

## Lincoln University Digital Thesis

### Copyright Statement

The digital copy of this thesis is protected by the Copyright Act 1994 (New Zealand).

This thesis may be consulted by you, provided you comply with the provisions of the Act and the following conditions of use:

- you will use the copy only for the purposes of research or private study
- you will recognise the author's right to be identified as the author of the thesis and due acknowledgement will be made to the author where appropriate
- you will obtain the author's permission before publishing any material from the thesis.

# **DIY (Do-It-Yourself) Home Improvement in New Zealand**

---

**A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**At**

**Lincoln University**

**By**

**Michael Mackay**

---

**Lincoln University**

**2011**

Abstract of a thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

## **DIY (Do-It-Yourself) Home Improvement in New Zealand**

**By Michael Mackay**

Do-it-yourself home improvement (DIY) is considered a defining characteristic of ‘Kiwi’ identity and the New Zealand way-of-life, with a 2009 home improvement advertisement boasting that DIY is “in our DNA”. Since at least the 1950s, the national enthusiasm for DIY has spawned a major and multifarious home improvement industry which includes DIY television shows, home improvement manuals and magazines, ‘how-to’ websites and hardware megastores, with DIY retail sales alone estimated at NZ\$1 billion per year. Yet despite the obvious cultural and economic significance of DIY in New Zealand, the home improvement *practices* of New Zealand homeowners are not well-researched or understood. To address the research gap, this thesis presents a naturalistic and exploratory study of the DIY practices of 27 Christchurch homeowners. To support the study, a synthesis of the international academic DIY literature is presented along with a brief history of DIY in New Zealand. DIY activity emerges in the study as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon involving property owners conceptualising, planning and executing a range of practical ‘projects’ associated with the production, maintenance and consumption of ‘home’. The deployment of a range of social science theories helps to demonstrate that the outcome of peoples’ home improvement activities is the ‘DIYed home’ – a socially and physically constructed *place* – ‘personalised’, ‘adapted’ and to be ‘enjoyed’.

**Keywords:** DIY, do-it-yourself, home improvement, housing, New Zealand, culture, social science, production and consumption, naturalistic research methods

## Acknowledgements

Many friends and colleagues supported me through the production of this thesis. First and foremost, I want to thank Harvey Perkins, my principal supervisor and very good friend, for his intellectual inspiration, mentoring, encouragement and belief in the project. I would also like to thank Bob Gidlow, my associate supervisor, for his constant support and friendship, and also for generously helping me get my ideas on paper at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour. My thanks also go to Jude Wilson, my chief “motivator” and very good friend who read through several messy chapter drafts, while also supporting me through some tough personal experiences. Thanks also must go to Bernadette Mani for encouraging me in my work and listening to all my troubles! I would also like to thank colleagues at AgResearch, particularly Steven Kelly, a good mate who, with a very keen eye, generously proof-read several chapter drafts. I am also indebted to members of the Centre for Housing Research Aotearoa New Zealand (CHRANZ) who provided me with a research grant. This thesis would also not have been possible without the support of my family and close friends – especially Ham ‘espresso’ Evans who kept me fully fuelled with caffeine over the course of the study.

My thanks must also go to all my interviewees. They allowed me to enter their houses, sheds and lives and gave me a lens through which to examine DIY. I am grateful for their stories. I am also very grateful for the time offered by my key informants and the perspectives they shared with me.

Last, I gratefully acknowledge the love and support which my partner Lindi has given me over the course of this research.

# Contents

<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1. Building background .....	1
1.2. Research questions .....	3
1.3. Organisation of the thesis .....	3
<b>2. Methods .....</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1. Introduction .....	5
2.2. Naturalistic social science .....	5
2.2.1. Induction (sharpening) .....	6
2.2.2. Naturalistic research methods .....	7
2.2.3. Exploration and inspection .....	8
2.3. Studying DIY (data collection) .....	8
2.3.1. Christchurch (the research setting) .....	9
2.3.2. Building context.....	11
2.3.3. Primary data collection .....	12
2.3.3.1. Homeowner/household interviews.....	13
2.3.3.2. House and property tour.....	15
2.3.3.3. Participant observation.....	15
2.3.4. Household survey.....	19
2.4. Data analysis.....	19
2.4.1. Non-interview data.....	20
2.4.2. Key informant interviews .....	20
2.4.3. Interview data (homeowners) .....	21
2.4.4. Survey data.....	22
2.5. Limitations.....	23
2.6. The role of the researcher .....	23
2.7. Chapter summary.....	25
<b>3. DIY in the Academic Research Literature.....</b>	<b>26</b>
3.1. Introduction .....	26
3.2. DIY in the international research literature .....	26
3.2.1. Quantitative studies of DIY .....	28
3.2.2. Qualitative studies of DIY .....	32
3.2.2.1. DIY histories .....	32
3.2.2.2. DIY in the media studies literature .....	36
3.2.2.3. DIY in the consumer and material cultures literature .....	38
3.2.2.4. DIY typologies in the international research literature .....	40
3.3. DIY in the New Zealand research literature.....	41
3.3.1. DIY as household ‘work’ .....	42
3.3.2. DIY as home-based ‘leisure’ .....	43
3.3.3. DIY and gender.....	45
3.3.4. DIY as ‘home-making’ .....	46
3.4. Chapter summary.....	47

<b>4.</b>	<b>Constructing Context: DIY in New Zealand.....</b>	<b>49</b>
4.1.	Introduction .....	49
4.2.	Building the frontier – the origins of DIY in New Zealand .....	49
4.3.	DIY, a new and emerging post-war phenomenon .....	53
4.4.	DIY in New Zealand in the 1970s and early 1980s.....	61
4.5.	Restructuring and the changing nature of DIY in the 1990s .....	65
4.6.	21 <sup>st</sup> century DIY in New Zealand.....	70
4.6.1.	DIY coverage in the news media .....	71
4.6.1.1.	Headline one: ‘big box’ DIY retail stores.....	72
4.6.1.2.	Headline two: regulating DIY .....	75
4.7.	The wider world of DIY .....	77
4.8.	Chapter summary.....	78
<b>5.</b>	<b>DIY Thinking.....</b>	<b>80</b>
5.1.	Introduction .....	80
5.2.	DIY dreams and housing potential .....	80
5.2.1.	DIY and economic potential .....	83
5.2.2.	DIY and aesthetic potential.....	84
5.2.3.	DIY and functional potential .....	85
5.3.	DIY and the house buying process .....	86
5.4.	The DIY ‘list’ .....	87
5.5.	Chapter summary.....	90
<b>6.</b>	<b>Types of DIY .....</b>	<b>91</b>
6.1.	Introduction .....	91
6.2.	Interior decorating .....	92
6.3.	House repairs and routine maintenance.....	98
6.3.1.	Maintenance .....	98
6.3.2.	House repairs .....	101
6.4.	Building work (alterations and additions) .....	103
6.5.	Gardening, lawn care and landscape construction .....	107
6.6.	Survey findings: what DIY gets done?.....	114
6.6.1.	Projects done in the current home.....	115
6.7.	Chapter summary.....	116
<b>7.</b>	<b>Planning DIY Projects .....</b>	<b>117</b>
7.1.	Introduction .....	117
7.2.	Getting ready .....	117
7.3.	Concept plans .....	119
7.4.	Planning tools .....	122
7.5.	Budgeting and finance .....	124
7.6.	Information and advice.....	129
7.7.	The gendered nature of project planning.....	137
7.8.	Chapter summary.....	138
<b>8.</b>	<b>Doing DIY.....</b>	<b>140</b>
8.1.	Introduction .....	140
8.2.	Labour structures – who does what? .....	140

8.2.1. Household DIY .....	140
8.2.2. Helping-hands .....	144
8.2.3. “Informal” professional help.....	147
8.2.4. The “working bee” .....	148
8.2.5. DIY/professional mix.....	150
8.3. Finding time.....	151
8.4. The duration of DIY projects .....	156
8.5. DIY as (skilled) activity .....	161
8.6. Botch-ups, blunders and “DIY disasters” .....	165
8.7. Project completion.....	167
8.8. Chapter summary.....	170
<b>9. DIY Tools &amp; Materials.....</b>	<b>171</b>
9.1. Introduction .....	171
9.2. Tools .....	171
9.3. Tool collections .....	172
9.4. Accessing tools.....	176
9.5. Men and (‘their’) tools.....	182
9.6. Cheap tools .....	188
9.7. Tool storage (sheds) .....	190
9.8. DIY materials .....	193
9.8.1. Materials, thrift and resourcefulness.....	196
9.9. Chapter summary.....	198
<b>10. Reframing DIY .....</b>	<b>200</b>
10.1. Introduction .....	200
10.2. DIY, consumption and the conditions of liquid modernity .....	203
10.2.1. Late and ‘liquid’ modernity .....	205
10.2.2. Consumer society.....	207
10.3. DIY as a consumptive and productive practice.....	209
10.3.1. Personalising .....	211
10.3.2. Adapting.....	214
10.3.3. Enjoying.....	215
10.4. Chapter summary.....	217
<b>11. Conclusion: The ‘DIYed Home’ .....</b>	<b>218</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>222</b>
<b>Appendix 1: Information Sheet for Interviewees.....</b>	<b>235</b>
<b>Appendix 2: Consent Form for Interviewees .....</b>	<b>236</b>
<b>Appendix 3: Information Sheet for Key Informants .....</b>	<b>237</b>
<b>Appendix 4: Consent Form for Key Informants.....</b>	<b>238</b>
<b>Appendix 5: Questionnaire .....</b>	<b>239</b>
<b>Appendix 6: Cover Letter (Survey).....</b>	<b>245</b>
<b>Appendix 7: Survey Method and Sample .....</b>	<b>246</b>

## List of tables

Table 1: Homeowners interviewed for this study of DIY.....	18
Table 2: Response rate by Christchurch suburb .....	247



## List of figures

Figure 1: ‘Big-box’ DIY retailing in New Zealand .....	2
Figure 2: Christchurch and Canterbury Region .....	10
Figure 3: Participant observation and researcher help .....	16
Figure 4: Participant observation was used to observe DIY projects being carried out .....	17
Figure 5: The first DIY manuals written specifically for New Zealand conditions .....	56
Figure 6: The first New Zealand DIY magazines were published in the late 1960s .....	57
Figure 7: DIYer information obtained from the nation’s new Building Centres.....	58
Figure 8: The 1950s and 1960s witnessed the arrival of the first power tools .....	60
Figure 9: DIY regularly features in the news media .....	71
Figure 10: Images of couples formulating DIY projects together .....	82
Figure 11: Sue hanging self-made curtains .....	92
Figure 12: Dave’s completed DIY bathroom renovation .....	95
Figure 13: ‘Inspiring homes’ - an example of print media read by interviewees .....	97
Figure 14: Shane fixing a broken floor board.....	98
Figure 15: Alan painting exterior window sills .....	100
Figure 16: Hamish's DIY French doors and deck .....	104
Figure 17: Barry and Anna at play and working in their respective gardens .....	109
Figure 18: Design ideas for the garden provided to Hamish from family and friends .....	111
Figure 19: Shane's garden designed for his children to play in and enjoy.....	113
Figure 20: DIY tasks done in the current house and home.....	115
Figure 21: Barry’s initial concept sketch for an outdoor deck.....	120
Figure 22: Sam's planning diagram for the plumbing of a new shower .....	121
Figure 23: Terry and Natalie’s use of a kitchen planning tool .....	122
Figure 24: Sam and Sally's use of test pots and colour charts .....	123
Figure 25: DIY loan advertisement 1.....	126
Figure 26: DIY loan advertisement 2.....	127
Figure 27: Illustrations of the female DIY craze .....	134
Figure 28: Bunny Rigold’s (“Television’s Home Handyman”) DIY manual .....	135
Figure 29: Sources of DIY information/advice – last 12 months .....	136
Figure 30: Britney's list of tasks for an upcoming working bee .....	149
Figure 31: Marty's room conversion (taking a tea break).....	151
Figure 32: DIY retailers advertised heavily in the weeks leading up to holiday breaks .....	153
Figure 33: Corporate sponsored DIY manual for New Zealand ‘kids’ .....	164
Figure 34: Humorous cartoons mocking the skills of the Kiwi home handyman .....	166
Figure 35: DIY tools owned by the survey respondents .....	173
Figure 36: Advertisements promoting tools as ideal Christmas gifts for men .....	178
Figure 37: Tool borrowing, by age group – last 12 months.....	180
Figure 38: Hamish's trailer (often borrowed by friends and family members).....	181
Figure 39: Tools that, among other benefits, <i>speed</i> up tasks within a DIY project .....	185
Figure 40: The interiors of interviewees’ tool sheds .....	192
Figure 41: James’s collection of ‘leftover’ paint and adhesives .....	197
Figure 42: Representations of gendered roles in DIY projects .....	204

Figure 43: The author's 'DIYed home', Christmas Day, 2009 .....	218
Figure 44: The author's earthquake-damaged 'DIYed' home .....	219

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Building background

This thesis presents the results of an exploratory study aimed at developing a social scientific interpretation of DIY home improvement in New Zealand. DIY, which stands for ‘do-it-yourself’, occurs when homeowners decorate, alter, build, maintain or repair any part of the house and home rather than paying a professional tradesperson to do the work for them. DIY can include small tasks (such as replacing a door handle), and big projects (such as building a new room). DIY might also include gardening work (such as planting a lawn) and landscape construction (such as building a deck or laying paving stones). What makes the activity a ‘DIY’ project is that the homeowner has a hand in doing all or some of the work, and that the work is unpaid.

DIY home improvement is a significant cultural phenomenon in New Zealand. In a feature article in the *New Zealand Listener*, journalist Joanne Black (2005, p.13) claimed that “if England is a nation of shopkeepers, New Zealand is a nation of home renovators.” That same year and using similar catchy prose, *Homestyle* magazine dubbed New Zealand the “renovation nation” (*Homestyle*, 2005, Issue 6, cover page). A similar punchy cultural claim was made in a recent television commercial for a New Zealand DIY retailer, which popularised the phrase “DIY, it’s in our DNA”.<sup>1</sup> Based on the findings of at least two recent surveys, it would appear that most New Zealanders would not contest these broad characterisations of their personal and cultural identity. One such survey, conducted for advertising firm DraftFCB, found that most New Zealanders thought that DIY capability was a defining national characteristic (one of the top three) and would “...expect to be able to do manual tasks to a level of proficiency – women as well as men – and admire such capability in others” (Clifton, 2010, p.16). Another recent survey by Nielson research and reported in *North and South* (Larsen, 2008), asked the question “what does it mean to be a New Zealander?” the responses revealing that the Kiwi ‘can-do/DIY’ attitude was among the most prized of cultural traits.

Of course DIY is not just culturally significant in New Zealand – it is also big business. Today a major and multifarious DIY industry exists to support and encourage DIY activity.

---

<sup>1</sup> To view an official online version of the advertisement see <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/unpaid-domestic-work/5/1>.

