it will go as it evolves and the future of the conversations will be dictated as they always have been, by community events. However, the future of group quilting is currently stable in New Brunswick as new generations of women continue to become involved, many who are introduced as girls and most joining in later life. In other words, group quilting is not dying. Thus the proverbial door remains open for more women to benefit from the knowledge-sharing, politically empowering, feminist laced, and identity altering conversations that are the backbone to communities in New Brunswick.

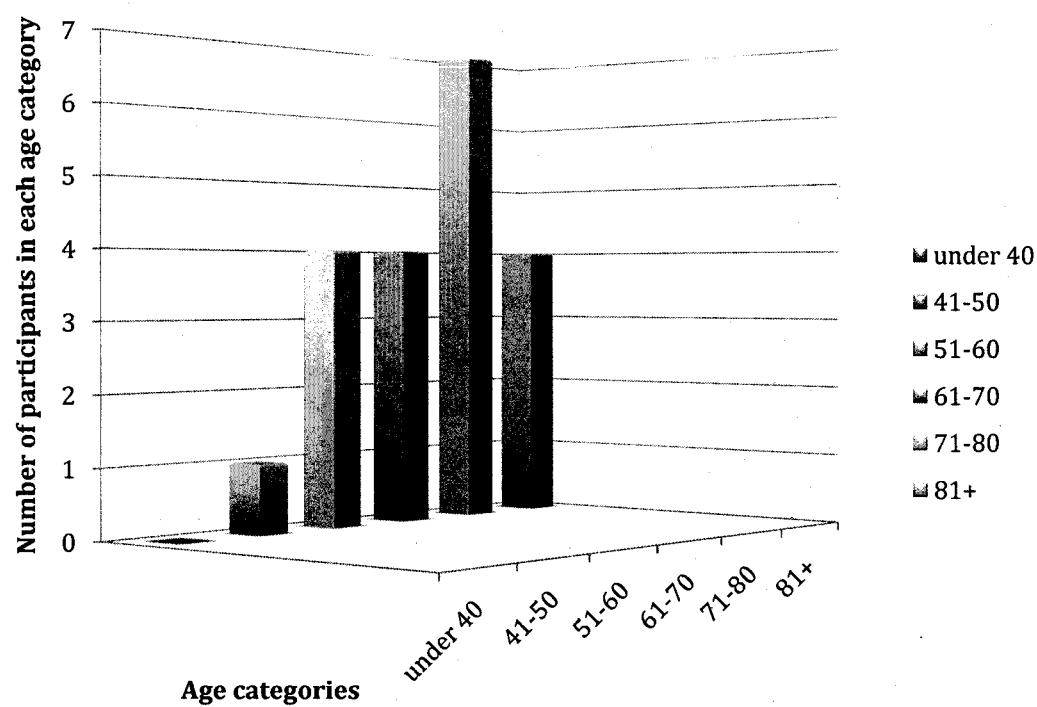
APPENDICES

Appendix A

Ages and Years spent Quilting and Belonging to a Quilting Group

Name	Age	Years Quilting	Years Belonging to The Group
Ruby Sharp	78	60	19
Margaret (Peggy) Pollock	78	59	53
Marga Norris	72	43	43
A. LeBlanc	70	14	9
Greta McGivery	88	74	25
Loretta Hanlon	81	65	25
Carmen Walters	60	0.3	0.3
Miriam Haines	81	17	17
Eleanor Kaye	74	15	15
Bonnie	57	14	13
Diana Reid	74	37	10
Christina Morrell	45	20	4
Liliane Kyle	74	30	3
Margaret (Marg) Stevens	67	35	5
Cecelia (Cee) Pearson	54	5	5
Helen Cobham	88	75	15
Lois Edwards	62	35	11
Daphne Howes	58	25	15
Faith Moar	75	15	15
Sandra Betts	69	11	11
Average	70.25	32.47	15.67

Ages of Participants, Grouped



Appendix B

My initial individual interview questions included:

Base-line Questions:

- 1) How long have you lived in a rural community?
- 2) How long have you been quilting?
- 3) How long have you been involved in group quilting?
- 4) How long have you been involved with this group?

Main Questions:

- 1) How has your involvement as a member in this (quilting) group affected how you perceive yourself?
- 2) How has your involvement in this group facilitated the development of your relationships within the entire community?
- 3) What are your thoughts on the conversations that occur during quilting as a group?

While my focus on group interaction would be defined by my investigation of:

- who can speak first and who cannot speak
- who directs the conversation and who controls the discussion
- what can be said and what cannot be said (being religious groups is certain religious conversations off limits?)
- what is the order of discussion topics and is this a regular pattern
- who is excluded or included in specific discussion topics and why
- is the language of the quilting group reflected in the materiality of the quilt

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