



Pre-cut Fabrics' Impact on the Quilting Experience of Quilters Under 45

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Introduction. Quilts are cultural objects telling the stories of our history and are embedded with meanings from significant cultural, political, and artistic movements (Ball, 2002; Brown, 1996; Cox, 2008; Stalp, 2007). What began in the American Colonies as wholecloth quilts and thrifty patchwork designs have evolved to elaborate block designs, art quilts, and modern geometric designs (Cox, 2008; Kiracofe & Johnson, 1993). Innovations such as new fabric techniques, kit quilts, sewing machines, and technology play a critical role in pushing quilting in new directions. As quilting evolves, the impacts of 21st-century innovations on contemporary quilters require more research. This study develops an understanding of how the innovation of pre-cut fabrics impacts the creative processes and quilt designs of quilters under the age of 45. This research advances the understanding of shifts in the quilting experience and influences on the direction and investments in the quilting industry

The multi-billion-dollar quilting industry is flourishing with millions of participants (Evert, 2017). Survey data from the Quilting in America™ 2017 study highlights the need to understand the effects of innovations in quilting for the industry to continue attracting quilters (Evert, 2017). Pre-cut fabrics are a key innovation identified by the survey as growing in popularity (The Quilting Company & Quilts Inc., 2017). In addition, the survey identifies the Under 45 (U45) Quilter as a small yet increasing segment of quilters (Evert, 2017). These quilters represent the future of quilting (Cavanaugh, 2018; Fields, 2017). Much of the research on quilting innovations has focused on the social and economic impact of quilting (Cerny et al., 1993; Johnson & Hawley, 2004; Stalp, 2007), finished quilts and historical aspects of quilting (Stalp, 2007), or female midlife quilters (Stalp, 2007). Little research has been done on innovations' impact on quilters' actual experiences and creative processes (Stalp, 2007). This study focuses on the effects of the specific innovation of pre-cut fabrics on the growing segment of U45 Quilters.

Pre-cut fabrics are coordinating fabric bundles, such as Layer Cakes®, Jelly Rolls®, and fat quarters, cut to a specific size and packaged by a manufacturer or quilt shop (Evert, 2018). Pre-cut fabric bundles typically contain one of every print in a fabric collection, often with duplicates of focal prints. These pre-coordinating fabric bundles provide quilters with quick and easy solutions when selecting fabrics for a quilt design. They eliminate the need to choose each fabric individually and reduce the amount of cutting required.

The U45 Quilter is generally a beginner or intermediate quilter who has less time than older, experienced quilters to dedicate to quilting due to family and career commitments (Evert, 2017; Fields, 2017). The generations represented by the U45 Quilter are highly influenced by digital platforms and expect convenience and instant gratification (Cautero, 2019; Lantos, 2014). Understanding the values, interests, and time commitments of this insufficiently researched segment of quilters will be crucial to the future of quilting.

Method. This research included interviews with 14 quilters who self-identified as age 45 and under, with at least five years of quilting experience, and had used pre-cut fabrics. Participation was inclusive of sexual identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and socio/economic status. Interviews took place at the *Road to California Quilter's Conference & Showcase* in January 2020. Participants were asked about their quilting processes and the value of pre-cut fabrics to their quilting experience. Participants optionally provided photographs of their quilts using pre-cut fabrics to facilitate the interview process. Data were analyzed through a grounded theory approach to find emergent themes on how pre-cut fabrics impacted quilters' creative processes and designs.

Results. First, this research investigated the impact on the U45 Quilter's creative processes regarding the perceived efficiency and value of the quilting experience. Results showed that pre-cut fabrics were pivotal to quilters' sustained engagement in quilting. Using pre-cut fabrics provided a level of instant gratification. By skipping tedious steps of the quilting process, e.g., fabric selection and cutting, quilters could quickly get to the part of the process they enjoyed, such as sewing. Pre-cut fabrics accommodated the life constraints of the U45 Quilter by requiring less space, time, and financial commitment than purchasing yardage. Lastly, pre-cut fabrics lowered perceived risk in terms of color coordination, accuracy, and finances, leading to greater adoption of pre-cut fabrics among quilters. These themes contributed to a greater sense of accomplishment, satisfaction, and confidence in the U45 Quilter's creative processes, leading to their continuing engagement of the craft.

Secondly, this research investigated the impact on the U45 Quilter's design choices as reflected in their quilts' colors, prints, and pattern selection. Pre-cut fabrics influenced quilters' aesthetic preferences leading to simpler quilt designs with less focus on small piecing and the use of a greater variety of fabrics. A desire to showcase fabric prints through larger piecework also produced simpler quilt designs. While pre-cut fabrics could be prescriptive, the U45 Quilter found ways to make their designs original by altering the color placement, arranging blocks, or adding additional details like appliqué. Conversely, pre-cut fabrics limited the quilters' design capabilities. Pre-cut fabrics' efficiency inherently created similarities among quilt designs, especially in block size, scale, and piecing techniques. Lastly, pre-cut fabrics impacted the selection of designs and fabrics. Quilters were more likely to purchase pre-cut fabrics and pre-cut friendly patterns due to increased visibility on social media and local quilt shops.

Discussion. The impact of pre-cut fabrics on the U45 Quilter's creative processes and quilt designs were interconnected. The influence on creative processes was seen in the preference for simpler quilt designs with a variety of fabrics. These simpler quilt designs allowed the U45 Quilter to showcase fabric prints through larger piecework than traditional quilts, provided instant gratification, lowered perceived risk, and accommodated their lifestyle constraints. However, quilters sacrificed some of their design freedom. Ultimately, these simpler quilt designs with a variety of fabrics created greater enjoyment of the creative process and sustained the engagement of the U45 Quilter.

Today, quiltmaking is a choice, and to compete with other leisure activities, quiltmaking must fit into the experiential lifestyle and values of the U45 Quilter. The results of this study indicate the importance of understanding what drives the U45 Quilter's creative processes to encourage them to learn and sustain quiltmaking. The U45 Quilter is looking for solutions to their already stressful, fast-paced lives that allow them to enjoy a creative and meaningful craft. This research illustrates how pre-cut fabrics fit into the values and lifestyle of the U45 Quilter, and therefore influence their quilt designs. Future research could explore areas like pre-cut fabrics use in modern quiltmaking styles, the relationship between fabric print scale and pre-cut fabrics, and the impact to quiltmaking of shifts in the social networks of the U45 Quilter.

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