



BIROn - Birkbeck Institutional Research Online

Cox, Rosie (2013) The complications of 'hiring a hubby': gender relations and the commoditisation of home maintenance in New Zealand. *Social and Cultural Geography* 14 (5), pp. 575-590. ISSN 1464-9365.

Downloaded from: <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/id/eprint/5024/>

Usage Guidelines:

Please refer to usage guidelines at <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/policies.html>
contact lib-eprints@bbk.ac.uk.

or alternatively



BIROn - Birkbeck Institutional Research Online

Enabling open access to Birkbeck's published research output

The complications of 'hiring a hubby': gender relations and the commoditisation of home maintenance in New Zealand

Journal Article

<http://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/5024>

Version: Accepted (Refereed)

Citation:

Cox, R. (2012) The complications of 'hiring a hubby': gender relations and the commoditisation of home maintenance in New Zealand <i>Social and Cultural Geography</i> (In Press)
--

© 2012 Taylor & Francis

[Publisher Version](#)

All articles available through Birkbeck ePrints are protected by intellectual property law, including copyright law. Any use made of the contents should comply with the relevant law.

[Deposit Guide](#)

Contact: lib-eprints@bbk.ac.uk

**The complications of 'Hiring a Hubby': Gender relations and the commoditization
of home maintenance in New Zealand**

Rosie Cox,

Department of Geography, Environment and Development Studies, Birkbeck

University of London, Malet Street, London, WC1E 7HX

This paper examines the commoditization of traditionally male domestic tasks through interviews with handymen who own franchises in the company 'Hire a Hubby' in New Zealand and homeowners who have paid for home repair tasks to be done. Discussions of the commoditization of traditionally female tasks in the home have revealed the emotional conflicts of paying others to care as well as the exploitative and degrading conditions that often arise when work takes place behind closed doors. By examining the working conditions and relationships involved when traditionally male tasks are paid for, this paper raises important questions about the valuing of reproductive labour and the production of gendered identities. The paper argues that while working conditions and rates of pay for 'hubbies' are better than those for people undertaking commoditized forms of traditionally female domestic labour, the negotiation of this work is still complex and implicated in gendered relations and identities. Working on the home was described by interviewees as an expression of care for family and a performance of the 'right' way to be a 'Kiwi bloke'

and a father. Paying others to do this labour can imply a failure in a duty of care and in the performance of masculinity.

Key words: care, New Zealand, masculinity, DIY, home

Introduction

Caring in the home is often thought of as a quintessentially feminine activity. It is women who are expected to make homes for their families and to look after the physical space of the house. This paper, however, reflects on the more literal 'making' of homes and the importance of home maintenance activities to care for families and the construction of masculinities. The paper draws on findings from a research project that worked with homeowners and 'Hubbies' from the handyman company 'Hire A Hubby' in New Zealand. The research found that carrying out home repairs was part of men's relationships with family and friends and was understood by many to be a duty of care that they owed to family as well as an important aspect of their identity. While not all male interviewees carried out repairs in their home, the ability to deal with home maintenance problems was portrayed as a specific, and desirable, New Zealand masculine identity. Reflecting this, the paper suggests that masculinities as well as femininities can be thought of as produced and performed within the home, and that caring work may be part of men's traditionally gendered responsibilities as well as women's.

The paper uses Fisher and Tronto's (1990: 4) definition of care which understands it to be a 'species activity'. This inclusive definition is helpful for

exploring how men as well as women relate to responsibilities in the home which are traditionally distributed along gender lines. The paper explores the negotiation of identities that takes place when a traditionally gendered form of caring labour is commoditized. It argues that in a culture that celebrates certain activities – in this case home maintenance – as being an important part of the ‘right’ way to be a man, the commoditization of those activities is not always a simple process but can involve the consideration and negotiation of identity.

The paper begins by looking at the home as a very particular site for caring and considers existing research on both the commoditization of care in the home and the relationship between masculinity and care at home. It then turns to conceptualisations of care and how these have been used productively by geographers to expand understandings of both care and space. The paper then briefly gives the context of the study and methods used in the research before exploring the experiences of handymen and homeowners who do DIY. The paper contrasts the work experiences of handymen with paid domestic workers – that is people carrying out traditionally feminised labour in the private home – to show how the gendering of tasks affects working conditions and ideas of skill. The final part of the paper shows how homeowners care for family and friends by working on their homes. It argues that for many men interviewed the performance of DIY tasks is a way to negotiate and perform a particular form of culturally celebrated masculinity which involves a duty of care for others.

The commoditisation of care in the home

The home is not a new space in which to explore the commoditization of care. There is now a thorough and often excellent literature discussing the increasing commoditization of female care work in the home in advanced capitalist societies. In particular the trend towards employing migrant domestic workers has been investigated in a wide variety of settings (see *inter alia* Anderson 2000; Cox 2006; Ehrenrich and Hochschild 2003; Hondagneu Sotelo 2001; Lutz 2011; Momsen 1999; Parreñas 2001; Pratt 2004). This literature suggests that the commoditization of female reproductive labour presents a substantial challenge to social justice and social well being (Tronto 2002). It creates work that is poorly paid and poorly regulated. It exploits migrant workers and it supports - and is supported by - inequalities in class, ethnicity and gender. This literature shows that the *gendering* of reproductive tasks – that is the expectation that women will do housework and caring as part of their ‘natural’ role – is extremely important in shaping the (poor) pay and conditions of workers who do these jobs (Cox 2012).

