Materialising masculinity: men and interior design

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Materialising masculinity: men and interior design

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Abstract: This paper investigates men’s engagements with interior design and decoration in contemporary Australia. Data is drawn from an in-depth qualitative study of men’s domestic practices in inner Sydney, and include interviews, diaries, home tours and photographs. The project seeks to understand new relationships between masculinity, home and homemaking in a context of changing gender, work, lifestyle and household patterns. Utilising an analytical lens informed by cultural geographies of home, in this paper I scrutinise what the data reveals about shifting associations between gender, the domestic sphere, and material dimensions of homemaking. Against the traditional ideology of the domestic sphere and its constituent practices as a feminine domain, the men in this study are highly engaged in interior design, active in composing the appearance of their homes alone and alongside their partners. Moreover, I find that their involvement in the material aesthetics of home is deeply entwined with fostering comfort and wellbeing, expressing personalities and identities, and strengthening relationships. Consequently, I argue that masculinity and domesticity are bound together in ever more complex correlations: men’s increasing participation in interior design, amongst other domestic practices, is simultaneously shifting gendered meanings of home and generating new (domestic) masculine subjectivities.

Men on the home front

This paper investigates men’s engagements with interior design and decoration – with the arrangement, appearance, colour and texture of domestic interiors, including fixtures, furnishings and ornamentation. I draw on data from a study of ‘ordinary’ men’s meanings and everyday practices of homemaking in twenty-first century inner Sydney. This context is one of changing gender, work, lifestyle and household patterns, thus enabling empirical observations which help refine knowledge of, and reconceptualise, the relationships between masculinity, domestic life and the modern home. The material includes in-depth interviews, reflective diaries and home tours conducted with fifty men. From analysing this data I argue that there has been a shift in men’s material and ontological connections to the domestic sphere in twenty-first century Sydney. Against traditional stereotypes of feminine domesticity, the men in this study are active in practices of interior design and decoration, deciding the style and appearance of their homes alone and alongside their partners. Consequently, these men are ever more engaged with the aesthetics of domestic materiality, emphasising its importance for expressing identities, cementing relationships and fostering feelings of comfort and wellbeing. With these shifting gendered practices of homemaking, new (domestic) masculine subjectivities are emerging.

Through developing this argument I seek to make a number of contributions to scholarship on interior design and domestic material culture. Men’s everyday homemaking practices have been marginal in research endeavours across design, humanities and social science disciplines, and so most fundamentally I help to redress this under-representation and under-theorisation in the present paper. As such, I contribute to a significant trans-disciplinary interest in the shifting relationships between gender and domesticity in the contemporary Western home. I use approaches from cultural geography to assist designers to better
understand the factors underpinning interior design practices in twenty-first century society. The first two sections outline a conceptual scaffold and methodology. I then analyse the empirical material, interrogating the meaning of men's changing concerns with interior design. In doing so, I elaborate the wider contextual associations of this change, contemplating how shifting patterns of gendered domesticity are embedded in trends unfolding across the West, including transformations in employment and relational meanings of home.

Domestic materiality, gender and interior design

I want to draw together and extend two themes informed by recent geographical conceptualisations of home. The first is the materiality of home and its connections to identity, comfort and wellbeing. One of the key points of Blunt and Dowling's critical geography of home is that the space of the home is both material and imaginative. Home is a physical location, constituted in Western society at the site of the house. But home is not reducible to location and shelter: home is a matrix of cultural associations and personal meanings and relationships intersecting in and with the space of the house. These material and imaginative dimensions of home are inseparable: for a house to become a home it must be imbued with meanings, feelings and experiences by occupants. And since the home is a material space, a critical dimension of homemaking is modifying and maintaining its materiality, including interiors, furnishing and objects -- domestic materiality is entwined with and shaped by personal and familial activities. Indeed, the home provides a material locus of comfort and wellbeing for the constitution and reconstitution of individual and collective identities. As Young argues, home is 'the material anchor for a sense of agency and a shifting and fluid identity'. In this paper, I focus on how men's material homemaking practices enable comfort and wellbeing which in turn articulates identities and affirms relationships.