In recent years, that industry has evolved to include: local versions of international home improvement television shows (such as *DIY Rescue*, *Changing Rooms*, *My House: My Castle* and *Dream Home*); New Zealand DIY manuals and magazines (such as *The Shed* and *Projects Magazine*); local and global product distribution and supply networks; DIY classes (including ‘ladies nights’); DIY advice services and multimedia products; internet chat rooms; and an abundance of new product innovations which make doing-up the house and home easier, cheaper and faster (so it is claimed) than ever before. Arguably, the most significant industry development has been the recent arrival of ‘big-box’ home improvement superstores (Figure 1, below, also see Craig, 2002; Head, 2005; Herbst, 2007). Here, one will find aisles of DIY tools and materials sourced from all over the world and stock units which highlight the industry’s connection with international DIY product manufacturers and the global nature of the DIY phenomenon, more generally (Section 4.7). On any given weekend, a quick visit to these enormous “new landscapes of consumption” (Perkins & Thorns, 2001, p.38), many of which include cafés, playgrounds, garden centres, product showrooms, hire departments and DIY classrooms, will show that the Kiwi tradition of ‘doing-up’ the house and home (or, more precisely, consuming DIY products) is very popular today.

Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 1: ‘Big-box’ DIY retailing was introduced to New Zealand in 2003. Since then, these “new landscapes of consumption” (Perkins & Thorns, 2001, p.38) have mushroomed in both urban and rural areas, reflecting the continuation of the DIY tradition (author’s photos)

Despite the obvious economic and cultural significance of DIY home improvement in New Zealand, very little academic attention has been given to the topic, with a noticeable and somewhat surprising silence among New Zealand's housing researchers. Interestingly, the same neglect is not evident further afield, with several international studies of DIY reported in scholarly journals, including the applied housing studies literature, and in the social sciences more generally. (See Chapter Three.) To provide a preliminary New Zealand perspective to this small but burgeoning body of work, this thesis explores the DIY home improvement practices of 27 Christchurch homeowners.

## **1.2. Research questions**

Given the dearth of research on DIY home improvement in New Zealand, I felt that it was important for this study of DIY to be exploratory and 'inductive' (see Section 2.2.1, page 6) – starting with a broad research agenda which could be sharpened as the inquiry progressed (Perkins, 1988). There were many possible starting points for the research. At the outset of the project, I focused on the DIY *practices* of Kiwi homeowners – examining the types of projects they carried out and how they made sense of their involvement in these activities. Given the exploratory nature of the project, three general research questions were initially developed to guide the research:

1. What types of DIY projects do current New Zealand homeowners carry out?
2. How do homeowners conceptualise, plan, resource and execute their DIY projects?
3. How can the DIY experience be characterised in social scientific terms?

## **1.3. Organisation of the thesis**

The remainder of this thesis addresses my three research questions through an interpretation of the DIY practices of 27 homeowners who were living in Christchurch over the period 2007-2008. It is important to note that the thesis is structured in an unconventional manner, with a theoretically infused interpretation of DIY delayed until the penultimate thesis chapter (Chapter Ten), *after* methods and the main research findings have been described. The organisation of the thesis in this way replicates the 'inductive' approach which characterised my fieldwork and emergent analysis – a process which started expansively and then converged on relevant social theories as the study proceeded.

The naturalistic research method developed for the research project is described in detail in the following chapter (Chapter Two: Methods). Chapter Three reviews the small but burgeoning international academic literature on DIY and a range of New Zealand-based studies which make mention of DIY, but often only in passing. The insights gained from the literature review were used to guide my interview questions. Chapter Four provides the necessary historical-context for this study of DIY practice in New Zealand. It reports the findings of my initial socio-historical investigation – which traces the evolution of DIY practice in New Zealand from colonial to contemporary times, including the emergence and evolution of its commercial base. This discussion draws on key insights from my key informant interviews, archival research, analysis of old and new DIY advertisements, manuals and magazines and a scan of New Zealand newspaper publications for references to DIY.

Chapters Five to Nine present the findings of my fieldwork – a detailed description of the DIY practices of 27 Christchurch homeowners. Where appropriate, my interpretation of their experiences is supported with findings from a household survey which was also administered as part of this research. My interpretation is also supported by findings from the literature review, which are signposted at various points in the analysis chapters.

Chapter Five – titled ‘DIY Thinking’ – describes how my interviewees contemplated big and small DIY projects or, put another way, how they thought about the changes they would like to make to their houses, homes and gardens. Chapter Six explores and describes the types of DIY projects my research participants had undertaken over the courses of their housing journeys, covering interior decorating, home repairs and maintenance, building work and gardening. Chapters Seven and Eight zoom in on DIY practice, first examining the planning activities which often surround DIY projects (Chapter Seven) and then how the work gets done (Chapter Eight). The resources (tools and materials) acquired and used (or ‘consumed’) to accomplish DIY projects are discussed in Chapter Nine. Chapter Ten reframes the description of DIY activity presented across earlier chapters using a combination of theoretical approaches. The study concludes in Chapter Eleven. Here, I discuss the ‘DIYed home’ and also ‘personalise’ the thesis by reflecting on my own recent lived DIY experiences. Before reporting the findings of my literature review, contextual-historical investigation, survey and interviews, the next chapter provides a detailed description of my research methods – *how* I sought to answer my three main research questions.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Introduction

This chapter provides a description of the methods and data sources I used in this research on DIY in New Zealand, and also the methodological foundation and geographical location of the study. The methodology I employed developed in response to the dearth of qualitative studies of DIY practice both internationally and in New Zealand (as signposted in Chapter Three), and reflects my personal preference for naturalistic social science. I begin with a brief introduction to the field of naturalistic research and how it seeks to explore, describe and explain social phenomena in the richest possible sense. I draw particular attention to its demand for “emergent design flexibility” (Patton, 2004, p.715), multiple methods and reflexivity (or the ‘role of the researcher’). I then explain how I carried out the research, including a description of my data gathering techniques, information sources and analytical approach. My research participants and the research location are also introduced. I finish the chapter by ‘locating’ myself in the study, thereby addressing the question of reflexivity.

### 2.2. Naturalistic social science

The lack of *specific* empirical research on DIY practice in New Zealand signalled an immediate need for this study to be *exploratory*. As noted by Brotherton (2008, p.12), exploratory research is best used when “... the situation is very new, has been previously inaccessible for some reason or the research problem is too large and complex to address without some initial, exploratory work ... to generate some initial insights and understanding”. In need of an exploratory approach, I chose a naturalistic methodological framework as outlined by Herbert Blumer (1969) and other interpretive social scientists (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973; Lincoln, 1985; Lofland & Lofland, 1995; Prus 1996; Norris & Walker, 2005). This methodology – which has much in common with ethnography (Prus, 1996) and 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomenology (van Manen, 1997) – involves the study of social life through a prolonged period of generally qualitative fieldwork in the lifeworld of the participants, “... standing, as it were, in the shoes of those being studied” (Davidson & Tolich, 2003, p.103).

The naturalistic approach reflects a particular *epistemology* or “theory of knowledge” (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p.16). Practitioners generally argue that one’s understanding of

the world (their perception of reality) is socially constructed and dynamic – produced in and through a range of economic, social and cultural processes and interactions, which are ongoing in their lives. As noted by Neuman (1997, p.346), those who adopt this standpoint:

...do not see people as a neutral medium through which social forces operate, nor do they see social meanings as something “out there” to observe. Instead, they hold that people create and define the social world through their own interactions. Human experiences are filtered through a subjective sense of reality, which affects how people see and act on events. Thus, they replace the positivist emphasis on “objective facts” with a focus on the everyday, face-to-face social processes of negotiation, discussion and bargaining to construct social meaning.

### **2.2.1. Induction (sharpening)**

In practice, the naturalistic approach is inductive; researchers start with a broad area of interest and sharpen their focus as their inquiry proceeds (Perkins, 1988). The act of induction (or ‘sharpening’) requires the adoption of a flexible research design which allows for one project to “...emerge, unroll, cascade or unfold during the research process” (Lincoln, 1985, p.142). For that reason, the method is well-suited to studies which aim to gradually *piece together* the meaning of previously unexplored spheres of social life (such as New Zealand’s DIY culture). Indeed, Schatzman and Strauss (1973, p.3) have noted that the method involves a “...process of discovery which may lead the researcher to his [or her] problem after it has led him [or her] through much of the substance in the field”. Patton (2004, p.715) refers to this as “emergent design flexibility” and described it in the following way:

Naturalistic inquiry designs cannot be completely specified in advance of fieldwork. Although the design will specify the initial focus, plans for observation, and initial guiding interview questions, the naturalistic and inductive nature of the inquiry makes it both impossible and inappropriate to specify operational variables, state testable hypotheses, finalise either instrumentation, or completely predetermine sampling approaches. A naturalistic design unfolds or emerges as fieldwork unfolds ... Design flexibility stems from the open-ended nature of naturalistic inquiry.

Given the epistemological foundations of the approach, naturalistic researchers recognise that they are both embedded in and part of the social world they are studying, and therefore, that their interpretation of any aspect of social life will inevitably be influenced by their own values, subjective views, presuppositions and experiences (May, 1993; Hammersley, 2000). They do not hide this fact. Rather, the method *demand*s reflexivity whereby the researcher explicates their position in the field of study and in the research process – as a person who entered the project with a particular set of views and experiences, a unique professional



background and an inimitable social and historical context. It is the researchers' open acknowledgement of these details and their potential influence on the research process, which provides naturalistic social studies with rigour and trustworthiness.

### **2.2.2. Naturalistic research methods**

Given the unstructured and emergent character of the naturalistic approach to social research, the inquirer is not restricted to a particular data gathering tool or prescribed set of data gathering techniques. Rather, the approach allows for he or she to employ "...any ethically allowable procedure that offers a likely possibility of getting a clearer picture of what is going on in the area of social life [being studied]" (Blumer, 1969, p.41; Neuman, 1997). Schatzman and Strauss (1973, p.7) have called this "methodological pragmatism".

While free to choose, albeit carefully, from the full spectrum of social research tools, practitioners have generally favoured qualitative research techniques, particularly participant observation, in-depth interview and document search. These methods enable the perspectives of the participants' to be fully expressed, thereby allowing the researcher to gain an *in-depth* knowledge of the topic under study. Further depth is gained by: becoming intimately familiar with the research setting (Prus, 1996); developing rapport with research subjects; interviewing and then, if new ideas are evoked, re-interviewing participants; and continuously witnessing and recording rich detail of the topic under study (Babbie, 2001). Familiarity is acquired by getting up-close and personal with the research participants; by immersing oneself in their social worlds in order to understand "...what things mean for [these] people in situ and [how they] ... live and interpret their lives" (Norris & Walker, 2005, p.133). This calls for the research to be conducted in real-world settings, not in the research laboratory. For this reason, the approach is also sometimes called "field research" (Neuman, 1997, p.250).

While qualitative techniques are certainly favoured by practitioners of the naturalistic research method, Lincoln and Guba (1985, pp.198-199; also see Perkins, 1988) have suggested that it should not be viewed as anti-quantitative:

Qualitative methods are stressed within the naturalistic paradigm not because the paradigm is anti-quantitative but because qualitative methods come more easily to the human-as-instrument. The reader should particularly note the absence of an anti-quantitative stance, precisely because the naturalistic and conventional paradigms are so often – mistakenly – equated with the qualitative and quantitative

paradigms, respectively. Indeed there are many opportunities for the naturalistic researcher to utilize quantitative data – probably more than are appreciated.

Another feature of the method is the use of *theoretical sampling* (or the researcher's good judgement) to identify suitable research participants, usually those who have some lived experience of the phenomenon under study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Indeed, Blumer (1969, p.41) advises that the researcher should "...sedulously seek participants in the sphere of life who are acute observers and who are well-informed. One such person is worth one hundred others who are merely unobservant participants".

### **2.2.3. Exploration and inspection**

Notwithstanding the flexible nature of the naturalistic method, studies utilising the approach are generally structured round two distinct processes: *exploration* and *inspection* (Blumer, 1969). "Exploration is the process by which researchers become familiar with their areas of study. They recognise existing theory, traditional understandings, and concepts, but instead of being directed by them, researchers attempt to test their relevance by comparing them with the world of everyday life" (Perkins, 1988, p.305). During exploration, the researcher's ultimate goal is to derive a "rich description" (Geertz, 1973) of the phenomenon under study by pursuing multiple lines of inquiry, observing activities from a variety of vantage points and by endeavouring to make sense of the issues and events which arise as the study proceeds. Through exploration, the researcher obtains first-hand experiential knowledge of the social phenomenon under study and a full description of the meanings people ascribe to it (Perkins, 1988). Further lucidity is acquired through the use of an adjunct process called *inspection* which "...focuses on the derivation of analytical elements which are general or categorical that arise out of exploration as being central to an understanding of the research problem" (Perkins, 1988, p.306). Blumer (1969, p.44) usefully compared the inspection process to the close assessment of an unfamiliar material object:

...we may pick it up, look at it closely, turn it over as we view it, look at it from this or that angle, raise questions as to what it might be, go back and handle it again in the light of our questions, try it out, and test it in one way or another. This close shifting scrutiny is the essence of inspection.

### **2.3. Studying DIY (data collection)**

The following sections explain how I carried out my fieldwork in this study of DIY, including a review of my participant selection procedures, data collection strategies, and

analytical approach. I also include a short section covering my own personal (and changing) involvement in DIY prior to, and over the course of, the study. The order of the methods principally follows that of the actual research process – from the development of initial context through to the analysis of data. Before proceeding, however, I briefly introduce the location where my fieldwork was carried out – Christchurch city.

### **2.3.1. Christchurch (the research setting)**

I conducted the bulk of my fieldwork in Christchurch (*Otautahi* in Maori), New Zealand's second largest city, with a population of 372,600 in June 2009 (CCC, 2010). Christchurch, which is located in the South Island in the Canterbury Region (Figure 2, page 10), is also known as 'the garden city' owing to its many wide open spaces and parks, especially the centrally located and distinguished botanical gardens (now home to one of the world's most prominent horticultural events – the *Ellerslie International Flower Show*).

Christchurch's residential housing stock might best be described as 'low-rise', with few dwellings over two storeys high. Most dwellings (74%) are detached or "separate houses" (CCC, 2010) each situated on their own section of land. The vast majority have been built on flat land (a key characteristic of the city's natural landscape), with a few of the city's more exclusive suburbs developed on the slopes of the surrounding Port Hills. In 2006, there were 134,718 private dwellings in Christchurch city (CCC, 2010) with the dominant tenure form being owner-occupation. To June 2010, the average house sale price in Christchurch was \$340,000 which was slightly under the national average of \$352,500, but significantly lower than figures for the country's two other main cities namely Auckland City (\$495,500) and the Wellington Region (\$405,500) (Real Estate Institute of New Zealand, cited in CCC, 2010, p.24).

Readers of this thesis will perhaps be familiar with Christchurch city, with three recent and very large earthquakes (September 2010, February 2011 and June 2011) having propelled the area into international news headlines. These events caused significant damage to the city's central business district, infrastructure, colonial heritage building stock (for which the city was also renowned) and the houses and homes of residents living across all its forty-nine suburbs, particularly those in the city's eastern belt, close to the Pacific coast. The fieldwork for my research was conducted before these earthquakes.