The home is also not just another workplace for care workers. Its strong association with women’s unpaid reproductive labour for family members has meant that it is conceptualised differently from other work spaces by both workers and employers and by regulatory authorities. Domestic labour in the home is excluded from key employment protections such as maximum working hours or minimum wages in many countries and immigration schemes which are designed to facilitate the movement of migrant domestic workers generally offer fewer rights than those for other groups of workers (see Cox 2012 for an overview). As Edward Hall (2011:

592) notes the home is weighted with 'complex and embodied familial relations' and care workers will often need to negotiate challenging relationships with those being cared for, their family members and co-habitants. The imagining of the home as a place where care is 'naturally' provided means that care workers in private homes often struggle to be treated as workers and find instead that their labour is interpreted as akin to that of unpaid family members (Bakan and Stasiulis 1997; Green and Lawson 2011; Gregson and Lowe 1994). Care exists within and can reinforce existing hierarchies and inequalities (Tronto 2002, 2006) and when care is commoditised its unequal distribution can be even more pronounced. As Atkinson, Lawson and Wiles put it (2011: 569) 'The care-less content of commoditised care within the logics of neoliberal economies can be documented in local proximate relations through to global care chains of care-less care connecting and exploiting global inequalities of choice.'

Masculinity and caring at home

The strong association of the home with women's traditional role as carers does not mean that home is unimportant to men or to masculinity, nor does it mean that men do not give or receive care in the home. Men's relationship to the home has been much less thoroughly explored than women's but work by Andrew Gorman-Murray (2008a, 2008b and see also Tosh 1999 and Cook 2011) shows that the home is an important site for the construction of multiple masculinities and that men's domestic activities are worthy of further research.

One aspect of men's home life that has been little investigated is their experience of home as a place to labour, a place to carry out tasks that, like those women carry out in the home, are expected of them by virtue of their gender and which are bound up in definitions and imaginings of appropriate masculinity. Steven Gelber (1997) has argued that in the early decades of the twentieth century in the USA the rise of DIY was a key component in men's renegotiation of their place in their homes and 'part of the definition of suburban husbanding' (1997: 67). Household repairs and maintenance were free from any hint of gender-role compromise and allowed men to reassert their masculinity. DIY was not undertaken to save money but as a way to be a proper man and a good father. Similarly Gordon-Murray (2011) has shown that an increased focus on home repairs and practical projects can be a way for men to negotiate anxiety produced in the world of work following the Global Financial Crisis.

Majella Kilkey (2010) has highlighted the increased commoditization of traditionally male domestic chores (household and garden maintenance and repair) which has happened alongside the commoditization of stereotypically female tasks of housework and childcare in the UK (see also Ramirez and Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2009 on the USA). The commoditization of male tasks in the home can follow similar logics to the outsourcing of traditionally female tasks. Men as well as women can face a time squeeze due to long hours at work and men are increasingly expected to be committed and nurturing parents at home (Kilkey and Perrons 2010, Perrons, Plomien and Kilkey 2010). Perrons Plomien and Kilkey (2010: 205) comment that '[d]ata from the UK TUS [Time Use Survey] 2000 show that the overall demand for

stereotypically masculinized forms of domestic household work is on a par with feminized forms’.

Studies of the commoditization of stereotypically male reproductive labour are few and far between but there is a small literature on self provisioning which has revealed that certain groups and certain household forms are less able than others to undertake these tasks themselves and have to pay them to be done. For example, Nelson (2004) found single-mother households were unlikely to be able to take on home and car maintenance themselves and low income families may lack the tools to carry out DIY or repairs (Williams and Windebank 2002, see also Shove *et al* 2007). In both cases it may be social disadvantage, rather than wealth, that forces people to rely on paid help (see also Pahl 1984).

Whilst the employment of such services may be related to social disadvantage for some households, the commoditization of ‘male’ reproductive labour does not appear to necessarily create the denigrated and marginalized jobs that characterise female domestic work (Perrons, Plomien and Kilkey 2010). The work is not particularly poorly paid; it is not segregated from other parts of the labour market, nor necessarily considered unskilled because it is sometimes done by family members for free (although cf Ramirez and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2009, re gardeners in Los Angeles). Ramirez and Hondagneu-Sotelo (2009: 72) comment that ‘[t]he domestic labor performed by foreign born women has been studied [...] but scholarship on the immigrant men in and around private households remains

scarce'. I would add to this that literature on commoditised male labour in the home is scarce altogether, be it done by migrants or no.

The lack of attention to men's reproductive labour in the home means that rather than being considered as care workers, men have more likely been seen as the recipients of care provided by women. Traditional gender divisions can disguise the amount of care both given and received by men. Tronto describes an imagining of the relationship between a breadwinning husband and care within the home (2006: 12):

A breadwinning husband 'took care' of his family by earning a living; in return he expected his wife to convert these earnings into comfortable shelter, edible food, clean clothing, a social life and so forth [...]. Such men rarely learned how to 'take care of themselves.' Care work, invisibly and efficiently performed, was a privilege of his role.

In such a scenario men are separated from care in the home and masculine identity is confirmed by distance from caring labour. However, if we adopt a broader conceptualisation of care (Fisher and Tronto 1990) and recognise that we are 'care receivers all' (Tronto 2006: 15), then our interdependences, not least the large amounts of care received by those who appear to be most independent, are revealed.