This leads into the second theme I wish to advance in this analysis: the gendered dimensions of meanings of home(making). Blunt and Dowling contend that home is a key location, and homemaking is a critical set of practices, for constructing, reinforcing and contesting wider subjectivities and social relations, including gender, sexuality, family, class, race and ethnicity. As feminist scholars have stressed, home is one of the most significant sites for constituting gendered subjectivities, and homemaking is a critical expression of gendered practices. In particular, home is imagined as a site for enacting normative heterosexual gender roles. Public policy and popular culture reinforces the heterosexual nuclear family home as the ideal version of home, bound tightly with the ideology of separate gendered spheres of home and work. In this discourse, paid work is positioned as the basis of men's self-worth, while domestic spaces and activities are seen as women's domain. This in turn gives rise to the binary subject positioning of male breadwinners and female homemakers. In this gendered framing of the domestic, homemaking is seen as a feminine undertaking, and men are rendered 'out-of-place' at home while paradoxically providing economic resources for family upkeep. From this perspective, men have limited engagement with homemaking.

But gendered subjectivities and associated masculine and feminine practices are also malleable and multiple. While the ideology of breadwinners and homemakers influences masculine and feminine associations with the home, its coverage is incomplete. In working-class families, for instance, wives have often participated in the labour market to ensure sufficient financial provision for their families. Moreover, the gendering of home has become increasingly complex over the twentieth century, with masculine insinuations into domestic
practices. Indeed, drawing together the two themes of materiality and gender, domestic materiality has provided a practical and ideological seam for refashioning gendered connections with the home. While wives, at least ‘ideally’, attend to housework (i.e. cooking, cleaning, childcare), husbands have been charged with home maintenance, particularly carpentry, cabinetry and plumbing — e.g. fixing broken window frames, unblocking drains and building furniture. The ‘handyman’ husband is not out-of-place at home; for him, home is a place on which to work. Gelber has chronicled the development of this domestic masculinity in the Anglophonic West, focusing on the US. Beginning in the early twentieth century, DIY grew in significance so that ‘by the 1950s being handy had … become an expected quality in good husbands’, and ‘household repair, maintenance, and construction projects … became a requirement of masculinity’. In this light, material homemaking constitutes masculine, as much as feminine, subjectivities.

Interior design is a fundamental aspect of domestic materiality linked to the pliable gendering of domestic practices. Stretching from the present day back to Victorian times, attention to interior design has been understood as a feminine concern. In the Victorian era, the middle-class home was understood as both a moral bulwark against worldly temptations and an aesthetic statement of family status, and bourgeois wives were expected to sustain these ideals through interior decoration. Style, colour, ornamentation and arrangement were utilised as instruments for shaping moral character and expressing social standing. Sparke contends this legacy was then taken up by housewives in 1950s post-war America and Britain (and across the West), who were ideologically charged with decorating, furnishing and making homely their newly-built suburban houses. Yet, there have also been masculine associations with interior design, particularly beyond the ideal of the hetero-nuclear home. In post-war America, the bachelor pad became a ‘cultural icon’ in which interior design was configured as a distinctly masculine practice underpinned by stylistic expression and (hetero)sexual seduction. Recently there has been discussion of gay men’s interior design, including whether their presumed aptitude for domestic styling is empowering or ‘feminising’, but also empirical studies investigating their domestic design practices in the context of wider processes of marginalisation.

Further configurations of masculine interior design are emerging. These changes are captured in various media forms, and thus the media is a key site for encapsulating and articulating new connections between masculinity, domesticity and the modern home. Key here is the rise of a ‘mixed gender address’ in interior decorating and homemaker magazines and lifestyle television programmes across the Anglophonic West since the 1980s, with both women and men equally targeted as image-conscious, style-attentive individuals. As Attwood contends, increasingly, in contemporary consumer culture, the home is presented as an important site of self-expression for both women and men. The ‘feminine’ worlds of fashion, beauty and the home are being opened up to men, acquiring new centrality and changing status within the culture.