Given the widespread popularity of DIY in New Zealand, this study could have been conducted in any New Zealand city. My decision to conduct the study in Christchurch was largely pragmatic – my university was located in Christchurch and it was where I lived and, over the course of this thesis, where I purchased my first home. Christchurch is also my birthplace and where I grew up and, therefore, it was a city with which I was already familiar. My familiarity with the research setting enabled me to get started on the research quickly. For example, I knew where many of the DIY stores were located and places where other possible data sources could be obtained, such as second hand book stores. I also had family in Christchurch and an established network of friends, five of whom I selected to be my initial interviewees, before snowballing began (and who also piloted my DIY survey). My local social network was also a vital source of support, always willing to listen to my ideas about DIY, read over thesis chapters and, on many occasions, challenge the direction of my thinking.

Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 2: Christchurch and Canterbury Region (source <http://ecan.govt.nz/publications/General/map-canterbury-150110.jpg>)

### 2.3.2. Building context

Following Blumer (1969), Prus (1996) and Neuman (1997), I started my fieldwork for this naturalistic study of DIY in July 2006 with a six month period of *exploration* during which I looked around the research field, collecting and examining material from a wide variety of sources. These information resources were gathered from the Internet, local (Christchurch) and national libraries, Archives New Zealand<sup>2</sup>, second hand bookstores, the online auction website *TradeMe*, ‘big-box’ home improvement stores and smaller hardware retailers. The resources I gathered included home lifestyle magazines, historical records, DIY manuals and magazines, instructional ‘how-to’ brochures, relevant popular media (including archived episodes of DIY television shows), housing reports and the publicity material and websites of the companies which manufacture and/or sell tools and materials for DIY projects. At the outset of the research, I also let friends and family know about my study and, as a result, I was ‘drip fed’ a wide variety of useful resources including old DIY publications, advertisements and, in one case, a 2003 newspaper supplement which explored various aspects of the ‘DIY culture’ in New Zealand.

In late 2006 to mid-2007, to further develop my understanding of the wider world of DIY and to confirm the accuracy of the contextual-historical picture I was developing (see Chapter Four), I conducted unstructured interviews with 15 key informants (see Section 2.4.2, page 20 in this chapter for selection procedures) representing different businesses and organisations involved in the DIY and/or housing sectors in New Zealand (identified in this thesis by the name of the organisation or company they represent).

Key informant interviews are what the name suggests, interviews with the ‘opinion leaders’ and ‘stakeholders’ for particular communities of interest. Key informant interviews involve interviewing such people as representatives of those communities in order to gain insight into the structure of the cultures and groups under study (Tolich & Davidson, 2003, p.131).

The key informant interviews all occurred at the place of work of the interviewee(s) and each took between thirty minutes and two hours to complete. Each was recorded and transcribed verbatim for later thematic analysis (refer Section 2.4, page 19 in this chapter).

In conjunction with this preliminary period of exploratory field work (July 2006 – July 2007), I explored the research literature on DIY (see Chapter Three) and continued monitoring

---

<sup>2</sup> Archives New Zealand, is the government organisation mandated with storing and protecting New Zealand’s historical records, including government documents, maps, paintings, photographs and film.

relevant journals for the duration of the study. My aim was to see how other academics had studied DIY, reflecting on their approaches and key findings, also to identify potentially useful concepts which might be explored in my key informant and household interviews. As will be noted in Chapter Three, my literature search uncovered a small and disparate DIY literature, with articles traversing the disciplines of social history, urban economics, marketing, consumption, leisure and gender studies, and the material culture of everyday life. This literature review became a vital reference point during the development of interview schedules and the interpretation and the sorting of data into thematic categories.

### **2.3.3. Primary data collection**

Once I felt I had developed a good contextual-historical understanding of the wider world of do-it-yourself (i.e., the socio-cultural and economic structures which underpin the DIY culture), I shifted my focus to the DIY practices of homeowners, my main interest in this study. I collected these primary data over the period mid-2007 to December 2008 in the form of:

1. ‘Housing-stories’ whereby members of Christchurch households – or at least one member of each household I sampled – talked to me about their involvement in DIY in a face-to-face, semi-structured interview
2. On-site observations of participants’ current DIY projects, DIY tools and workshop, and past DIY accomplishments visually documented in photographs, with additional details captured in field notebooks
3. Observations of participants doing DIY (again visually documented in photographs, with additional details captured in field notebooks)
4. A household survey which sought to examine the distribution of DIY participation among the wider Christchurch population

At this point it is pertinent to note that the combination of interviews and house tours mirrored the method used and refined by Perkins and Thorns (1999, 2001, 2003; Perkins et al., 2008) in their study entitled *New Zealanders at Home: The Meaning of House and Home*, which explored the meaning of the often intense relationship that many people have with their dwellings. To do this, the authors conducted in-depth interviews with householders during which they asked questions relating to their experience of homeownership. To supplement interview data, they also followed the interviewees through the rooms of their

homes while audio- and video-taping their interpretations of these spaces. I now describe the nuances of each of my own primary data gathering procedures (which represented the bulk of the fieldwork) in more detail.

### **2.3.3.1. Homeowner/household interviews**

To ensure this thesis was grounded in the experiences of homeowners and/or households who were involved in DIY, I used face-to-face in-depth interviewing as my main data gathering method. I started each interview by initiating a conversation about the participants' history of homeownership (which I considered to be crucial contextual information). I then shifted the focus to their DIY experiences, asking questions about their current, past and present DIY projects, how they got involved in DIY, how they orchestrated their DIY projects from beginning to end (and the social relations bound up in this activity) and how their involvement in DIY had changed overtime, if at all.

Negotiating access to participants was achieved through a snowball technique starting with interviews of five Christchurch homeowners who I knew personally, and then asking them for the names of other Christchurch homeowners who might be willing to participate in a discussion about DIY. The criteria for selection was that they were 'homeowners' and that they had done some DIY in the last few years. This snowballing generated a large list of potential interviewees (suggestions often accompanied by comments that the potential interviewee would be likely to talk a lot about DIY). From the list I selected "sedulously" (Blumer, 1969), across age groups and generations, ensuring I spoke to both young and older homeowners, from a variety of housing types and styles. I stopped when I was confident that I had obtained a full data set (i.e., I had reached the point of saturation) "...where nothing new is being added" to the story of DIY that my interviewees were relaying (Bowen, 2008, p.140).

All the research participants were contacted by telephone and were asked for their agreement to take part in the study; none of the homeowners I approached refused to be interviewed (in fact, many of them expressed a great deal of enthusiasm). The interviews, which took place during 2007 and 2008, were all conducted in the homes of the participants. They ranged in length from one to two hours, were tape-recorded, transcribed in full, and then manually coded in a line-by-line search for "repeatable regularities" (Miles & Huberman, 1994) or, put

another way, for recurrent themes and for links between these themes (see Section 2.4 for a detailed description of analysis procedures).

The study followed the ethical principles and practices of informed consent, participant confidentiality and the right of the individual to withdraw from the project (anytime within the four week period after being interviewed). Prior to interviewing, I gave my interviewees a covering letter (Appendix 1) which described the research (and informed them that photographs would be taken) and outlined their rights as contributors; upon reading the project description, I asked individual participants to sign a consent form (Appendix 2). Key informants were also given an information sheet (Appendix 3) and were also required to sign a consent form (Appendix 4). The study was approved by the Human Ethics Committee of Lincoln University.

In all, I interviewed 22 Christchurch households (involving 27 individual participants) about their involvement in DIY. Five of the interviews were conducted jointly with couples (n=10) and in thirteen instances I spoke to one member of the couple-household (n=13). Four interviews were conducted with single home owners (n=4, one woman and three men, one of whom was recently divorced). The ages of the interviewees ranged from late twenties to early seventies, except for one participant who was in his early nineties. With the exception of one Maori male, all the interviewees were of Anglo-European descent. Four participants lived alone at the time of interview, while all others lived with their partners. (Some had young children at home, others had older offspring who had moved out of the house and were now either living in rental accommodation or had purchased homes of their own). Table 1 (page 18) provides further demographic information about the interviewees, including the pseudonyms I use in the thesis to identify them.

All my interviewees were owner-occupiers (the main selection criteria) and, at the time of fieldwork, the length of time they had owned their current home ranged from three months (Terry and Natalie) to fifty years (Charlie). The majority had mortgages, with just six households (all older participants) owning their home freehold. Based on my observations, the dwellings of the participants corresponded well with Perkins and Thorn's (2001, p.37) description of the iconic suburban 'Kiwi-home'; "...single-family, one-storey houses, typically the three-bedroom 'bungalow...'", each on its own section of land. Based on the information provided by my interviewees, the age of their houses ranged from about 90 years (those built in the 1920s) to about 20 years (the newest of them constructed in the late 1980s).



### **2.3.3.2. House and property tour**

Following the approach employed by Perkins and Thorns (1999, 2001, 2003; Perkins et al., 2008), after each household interview I conducted an interpretive house, garden and workshop tour with the interviewee(s), the details of which were captured in photographs and field notes. The point of the house tour was twofold. Firstly, it provided an opportunity for householders to showcase their DIY and to elaborate on what they had done. For most, standing in the spaces where projects had been carried out, or were in progress, sharpened the interviewee's memory, thereby enabling them to describe more fully various aspects of their DIY. Secondly, the tours provided me with the opportunity to observe the material dimensions of the interviewee's projects and to cross check householders *reported* DIY practices with the visible outcomes of their work (what they had *actually* achieved). In every case, the house tour involved an excursion to the participant's shed and/or garage-workshop where I was able to see, photograph and talk about the tools they owned and the materials they had in storage.

### **2.3.3.3. Participant observation**

Over the course of the research, I returned to the homes of seven interviewees where I was able to observe them *doing* DIY, watch projects develop step-by-step (Figure 4, page 17) and lend a hand when needed. The DIY projects I witnessed varied widely and included: 1) the repair and painting of a rusted corrugated iron roof, 2) the redecoration of a living room, 3) the construction of a hallway cupboard for added storage space, 4) the removal of an old brick fireplace (Figure 3, page 16) and subsequent patching of the empty space, 5) the preparation of exterior window sills for painting, 6) the demolition of an old laundry to create the necessary space for a new bathroom expansion, and 7) the construction of a low-rise timber deck. During these home improvement activities I was regularly called upon by the participants to lend a hand (Figure 3, page 16). I was also invited to join them as they journeyed to DIY stores to buy the building supplies they needed for the project at hand. All the projects I observed took place during weekends and frequently involved help from the participants' friends and family. The presence of helpers provided me with a chance to witness the roles these people played in the accomplishment of various DIY projects and also to engage in casual conversations with them about their reasons for helping out.

Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 3: Participant observation and researcher help (author's photo)

Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 4: Participant observation was used to observe DIY projects as they were carried out step-by-step, stage-by-stage, day-by-day (author's photos)

Table 1: Homeowners interviewed for this study of DIY

Pseudonym & age (years)	Other household members	Household member(s) interviewed	Housing history	Age of home (approx.)	Mortgage
Anna (32) & James (33)	(Expecting their first child)	<b>Anna &amp; James</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> home	1930s	Yes
Linda (34) & John (35)	Two pre-school children	<b>Linda</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> home	1930s	Yes
Jerry (34) & Lucy (32)	One pre-school child (expecting their second child)	<b>Jerry</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> home	1920s	Yes
Hamish (34) & Zoe (33)	(Expecting their first child)	<b>Hamish</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> home	1940s	Yes
Britney (36) & Gavin (36)	(Expecting their first child)	<b>Britney</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> home	1940s	Yes
Sam (36) & Sally (34)	No children or other housemates	<b>Sam &amp; Sally</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> home	1950s	Yes
Kate (28) & Paul (35)	No children or other housemates	<b>Kate</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> home	1950s	Yes
Terry (33) & Natalie (33)	No children or other housemates	<b>Terry &amp; Natalie</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> home	1920s	Yes
Hazel (31) & Gary (36)	No children or other housemates	<b>Hazel</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> home	1950s	Yes
Alan (32)	No children or other housemates	<b>Alan</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> home	1970s	Yes
Marty (38)	Has international border who pays rent	<b>Marty</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> home	1920s	Yes
Shane (40) & Kathryn (38)	Two children aged 4 and 6	<b>Shane</b>	2 <sup>nd</sup> home	1950s	Yes
Dave (40) & Michelle (41)	No children or other housemates	<b>Dave</b>	2 <sup>nd</sup> home	1950s	Yes
Glen (41) & Clara (37)	One child aged 6	<b>Glen</b>	2 <sup>nd</sup> home	1960s	Yes
Eric (45) & Amy (39)	Three children aged 6, 8 & 11	<b>Eric</b>	3 <sup>rd</sup> home	1950s	Yes
Rose (53)	No children or other housemates	<b>Rose</b>	4 <sup>th</sup> home	1980s	No
Sue (55) & Grant (60)	Three adult children (all have left home)	<b>Sue</b>	4 <sup>th</sup> home	1960s	No
Bruce (56)	Recently divorced and now lives alone	<b>Bruce</b>	5 <sup>th</sup> home	1930s	Yes
Barry (58) & Janice (56)	Three adult children (all have left home)	<b>Barry</b>	6 <sup>th</sup> home	1970s	No
Mary (65) & Max (73)	Two adult children (all have left home)	<b>Mary &amp; Max</b>	3 <sup>rd</sup> home	1980s	No
Jack (72) & Jane (70)	Four adult children (all have left home)	<b>Jack &amp; Jane</b>	3 <sup>rd</sup> home	Late 1980s	No
Charlie (92) & Liz (87)	Four adult children (all have left home)	<b>Charlie</b>	2 <sup>nd</sup> home	1950s	No

### **2.3.4. Household survey**

Owing to the lack of statistical data on do-it-yourself practice in New Zealand, and in consideration of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) assertion that more use could be made of quantitative data by naturalistic researchers, midway through interview fieldwork (late in 2007), I also conducted a household survey on DIY. The survey was made possible through a financial grant from the Centre for Housing Research Aotearoa Zealand (CHRANZ). The main purpose of the survey was to assess the distribution of DIY participation among the wider Christchurch population and to capture descriptive detail of the nature and scale of their DIY activities. The questionnaire explored four main areas of interest which emerged from the first period of in-depth interviewing with households. They were: 1) the general scale and nature of homeowners' DIY projects, 2) the acquisition of information and advice, 3) homeowners' reasons for engaging in DIY and 4) tool acquisition/ownership among homeowners. The survey questions (see Appendix 5 for the questionnaire) were developed over a six week period and pretested in August 2007. (The cover letter which was sent to households with the survey is presented in Appendix 6.) A 'geographically stratified sampling' strategy was developed to ensure that the survey sample encompassed a wide variety of housing types and people with different socio-economic circumstances. The sampling strategy produced a 22 per cent response, with 520 of the 2,400 individual survey forms returned. A 20 per cent response rate is not unusual for unsolicited mail surveys involving single mail-drops with no reminder letter sent to the recipients (Fink et al., 1995). A full description of the survey method is presented in Appendix 7. (A copy of a summary report of survey findings is available from the author.)