Spaces of care

Within geography an impressive range of work on care has emerged in recent years which explores care at various scales and in a variety of settings (see for example

themed section in *Environment and Planning A* 35, 2003; themed issue of *Ethics, Place and Environment* 2010, and a recent issue of this journal 12 (6) 2011). This research has considered care, both paid and unpaid, for the self and for human and non-human others and for those both physically close and distant. Recent debates have also included discussion of the ethic of care and the ontological status of care has been bound up with issues of ethics, morality, responsibility and social justice (Lawson 2007). Care and the spatiality of care have emerged as ethical issues of broad interest within the discipline (Popke 2006, Milligan *et al* 2007). This work has shown that geography, as a discipline, has something special to offer to debates around care through its attention to spatialities of care, the importance of nearness and distance to negotiating ethics of care and by highlighting the connections between care for people and care for the physical environment and non-human others (McEwan and Goodman 2010).

Much of this recent writing on care has drawn on the concept of the 'feminist ethic of care'. This has its origins in Carol Gilligan's (1982) work on the development of moral reasoning. Gilligan claimed that women adopted an ethic of care based on relatedness and responsiveness to the needs of others. Her work has spawned debates in a range of disciplines (see Larrabee 1993) and within these debates Joan Tronto (see 1993, 2006, Fisher and Tronto 1990 amongst others) has written extensively on the ethic of care and the role of care in society. Tronto argues that if we think about care as something more than just the work that supports vulnerable others, then care can be used as a basis for re-thinking the moral boundaries which currently preserve inequalities of power and privilege whilst 'degrading "others"

who currently do the caring work in our society' (1993: 101, see also Tronto 2006). In order to think differently about care it needs to be understood as something which involves everyone.

Fisher and Tronto (1990: 4) define 'caring' as: 'a species activity that includes *everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible*. That world includes our bodies, our selves and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web' (emphasis in original). This definition of caring as a 'species activity' is broad and it moves us away from thinking about 'care work' as something specific, to focus on the activities of all people and the care that is done for everyone (and everything). Tronto (2006) argues that 'care' must be understood as something that everyone is and can be involved in, and that everyone needs. By recognizing that we are all recipients of 'care', we expose our interdependence and reject conceptualisations of care that situate it in the private family or intimate relationships alone and which denigrate those perceived as receivers of care (Green and Lawson 2011; Hall 2011; Lawson 2007).

By using the concept of care to look at male labour in the home, this paper keeps faith with this broad definition, showing the myriad ways in which we depend on others and express our desires to care for them. The paper adds to existing conceptualisations by raising the question of whether it is possible to see care being practiced within a traditional masculine role within the home – a role which the literature largely overlooked or has seen to be uncaring. This paper brings back

men's emotional relations to the role of caring in the home and argues that providing (specific) caring labour can be important to sense of self for men as well as women.

Researching 'hired hubbies' in New Zealand

NZ has a long history of DIY homebuilding and home repair activities, rooted in the bush-clearance and house building of early European settlers. During the 1950s and 60s, with the spread of suburbanism, and single homeownership DIY as we think of it today really took off (Brickell 2006; cf Gelber 1997). As Wolfe (1997 p64, quoted in Mackay, Perkins and Gidlow 2007 p2) comments:

For many [New Zealanders] the home and garden is little short of a microcosm of the colonial estate of their forebears. With no need for actual bushcutting and clearing, today's suburban equivalent is rampant do-it-yourselfism, especially at weekends when the whine of mowers forms a background to the whirr of skillsaws, the repetition of hammer blows and engine noise as convoys of cars and trailers proceed to the local tip.

Whilst figures are hard to come by it is suggested that New Zealanders are more likely to be involved in DIY projects than any other population in the Western world. DIY is increasingly big business too, investment in tools and materials can be substantial it is thought that in the 2000s about NZ\$1billion was spent each year at DIY stores (Mackay, Perkins and Gidlow 2007). DIY appears to be an important part of what it means to be a proper 'Kiwi bloke'.

For this project interviews were carried out with thirty homeowners and ten 'hubbies' (franchise owners with the company Hire A Hubby) in New Zealand

between 2007 and 2010. Hubbies were asked about their work history, training, skills, experience of working as a hubby, jobs they commonly do, pay conditions and the attitude of clients. Homeowners were asked what home repairs/building they paid for, what work they and other household members did for themselves, how they made decisions about who should do tasks and who else might help them with such tasks.

The firm Hire A Hubby provides general 'handyman' services throughout New Zealand and Australia (see www.hireahubby.co.nz). It is one of the most successful franchise companies in both countries and illustrates the developing demand for commoditized forms of traditional male labour. Based on the imagining of an absent or inept 'hubby', Hire A Hubby facilitates the commoditization of traditional male reproductive labour in exactly the same way as cleaning franchises replace female labour in the home without challenging gender roles and responsibilities. In fact Hire A Hubby has a sister company that provides cleaning services called 'Mobile Mums'. Their selling point is that they will undertake any kind of household repairs/maintenance/updating no matter how big or how small and they emphasise that they will take on small jobs that which householders might be expected to do themselves.

The Hubbies interviewed were accessed through a list of all franchise owners supplied by Hire A Hubby. Hubbies in Auckland, Christchurch and Wellington (the largest cities in New Zealand) were approached and ten agreed to be interviewed. Interviews lasted from twenty minutes to over three hours. The Hubbies had all

been in the job for more than two years but were of very different ages and had taken very different routes to become self-employed handymen. All the hubbies were Pakeha (white, of European descent) but not all were born in New Zealand. All were male (as are all the Hubbies listed as franchise owners) but one co-owned the franchise with his wife who kept the books and did other routine administration.

