



Uncommon Threads: Motivations of Men Who Quilt

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The selection of and participation in leisure activities is one way we construct and affirm our identities (Haggard & Williams, 1992). Leisure activities are typically categorized as masculine or feminine, and men face greater social stigmas when they participate in leisure activities that are gender atypical (Shaw, 1999; Shaw & Henderson, 2005). Sewing and quilting are typically associated with women, and men who sew are often stigmatized because of “hetero-normative assumptions about domesticity and traditionally hegemonic practices” (Johnson & Cousineau, 2019, p. 139). Numerous studies have explored what motivates women to quilt (Burt & Atkinson, 2012; Dickie, 2011; King, 2001; Stalp, 2007), but only limited scholarship exists about men’s needlework and men who quilt (Gregory, 2016; Leimbach, 2013; Little, 1999; McBrinn, 2021). This study contributes to expanding this understudied area of quiltmakers’ lived experiences, and it seeks to advance understanding of gender atypical participation in textile-based leisure activities. Findings about motivational factors could benefit manufacturers and retailers in further expanding the quilting industry and increasing its inclusivity.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the motivations of men who quilt, and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) was utilized as a theoretical framework. The core premise of SDT is how the fulfillment of the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness result in enhanced motivation and in increased wellness (Deci & Ryan, 2017). People actively seek activities that offer the potential to fulfill these needs (Deci & Ryan, 2017), and when that occurs, “individuals feel that their motivation is ‘self-determined;’ they are engaging in an activity out of choice and pleasure or because it reflects their values” (LaPointe & Perreault, 2013, p. 137). The following research questions guided this study: (a) What factors motivate men to make quilts? (b) Is quilting a self-determined behavior for men? (c) Are there gender-based motivations for participating in quilting?

As part of a larger study, 15 men who quilt participated in oral history interviews combined with object elicitation and photo elicitation. After securing IRB approval, narrators were recruited through flyers posted on social media and through snowball sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). All narrators were over 18 (age range was 33 to 72; mean = 54); lived in the United States; identified as men; and made quilts for leisure, charitable, or artistic purposes. Pre-interviews were conducted via Zoom video chat software or telephone to explain the project, to address expectations and questions, and to obtain informed consent (Oral History Association, 2018). Oral history interviews were conducted via Zoom or telephone and were audio recorded only. Automated transcripts were produced by Microsoft Office 365’s Transcribe in Word service (Parish, 2020) and reviewed for accuracy while listening to the audio. Prior to data analysis, the narrators had the opportunity to review their transcripts (Leavy, 2011) and to select a pseudonym if desired. Fourteen of the narrators approved the use of their real names, and one preferred a pseudonym. Transcripts were imported into MAXQDA software, and data were

analyzed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA). With RTA, the reflexivity of the researcher takes center stage, and the researcher's role is that of a storyteller who uses an organic and iterative coding process to actively interpret data through their own cultural, social, theoretical, ideological, and scholarly lens (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun et al., 2018). Multiple strategies were employed to ensure rigor, including triangulation, reflexivity, and peer review, which addressed the study's validity and trustworthiness (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). An audit trail can bolster a study's trustworthiness, and detailed notes were created at each step of the research process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Six motivating factors for men who quilt were identified: (a) enjoyment, (b) artistic expression, (c) self-care, (d) care for others, (e) ability to solve problems, and (f) skill development. The first theme is *enjoyment*, and the narrators discussed that making quilts made them feel good, it excited them, and it was a fulfilling experience. Harold was matter of fact when discussing his quilting, "I don't have someone standing over me saying you have to make a quilt. It's something that I enjoy doing." The opportunity for *artistic expression* was another motivating factor for the narrators. Andrew explained, "For me, quilting is ... about using my creativity. I've always felt like I was a creative person, and I expressed that creativity in several different ways throughout my life. Quilting is the latest way of doing this."

Self-care refers to the narrators using quilting to support their own mental health. Johnny discussed how quilting makes him feel, "I try to do it meditatively. I like to make blocks. I like to sit down and sew. I will sew for hours making the same block over and over and over." The narrators were also motivated because they *care for others*. Ricky explained, "I want the people to feel something, so I think that's where most of my desire for quilting comes from. I want them to know that they are loved that someone cares about them."

Ability to solve problems refers to the narrators' strategies and successes at overcoming obstacles in the quilting process, which helped them to build confidence. Tim encountered difficulties with the quilt he was making at the time of the interview, "I keep learning what new thing can I try now and how can I adapt others. Adapting is what I'm doing a lot of right now, and that's okay. Fixing doesn't mean it has to be perfect." The narrators were also motivated to continue making quilts by their efforts in *skill development*. Troy said, "I'm very comfortable doing geometric shapes, using a rotary cutter. ... I'm also starting to learn more techniques like paper piecing or do bigger things with appliqué where maybe I can get rounder shapes."

Analysis of the data suggests that quilting allowed the narrators to fulfill the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness; the social contexts of the narrators also provided support for the fulfillment of these needs; and the narrators were intrinsically motivated to make quilts (Deci & Ryan, 2017). Their motivating factors were consistent with the previous research about men who quilt (Gregory, 2016; Leimbach, 2013; Little, 1999), and with research about women who quilt (Burt & Atkinson, 2012; Dickie, 2011; King, 2001; Stalp, 2007). Therefore, the analysis of the data suggests that there are not gendered factors that motivate participation in quilting. While the quilting industry will continue to cater to those who generate the most revenue, men are motivated for the same reasons as women, and they are a cohort that should not be ignored economically. Retailers and manufacturers should explore products that are aimed at men to increase industry inclusivity.

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