### **2.4. Data analysis**

The multiple methods I used in this study of DIY (interviewing, observations, property tour, household survey, photography, secondary data search) produced a very large and heterogeneous data set. Not surprisingly, making sense of it all was a mentally demanding and time intensive task.<sup>3</sup> For guidance, I reviewed the standard panoply of methods texts and particularly useful was the advice offered by Schatzman and Strauss (1973), Lofland and Lofland (1995) and, in the context of housing studies, Perkins and Thorns (2008). These proponents of naturalistic social science suggest that analysis should be viewed as "the

---

<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that my analysis of data was not a one-off event, but an on-going activity over the course of the research, following Coffey and Atkinson's (1996, pp.10-11) advice that "analysis is a pervasive activity throughout the life of a research project. Analysis is not simply one of the latter stages of research, to be followed by an equally separate phase of writing up results".

*emergent* product of a process of gradual induction” and that while it does have its own set of ‘concrete’ routine practices, “the process remains, and is intended to be, significantly open-ended in character. In this way analysis is also very much a creative act” (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p.181).

#### **2.4.1. Non-interview data**

As noted earlier in this chapter, I began this study of DIY with a period of ‘exploration’ with the aim of developing a detailed contextual-historical picture of the DIY phenomenon in New Zealand. At the outset of this exercise I searched for anything that might be useful – immersing myself in the “litter of popular culture” (Shields, 1991 cited in Fountain, 2002) which surrounds DIY activity (including websites, advertising leaflets, promotional material, newspapers, books, manuals and magazines). I did not follow any formal/rigid analytical procedures when examining these ‘texts’. Rather I looked at them and carefully considered their significance to DIY activity and then documented the thoughts they stimulated – especially aspects I found exciting, factual or contradictory and therefore in need of further thought. Along with their general content, I also considered the temporal context (when they were produced) and the arena in which they appeared and the forms they took. While these non-interview data were primarily used to construct a contextual-historical backdrop for the study (which is reported in Chapter Four), they also supplemented the interview data (appearing across Chapters Five to Nine where appropriate).

#### **2.4.2. Key informant interviews**

To supplement the non-interview data and thereby bolstering the contextual-historical picture I was painting, I undertook fifteen key informant interviews. Following Blumer (1969), these informants were selected using “theoretical sampling” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) i.e., on a case-by-case basis for their capacity to provide details about the way in which different aspects of the DIY industry and culture had developed in New Zealand and changed overtime, if at all. Over an eight month period I spoke with: the National Marketing Managers of *Mitre 10* and *Bunnings* (the two main home improvement retail chains in New Zealand); the editing staff of two current DIY magazines (*The Shed* and *Projects*); the owner of a *Mitre 10 Mega Home Improvement Warehouse*; a *Resene* paint store representative; the co-owner of a *PlaceMakers* building supplies outlet; two representatives (interviewed together) from a finance company specialising in home improvement loans; the owner-administrator of a DIY website who had also written two DIY books for children; a housing

economist from the Building Research Association of New Zealand (BRANZ); a spokesperson from the government's *Welcome Home Loan* programme; a real estate agent; a home-show co-ordinator, a builder and electrician. Some of these informants had worked in the DIY sector for their entire working lives and, therefore, could recall the ways in which it had developed over a long period of time (invaluable historical insight). Others were more recent participants and, thus, provided a more contemporary account of the nature of DIY and its wider social and economic structures. As noted above, the stories they volunteered – which were filled with factual information – were used to build a contextual-historical backdrop for the study. This information also proved to be very useful during my analysis of interview data collected from homeowners; where it was especially supportive, I have discussed it in the text.

### **2.4.3. Interview data (homeowners)**

I began my analysis of interview data with a search for recurrent overarching themes, a process which started when I was transcribing the tape recordings and then, in a more focused way, as I read (and re-read) the full interview transcripts. The process I employed mirrored what Agar (1991, p.193; cited in Wilson, 2007, p.25) describes as “flexible thinking”, a procedure which he argued should encompass “manual” inspection of the data via “numerous cycles through a little bit of data, massive amounts of thinking about that data, and slippery things like intuition and serendipity”.

To begin my analysis I conducted a line-by-line search for “repeatable regularities” (Miles & Huberman, 1994) or, put another way, for recurrent themes and for links between these themes. I did not use computer assisted software for this on-going process or a strictly structured/mechanical coding regime, but rather colour pencils to manually identify, mark and track emerging themes through the interview transcripts. Gradually, key topic areas began to stand out – clusters of interrelated ideas (each colour coded) which I believed would be crucial for fully understanding DIY and which might form the structure of the thesis.

Immediately apparent to me during this process was an inextricable link between homeownership and DIY which, upon closer inspection, appeared to be connected to my interviewees' housing aspirations, i.e., the potential they saw in the home they owned and the role of DIY in bringing these potentialities into fruition (a narrative around which I have structured Chapter Five). During coding I was also struck by the wide range of activities my

interviewees were discussing under the banner of DIY (including gardening) and for this reason I knew it would be necessary at the beginning of the thesis to write descriptively about the different types of DIY (the focus of Chapter Six). The word ‘project’ was pervasive across interview transcripts, a concept I utilised as a conceptual ‘lens’ through which to explore DIY practice. Data revealed that DIY projects have two main phases: 1) conceptualisation and planning (comprising a wide variety of pre-project interactions and activities, see Chapter Five and Seven respectively); and 2) the execution/orchestration of project work (which became the focus of Chapter Eight). Another topic prevalent across the transcripts was the material culture of DIY – the tools and materials my interviewees acquired and used (and in fact depended on) in order to carry out their projects. My exploration of these data culminated in Chapter Nine.

Once I sorted data into these main topic areas I conducted a closer inspection – looking for themes-within-themes or distinctive categories within each of the areas of interest. At a practical level this involved more manual coding and more coloured pencils, coupled with various other sorting procedures (including regular “whiteboard” sessions, and coffee-mediated discussion with university colleagues where I bounced ideas around and developed diagrams to help make sense of the data). During this process I also returned to my key informant interview transcripts and other data sources (including my survey), looking for evidence or factual information which might support my emerging ideas. For example, I found useful evidence to support the ‘gendered’ nature of DIY (which stood out at various points in my analysis) in the advertising and newspaper articles I collected and also across the key informant and survey data sets. My initial literature review, which had ‘sensitised’ me to this topic area, was also a useful tool during my closer inspection, one I used to check and compare my ideas with the theorising of other researchers and to help with the interpretation of my own data set and develop more refined foci.

#### **2.4.4. Survey data**

Survey data from the Christchurch-wide sample, were used to support the largely qualitative analysis. For analysis of the survey data, responses were entered into a pre-designed Microsoft Excel spread sheet and then exported to the computer based Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). In SPSS, the data were subjected to simple descriptive statistical analysis, including frequencies and cross-tabulation. A summary report was then written (available in full upon request) and then used as an additional resource to demystify (or



indeed debunk) the ideas I was developing during my analysis of the qualitative interview data. Key survey findings appear in the analysis chapters, where they are used to support the developing discussions.

## **2.5. Limitations**

At this point in the thesis it is important to signpost three key methodological concerns which relate to the way participants (homeowners) were selected. Firstly, homeowners with an obvious interest in DIY were chosen to be interviewed – but what of those who opted not to do-it-themselves? Given budget and time constraints, I only chose to interview residents living in Christchurch city – but what of those who live in the countryside? Additionally, I did not interview anyone living in a brand (or nearly) new home – what DIY these do these owner occupiers carry out? In essence, these questions present a range of opportunities for future studies of DIY.

## **2.6. The role of the researcher**

As noted earlier in this chapter, the role of the researcher is a key methodological concern in naturalistic studies largely because he or she is the principal data gathering and processing ‘instrument’ and, for this reason, cannot be separated from the findings (having come from a position of knowing something about the topic before the research commenced). In naturalistic research it is expected that the researcher will reveal relevant aspects of their “personal history” and “current biography” (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, pp.11-12), reflecting on their prior knowledge of the topic area and their interest in the subject (or why they care) which, if concealed, may give rise to concerns about bias and validity. In light of these exhortations and to end this chapter, I wish to provide a very brief autobiographical background as to how I became interested in the DIY phenomenon and also how over the course of the research project I moved from outside observer to homeowner and do-it-yourself practitioner.

I started this thesis with what might be considered an everyday understanding of DIY, aware that it involved a bundle of home improvement activities which were very popular among ordinary New Zealand homeowners, such as my parents. My earliest personal recollections of DIY are in fact associated with my parents in our second home in Christchurch, which we moved into when I was eight years old. There (and in subsequent homes) I remember my mother and father executing a wide variety of DIY projects, sometimes with help from my

grandfather, uncles and aunts. I also helped out. In those days – the 1980s – my parents were very keen on wallpapering and I can remember once helping my mother cut and paste decorative paper for my bedroom and then helping transfer the gluey sheets to my father who, balanced on his ladder, neatly fixed them to the wall with the aid of a wallpapering sponge and plumb-bob (which I have now inherited). I also remember helping my father construct a multi-tiered timber deck at the back of that two story house; I was particularly impressed with his design – particularly how he ingeniously trained a tree through a hole he had cut in the deck to provide us with some summer shade. While my mother and father have certainly accomplished a number of ‘epic’ home improvement projects over their history of homeownership, they were certainly never ‘fanatical’ DIYers, perhaps better described as ‘typical’ New Zealand homeowners who, over the their adult years, have together enjoyed gradually doing-up the houses they have owned and occupied together. Given this personal background – growing up in a typical family home in New Zealand – it is fair to say that I have always had an awareness and understanding of the DIY tradition, and some hands-on experience.

My interest in ‘studying’ DIY began in the mid-2000s – a time when many of my closest friends reached their late 20s and early 30s and, virtually in chorus, got married and purchased their first homes. It was certainly an exciting period in my life – what seemed like several years of mates’ weddings and house warming parties. It was also a time when my friends started doing a lot of DIY and talking about it too. Before long I found myself locked into ‘working bees’ (see Section 8.2.4, page 148) and – for the very first time – engaged in long conversations about DIY power tools, projects and products. At the time, I was finishing my Master’s thesis and thinking about future PhD topics – as a non-homeowner<sup>4</sup> at the time, the DIY craze was a personally relevant social phenomenon which I thought would be very interesting to explore. Fortuitously, at the time, I was informed by a colleague that my current primary PhD supervisor (Harvey Perkins) was writing about the meaning of house and home for New Zealanders and had touched on DIY in this study. We soon met, talked and agreed

---

<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that early in 2010, after my fieldwork and initial analysis was completed, Lindi (my partner) and I purchased our first home. Like our friends had done, we spent weekend-after-weekend making our new house our home. By way of DIY we: repainted the interior and exterior walls, stained fences, laid vinyl floor coverings, replaced light fittings, sowed a new lawn, landscaped, established a vegetable garden, installed an irrigation system, patched the roof and fitted a new kitset kitchen, all in our first 18 months of occupancy. While we lost that house (our home) in the February earthquake which struck Christchurch in 2011, there is no doubt that my personal experience of “doing-it-up” helped with the final stages of analysis.

that it was an understudied but very significant facet of New Zealand culture – a conversation which ultimately led to the production of this PhD thesis.

## **2.7. Chapter summary**

In this study of DIY – the first of its kind in New Zealand – I adopted an exploratory naturalistic research strategy comprising an assortment of qualitative social research methods and a household survey. I started the study with a six month period of exploratory research which included 15 key informant interviews, collecting and reading DIY magazines and manuals and advertisements (popular culture sources), and a systematic document search and literature review (the latter of which continued until the study concluded). These data were used to construct a preliminary picture of DIY in New Zealand (Chapter Four), including key aspects of its history and wider economic and social structures. This preliminary contextual-historical work informed the next phase of the project – primary data collection. At this stage of the research process, in-depth interviews, interpretive house tours and participant observations were used to gather data describing the ways in which 27 Christchurch homeowners engaged in, experienced and made sense of their involvement in DIY. A household survey was also used to gather data about other homeowners' involvement in DIY. The combination of methods I employed for this study, which I have described in this chapter, provided a wealth of data which, and after rigorous analysis, enabled me to develop a “rich description” (Geertz, 1973) of the DIY phenomenon in New Zealand.

## 3. DIY in the Academic Research Literature

### 3.1. Introduction

This chapter reviews the international and New Zealand academic literature on DIY home improvement. The chapter was developed as a platform upon which to build my own analysis – a resource I initially used to identify entry points into the subject area, help shape my initial interview questions and then, later, as an aid for sorting, ordering and interpreting my own data set. It also helped me to identify obvious gaps in the literature. The material covered includes explicit scholarly studies on DIY and, in a more limited way, those in which DIY features strongly, but is not necessarily the central subject matter. This literature traverses quantitative and qualitative studies in the areas of economics, consumption, material culture, leisure, work, housing, history, and gender and media studies. Together and to date, this body of work presents a disparate picture of DIY, the notable exception being recent progress made in the allied fields of material culture and consumption where a small, but more integrated and interpretive discussion has taken place, one to which I will make a theoretical contribution in Chapter Ten. I begin the chapter with a review of the international literature on DIY and then consider New Zealand-based studies.

### 3.2. DIY in the international research literature

The topic of DIY home improvement first appeared in the international academic literature in an essay published in *American Quarterly* in 1958. There, Albert Roland (1958, p.154) wrote of the “phenomenal growth of the do-it-yourself trend” and how it was altering well-established “patterns of domestic life in millions of American homes”. Driving his curiosity was an observation of a shift in the nature of do-it-yourselfing from an act of economic *necessity*, (against the backdrop of material shortages in the war and immediate post-war years), to a new and emerging lifestyle *choice* in much more prosperous times. Evidence of this transition, he argued, could be seen in the growing number of affluent American homeowners who, since the early 1950s, were *opting* to do their own home improvement projects for fun, to satisfy their creative impulses and to have a hand in the realisation of their domestic housing dreams. Roland (1958) argued that evidence could also be seen in the then new and burgeoning domestic hardware marketplace where legions of American “do-it-yourselfers” were happily going to purchase the latest tools, materials and instructional literature for their do-it-yourself projects (Roland, 1958).

Theorising, Roland drew on Henry Thoreau's well-known autobiographical account of his two year 19<sup>th</sup> century retreat from industrial society to the wilderness where he built, by hand and with minimal economic investment, a house on the banks of a small lake called Walden. There, for two years, Thoreau embraced the principles of self-sufficiency and self-reliance and then wrote of these liberating experiences (his notes first published in 1854). A century later, Roland (1958, p.154) connected Thoreau's thoughts to his scrutiny of "do-it-yourselfing" which he thought involved homeowners of all social distinctions, retreating to their sheds, basements and workshops (their temporary 'Waldens') to design, build and make artefacts for their home. Roland (1958) suggested that through the accomplishment of do-it-yourself projects, homeowners were able to develop a strong sense of pride in their practical abilities, a far cry from their experiences in the modern alienating workplace – the office, assembly line or shop counter. DIY, Roland (1958) suggested, also provided a temporary escape from the mounting pressures of social and economic life – a moment to recoup and gain a better perspective, albeit, as he recognised, predicated on the need to purchase goods from the emerging mass DIY marketplace.