Homeowners were interviewed in Auckland, Dunedin, Hamilton and Wellington. Interviewees were sought systematically through personal contacts in these cities, to give maximum variety in terms of household income, age, lifecycle stage and household size. All the homeowner interviewees were Pakeha and many of them had lived outside New Zealand at least briefly. The majority of households contained two adults with or without resident children; three of these were lesbian couples. Four households were single people (two men and two women). The interviews were carried out with whichever members of the household agreed to be interviewed and these were relatively evenly split between men and women. In six cases both adult partners agreed to be interviewed together. Interviews took place in a variety of locations including the participants' homes, workplaces and coffee shops. Interviews with homeowners lasted between 20 minutes and nearly two hours with interviews in homes generally being longer and including some element of interviewees showing me the projects that they were telling me about.

The paper now turns to the findings from the research project. It begins by contrasting the working conditions of hubbies with those that have been found in traditionally female forms of paid domestic work (cf Kilkey 2010). It then looks at

the complex negotiations that take place within households when home maintenance work is commoditized and reflects on the way that carrying out DIY and home repairs is understood by some men to be part of the care they provide for friends and family.

Working conditions in traditionally male domestic labour

The large body of research on female domestic workers has shown the low wages and poor conditions that often predominate when care work is carried out in the home for pay (Lutz 2011) but much less is known about pay and working conditions for people working in commoditized forms of traditionally male domestic labour (See Kilkey 2010 for a detailed comparison of handyman work and domestic work in the UK and Cox 2010 for a more detailed discussion of how hobbies conditions compare to domestic workers). My study found that hobbies pay was not high but their working conditions were markedly better than those commonly found amongst female domestic workers in other countries. Like domestic workers they could struggle to have their work considered as skilled even when it was appreciated by their customersⁱ

The hobbies I interviewed reported that their pay was very variable and it depended both on the number of hours that they worked and the rates they felt able to charge. Hobbies earned much more per hour than cleaning staff but making a living did mean long hours of work, careful balancing of types of jobs and paperwork at weekends or evenings. They also made money on providing materials that were bought at trade price and sold on at retail and this was very important to incomes.

All but one of the hubbies interviewed thought they were not able to charge enough for their work – their customers just would not pay it or they would be undercut, as one hubby put it:

there's always some a bloke down the road who would charge less

A number of hubbies were effectively subsidising their business in various ways. For example, by buying equipment upfront with redundancy payments, using the unpaid labour of family members to help with paperwork or self-exploiting through long hours. One hubby I spoke to was pulling out because he felt he could not make enough to live on.

Working conditions for hubbies were generally very good and flexible and this element of the job was appreciated by the hubbies interviewed. Most felt they could adjust their hours to suit themselves and that they had some control over the tasks that they did. Once they were established, most hubbies had enough work that they were able to turn down the jobs they least liked. Almost all considered it to be a good job – one even said 'fabulous!' when asked. Additionally, hubbies who were interviewed felt that their skills were largely appreciated by clients and that certainly the work that they did was, with customers making an effort to express their appreciation, for example by sending thank you cards. This again is in contrast to female domestic work. The hubbies' labours were not unrecognised, invisible, overlooked or presumed to take no time at all as domestic workers often find their work is (Anderson 2000; Lutz 2011), even when they carried out small tasks that householders could do for themselves, or routine tasks such as gardening.

Hobbies did sometimes however, have to deal with their skills being overlooked. This happened most often when they worked with registered tradesmen, but it could also be in contrast to white collar professions. One hobby recounted to me an exchange he had with a potential client, who is a lawyer. The hobby quoted for the job but the solicitor wanted to query the price. He asked the hobby what his hourly rate is and the hobby responded that he does not give an hourly rate but a price for the job (this is so he can get the mark up on materials), the discussion turned into a debate about recognition of skills, which went something like this:

Solicitor: But you must have an hourly rate. What is it?

Hobby: I don't work like that, but you're a solicitor, what's your hourly rate?

Solicitor: I'm not obliged to tell you that.

Hobby: Yeah, and I'm not obliged to tell you mine.

Solicitor: But I'm a professional ...

Hobby: (Now riled) Are you saying I'm not a professional?

Solicitor: No, no I'm not saying that. It's just I'm educated ...

Hobby: So now you're saying I'm not educated or professional? Do you have any idea how long my training took?

They decided the hobby wouldn't do the job.

As this exchange shows, not all customers recognised hobbies as 'skilled' in any formal sense and the use of words such as 'educated' and 'professional' sends strong signals about the perceived status of handyman work which are rooted in class prejudice. Yet, the confidence the hobby had to defend himself, and the fact that the solicitor did backtrack on his comments, demonstrates that handymen are

able to claim a status as 'skilled' which would be unlikely to be available to workers carrying out traditionally female domestic tasks. Even domestic workers who have relevant qualifications, such as nurses who become carers following migration, find it extremely difficult to have their skills recognised or to retain any of the status that was accorded to them in their earlier roles (see Pratt 1999 for example).