This is buttressed by the presence of men engaged in conventionally feminine homemaking practices in popular lifestyle programmes and magazines in the UK, the US and Australia, from cooking to interior decoration, as both experts and everyday practitioners. Attwood argues that this gathering masculine address re-genders the domestic: in the contemporary
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West, men are increasingly positioned as homemakers, and the home has become a central arena for masculine self-expression.²³

New design-oriented domestic masculinities are further reinforced in other media forms. Recent commentaries and advice books in Australia, the US and the UK suggest that more types of men – straight, gay, husbands, fathers and bachelors – are increasingly concerned with interior design and decoration.²⁴ These assertions link men’s identities, happiness, comfort, and relationship satisfaction to active decision-making about the design of interior spaces. Minor, for instance, contends that a man’s personal investment in décor provides material support for his sense of self, with flow-on affects for both his wellbeing and intimate domestic relationships.²⁵ He further suggests that greater numbers of ‘ordinary’ men in Sydney are designing and decorating their own domestic spaces. But while there has been scholarly interest in men’s increasing contribution to domestic labour and parenting,²⁶ there has been little attention to their involvement in interior design and what this means for the constitution of masculinities²⁷ (aside from studies of bachelor apartments and gay men’s homes noted above).²⁸ These unfolding changes in men’s homemaking need empirical and scholarly assessment to understand how meanings of home, gendered subjectivities and domestic practices are shifting in contemporary society. This is the aim of this study; next, I outline data collection methods.

Methodology

The data utilised in this analysis are drawn from a project on men’s changing practices of homelife in contemporary inner Sydney. The project is prompted by growing concern amongst social commentators and policy-makers about men’s wellbeing and sense of self-worth – a so-called ‘crisis of masculinity’ induced by changing employment conditions, gender roles and household and family structures since the 1980s.²⁹ Yet these social changes and crises lie alongside persistent cultural valuations of homelife, a basic manifestation of the ‘Great Australian Dream’, reinforced through popular discourse like lifestyle television, homemaker magazines and interminable reports on the health of the real estate industry.³⁰ In this national ideal, home is epitomised as a site and source of self-fulfillment, happiness, emotional health and ontological security. In these twin contexts, this project seeks to understand how men value and use their homes for personal and lifestyle goals in the pursuit of work/life balance, and how domestic spaces and activities contribute to a sense of self-worth, wellbeing and ‘healthy’ masculinity.

This is not a simple equation by any means. In light of the crisis of masculinity and associated gender transformations, there is no universal and homogenous masculinity.³¹ Rather, there are masculinities – a fluid set of subjectivities differentiated by intersections of gender with sexuality, class, age, inter alia. They are also distinguished by household and family formation, including bachelorhood, cohabitation and fatherhood.³² These social and spatial intersections produce multifaceted relationships between masculinity and domesticity. Fifty men have participated in this project, varying across household type (including single, couple and family homes), age and occupation.³³ Table 1 summarises these characteristics. While there are a range of household, dwelling and tenure types represented, there are some demographic tendencies: 88% are of European heritage (80% Anglophone), 84% are (or were) employed in managerial or professional jobs (with associated middle-class performativities), and only two respondents are over 70yo. This is partly because of the
spatial concentration of the respondents. The fieldwork was focused on inner Sydney (from the coast in the east to Strathfield in the west, from Sydney Harbour in the north to Botany Bay in the south) to provide some socio-spatial coherence. And indeed, some similarities did emerge across the sample, such as men’s interest in interior design, the focus of this paper.