Despite Roland's (1958) early theorising of the DIY phenomenon in America, it was not until the 1990s that the topic was revisited with any notable degree of academic rigour. Writing from a Cultural Studies perspective, Melchionne (1999) suggests that this long period of neglect was the result of a tendency among social scientists to focus on sub-cultural groups engaged in acts of mass cultural contestation and a methodological preoccupation among theorists with the interpretation of high cultural texts such as film, literature and new media. For Melchionne (1999), therefore, it was perhaps the very *ordinary*<sup>5</sup> nature of DIY that had likely led to its neglect. He wrote:

... do-it-yourselfing, at least in the incarnation of home improvement, is in the purview of the most politically uninteresting group out there; largely white, middle-class, child-rearing, middle-aged homeowners and working-class people with middle-class ambitions. The do-it-yourselfing homeowner does not fit the picture of subordinate contestation that harmonises so well with the theoretical and

---

<sup>5</sup> Over the last twenty years or so, the *ordinary* practices which constitute everyday life have become the subject matter of an increasing number of social scientists (De Certeau, 1998; Paterson, 2006). As a result, there has been a marked surge in published studies focusing on "...the most typical human experiences, bent on unravelling their subtle collective or interpersonal dimensions and internal mechanisms" (Sztompka, 2008, p.24). For Sztompka (2008, p.25), this growing trend perhaps marks the advent of a 'third sociology' "...following after the 'first sociology' of social wholes – organisms, systems – as practised by the classics of the discipline ... and the 'second sociology' of social 'atoms' – behaviours, actions, or even their 'sub-atomic particles', meanings, scripts, texts – initiated by Max Weber, and later pursued by George Herbert Mead, Claude Levi-Strauss and others".

political stakes of Cultural Studies. Do-it-yourselfing simply does not possess the political élan of these cultural practices (Melchionne, 1999, p.254).

Despite DIY being overlooked for so long, over the last 15 to 20 years, academic interest has slowly grown, particularly in North America and Britain where the DIY industry, as is reported in Chapter Four (Section 4.7, page 77), has expanded remarkably since World War II. This interest has culminated in a small, disparate, but growing number of publications traversing a variety of theoretical perspectives, methodological approaches and topic areas including: urban, real estate and household economics (Mendelsohn, 1977; Poteman, 1989; Montgomery, 1992; Bogdon, 1996; Davidson & Leather, 2000; Baker & Kaul, 2002); housing studies and social policy (Littlewood & Munro, 1996; Munro & Leather, 2000); retail and consumer studies (Williams, 2004, 2008); history (Gelber, 1997, 1999; Goldstein, 1998; Dingle, 2000; Atkinson, 2006; Jackson, 2006); media and communications studies (Janning & Menard, 2006; Lewis, 2008a, 2008b; Rosenberg, 2008; Powell, 2009); consumption/consumer and material cultures (Browne, 2000; Clarke 2001; Campbell, 2005; Shove et al., 2007; Watson & Shove, 2008) and the social sciences more generally (Melchionne, 1999; Brodersen, 2003; SIRC, 2003; McElroy, 2006). In the remainder of this section, I review this international DIY literature – beginning with quantitative studies, then turning to the qualitative social research which has been published.

### **3.2.1. Quantitative studies of DIY**

Much of the published international research on DIY is quantitative in nature. This literature – largely produced by US and British-based analysts with an interest in housing (as opposed to DIY per se) – reports the findings of exploratory survey work involving either descriptive or inferential statistical procedures. Housing, real estate and urban economists have shown a strong preference for inferential statistical analysis, studying national house condition survey datasets and census registers in order to model different aspects of the household decision to carry out home improvements by way of DIY or professional contracting (Mendelsohn, 1977; Pollakowski, 1988; Poteman, 1989; Montgomery, 1992; Bogdon, 1996). For these economists, DIY (and home improvement more generally) is treated as an indicator of an owner-occupier's willingness to *invest* in the improvement of their existing home, as opposed to staying put and doing nothing, or moving out and into a newer dwelling. While variations exist across these studies as to what activities exactly constitute DIY and/or 'home

improvement’, an interesting cluster of positive statistical relationships have been reported, including:

1. DIY practice and age, with younger homeowners (under 65 years) more likely to undertake their own home improvements (Mendelsohn, 1977; Pollakowski, 1988).
2. DIY practice and house age, with those who own older houses more likely to pay professionals to do their home improvements – which may relate to the complexity of the renovations being carried out in order to modernise these older dwellings or to aging residents (Mendelsohn, 1977).
3. Income and the use of hired help, with wealthier homeowners more likely to use professionals than undertake their own home improvements (Mendelsohn, 1977).
4. The duration of owner-occupation and the likelihood of DIY occurring, with recent movers/new homeowners the most likely to be carrying out home remodelling projects (Pollakowski, 1988; Bogdon, 1996).
5. DIY and household configuration, with married couples or multi-adult households more likely to do DIY than all other types of family units (Bogdon, 1996).
6. The addition of household members (a child or adult) and the likelihood of a housing expansion project being carried out (by way of DIY or professional contracting), with these expanding households altering their homes in order meet the evolving needs of the family<sup>6</sup> (Baker & Kaul, 2002).

Other quantitative social scientists, particularly those with an interest in the broader role of DIY in the maintenance and improvement of national housing stocks, have tended to use descriptive procedures (i.e., frequencies and measures of central tendency) to analyse the datasets they have compiled or acquired as a secondary source. This mainly European-based research seeks to understand the nature of DIY activity, providing descriptive insights: the type of projects carried out by households, who participates and their motives. Davidson and Leather (2000), for example, used data from the 1986 and 1991 English House Condition Surveys (EHCS) and Family Expenditure Survey to examine the nature of the DIY work undertaken by British owner-occupiers and their reasons for carrying out these projects. Their data revealed that DIY generally involved cosmetic jobs (i.e., painting and decorating) as

---

<sup>6</sup> Importantly, this finding led the researchers to advise “...that the home improvement process can be better understood by putting it in a broader context of household life-cycle changes and in the context of how homes are adapted to changing family circumstances. There are times in the household’s life-cycle when home improvements – particularly discretionary home improvements – are likely to be undertaken” (Baker & Kaul, 2002, p.566).

opposed to repair or maintenance work. They also found that remodelling projects were often accomplished by a mix of contractors, homeowners (DIY) and unpaid help (with only eight per cent of these jobs undertaken *solely* by the homeowner). Projects left wholly to contractors were generally those involving: 1) specialised skills (such as plastering), 2) equipment not usually owned by households (such as scaffolding), and 3) potentially dangerous tasks (such as electrical or gas related jobs) (Davidson & Leather, 2000). They also discovered that the most prolific DIYers were: 1) younger couples with children, 2) affluent households (perhaps reflecting the fact that their DIY is discretionary or recreational activity rather than a necessity), and 3) those with building trade experience who had the skills and often resources to do a wider range of jobs. They also found that those least likely to engage in DIY were older owner-occupiers (especially those over the age of 75) and those with low household incomes, "...households which might seem to have the most to gain from DIY in terms of cost reduction" (Davidson & Leather, 2000, p.751).

Brodersen (2003) also used descriptive statistics to examine the nature of DIY activity, taking as his data ten household surveys administered in five European countries (Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Britain and Germany). over the period 1993-2001 In this case, each survey was part of a larger study into the nature and overall extent of the informal (or untaxed/non-registered) economy in Europe which included DIY activities (for more discussion about the 'informal economy' see Gershuny 1979; Pawson & Cant, 1983). Brodersen's (2003) descriptive analysis of the DIY data found that 'homeowners' were much more likely to do DIY than those who rented their property, thereby highlighting the strong link between DIY and property ownership. Brodersen (2003) also found that age had an effect on the likelihood of doing DIY, with the frequency of activity falling, along with the scale of the work done, with a corresponding increase in age, indicating that the nature of one's involvement in DIY changes over the life course (also see footnote 6, page 29).

The Danish and German versions of the survey also asked respondents about their *motives* for carrying out DIY with the great majority (75%) indicating that the opportunity to 'save money' was their primary motive. A quarter said they did DIY because they simply 'enjoyed' doing the work (Brodersen, 2003). Brodersen (2003) also found that painting and wallpapering (simple interior decorating tasks) were by far the most common DIY jobs accomplished, thereby supporting Davidson and Leathers' (2000) results. In explaining this, Brodersen (2003, p.75) noted that "the high figure for DIY probably reflects the fact that



painting neither requires special knowledge nor expensive tools”. Plumbing, electrical work and the installation of heaters were the jobs most frequently left to professional firms. Surmising, Brodersen (2003, p.76) remarked that it is “...mainly work which requires expensive tools or specialist knowledge which households avoid doing as DIY.” (For a similar argument see Bogdon, 1996.)

Another study of the motives of DIYers was carried out by scholars at Britain’s *Social Issues Research Centre* (SIRC, 2003). Their data revealed six primary motives among British DIYers, with the dominant reason being to fulfil one’s ‘creative’ urges (84%), followed closely by the goal of ‘personalising the home’ (72%) through a process the researchers called ‘territorial marking’. For 63 per cent of their respondents, the quest for ‘perfection’ was also an important motive, one which often stemmed from the recent negative experiences they had had with substandard tradesmen. For 38 per cent, DIY was an ‘economic necessity’. Interestingly, and consistent with Brodersen’s (2003) survey research, just 28 per cent emphasised ‘leisure’ as a central motive – DIY providing a welcome and entertaining respite from the dull routines of their weekday work. Finally, 18 per cent of the sample alluded to ‘psychological drivers,’ i.e., doing DIY helped to reduce stress and ‘switch off’, escape and relax. Akin to Brodersen’s (2003) findings and the work of Davidson and Leather (2000), SIRC (2003) also found that most homeowners left plumbing and electrical work to qualified professionals, but would generally do their own decorating.

In keeping with this interest in DIY motives, Williams (2004, 2008) surveyed British DIY shoppers in both urban (2004) and rural (2008) settings. Williams’ overriding aim was to critique popular agency-oriented interpretations of the home improvement retail market which, he suggested, had either overemphasised the *lifestyle* dimension of DIY (that people do it for fun and to express their identity) or exaggerated its *economic* underpinnings (i.e., DIY is the result of financial constraints). William’s (2004) early survey work (in two urban areas in England) found that economic necessity and lifestyle choices were almost always entangled in people’s motives to engage in DIY (which is also apparent across the other quantitative reports I have reviewed above). Consequently, Williams pushed for commentators to widen their lens when examining the motives of DIYers. His follow-up work in rural England in 2008, which utilised a face-to-face interview method, also showed that people engage in DIY for not one, but many reasons (Williams, 2008).

### **3.2.2. Qualitative studies of DIY**

Qualitative social scientific studies of DIY are more difficult to locate – scattered thinly through history publications, media studies journals and the consumption and material culture literatures. Of these, historical papers are the most prolific and nearly all of them adopt a strong gender perspective. The recent development of reality television shows (featuring homeowners doing up their houses or the homes of their neighbours) has also captured the attention of qualitative theoreticians, particularly those working in the fields of media and communication studies. The appropriation and use of tools and materials among home handymen and women has caught the attention of academics with an interest in consumption and the material culture of everyday life – their work resulting in several important contributions to theory in these fields. It is to these published qualitative studies that I now turn.

#### **3.2.2.1. DIY histories**

A handful of US and British-based historians have, since the mid-1990s, written about DIY and how it has changed over time. Of these, the most thorough account has been provided by Gelber (1997, 1999), who investigated DIY as part of a much broader study of the evolution and meaning of hobbies in 20<sup>th</sup> century North America (thereby conceptualising DIY as a certain kind of *leisure*). For his analysis, Gelber (1997, 1999) collected and analysed old DIY manuals, magazines, newspaper articles and advertisements, looking for clues in these ‘texts’ as to the origins of DIY activity and its changing social meaning over the course of time.

Gelber (1997, 1999) argued that DIY (and many creative hobbies) first surfaced in North America during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as male-workers – especially those who did not use manual skill in the workplace – searched for creative outlets to compensate for the alienating qualities of their paid employment. Gelber (1997, 1999), like Roland (1958), suggested that by conducting DIY projects (from start to finish) at home and in their spare time, workers were able to derive a sense of personal pride and achievement in their ‘work’ making it an alluring free-time activity. The gendered nature of DIY is strong in Gelber’s (1997, 1999) writing; he argues throughout his historical narrative that DIY was especially good for the male psyche because it involved the use of heavy tools, practical skills and control over the physical environment and, therefore, did not compromise the core values of masculine identity – DIY practice, in fact, reinforced them. Gelber argued (1997, 1999), moreover, that as DIY became increasingly popular among North American men, particularly during the

post-war suburban housing boom, husbands and fathers gradually constructed for themselves: 1) a new place in the home (although often on the periphery in the very *masculine* spaces of shed or make-do workshop), and 2) a new role in the domestic sphere – so much so “...that by the end of the 1950s the very term ‘do-it-yourself’ would become part of the definition of suburban husbanding” (Gelber, 1997, p.67).

Osgerby’s (2001) broader historical perspective on the evolution of American masculinities supports Gelber’s argument, although he only briefly touches on the topic of DIY. Osgerby (2001) maintains that during the early 1950s, American fathers started to participate more in home-life and indeed home-making by taking on a range of new responsibilities such as home-repair. This “participatory fatherhood” as he called it, was a central part of a new suburban idyll that manifest in the post-war era and this vision of the domesticated male was celebrated in magazines (Osgerby, 2001). A key point in these two historical studies (and also in Roland’s (1958) seminal work) is that the DIY phenomenon (as it can be recognised today) surfaced in the post-war years, as new patterns social life and leisure emerged, a great many of which centred around the privately-owned house and home. Bell (2001, pp.470-471) would certainly not quarrel with this suggestion:

The real growth of the do-it-yourself movement ... took place in the 1950s as the post-war United States settled into a period of prosperity and expanded leisure time ... Clearly, in the 1950s the do-it-yourself movement was becoming more diversified and more focused on the individual homeowner’s interests and range of abilities. It was becoming a recognisable element in the economic climate of the time.

Goldstein’s (1998) history of DIY in America focuses on the rise of the home improvement marketplace in the 1950s and the way in which it evolved over the next four decades, drawing many parallels with the findings from Gelber’s (1997, 1999) research. Akin to Gelber’s research technique, Goldstein (1998) based her theorising on the content analysis of DIY manuals and magazines, DIY advertisements, business reports and the publicity material of home improvement stores. In her book – sponsored by the *American Hardware Manufacturers Association* – Goldstein (1998) reported the way in which the American DIY marketplace emerged in response to the growing DIY craze which swept the nation in the prosperous 1950s (when homeownership was on the rise), and then how the industry sought to maintain and support the culture via the manufacture and distribution of home utility tools, the delivery of instructional information and advice, and the production of a wide range of new materials designed especially for amateur installation.