Hubbies were not faced with the worst of the poor pay and conditions that characterise the lot of domestic workers, nor was their labour overlooked by those they worked for as is often the case for those carrying out housework and childcare, be they paid or unpaid. Gender, therefore, appears to be important in shaping the jobs that emerge when domestic tasks are commoditized (Kilkey 2010). Traditionally female tasks are more likely to be unappreciated and those doing the work are assumed to be unskilled. It is worthwhile to be sceptical about the extent to which levels of skill are inherent in the jobs being done rather than social attitudes towards them.

Hubbies are also able to avoid becoming embroiled in the inter-personal aspect of care even when working in a home for a long period of time and would, therefore, not become enmeshed in familialism or treated like 'part of the family'. For domestic workers this aspect of the job can be a blessing – offering them the opportunity for emotional closeness and fulfilment in a situation which can otherwise be isolated (Lutz 2011) – but it can also be a curse as their status as workers is overlooked and their labour is cast as a duty or a favour (Cox and Narula 2003; Hess and Puckhaber 2004). Hubbies can find, however, that they are caught in

the negotiation of gender roles and identities within families and it is to this aspect of 'hiring a hubby' that I turn now.

Negotiating masculinity and care at home

Throughout the research it became clear that homeowners were negotiating the commoditization of traditionally masculine labour in the home through ideas of duty to family and in terms of activities which held families and friends together and which can be enjoyable social occasions. These ideas were highly gendered and discussion of home repairs revealed a strong sense that this was 'men's work' and part of the right way to be a 'Kiwi bloke' even though almost all women were involved in working on their homes too.

The hubbies I interviewed clearly expressed the idea that home repairs and DIY were a man's duty to his family. When asked why their customers were paying for work to be done hubbies generally answered in terms which entirely assumed it was the man's duty to do this work and he had failed in some way. These included that men are too lazy, work too long hours, or that they do not learn the skills anymore from their fathers. One hubby said:

You get a lot of calls on Mondays and Tuesdays because the husband's obviously gone off on the booze or something like that, and hasn't done what he promised to do.

This assumption that hubbies were replacing men who had failed in their duty to their families was also present when jobs were being negotiated. Hubbies reported that it was almost always women who phoned them to ask for work to be done and

that they much preferred this. If the hubby has to ring back and a man answers the hubby feels intense embarrassment (as he presumes the man he is talking to does) because the hubby's very existence implies failure on the part of that man. Some homeowners felt the same way and the name 'Hire A Hubby' was seen to be particularly insulting. Homeowner 4 commented that he would *never* use the company because its name implies that his 'role is being usurped'.

Interviews with home owners revealed that while both men and women did large amounts of DIY there was a gendered *expectation* about knowing how to do home maintenance tasks and taking responsibility for them. Like the hubbies, homeowners saw DIY as men's work even when their own experience contradicted that. Decisions about whether to work on the house oneself or to employ someone were made in the light of this gendered understanding, which for many cast home repairs as part of men's duty of care to family and friends.

For a number of homeowner interviewees doing home repairs could be a way to express care for family and to physically look after them. For example, Homeowner 11 explained that when his wife was pregnant with their first child he felt the work he did on their home was something [he] could contribute:

I was not carrying the baby or giving birth, but this [painting the outside of the house] was something I could do.

He went on to explain that he continues to work on the house himself despite being able to afford to pay for tasks to be done because wants to be a role model to his children, he said:

[I do DIY] so that they know you can do things. They have helped a little bit with painting, they're not very good, but mostly I want to provide a model so that they will have a go.

Homeowner 11 understood this specifically as a gendered role, as something he would do as a *father*. This was a motivation that was also expressed by other interviewees. They felt that they should show their children both how to do DIY and show them that working on your home is something that you can do yourself. This contrasts to Perrons, Plomien and Kilkey's (2010) findings in the UK, where ideals of 'hands-on' fatherhood were more likely to be a motivation for paying a professional handyman in order to free up time to spend with kids.

For Homeowner 11 his role as a father and as a good husband was part of a distinct form of masculinity which encompassed being responsible for the physical upkeep of the home. This came out in a story that he recounted about a conversation with his wife about his brother in law's lawns. Homeowner 11 prefaced the story by describing his brother in law as 'busy at work and lazy at home', as a result 'his lawns are always a mess.' As Homeowner 11 had often commented on this to his wife, she suggested that he offer to mow them. He said 'No way! That would be such an insult to him!' For Homeowner 11 offering to mow another able-bodied man's lawns would be to directly comment on the way he looks after his house and with it his family. When telling this story Homeowner 11 showed the incredulity he felt that his wife had ever suggested such a thing. When reflecting on times he might pay a professional, Homeowner 11 also framed this in terms of his role as a husband and father. He said that over the years he has become happier to pay for people to do things:

I think that I'm intelligent enough to work out what is good for my family and not take on something that is going to take six months to finish just because that is what a bloke is meant to do.

For Homeowner 11 caring for his house was about his role as a husband and father. The external appearance of his house, such as well-kept lawns, communicated his successful accomplishment of this role to the world. He did not expect to do all the work on his house (even if that is what 'a bloke is meant to do') but he did feel responsible for the house and thought that it reflected on him as a man.

Working on homes can also be a way that care is shown to and provided for grown up children and parents. Many interviewees were involved in providing help reciprocally or non-reciprocally for members of their extended families. For example, Homeowner 20 was from a family which included many skilled tradesmen and there was an expectation that they would all work on each others houses:

We took out the pond in the garden first, on the day that we got the keys, and then the family came over later that day and started stripping the wallpaper...in every single room in the house. [...] But we wouldn't have done as much [right] if we were paying full price for a tradesman we didn't know [right]. So obviously we were able to do more because, um...family love and labour [laughs].