Table 1: Respondent characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household</th>
<th>Number (Proportion)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Couple family</td>
<td>14 (28%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear family¹</td>
<td>15 (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-parent family</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-person</td>
<td>15 (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group²</td>
<td>5 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dwelling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi/detached house</td>
<td>25 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apartment</td>
<td>25 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owned</td>
<td>23 (46%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rented (private)</td>
<td>17 (34%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rented (public)</td>
<td>3 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal agreement³</td>
<td>7 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-30</td>
<td>7 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-50</td>
<td>24 (48%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-70</td>
<td>17 (34%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71+</td>
<td>2 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birthplace</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia/New Zealand</td>
<td>35 (70%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>6 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North/South America</td>
<td>4 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK/Europe</td>
<td>5 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation (Australian Standard Classification)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers/Administrators</td>
<td>9 (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals</td>
<td>25 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tradespersons</td>
<td>3 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Workers</td>
<td>3 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired⁴</td>
<td>10 (20%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Normative couple family with children.
2. Unrelated adults cohabiting.
3. Informal agreements between family members: e.g. adult sons living with parents; leasing property owned by a family member; or only one partner in a couple being the property-owner.
4. Former occupation: 8 managerial/professional, 1 trades, 1 service.

Men were recruited in June-September 2009 through advertisements in local newspapers. Participation involved three stages, offering a depth of narrative and visual information. First, participants completed a semi-structured interview about their homelife. A range of themes was explored: work at home, leisure at home, interior design, domestic labour, parenting,
home maintenance, gardening, pets, entertaining, neighbourhood involvement, and the ideal home. Next, participants recorded a time-use diary of their homelife for one week. For each day they were asked to chronologically document their activities — what, where, how long, with whom — and to write a reflection for each activity considered significant to their wellbeing, feelings, and sense of self. Finally, a follow-up visit was conducted one week after I had read the diary. This involved asking specific questions about the diary, discussing the participant’s life satisfaction, and importantly, a guided home tour. Home tours allowed me to ‘see’ the spaces and activities discussed in the first two stages, probing for further details about homelife. This provided a valuable visual component to the research, and photos were taken with permission. Men’s partners, if applicable, were invited to participate in the follow-up. Together, the interviews, diaries and tours afforded rich layers of insight into men’s homelife. In this paper, I focus on what these data reveal about men’s changing engagements with interior design — a practice, I argue, that offers a powerful lens for interpreting newly emerging domestic masculinities, and subsequently for the shifting gendered meanings of home in contemporary society.

Materialising masculinity: men and interior design in Sydney homes

Men’s role in interior design was explicit in this project. In each interview I discussed interior design, asking men if it was important for their wellbeing and sense of self, and how they participated in interior design practices. I found that, across the sample, interior design was important: 43 men, 86% of respondents, said that they were concerned with and participate in interior design, and that it was important for their wellbeing. Men across all household types were engaged with interior design decisions and actions — bachelors, partners and fathers — thus supporting Minor’s assertion that the feminine stereotype of interior design and decoration is being reworked in contemporary Sydney. In this analysis I want to focus on men’s interest in interior design in relation to several themes raised in the earlier conceptual discussion: gender norms and roles, self-expression, comfort, wellbeing and relationship-building. These elements are interwoven. For example, wellbeing is enabled by a combination of self-expression and physical comfort; gendered practices are re-sculpted in the context of relationships with spouse and/or house. I consider both bachelors and partnered men to show the increasing significance of masculine interior design across household types. In doing so, I draw specific examples from the research.

The interviews, diaries and home tours indicated that men are engaged in interior design practices to create a comfortable environment for relaxation and rejuvenation that simultaneously allows unhindered self-expression. I contend that this concern originates in, but reworks, a particular normative masculine engagement with the home: the idea that a man’s home is his castle, a private place to retreat after the distractions of a heavy workload. As a bulwark against the trials of public life, home enables the articulation of a man’s ‘private’ or ‘inner’ sense of self, as Noble argues, comfort ‘is fundamental to the fashioning of identity’ and ‘is best seen in terms of an attachment to a place or context that makes acting in that setting possible’. This thesis is supported in my findings. When I asked respondents what home meant to them, all said it was (or should be) a private space secured against the public sphere and outside engagements, where they could ‘be themselves’ and express their personalities. Even if some worked at home sometimes, this was typically presented as an intrusion into private space and time. Sequestering a restful space was thus seen as important for personal and emotional wellbeing. Interior design was deployed as a key way of
facilitating this environment, with comfort, self-expression and wellbeing achieved through control over colour, texture, furniture and arrangement.