While Goldstein's (1998) work focuses on the institutional mechanisms which have supported and encouraged the DIY culture, another important strand in her work is that of the clear differentiation between men's and women's roles in the carrying out DIY projects, as was evident in her sample of home improvement advertising published in the USA since the late 1940s. In the earliest of this material, men were almost exclusively portrayed *doing* building and construction around the home with their wives close by looking on with great admiration or engaged in their own very light duties, usually cleaning, painting or varnishing interior surfaces. Goldstein (1998) observed that through the 1950s and 1960s this gendered division of labour changed slightly with women pictured more actively involved in their husbands' building projects, but mostly in a limited and/or supportive role. In the following decade, and against the backdrop of the 1970s feminist movement, these representations shifted again and, according to Goldstein (1998), women were often depicted carrying out a range of more serious DIY projects. For the first time, they were also pictured using heavy power tools. But, as pointed out by McElroy (2006) (albeit in a European context), despite the strong gendered divisions emphasised in a great deal of DIY advertising and magazines, another remarkably strong theme is the representation of DIY as an activity carried out 'together' by couples – reminiscent of the "joint approach" to gardening sometimes taken by British home-making couples (Bhatti & Church, 2000, p.92) – a leaning which continues in DIY advertising today. In her words (McElroy, 2006, p.94; also see Atkinson, 2006 for a similar discussion):

For both men and women, but perhaps most for heterosexual couples, DIY has provided a space in which to produce, challenge and reformulate sexual identity and sexual relations. The making of home in DIY literature was repeatedly fashioned as a form of coupledness, not just of masculine activity. Interestingly, this trend continues today.

The gendered nature of DIY has also been studied as a key aspect of the history of home improvement in Britain by Browne (2000) and similar themes have emerged. Browne's (2000) research focused on the rise of DIY in post-war Britain and found that, despite DIY being a means through which men have continued to assert their masculine identity in the domestic setting (as Gelber (1997, 1999) also argued), DIYing was also an empowering act for women. Via an analysis of imagery located in 1950s home improvement magazines and oral histories of homeowners from the era, Browne (2000) has drawn attention to the way in which women creatively and practically engaged in DIY. Her findings suggest that through DIY, women were able to produce an interior which reflected their identities and aspirations,

although their participation was usually as interior decorator, project manager/director and decision-maker (especially with regard to the selection of colours, textures and designs). Browne (2000) notes that despite the common representation of women as passive housewives in the popular media and advertising of the era, women did in fact exert considerable power around the *orchestration* of DIY activities. Accordingly, the home became a symbol of *their* aspirations, tastes and domestic dreams, albeit via the labour of their ‘handy-husbands’. Whatever the case, she suggests that ‘making a home’ was an activity done together, albeit set around gendered tasks.

Jackson (2006) expands the British historical perspective through a study of amateur DIY boat building in the context of the wider DIY movement in Britain. He makes note of a change which occurred during the 1950s whereby homeowners’ perceptions of DIY shifted from the view that it was an activity borne out of necessity to a means of *self-actualisation* – a leisure activity through which the participants could realise their own full creative and productive potential. In this sense, DIY was humanising.

In the immediate post-war era, support and information for DIYers came in the form of new media, especially handyman magazines (which joined how-to books as sources of guidance and inspiration). For a good example, *Practical Householder* was launched in 1955 and remained in print until the 1990s – one of the longest running DIY magazines. Jackson (2006) suggests that, at its inception, the tone of these magazines was utilitarian, focusing on utility and economy, with DIY portrayed as: 1) a means to bypass tradesmen (and save money) and 2) a primal source of enjoyment and satisfaction. Jackson (2006) suggests that as the market matured, the magazines began to change their focus, stressing that DIY was a way for homeowners to improve the style and aesthetics of their dwelling; through the 1960s, *Practical Householder*, for example, had become a “catalogue of design ideas” (Jackson, 2006, p.60) helped along with the addition of colour photographs. This led Jackson (2006, p.61) to conclude that “Home improvement was no longer tackled only out of necessity, but as part of a project leading to more aestheticised lifestyles, and as a means of establishing status and identity”.

As can be seen above, historical studies of DIY have mainly been undertaken in North America and Britain where, since the 1950s, DIY home improvement has become both a significant home-based (fundamentally leisure) activity and marketplace phenomenon. One of the only historical studies I managed to locate outside these two regions was Dingle’s

(2000), work which examines the history of do-it-yourself house building in Australia (which he also notes gradually shifted from an act of necessity to one of choice). In Australia this activity – building a house from scratch – has a long history and is somewhat of a revered tradition, emerging as a *necessity* during historical periods when houses had been in short supply, but developing into a leisure *option* during the 1970s for those with the resources and skills to build their own ‘dream’ home. Dingle (2000) argues that in a market economy, people generally rely on the marketplace to provide for their housing needs, but when this becomes difficult, owner-building proliferates (and may become the only option).

Dingle traces the history of do-it-yourself house building in Australia to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, with a focus on the nation’s settlement. Then, capital and labour from abroad arrived in Australia to exploit land and minerals in areas with little or no housing; to survive one needed first to build their own home. This housing shortage remained until the building industry established itself and was able to supply the materials and labour for the commercial construction of dwellings. After World War II, the nation experienced another significant housing shortage – the choices were to rent public or private housing, buy or build. Many chose to build. Finding materials was one of the biggest challenges and newspapers and magazines started to offer advice on technical aspects of building and resourcefulness. In the 1970s a different type of owner builder emerged – not reacting to a housing shortage as their predecessors had done; they generally earned good incomes and built to get the type of house they wanted – this was a *choice*. The building and construction market responded with information, tools and materials aimed at DIY home-builders which further enabled them to do the building work.

### **3.2.2.2. DIY in the media studies literature**

British and North American researchers working in the field of media studies have also studied DIY, with a particular interest in the recent rise in prominence of home improvement television shows. A recent example is Powell’s (2009) investigation into the nature of contemporary DIY television shows in Britain which, she argues, have changed from programmes designed to distill practical information to would-be DIYers (show-by-show) to spectacles aimed at inspiring and entertaining owner-occupiers in 60 minute time slots. Shows such as *60 Minute Makeover*, for example, present instant transformative changes in a rapid and entertaining manner, a far cry, she suggests, from the didactic DIY shows of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s which offered simple and often unspectacular advice and practical

instruction for one-off projects, sometimes over several episodes. In the new DIY shows, emphasis on the process of *doing*, she argues, has been replaced with a focus on *outcomes* (such as the benefits of a new stylish interior) and, furthermore, the presenters of didactic shows have been replaced by “tastemakers” who direct home improvement-related consumption via this form of TV entertainment (Powell, 2009, p.103). Theorising, Powell (2009) suggests that in recent decades, DIY has changed from a productive practice to a consumerist engagement, one which has been propelled forward by DIY TV and other popular media.

The proliferation of home improvement television – in all its forms – has attracted the attention of other social researchers whose contributions can be found in the media studies literatures (Janning & Menard, 2006; Lewis, 2008a, 2008b; Rosenberg, 2008). The shows they have studied typically involve the transformation of residential properties, (utilising a before-and-after format), in a number of different ways. First, there are those shows which involve a celebrity host accompanied by a professional design and/or renovation crew entering the homes of ordinary people, removing them from the scene, and renovating their homes for them, along with labour provided by friends and/or neighbours – other DIYers. Others – like *Changing Rooms* – involve everyday people doing the work for themselves. Like Powell (2009), these researchers show how these new and very *entertaining* shows differ markedly from the *didactic* DIY programmes of previous decades which involved (in a relatively unglamorous fashion) expert tradesman conveying from the studio step-by-step instructions for a wide variety of home improvement tasks.

The idea that DIY TV has more to do with generating desires than building skills is also at the heart of Rosenberg’s (2008) work. Rosenberg considers the way in which the home makeover television genre delivers an “aesthetic education” (delivered by “tastemakers” who promote contemporary home and garden trends and the latest design principles) rather than instructional schooling. But astutely, Rosenberg (2008) also points out that while academic studies of makeover television have emphasised the consumption dimension of such shows (encouraging the purchase of fashionable DIY products), narratives of thrift, cost-saving and control are *also* present in the programmes and for this reason need to be considered in future studies of the genre.

### **3.2.2.3. DIY in the consumer and material cultures literature**

A small cluster of social scientists working in the allied fields of consumer and material culture have developed useful theory in relation to DIY. Most notable is the recent work carried out by Shove et al. (2007; also see Watson & Shove, 2008) who have used the British DIY case to explore the nuances of what they call “ordinary consumption”. This concept extends post-structural or “post-social” (Gabriel & Jacobs, 2008) theorising in the field of consumer and material culture by pointing out that while some material goods or ‘commodities’ are purchased in order to construct and convey a desirable individual or group identity (i.e., they have semiotic/symbolic value – for a full discussion see Featherstone, 1991), a good deal more are bought and used in the practical execution and accomplishment of everyday life, often in “pressingly mundane” ways (Watson & Shove, 2008, p.70; also see Shove et al., 2007). This is no better seen, Shove et al. (2007) argue, than in the everyday act of doing DIY projects where the co-dependent relationship between people, tools and other very ordinary commodities (nails, wood, sandpaper, paint, glue, plastic pipe, wire, nuts and bolts etc.) is plainly obvious. Shove et al’s (2007) qualitative data (interviews with DIYers) reveals that as DIY projects are carried out by practitioners, with the help of tools and new DIY technologies, their competence and confidence grows and, as a result, new possibilities for future projects emerge which, in turn, have implications for “future patterns of consumption” (Shove et al., 2007, p.43).

To inform their theorising, Shove et al. (2007) draw on Campbell’s (2005) conceptualisation of “craft consumption” – an idea which blends consumption aspects of DIY (i.e., the need for tools and materials and the desire to have a ‘nice’ house) with its obvious creative dimensions. Campbell (2005) begins his theorising with a useful description of the three dominant images of the consumer in the social science literature (also see Clarke et al., 2003; Paterson, 2006) and then develops his argument for the inclusion of a fourth category – the overlooked ‘craft consumer’. The first image, which is most palpable in the field of economics, is that of the ‘rational actor’ – a person, who with perfect market knowledge, judiciously approaches the purchase of goods and services in order to maximise utility and profit or, put more simply, acquiring the most for the least. The second image Campbell (2005) alludes to is that of ‘passive dupe’ whose consumption and purchasing choices are influenced by market mechanisms (such as advertising) which aim to maintain or generate wants and needs (also see Clarke et al., 2003, p.135). The third and most recent image – one developed by postmodern social scientists – is that of an ‘agent’ who buys market



commodities and then uses them to convey an image of self or to display their “buy in” to a particular lifestyle, group or community (Campbell, 2005). Campbell (2005) contends that while this three-pronged model of consumer types – dupe, rational actor and “postmodern-identity seeker” – provides a useful typology of consumption practices, it fails to account for the increasing number of people who purchase often very *ordinary* commodities (and, again, nails and screws spring to mind) and then, through the application of skill, judgement, desire and care, make something new, often for the sake of the ‘making’ experience itself. Campbell (2005) calls this fourth category of consumer practice, ‘craft consumption’. Elaborating, he writes:

This model ... rejects any suggestion that the contemporary consumer is simply the helpless puppet of market forces. On the other hand, it does not foreground rational self-interested conduct, nor does it presume, as is the case with the postmodern model, that the consumer has an overwhelming concern with image, lifestyle or identity. Rather the assumption here is that individuals consume principally out of a desire to engage in creative acts of self-expression ... they already have a clear and stable sense of identity ... (Campbell, 2005, p.24).

Campbell (2005) suggests that obvious examples of craft consumption can be identified in the world of DIY home improvement where homeowners produce items for their homes from assemblages of raw materials – one strand of craft consumption which he labels “ensemble activity”. Important here, Campbell (2005) purports, is that the artefacts which the craft consumer constructs can in fact be purchased in finished form from the marketplace or, alternatively, one can pay a professional to do the work; but craft consumers, he argues, reject this option, instead choosing to make the end product themselves (a DIY approach). In essence, craft consumption – which may take many forms (weaving, cooking or building a deck or garden, etc.) – involves some ‘thing’ being designed and made by the same person, most likely the end user, from tools and materials accessed from the marketplace. Most important to the craft consumer is control over all aspects of the project – conceptualisation, product design, purchasing the necessary materials and also *doing* the work. “Thus one may say that the craft producer is one who invests his or her personality of self into the object produced” (Campbell, 2005, p.27).

In many ways, Campbell’s (2005) ideas mirror the recent thoughts of Richard Sennett (2008) in his book the *Craftsman*. While not explicitly concerned with DIY, nor based on primary data analysis, Sennett (2008) argues that as people engage in the act of making some ‘thing’ (from beginning to end) they develop a sense of pride in their work – pride being the reward

for perseverance, skill and commitment. Sennett (2008) suggests that despite the divide which has emerged between maker and user (producer and consumer) in modern society, most people carry the predisposition or impulse to make something for its own sake and, as such, we are all *potential* craftsmen. But he also points out that ‘making’ relies on people being curious about the tools and materials they have at hand and what they might be able to do with them.

#### **3.2.2.4. DIY typologies in the international research literature**

Before concluding this section on the international DIY literature, two DIY typologies need to be mentioned, one of which focuses on types of DIYers (Roland, 1958), the other on the nature of the activities they carry out (Atkinson, 2006). I will discuss each in turn.

Within his seminal work (which I reviewed at the beginning of this chapter), and based on his personal observations, Roland (1958) devised a typology of DIY ‘practitioners’ with each type determined by the nature of work they did. His typology describes three distinct DIY groups: 1) the craftsmen-hobbyists, 2) handymen, and 3) the do-it-yourselfers proper. For his “craftsmen-hobbyists,” do-it-yourself, he argued, is a favourite leisure pursuit or ‘hobby’ in which much discretionary income is invested in buying the latest tools which are then added to an already large and generally well-organised hardware collections. Roland argued that the craftsmen-hobbyist mainly derives satisfaction from the solitary process of *making* and *doing* (rather than the end effect – be it a social or economic outcome) and especially enjoys mastering tools and the challenging process of crafting raw materials into professionally-finished goods (perhaps mirroring Campbell’s (2005) much more recent description of the “craft consumer”).

In contrast, Roland’s (1958) “handymen” limit their involvement in do-it-yourself to essential home repairs and routine property maintenance. Unlike the craftsmen-hobbyist, these handymen purchase tools and materials on a ‘need-it-now’ basis and for practical guidance and ideas, rely heavily on advice from peers and/or instructional manuals and magazines. At his time of writing, Roland (1958) believed that this group, and their spontaneous need for tools, materials and information, was driving a shift in the building supplies sector, from servicing the needs of professional builders and decorators to the supply and sale of tools and materials designed and marketed for amateur/DIY use.

Roland's (1958) third group – the “do-it-yourselfers proper” – comprised aspirational young couples who, despite reasonable household incomes, are financially stretched. Mortgage payments, the servicing of hire purchase agreements and the considerable cost of raising a family, means that to realise their often grandiose domestic aspirations – a modernised bathroom, a freshly painted house – they *have* to make use of their own manual labour. Roland (1958, p.162) noted that while their reasons for do-it-yourselfing might appear purely economic, the activities of this group could not be characterised as “old-time thrift nor pioneer, necessity born enterprise ... [nor] as a means to save money, but to upgrade their living standards, to afford more of the luxuries their peer group set up as the necessities of life”.