Homeowner 8 commented that helping her son and his family was a natural part of being a mum:

He knows that they just have to ask me and I will go over there and help do things. I enjoy it and I did say to him "anytime you want me to come and help paint, just let me know". And I've said I'll help them set up the garden if need be. It's what mums do.

For both these interviewees the labour of home maintenance and improvements was quite clearly part of their relationship with their families, an expression of love and a way to care for those who might not need some other forms of looking after any longer. As Janine Wiles comments (2011 p275) caregivers do not necessarily experience giving care as a burden but rather 'caregiving offers opportunities for appreciating personal relationships, being in the present and for enhancing the dignity of both caregivers and recipients.' This was true of a number of my interviewees who took both pride and pleasure in providing care for others through working on their homes.

Many of the interviewees talked about the work they had done with friends as well as families, particularly on their first houses, and how they had then helped friends in return. Some were still involved in these networks of mutual exchange, swapping advice and tools and well as lending a hand. Sophie Bowlby (2011) has commented that we know little about the spaces of caring amongst friends despite the importance of these relationships to many people. Amongst my interviewees, home was an important space for friends as well as family and home repair activities provided a forum for helping friends and socialising. These home repairs were rooted for many in a tradition of doing a hard day's work and then hanging out with mates, or as one interviewee said:

[T]here is a male New Zealand culture where people come around and appraise your work over a beer and compare notes and give advice.

Homeowner 13, who had described both her husband and father as ‘typical New Zealand handyman’, gave an example of how family and friend relationships were negotiated as people helped her and her (male) partner work on their first house.

As well as a bonding process between [my partner] and my dad, it’s also a point of contention because my dad’s always been the person I’ve gone to, to ask for advice about this stuff. But now my partner thinks that his ideas are right, and there can be a little bit of tension there sometimes which is quite funny. But he organized it all, and he had my dad, his dad, and probably about five friends that came over and spent the morning putting down the concrete slab [right] whilst I did the barbecue and bought the bread for the sausages and stuff like that.

Many other interviewees had similar stories of groups of friends working together and then relaxing with a beer around the barbie.

Joining in with group projects could be an important part of social activities even for some male interviewees who did not consider themselves particularly skilled or able. Homeowner 17 commented:

And also, my network of friends know that I’m, you know, nine out of ten useless. The New Zealand male...still in the baby booming era of our ...of our era, still has an incredible amount of expertise compared – and...and I’m on the lower end of that [right]. So they don’t consult me [right]. It’s only one way. [...] And of course, I’m at that end of the continuum for New Zealand where I think I’m not quite as handy as I perhaps ought to be. And, uh, so, you know, if I’m involved in any working bees or anything [...] Then I’m going to be pretty much designated to the heavy lifting, umm, brainless kind of stuff

Homeowner 17’s comment suggests that he feels that New Zealand men both are, and perhaps should be, ‘handy’. This is despite the fact that he has a professional,

well-paid job, in the top decile of earners for the country so can afford to pay others to work on his house, and has access to a 'cerebral' form of masculine identity through working in a university. Perrons, Plomien and Kilkey (2010: 205) comment that their interviewees in the UK understood the perceived relationship between household maintenance and traditional forms of muscular masculinity but 'they were often quite open about lacking the necessary skills, not considering these attributes critical to their sense of masculinity. With very few exceptions they expressed no ambivalence over outsourcing 'their' domestic chores.' Their sense of masculine identity was through work and career. This contrasts with interviewees from New Zealand who, even when they were highly paid and in professional, 'cerebral' careers, still commented on their abilities or inabilities as handymen.

Claudia Bell (1996: 183) comments on the importance of handyness and 'mateyness' to Kiwi masculinity. She reports a story of 'a group of blokes' who wanted to build their own grandstand to go in front of their big screen TV to watch the rugby world cup. So they jumped in their 'ute' and went and bought some wood:

Then in the great tradition of matey co-operation, and with typical Kiwi ingenuity, they built a wooden mini-grandstand in their lounge ... this item gained worldwide attention via Reuters. It showed the world the values New Zealanders tell themselves they should have. ... These rugby-loving handymen are models of the sort of character a kiwi bloke should be.

This has echoes of Jock Phillips' (1987) concept of 'mateship' a term he uses to describe relationships between men in early pioneering days. These relationships were built on camaraderie in the face of harsh conditions and in the provision of mutual practical benefits (see also Brickell 2008).

As comparison with Perrons, Plomien and Kilkey's (2010) work on the UK and Gelber's (1997) on suburban USA shows, the construction of masculinity through manual work on the home is place and time specific. The men in my study were responding to a particular version of masculinity which they understood as celebrated in contemporary Kiwi culture. Historically the rural nature and frontier character of the settler experience provided fertile growth for the development of male institutions and of particular attitudes towards work, physical strength and comfort. The ability to learn on the job, turn one's hand to what needed doing and 'make do and mend' were all practically useful as well as culturally celebrated. Thus Kiwi masculinity is not just about brute strength or sporting prowess, but about a particular set of attitudes and ingenuity allied to physical ability (Bell 1996). For many New Zealanders today, carrying out DIY activities may be the only opportunity to display such skills. This version of kiwi masculinity that has come to be taken for granted was nurtured by government in order to increase enlistments for the wars of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is a model of masculinity that sent men to their deaths as well as being one which has disguised racial and class inequalities (Connell 1995; Phillips 1987).