This was noticeable in bachelor apartments, where men lived alone, generating their own homemaking ideals. These men's interior design practices arguably find their heritage in classic treatises on bachelor domesticity stretching back to the nineteenth century. In 1881, for instance, Oliver Bunce asserted in Bachelor Bluff
refined and perfect domestic comfort is understood by men only. ... Women are ...
neat because they constitutionally hate dust, not because neatness is important to their own selfish comfort. 36

Drawing on such evidence, Snyder argues that bachelors could be seen as 'exemplars of domestic life', especially skilled in creating a comfortable home environment as a framework for selfhood and personal wellbeing. Some of the middle-class bachelors in this study embody this legacy, discussing how they made their homes comfortable and expressive through material refinements in design and furnishings, creating a private oasis from work and the public sphere, and buttressing their psychological and physical health.

For instance, Brett (30s, professional, renter) described his apartment as his 'sanctuary', a space where he could retreat from a range of outside pressures, including work and interpersonal relationships, and 'be himself'. Creating this sanctuary was heavily contingent upon interior design and material culture. He emphasised the need to craft an environment that was expressive, comfortable and beautiful, with these elements entwined through the choice and arrangement of furniture, texture and colour. Figure 1 shows his open-plan living area. Colour is important for generating a restful personal space, particularly 'earthy' greens and browns, which affirm his sense of connection to nature and bring this into the domestic.

![Figure 1: Brett's living area: colour, texture and arrangement (30s, renter, apartment).](image)

To this end, Brett has a balcony garden, and places a mirrored screen at the opposite end of the living area which reflects the greenery and draws it deep into the living space. The leather lounge is the centre of this scenic domain: even though it was over-budget, Brett said he had to purchase this lounge, providing two reasons which interleave self-expression and wellbeing. On the one hand, its colour, brown, complements and enhances Brett's ethos of using natural light and colour to create a restful space, bookended by real and reflective gardens. On the other hand, its textural softness induces rest: since he spends most of his
time at home on the lounge, it was important that he could ‘sink into’ it and allow it to envelope his body. The combination of colour, texture and placement thus establishes an expressive and restful home environment designed to facilitate emotional and physical comfort.

Brett’s example invokes design features that were important across other single men’s apartments. When I asked Gavin (30s, professional, renter) and Tom (30s, professional, renter) what was the most important space in their homes, both focused on the lounge itself. The lounge was the specific site where most relaxation and recuperation from public and employment commitments took place, and was central to building a restful homelife. This was an explicitly material concern, utilising interior design to facilitate wellbeing. Size and texture were important for relaxing body and self, but so too was placement adjacent windows in order to access views and natural light seen as rejuvenating (Figure 2). Arrangement of other furnishing and use of colour were also important for bachelors’ comfort and self-expression. To create an individual but harmonious environment, Ryan (30s, professional, owner) chose furniture which suited the colour of existing features (e.g. a red lounge to complement the maroon splashback), the unusual circular shape of the rooms (his apartment was in a ‘silov redeveloped) and emphasised space and flow (Figure 3). Limiting clutter was important here, and reflected his ‘meticulous masculinity’. But for others ornamentation equally engendered a personalised and emotionally healthful interior. For widower Doug (60s, professional, owner), this meant surrounding himself with furniture, ornaments, paintings and photos (of family) from his earlier home (Figure 4).