In contrast, Atkinson (2006) has more recently characterised DIY by the types of DIY ‘activities’ undertaken by practitioners, producing a typology consisting of four (overlapping) categories of DIY practice. The first category – “pro-active DIY” – included projects containing “...significant elements of self-directed, creative design input, and which might involve the skilled manipulation of raw materials or original combination of existing components, where the motivation is personal pleasure or financial gain” (Atkinson, 2006, p.3). The second category – “reactive DIY” – refers to activities involving the assembly of combinations of ready-made parts (purchased as kits or as separate finished components), generally conducted in free-time and as a pure leisure pursuit, but which, as an aside, might produce some financial gain. Atkinson's third category is “essential DIY” comprising tasks carried out by the homeowner in and around the home (with some reliance on instructional material) because professional labour is either too scarce or is beyond the financial means of the individual. While underpinned by need, Atkinson (2006) notes it is likely that essential DIY will usually involve an element of creative input and, therefore, can be personally fulfilling. His final category – “lifestyle DIY” – involves “...activities undertaken as emulation or conspicuous consumption, and where the use of one's own labour is by choice rather than need (although professional input, usually in the form of design advice, is often included)” (Atkinson, 2006, p.3).

### **3.3. DIY in the New Zealand research literature**

While no explicit research on DIY has been carried out in a New Zealand context, DIY has been mentioned in passing in broader New Zealand studies covering a wide range of topics including: aesthetic leisure (Bell & Lyall, 2001); the portrayal of gender in home related

advertising (Shaw & Brookes, 1999; Winstanley, 2000); the meaning of house and home (Leonard, Perkins & Thorns, 2004; Winstanley, 2000); geographies of aging (Mansvelt, 1997a, 1997b; Davey 2006); and household engagement in informal work (Pawson & Cant, 1983). DIY has also featured in applied research reports such as published national leisure and time use surveys (Russell & Wilson, 1991; Statistics New Zealand, 2001) and New Zealand building industry research (Clark, Jones & Page, 2006).

### **3.3.1. DIY as household 'work'**

DIY first appeared in the New Zealand academic literature in the early 1980s in a study conducted by Canterbury-based geographers Pawson and Cant (1983). Their study investigated the nature and scope of the informal work carried out by Christchurch residents in and around their houses and homes – *informal* in that it could also be accomplished by purchasing the relevant trade services from the formal and taxed economy. Pawson and Cant's (1983) research was influenced by the theorising of two prominent international scholars. The first was Gershuny (1978), who was arguing at the time that because trade related services were increasing in cost in comparison to goods, it was rational for householders to purchase the necessary implements (such as hammers and paintbrushes) and materials to do work around the house themselves – giving rise to what Gershuny (1978) called the "self-service economy". The second was Pahl (1980), who argued that self-provisioning was done by households as a form of insulation against recession – one way to save money as the cost of living increased. Pawson and Cant (1983) suggested that both these reasons were perhaps less applicable in the New Zealand context because the nation had a long and well-established tradition of DIY, evident not only in times of economic recession but also in much more prosperous times. They argued that while DIY might well be carried out in reaction to inflation and rising building costs, its widespread popularity was perhaps more *culturally* driven.

Pawson and Cant's (1983) fieldwork involved a survey of 256 households located in two contrasting suburbs in Christchurch city. Similar to Pahl's (1980) survey instrument, their questionnaire included 19 household tasks (mainly home improvement but also car repairs, housework and haircutting) and asked the survey respondents to indicate who they got to do the work i.e., household members, friends, family and relatives, professionals, or any mix of these labour sources. Their data revealed a high degree of internalisation of the work, with three quarters of the respondents carrying out their own decorating and minor home

maintenance and repairs and nearly all of them doing their own gardening. Pawson and Cant's (1983) data also revealed that DIY was lower for tasks that were more technically difficult and where the cost of failure could be high (thereby anticipating the findings of the international DIY research reported by Bogdon, 1996; Brodersen, 2003; Davidson & Leather, 2000). According to Pawson and Cant's (1983) data, some of the key variables for understanding DIY participation in New Zealand were (home) ownership and household composition, with multiple adult households who owned their own home much more likely to engage in DIY than single owner occupiers and/or those who rented their house.

Pawson and Cant (1983) concluded that in New Zealand there was indeed a high degree of DIY – conceptualised here as *informal work* – but that there was still great dependence on the formal economy (marketplace) for the acquisition of the necessary tools and materials to carry out the work. Following this line of thought and akin to the findings of Gurshuny (1978) and Pahl (1980), they suggested that DIY was in fact a product of affluence, an assertion supported by their observation of the many tools possessed by the households they surveyed. Given the high collective cost of these goods, Pawson and Cant (1983) believed that economic necessity was not the only force at play, further supporting their view that DIY was a cultural trait. Theorising further, Pawson and Cant (1983) suggested that it was also the relatively large size and nature of New Zealand houses and sections which also likely influenced the high levels of DIY in New Zealand i.e., there was, quite simply, a lot of improvement, maintenance and gardening work to be done.

### **3.3.2. DIY as home-based 'leisure'**

While Pawson and Cant (1983) conceptualised DIY as a form of household *work* in New Zealand, at a similar time and through the 1990s it also began to be theorised as an important home-based leisure activity. This treatment of DIY was evident in the empirical social scientific research on leisure participation in New Zealand – a body of work which, for many years, was dominated by cross-sectional population surveys broadly examining everyday patterns of leisure (e.g., Robb & Howarth, 1977; Tait, 1984; Hillary Commission, 1991). While these surveys largely focused on trends in sport and outdoor recreation away from the domestic setting (De Joux, 1985), an interest in passive forms of leisure developed during the early 1990s and this focus included a range of home-based leisure pursuits such as gardening and home maintenance tasks. This new interest was evident in the *Life in New Zealand* survey conducted under the auspices of the Hillary Commission for Recreation and Sport in

1990 and which included a section devoted to home-based leisure pursuits (Hillary Commission, 1991). That survey revealed that do-it-yourselfing was a major component of the typical New Zealand leisure repertoire.

While not explicitly focused on leisure, the 1998/99 *New Zealand Time Use Survey* – sponsored by the Ministry of Women’s Affairs – also shed light on the significance and nature of home-based leisure pursuits including DIY (Statistics New Zealand, 2001). This research asked 8,500 New Zealanders to record all their paid and unpaid free-time activities (including household tasks) over a two-day period. Pertinent to this thesis was the finding that women were spending twice as much time as men on general (unpaid) household duties, (such as food preparation and cleaning), while men spent considerable more time on DIY home maintenance. These findings were suggestive of a gendered household division of labour in New Zealand, with men taking care of the property and women assuming the more traditional role of homemaker. (For more on this debate, see Lynch & Simpson, 1993.)

In the late 1990s, Mansvelt (1997a; 1997b) also drew attention to DIY as a form of home-based leisure in a broader qualitative study examining the personal geographies of aging in New Zealand. Her interview data indicated that productive leisure-type activities carried out in and around the house and home (such as gardening and DIY) provided New Zealand’s retired and elderly population with a heightened sense of value and achievement – positive outcomes which helped to alleviate the concerns they had about being, or becoming, a burden on society (and thereby challenging the central stereotype of ‘being old’). (Similar themes are discussed in Bhatti (2006), albeit focused on the gardening activities of British homeowners in the latter phases of their life courses). More conceptually, her study drew attention to the fuzzy and somewhat problematic boundary between work and leisure, “...two concepts which are not mutually exclusive” nor oppositional (Mansvelt, 1997a, p. 289).

While not directly related to leisure, Davey (2006) also interviewed older New Zealanders about their participation in, and also the demands of, home maintenance, renovation and repair. Her work was one part of a larger study titled *Aging in Place* which aimed to encourage and assist the elderly to remain in their own homes. Davey (2006) suggested that the capacity for the elderly to remain at home was often dependant on their ability to keep the home safe and in a good state of repair. Her data revealed that while the elderly were not always capable of performing major renovations themselves, many were capable of accomplishing a range of simpler maintenance tasks and, akin to Mansvelt’s (1997a, 1997b)

findings, exhibited a strong desire to express their self-sufficiency in this way. Most said they could afford to pay someone to take care of this work, but chose not to. Davey (2006) believed their desire to engage in basic DIY was likely a reflection of the New Zealand ethos of independence and resourcefulness and was also associated with the centrality of home (ownership) in New Zealand society. Similar cultural drivers were evident in the sociological work of Bell and Lyall (2001) who considered DIY in their appraisal of the meaning of ‘aesthetic leisure’ in New Zealanders’ everyday lives. They argued that New Zealand has always been a resourceful, inventive and creative nation and that DIY, (as one form of creative expression), is evidence of this cultural disposition (also see Bell, 1996).

### **3.3.3. DIY and gender**

During the late 1990s, much effort went into understanding the history of housing in New Zealand and much of this work mentioned DIY and carried a distinct gender perspective. Shaw and Brookes (1999), for example, referred to the topic in a paper examining representations of gender identities in domestic advertising in New Zealand over the period 1936-1970. They found that images of DIY practice in housing advertisements worked to reinforce gendered conventions about home-based work; interior decoration was often depicted as the responsibility of the wife or mother while the husband was portrayed as the “protector and maintainer” of the structure and exterior of the house. The authors also noted “...a continual contest between the advocates of professional design – the architects, interior designers and domestic scientists – and the ‘do-it-yourself’ approach ... reflected in the number of advertisements where homemakers are portrayed undertaking interior decorating themselves” (Shaw & Brookes, 1999, p.217). Similar themes were teased out and discussed by Winstanley (2000) who, as one part of a study of the meaning of home for New Zealand women, analysed a selection of post-WWII building product advertisements. Winstanley (2000) noted that while advertising often featured women outside, they were usually depicted as passively supporting their husbands as they carried out the technical aspects of the DIY tasks, thereby promoting the image of competent man/incompetent women. Even when depicting working on the inside of their home, Winstanley (2000) found that women were usually seen as being technically incompetent, with many products advertised on the basis that they were ‘easy’ for women to install. More recently, she noted, New Zealand women are increasingly challenging these media representations by picking up tools and carrying out their own home improvements.

### 3.3.4. DIY as 'home-making'

DIY home improvement also appears as a strong theme in Perkins and Thorn's (1999, 2001, 2003) exploratory study of the meaning of house and home in New Zealand. When interviewing 41 households in the Christchurch area, they found that DIY was a popular pastime among New Zealand homeowners – a relatively inexpensive method for transforming or 'making' one's house into their ideal version of home. Their research also showed that while DIY is generally conducted by individuals in the privacy of their own home, such activities and the associated aspirations are influenced and shaped by a range of exogenous forces such as: the availability of tools and materials, the job market, housing policy and planning, house and garden lifestyle magazine advertising, and the local and global media (for this discussion see Leonard, Perkins & Thorns, 2004).

Worth mentioning here is the theoretical perspective upon which Perkins and Thorns (1999) based much of their work. Recognising that homes are special kinds of *places*, they set out to explore the possibility of linking theories of *place*-making with their empirical work on the meaning and making of house and home in New Zealand. They found that houses (observable material constructions) became homes (special kinds of *places*) as the inhabitants lived in, experienced and ascribed meaning to them. Particularly useful here is a similar point made by Schrader (2005, p.11) who, in a New Zealand housing context, wrote that:

...home has a social as well as physical fabric. The social fabric is the intangible patchwork of memories, emotions and experiences that we spread over the physical fabric and onto which new pieces are constantly stitched.

Drawing on Massey's (1995) theoretical work – which considers that places are not static entities but "processes" – Perkins and Thorns (1999) suggested that our homes are always in process, being made and re-made by their occupants. They argued that individuals and families continuously adapt their houses and homes to accommodate their changing needs, wants and desires. In their words, "houses as material objects and homes as symbolic entities are shaped and reshaped by owners and tenants over time in response to both changes in the individual's life course and the social context within which they are set" (Perkins & Thorns, 1999, p.124). Accordingly, the home exists in a perpetual state of flux – always evolving within an individual, local and global context – a project which is, therefore, never really finished. Pertinent to this study is that DIY is one way in which people change the physical appearance of their houses as they make them their homes.



### 3.4. Chapter summary

This chapter has reviewed the international and New Zealand academic research literature on DIY. Four main themes (or approaches to the study of DIY) emerged. Firstly, I have shown that since the 1970s, a small cluster of quantitative studies of DIY have been published in the applied economic literature. Here, British and American economic theorists have treated DIY as a form of investment in the existing housing stock and have sought to identify and model the determinants of the decision to improve ones' home by way of DIY or by hiring a professional. From this body of work it is possible to gain a basic understanding of the types of DIY projects done by homeowners and also the types of households who choose to carry them out. This work indicates that DIY is mostly carried out by younger homeowners and recent movers, and generally involves cosmetic work (such as painting and decorating) with more complex tasks left to the professionals. In these studies, levels of participation in DIY have been shown to change over the life course, with the frequency of DIY falling, along with the scale of the work done, with a corresponding increase in age.

Secondly, I have shown that descriptive survey data have been used to help understand people's motives for doing DIY. This survey work has revealed a complex entanglement of lifestyle and economic drivers. Common across the research is that people engage in DIY because they *want to*; because it can be a fun social experience and personally rewarding.

Thirdly, I have shown that DIY has been examined through historical research, with British and American historians especially active in the field. They have sought to track the development of DIY (as a commoditised leisure form) since World War II, when the global DIY industry started to develop. In these studies, gender has often assumed a central position of importance, with DIY seen as a distinctly gendered activity, with the physical work (especially tasks involving heavy tools) viewed as a masculine interest. These historical papers have often been constructed around a reading of media discourses of DIY and which have tended to reinforce the notion that DIY is men's work.

Fourthly, studies of DIY have surfaced in the allied fields of material and consumer culture, the activity providing theorists with an interesting lens through which to explore the nature of unique forms of consumption – such as 'craft consumption' (Campbell, 2005) and what have been described as 'ordinary' consumer practices (Shove et al., 2007). Apparent in these studies (and also many of the DIY histories referenced above), is the difficulty of precisely positioning DIY in the literature – commentators often referring to it as a composite of the

binaries of work and leisure and production and consumption. The New Zealand research literature, within which DIY has only been mentioned in passing, illustrates a similar tension, with DIY featuring in the New Zealand research on ‘work’ (e.g., Pawson & Cant, 1983) and also ‘leisure’ (e.g., Mansvelt, 1997a, 1997b).

Plainly missing from the international and New Zealand research literature covered in this review are studies examining the actual *doing* of DIY (the focus of the current study) which might provide an in-depth understanding of the DIY experiences of homeowners and which might also, in part, contribute to unpicking the ‘work’ versus ‘leisure’ and the ‘consumption’ versus ‘production’ interpretations. Before reporting the findings of my fieldwork, which may help to advance the aforementioned interpretations of DIY practice, the next chapter provides the necessary background context for the research – a history of DIY in New Zealand.

## **4. Constructing Context: DIY in New Zealand**

### **4.1. Introduction**

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. Concrete paths, fences, decks, barbeques, renovations, painting are all grist to the mill of the weekend industry (Barnett & Wolfe, 1997, p.64).

This chapter considers the evolution of the DIY tradition in New Zealand, tracing its development from an act of necessity and survival on New Zealand's colonial frontier to one now characterised by weekend (discretionary) leisure projects in and around the house and home. It is important to note at the outset that while I present the narrative chronologically, the chapter is not designed to be an historical treatise. Rather, its intent is to provide a background understanding of how "do-it-yourselfism" (Barnett & Wolfe, 1997, p.64) has progressively become a central element of New Zealand culture and economy, thereby providing the necessary context for this study of DIY practice today. In order to construct this contextual-historical backdrop, I have drawn on a wide-variety of data sources including: newspaper articles, DIY manuals and magazines, websites, archive documents, key informant interviews and the advertising material produced by the companies which make and/or sell DIY products.