The commoditization of home maintenance work can be understood within this particular history and culture which values a form of masculinity which can be displayed through the skills used in DIY. The image of the capable, practical, ingenious 'Kiwi bloke' is clearly at play when people think about their own home repairs and make decisions about whether to employ a handyman. This version of

masculinity makes caring for family and friends in certain ways more possible or desirable for men. DIY offers (at least some) New Zealand men a way to care for whilst performing an acceptable form of masculinity, in this circumstance doing care in the home and doing masculinity are not contradictory.

Conclusions

The paper raises important questions about the valuing of care labour and the production of gendered identities. It has argued that masculinities as well as femininities can be thought of as produced and performed within the home through caring work. It has shown that while working conditions and rates of pay for hobbies are better than those for people undertaking commoditized forms of traditionally female domestic labour, the negotiation of this work is still complex and implicated in gendered relations and identities. Working on the home was described by interviewees as an expression of care for family and friends and a performance of the 'right' way to be a 'Kiwi bloke' and a father. In a culture that celebrates 'handyness' and practicality as being important parts of the 'right' way to be a man, the commoditization of home repair and maintenance activities is not always a simple process but can involve the consideration and negotiation of identity. Paying others to do this labour can imply a failure in a duty of care and in the performance of masculinity.

Geographers have shown how care, paid and unpaid, for the self and for human and non-human others and for those both physically close and distant is bound up with issues of ethics, morality, responsibility and social justice (Lawson

2007). When care is commoditized questions of social justice become even more pressing (Tronto 2006). Through attention to the spatialities and spaces of care, social and cultural geographers have contributed to these debates and revealed the meanings of care to carers and cared for.

In this paper I have followed Tronto's (1993) call to think about care as something more than just the work that supports vulnerable others, but rather to see care as something which connects people to each other and to non-human others. Using a broad definition of care that recognises it as a 'species activity' reveals all of the caring that goes on and that is received, even by people who appear to be 'independent'. This conceptualisation moves both the giving and receiving of care, from the denigrated space of relationships between dependent 'others' and shows it to be something that includes everyone, even members of privileged groups. Through its examination of carrying out home repairs as form of caring, this paper shows the pleasure and affirmation that can be received from giving care and how important some forms of care giving are to sense of self – even for some men. This is significant because men are too often invisible in discussions of care, a conceptualisation which lowers the status of all caring activities. Understanding activities in the home which have been traditionally gendered as male as forms of care for family and friends, is one way of showing that those who give and receive care are not lesser members of society. Care can be used as a basis for re-thinking the moral boundaries which currently preserve inequalities of power and privilege whilst 'degrading "others" who currently do the caring work in our society' (1993: 101). In order to think differently about care it needs to be

understood as something which involves everyone and which defines relationships and identities for men as well as women, the more privileged as well as the less.

Acknowledgements

I would particularly like to thank Lynda Johnston of the University of Waikato and Annabel Cooper of the University of Otago for their many comments on early papers and discussions of this project. Thanks also to them for providing space and encouragement to work in New Zealand. I would also like to thank the two anonymous referees for their perceptive and helpful comments.

References

- Anderson, B (2000) *Doing the Dirty Work: The Global Politics of Domestic Labour*. London: Zed Books
- Atkinson, s. Lawson, V. and Wiles J. (2011) Care of the body: Spaces of practice, *Social and Cultural Geography* 12: 536-572.
- Bakan, A. and Stasiulis, D. (eds.) (1997) *Not One of the Family: Foreign Domestic Workers in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Bell, C. (1996) *Inventing New Zealand: Everyday Myths of Pakeha Identity*. Auckland: Penguin books.
- Bowlby, S (2011) Friendship, co-presence and care: neglected spaces, *Social and Cultural Geography* 12: 605-622

- Brickell, C. (2006) The politics of post-war consumer culture, *New Zealand Journal of History* 40: 133-155.
- Brickell, C. (2008) *Mates and Lovers: A History of Gay New Zealand*. Auckland: Random House.
- Connell R. W. (1995) *Masculinities*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Cook, M. (2011) Homes Fit for Homos: Joe Orton and the Domesticated Queer, in Brady, S. and Arnold, J. (eds.) *What is Masculinity? Historical Perspectives and Arguments*. London: Palgrave Macmillan
- Cox, R. (2012 forthcoming) Invisible au pairs: Gendered work and migration regimes, in Sollund, R (ed.) *Transnational Migration, Gender and Rights*. Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing.
- Cox, R. (2010) Hired hubbies and mobile mums: gendered skills in domestic service, *Renewal* 18:51-58.
- Cox, R. (2006) *The Servant Problem: Domestic Employment in a Global Economy*. London: I.B. Tauris
- Cox, R. and Narula, R. (2003) Playing happy families: Rules and relationships in au pair employing households in London, UK, *Gender, Place and Culture* 10: 333-344.
- Ehrenreich, B. and Hochschild, A. R. (eds.) (2003) *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy*. London: Granta Books