![Figure 2: Tom's living area: placement and light (30s, renter, apartment).](image)

![Figure 3: Ryan's dining room: colour, shape and flow (30s, owner, apartment).](image)
Expressive interior design was also enacted by men in heterosexual couple family households. This provides an interesting case of changing gendered meanings and practices of home. In this case, the underlying discourse of home-as-a-man's-castle is predicated on a traditional archetype of separate gendered spheres and divisions of domestic labour — a model which, as noted earlier, posits women (as wives-and-mothers) as unpaid homemakers whose duty is to create a secure and restful ‘fortress’ for their husbands, and serve their needs when they come home from work. This model has been rightly challenged and altered by the entry of women, wives and mothers into the paid workforce. In couple family households where both partners work full-time, there are both reduced expectations and opportunities for female partners to take charge of creating a home environment as a haven from work. In this study, 23 out of 25 non-retired couple (and nuclear) families, both partners worked (mostly) full-time; the female partner was a full-time homemaker in only two. In this contemporary context of dual careers, both husbands and wives work together to sculpt their domestic retreat. Male and female participants reflected on how this diverged from their own parents’ experience, where mothers had typically handled interior design. Consequently, I argue that men have taken — have had to take — considerably greater interest in interior design in order to fashion, together with their partners, a domestic refuge for the constitution, affirmation and wellbeing of both partners.

In many cases this was done in flexible and interesting ways, and such material homemaking practices were also significant for relationship-building. Planning and fashioning domestic interiors together, for the wellbeing of both partners, requires careful and often lengthy negotiations over colour, furnishings and arrangement. Samuel (30s, professional, owner) and Lisa, for instance, planned and executed the renovation of their house over a three year period, enabling their individual and mutual likes and personalities to be materially reflected in their home (Figure 5). Similarly, Michael (40s, professional, owner, house) and Gina admitted to spending considerable time — months and even years — negotiating new colour schemes and furnishings. Aaron (20s, professional, renter, house) and Wendy demonstrated another style of partnered interior design. Wendy worked in a major furniture and homewares store, and used this situation to select the furnishings, paintings and ornaments for their home. However, it was Aaron who took responsibility for deciding where these acquisitions should go and arranging the appearance of their living space (Figure 6). This was a fascinating way of allocating aesthetic decision-making, and both emphasised that this process had effectively
created a shared sanctuary from outside pressures and engagements – a home which reflected not just their separate personalities, but their relationship and joint aspirations.

Figure 5: Samuel and Lisa’s dining room: negotiation and expression (30s, owners, house).

Figure 6: Aaron and Wendy’s living area: aesthetic decision-making (20s, renters, house).

Indeed, in all cases the aim was to confer to both partners, through an ongoing process of disagreement, compromise and alignment, a sense of investment in the appearance of domestic spaces. These homemaking practices materialised both partnerships and individual personalities in couples’ interiors, enabling a space of identification, comfort and wellbeing for both men and their partners, alone and in relationship. But in order to ensure this was the case – and that the male partners’ aspirations and identities were reflected in the home – the men themselves had to take an active involvement in interior design decisions and practices. This engagement reveals a significant change in men’s relationships with domesticity and, moreover, a loosening of the traditional gendering of the domestic sphere. There is a shift away from both a simple link between femininity and domesticity, on the one hand, and the rhetoric of a man’s home as his castle on the other. Instead, there is an
emerging ethos of equal gendered investment in the modern home, including its interior design and decoration.

A final point about men’s changing concern with interior spaces cuts across both single-occupancy and couple family households: the contribution of media messages to design practices. Earlier I argued that the media – especially homemaker magazines, lifestyle television and advice guides – constitutes a key space for articulating new relationships between masculinity and the home, prompting men’s involvement in domestic aesthetics. The input of media commentaries into men’s interior design activities was affirmed in this study. For both bachelors and partnered men, media discourses played an important role in encouraging design practices and providing information about possibilities. Most homes contained an assembly of homemaker magazines. These were prominent in bachelors’ homes, often exhibited as aesthetic library displays. Both Brett and Harry (50s, professional, owner, apartment), for instance, housed collections of home design journals on living room shelves, including The World of Interiors, Vogue Living and Indesign Magazine. Partnered men also read such publications: Brendan (50s, professional, owner, house) had journals and books on domestic design (which were his, not his wife’s). While these men applied ideas from magazines and books, others utilised advice from lifestyle television. HomeMade – a renovation show featuring teams of interior designers, and the new lifestyle programme for 2009 – was a favourite. Michael and Sean (40s, professional, owner, house), for instance, watched the show with their wives to glean creative ideas for their homes. These men, like most in the study, felt they should be equally involved in interior design, and found information and inspiration through lifestyle programmes. Such findings confirm contentions about the role of media discourses in re-gendering interior design and reconfiguring domestic masculinities. 43

New masculinities, new domesticities

This paper has utilised a cultural geographical perspective on homemaking to advance insight into interior design practices in contemporary Australia. Specifically, I have drawn together concepts about the materiality and gendering of homemaking to analyse new relationships between masculinity and interior design, focusing on the case of men’s shifting patterns of homelife in inner Sydney. The spatial and temporal context of twenty-first century Sydney offers opportunities to explore meanings and practices of homemaking in a situation of changing gender, work, lifestyle and household configurations. Through a combination of interviews, diaries and home tours I have found that the majority of men in this study take a strong interest in the design and decoration of their domestic interiors. This is true for both bachelors and men in heterosexual couples. Concern with material homemaking practices – with the style, appearance and arrangement of domestic space – is bound up with personal needs for comfort, wellbeing, self-expression and relationship-building, in the process, interior design and decoration is appropriated as a masculine activity. At the same time, the gendered meaning of the domestic sphere is reconfigured, and home becomes a site for materialising both masculine and feminine identity work.

These changes are bound up with trends unfolding across the West, including the continued entry of middle-class women into the paid workforce, the rise of personal 'lifestyle projects', and the centrality of domestic styling to those lifestyle goals. 44 In other words, while the ideology of separate gendered spheres erodes, home is increasingly valued as a material site
of comfort, wellbeing and self-expression. Advancing these desires has demanded a realignment of gender and space. Just as women are now firmly embedded in the public sphere, men are ever more present in the domestic sphere, taking up homemaking practices like cooking, designing and decorating. These emerging masculinised domesticities are apparent in lifestyle television across the West. Along with advice guides and wider media commentaries, these programs urge men to further engage with homemaking as part of an ethos of wellbeing and self-expression. Moving beyond the simple misogynistic logic of ‘a man’s home is his castle’, masculinity and domesticity are entwined in increasingly complex correlations, with consequent fluorescence of new (domestic) masculine subjectivities. Future work on these gendered performativities would find a fertile vein in intersections of class and sexuality with masculinity, comparing working-class and middle-class masculinities and gay and hetero-masculine domesticities. Indeed, these are my intentions for further analysis of the material introduced in the present paper.

Acknowledgement: Thanks to two referees for constructive feedback. This research is funded by an Australian Research Council Discovery Grant (DP0986666).

Endnotes

12 All domestic practices are material to the extent that people have physical need for shelter, food and clothing. Thus, cooking, cleaning and laundry are also arguably material practices. What I am interested in here, however, is the materiality of the dwelling and contents.
14 Domosh and Seager, Putting Women in Place, 2001.


Attwood, 'Inside out: men on the "Home Front".' 97.


Gosling et al.'s US study of material attributes in young college students' accommodation shows some gender differences in décor, with women's personal living spaces (PLSs) often more colourful and stylish, containing flowers, and men's PLSs less organised, containing mechanical equipment. They suggest this reflects conventional gender roles. My concern, however, is with changing masculinities. See Gosling, S., Craik, K., Martin, N. & Pryor, M. 'Material attributes of personal living spaces.' *Home Cultures* (2:1) (2005): 51-88.


Sexual orientation also varied, with 13 self-identified gay men and 37 heterosexual men. A thorough comparative analysis of gay and hetero-masculine domesticities will be the focus of a later publication from this study (as noted in the conclusion to this paper).


Minor, 'A room of his own,' (2004).


40 Pink, S. *Home Truths: Gender, Domestic Objects and Everyday Life*. Oxford: Berg, 2004