- Fisher, B. and Tronto, J. V. (1990) Toward a Feminist Theory of Care, in Abel, E., and Nelson, M. (eds.) *Circles of care: Work and Identity in Women's Lives*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Gelber, S. M. (1997) Do-It-Yourself: Constructing, repairing and maintaining domestic masculinity, *American Quarterly* 49: 66-112.
- Gilligan, C. (1982) *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Gorman-Murray, A. (2008a) Masculinity and the home: a critical review and conceptual framework, *Australian Geographer* 39: 367-379.
- Gorman-Murray, A. (2008b) Reconciling self: Gay men and lesbians using domestic materiality for identity management, *Social and Cultural Geography* 9: 283-301.
- Gorman-Murray, A. (2011) Economic crises and emotional fallout: Work, home and men's senses of belonging in post-GFC Sydney, *Emotion, Space and Society* 4: 211-220.
- Green, M. and Lawson, V. (2011) Recentring care: Interrogating the commodification of care, *Social and Cultural Geography* 12: 639-654
- Gregson, N. and Lowe, M. (1994) *Servicing the Middle Classes: Class, Gender and Waged Domestic Labour in Contemporary Britain*. London: Routledge
- Hall, E (2011) Shopping for support: personalisation and the new space and relations of commodified care for people with learning disabilities, *Social and Cultural Geography* 12: 589-603.

- Hess, S. and Puckhaber, A. (2004) Big sisters make better domestic servants?!
 Comments on the au pair business, *Feminist Review* 77: 65-78.
- Hondagneu-Sotelo, P. (2001) *Doméstica: Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence*. Berkley: University of California Press
- Kilkey, M (2010) Domestic-Sector Work in the UK: Locating Men in the Configuration of Gendered Care and Migration Regimes, *Social Policy & Society* 9: 443–454
- Kilkey, M. and Perrons, D. (2010) Gendered divisions in domestic-work time. The rise of the (migrant) handyman phenomenon, *Time and Society* 19: 239-64.
- Larrabee, M. J. (ed.) (1993) *An Ethic of care: Feminist and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. London: Routledge.
- Lawson, V. (2007) Geographies of care and responsibility, Presidential Address, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 97: 1-11.
- Lutz, H (2011) *The New Maids: Transnational Women and the Care Economy*. London: Zed Books.
- Mackay, M., Perkins, H. and Gidlow, B (2007) Constructing and Maintaining a Central Element of Housing Culture in New Zealand: DIY (Do-It-Yourself) Home Building, Renovation and Maintenance. Paper presented at *Transformations in Housing, Urban Life, and Public Policy Conference* 30 August - 1 September 2007, Seoul, Korea
- McEwan, C. and Goodman, M. (2010) *Guest Editorial* Place Geography and the Ethics of Care: Introductory remarks on the geographies of ethics, responsibility and care, *Ethics, Place and Environment* 13: 103-112.

- Milligan, C., Atkinson, S., Skinner, M. and Wiles, J. (2007) Geographies of care: A commentary, *New Zealand Geographer* 63: 135-140.
- Momsen, J. H. (ed.) (1999) *Gender, Migration and Domestic Service*. London: Routledge.
- Nelson, M. (2004) How men matter: Housework and self-provisioning among rural single mothers and married couple families in Vermont, US, *Feminist Economics* 10: 9-36.
- Pahl, R. E. (1984) *Divisions of Labour*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Parreñas, Rhacel (2001) *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration and Domestic Work*. Stanford: Stanford University Press
- Perrons, D. Plomien, A. and Kilkey, M. (2010) Migration and uneven development within an enlarged European Union: Fathering, gender divisions and male migrant domestic services, *European Urban and Regional Studies* 17: 197
- Phillips, J. (1987) *A Man's Country: The Image of the Pakeha Male: A History*. Auckland: Penguin Books
- Popke, J. (2006) Geography and ethics: everyday mediations through care and consumption, *Progress in Human Geography* 30: 504-512.
- Pratt, G. (1999) From registered nurse to registered nanny: discursive geographies of Filipina domestic workers in Vancouver B.C., *Economic Geography* 75: 215-36
- Pratt, Geraldine (2004) *Working Feminism*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press

- Ramirez, H. and Hondagneu-Sotelo, P. (2009) Mexican immigrant gardeners: Entrepreneurs or exploited workers, *Social Problems* 56: 70-88
- Shove, E., Watson, M., Hand, M. and Ingram, J. (2007) *The Design of Everyday Life*. Oxford: Berg.
- Tosh, J. (1999) *A Mans Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* New Haven Connecticut and London: Yale University Press
- Tronto, Joan (2006) 'Vicious circles of privatized caring', in Hamington, M., and Miller, D. (Eds) *Socializing Care: Feminist Ethics and Public Issues*, Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield: 3-26.
- Tronto, J. C. (2002) The 'nanny' question in feminism, *Hypatia* 17: 34-61
- Tronto, J. C. (1993) *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*, London: Routledge.
- Wiles, J (2011) Reflections on being a recipient of care: vexing the concept of vulnerability, *Social and Cultural Geography* 12: 573-588
- Williams, C. and Windebank, J. (2002) The uneven geographies of informal economic activities: a case study of two British cities, *Work, Employment and Society* 16: 231-250.

ⁱ . There is no known research on domestic workers in New Zealand so the literature I draw on in this section is from Europe and North America. Therefore, this is not a comparison of like with like but an indication of some similarities and differences to highlight the role that gender might be playing in constructing these jobs. For example almost all domestic workers discussed in the literature are migrants – often

international migrants – and their conditions are shaped by ethnic/racial discrimination and immigration status as well as gender. Thanks to the two anonymous referees for highlighting these points.