### **4.2. Building the frontier – the origins of DIY in New Zealand**

During the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the first wave of colonial immigrants (mostly British in origin, middle or working class) reached New Zealand shores having survived an arduous journey at sea from their homeland 12,000 miles away. Once ashore, the colonists – like the Maori and missionaries who arrived before them – confronted a heavily forested landscape, a climate of harsh extremes and the inconvenience associated with a limited population and distance from the industrialising world. These conditions (which included a severe shortage of essential

resources and labour<sup>7</sup>) meant that everyday survival rested on one's own practical abilities and readiness to 'have-a-go' at overcoming the practical challenges faced. On New Zealand's colonial frontier, doing things for oneself was a *necessity*.

The fact that DIYing was a need is particularly evident when housing is considered. With virtually no housing infrastructure in place, an immediate requirement for most new arrivals was to locate a temporary shelter. While some families secured accommodation in crowded New Zealand Company Immigration Barracks, most spent their first nights sheltering under makeshift tarpaulin tents or in crudely constructed self-built huts (Mulgan, 1944; Morrell & Hall, 1957; Salmond, 1986; Cottrell, 2006). One settler's reminiscences of 1842 are telling of the difficult situation that many of them faced:

...our house was part clay and manuaka and some were not so well off as that: their houses were just four poles stuck in the ground with fern on top for a roof. That was a sad time for mothers and fathers, but as children we did not mind it so much ... We had no fire-place in our house at first, and my mother and I set to work to make one. I brought some flat smooth stones from the river and we got some of my father's clay he had made ready for the walls of the house, and so my mother and I built something like an oven (settler's quotation cited in DIA, 1940, p.7).

While finding employment was an initial priority for many settlers (Morrell & Hall, 1957), the rough living conditions they had to endure pushed housing improvement to the fore. As soon as possible under the New Zealand Company's settlement programme, many settlers staked their claim to land<sup>8</sup> and with minimal resources built for themselves a basic but more comfortable home by hand (Perkins & Thorns, 2003). One story of such experiences was provided by Mr Green in an article published in 1922, where he recalls the situation that his family faced on arrival in Christchurch in the 1850s and their subsequent house building experience:

---

<sup>7</sup> For example, Canterbury provincial government immigration agents' correspondence highlights the continuing demand on tradesmen – carpenters especially, but also mechanics and stone masons. See for example New Zealand Archive References: CH287, CP17, ICPS 231/1859; CH287, CP596d/8, ICPS 326/1858; CH 287, SFF, CP 329d, Item 2481/1874.

<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the British immigrants who arrived wanted to own their own home and small piece of land – it was in fact a key aspiration and reason for emigrating. Homeownership symbolised improved status and financial success, but was also aspired to for practical reasons – an escape from Britain's cramped cities and an opportunity to have enough space to have one's own productive garden (Winstanley & Winstanley, 2006). "The quarter-acre section was, in a small way an opportunity for these settlers to assume some of the standards afforded to Europe's wealthy. And what is especially significant is the fact that many settlers not only dreamt of owning their own house and quarter-acre section on which it stood, but actually achieved this" (Winstanley & Winstanley, 2006, pp.12-13). By 1919, New Zealand's homeownership rate reached 53% - five times higher than British figures (Winstanley & Winstanley, 2006).

My parents had brought a little money with them but was [sic] fast frittering away. These conditions could not continue; something had to be done. So my father took up the lease of half an acre in Salisbury Street and spent his last shilling in building materials and with the united efforts with his wife and three of the children whose ages ranged from six to eight and a-half years, he erected a two storey house. He built the chimney himself and in fact did everything himself (settler quotation cited in *The Star*, August 26, 1922).

Given the unfamiliarity of the environment, the limited range of tools<sup>9</sup> and materials they had and the fact that many of them had never built a home before (Hammond, 1979) the build-it-yourself accomplishments of New Zealand's first colonial migrants were certainly remarkable<sup>10</sup>. For instruction it is likely that some turned to the simple house building plans published in books such as *Brett's Colonial Guide*, while others, it is certain, enlisted the help of local Maori-builders (Hammond, 1979; Salmond, 1986; Cottrell, 2006). Nevertheless, the journal entries of countless settler families (like the Greens quoted above) suggest that for many, building a house was a necessary endeavour achieved with little or no assistance from tradesmen and with nothing more than a hammer and wood saw in hand.

As economic conditions improved in New Zealand and the population grew, the construction of predominantly timber<sup>11</sup> houses quickly shifted from the realm of the owner-occupier (DIY) to that of a growing workforce of skilled professional tradesmen, house building gangs (Salmond, 1986) and speculative builders. At the outset, professionals built<sup>12</sup> the shell of the home, leaving the interior to be finished by the homeowner (DIY) but from the late-19<sup>th</sup> century, they began constructing new houses to their finished state (Arden & Bowman,

---

<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that would-be settlers were advised to pack a selection of rudimentary tools before sailing to New Zealand (Cottrell, 2006). In Britain, Sheffield tool manufacturers offered migrants "...a bewildering array of pre-fitted tools chests. These chests naturally varied greatly in price and contents, and at the most basic level they offered a selection of cheaper tools that enabled the colonist with few woodworking skills to feel confident that he had supplied himself with the necessities to perform house maintenance and construct simple furniture" (Cottrell, 2006, p.401). More sophisticated tool-kits also arrived among the luggage of professional cabinet makers, carpenters and builders (Cottrell, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> It is important not to over-romanticise the building accomplishments of New Zealand's first settlers for some were quite likely the nation's first 'DIY disasters'. As noted by Hammond (1979, p.7): "The settlers' limited resources, tools and expertise coupled with the urgent need for shelter produced construction methods which were quick and simple. One result was that many of the first homes were unstable, and though some were lived in for months – sometimes years – a number collapsed or disintegrated within weeks".

<sup>11</sup> New Zealand was densely forested offering a valuable resource to the settlers for house building; by the 1860s about 80 per cent of houses were framed and clad with timber (NZOY, 1990).

<sup>12</sup> Supporting this building activity was the surfacing and early maturation of the New Zealand building supplies sector which, along with many family-owned hardware stores (or "ironmongeries"), began to import and stock the hardware necessary for the professional construction, decoration and repair of homes (Salmond, 1986; Melling, 1994). By the 1880s, a wide variety of tools and materials were available including, nails and screws, locks and keys and industrial strength glues. By now the earliest hardware stores were "at the forefront of colonial development and expansion" (Cottrell, 2006, p.330).

2004). The early importation of heavy equipment, such as woodworking machines, meant that many factories were soon able to mass produce and provide tradesmen with nearly all the materials they needed for building, and with more tradesmen available to take on the work, many New Zealanders were freed from *having* to rely on their own skills and time to build themselves a home (Melling, 1994).

But in the isolated and relatively inaccessible rural areas which were also being settled at the time, the DIY approach remained a need, with aspirant farmers, their wives and often their children having little choice, until access was improved, to build and maintain their first homes themselves. As noted by Hammond (1979, p.7), in one of the few studies to consider home building in the settlement period ...

...the working class immigrants who came to live in the towns, and especially the main centres, were able to rent [ready built] accommodation or assist each other in building. They were certainly far less dependent upon their own resources than those roughing it 'in the wild'.

As settlements became established and New Zealand society emerged into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the growing population faced World War I, an influenza epidemic, the Great Depression and then World War II. Arguably, it was during these events that the frontier 'DIY' spirit re-emerged, was internalised and reinforced – passed on from generation to generation (grandfather to father to son, grandmother to mother to daughter). Like the settlement period, these were all tough times for New Zealanders, characterised by material and labour shortages and, by extension, a *need* to make-do with the limited resources that were at hand. During these events, expressions of the same DIY ethos (ingenuity, self-reliance and resourcefulness) that had been displayed by the settlers arose again as a *necessity*, if not a cultural expectation. Owen (2000), to take one example, noted that in the 1930s during the Great Depression, when money and goods were scarce, children were expected to be inventive. Owen (2000, p.6) described the decade as the “age of boyhood do-it-yourself” with children drawing on their own ingenuity and imagination to make games and toys. To take another example, Brickell (2006) noted that during World War II, New Zealanders on the 'home front' were expected to improvise with the resources they had at hand and proved able and willing to do most things for themselves. One manifestation of their efforts became known as the 'make-do-and-mend' approach (Brickell, 2006).

The DIY practices of New Zealand's urban settlers, rural pioneers and survivors of 'tough times' of the early-20<sup>th</sup> century have become strongly entrenched in the mythology and

language of the Kiwi DIY tradition. This legend is perhaps no better encapsulated than in the now popular ‘No.8 wire’ maxim; a phrase which has come to stand for Kiwi ingenuity and resourcefulness – two cultural characteristics which remain highly valued today (Phillips, 1987; Bell, 1996; Barnett & Wolfe, 1997; Conrich & Woods, 2000) and which have surfaced through time as key survival traits during moments of scarcity and need. Number eight gauge steel wire was initially used in rural New Zealand for farm boundary fencing but “...was adapted for countless other uses in New Zealand farms, factories and homes” (Derby, 2010, online). To take a ‘No. 8 wire’ approach is to refer to the attitude of the archetypal ‘Kiwi bloke’ who, according to legend, exhibits a ‘have-a-go/can-do’ DIY attitude, has boundless practical skill and, therefore, can turn his hand to almost anything<sup>13</sup>. It has also “...come to represent this nation’s alleged ability to improvise, and make do with available resources” (Wolfe, 2007, p.26).

Yet while the origins of the DIY tradition are often linked to the *necessary* build-it-yourself practices of the colonial times and to periods of material and labour shortages, it was during the 1950s and 1960s that the activity evolved into the popular and highly commodified home-based pursuit that we (and the home improvement industry) call ‘DIY’ today – one associated more with discretionary weekend projects in and around the home than building a house from scratch. In the next section I explore this important period in the history of DIY, one in which the activity rose in popularity against the backdrop of growing prosperity, consumer culture, post-war (housing) aspirations, suburbanisation, increasing levels of private home ownership and the early development of the DIY retail sector.

### **4.3. DIY, a new and emerging post-war phenomenon**

After the Second World War, the New Zealand economy began to grow at an unprecedented rate – driven along by strong British demand for the nation’s agricultural commodities (wool, meat and dairy products) and high-levels of immigration from Europe (Parker, 2005b). Unprecedented also was first, a growing demand for family homes (fuelled by the new immigrant population, rural-to-urban migration, the return of servicemen and a post-war baby ‘boom’) and second, the associated speedy development of large suburban enclaves on the outskirts of most New Zealand towns. The suburbanisation process was characterised in part

---

<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that in rural areas, tending to the land was of paramount concern for aspirant farmers and, therefore, women often built, laboured or prepared sites for building their homes (Hammond, 1979).

by the intensive commercial construction of mostly timber framed<sup>14</sup> single-storey detached family-homes on generous quarter acre sections of land<sup>15</sup> (Perkins & Thorns, 2001; Hutchins, 2008). In 1950 and with government support, 17,000 of these new homes were built in the expanding suburbs (Parker, 2005b, p.32) and over the ten year period from 1954 to 1964, a further 207,700 were constructed (Hutchins, 2008, p.16).

Through the 1950s and 60s, access to ownership of new suburban homes was made possible via a range of state-supported mortgage programmes<sup>16</sup> provided by successive governments committed to the ethos of private homeownership and the development of a “property owning democracy” (Thorns & Schrader, 2010, online; Davidson, 1994). The inexpensive government-backed home loans of the 1950s and 60s enabled thousands of middle and low-income<sup>17</sup> families to become homeowners, with the securing of government finance seen as the ‘normal’ pathway into a home of one’s own (Thorns & Schrader, 2010; Pool & Du Plessis, 2011). Before long and off the back of this state assistance<sup>18</sup>, the new suburbs in New Zealand were populated with a new generation of house-proud citizens among whom a distinctive home-centred lifestyle emerged and developed, one in which DIY became an integral part, especially for men (Hutchins, 2008). In the suburbs, there was an expectation that women would stay at home and raise children, clean and cook, while their male counterparts went to paid work in the city, returning home to recover and, in their free time, carry out home maintenance and repairs and also tend to the garden. As Hutchins (2008, p.176) has suggested, “domestic bliss prevailed”.

It is important to note that during this period, many New Zealanders did not find themselves living in a new home of their own in the new suburbs (one they could decorate and landscape, furnish and maintain), but in possession of older, pre-war dwellings. These homeowners, however, were also drawn into the DIY tradition and for them *modernisation* defined the nature of their DIY activities. Through the 1950s and 60s, DIY magazines in New Zealand featured many articles offering tips on how to renew and modernise older dwellings, such as through the replacement of heritage lead lights (stained glass windows) with clear glass panes

---

<sup>14</sup> Since settlement, most New Zealand homes had been framed and clad with native hardwood timber. In the 1950s, however, pine (*pinus radiata*) became the new wood of choice for the framing of dwellings (NZOY, 1990).

<sup>15</sup> Johnston (1976, p.54) describes this as the beginning of the “cult of the quarter acre section”.

<sup>16</sup> By the mid-1970s, nearly 20 per cent of housing funding was state funded (Olssen, McDonald, Grimes & Stillman, 2010).

<sup>17</sup> At one point in 1958, the government offered home-loans to families earning under \$1,000 a year at just 3 per cent (Olssen et al., 2010).

<sup>18</sup> “The shift towards owner occupation was financed by government connections with corporate capital and backed by the government’s belief that it must play a major role in satisfying the growing consumer demands of the period” (Lowes, 1990, p.33).



(*HOW*, 1969a, p.8). Another article provided a method for altering old monolithic tile fireplaces with the aim of making them look more modern and fashionable i.e., “low, with bookshelves on either side,” a task which was “not beyond the average handyman” (*HOW*, 1969, p.13). Instructions were also given on how to paint the exterior of the house to create a fresh modern look and also how to ‘modernise’ old porches, the first step of which was to “fix the problem” of (now redundant) ornamentation by “... remov[ing] the decorative woodwork, leaving only the uprights and cross bars” (Lawson, 1964, p.23).

During the 1950s and 60s and in response to public demand, DIY-related information and advice proliferated in New Zealand, taking on a variety of forms. For instance, some of the first DIY manuals written specifically for New Zealand conditions were published over this period (Figure 5, page 56) the pages of which were filled with step-by-step instructions for all manner of projects for new and old homes<sup>19</sup>. The latter half of the 1960s saw the publication of the first two New Zealand-based DIY magazines titled *HOW* and the *New Zealand Home Handyman and Hobbyist* (NZHH) (Figure 6, page 57). These publications also contained instructions and guidance for all manner of projects with the addition of advertisements for the latest local and imported tools and materials available from building supplies outlets and variety stores. New Zealand homeowners responded well to the magazines with one reader of NZHH – A. J. Harbott from Christchurch – providing the following positive review: “on reading through I find it contains a wealth of information for the “Do it Yourself” man. It is a magazine which should have been available to the average householder years ago” (NZHH, 1968a, p.13). Another reader – J. A. Mason from Auckland – wrote: “I have just seen a copy of your publication and would like to commend you for at last producing a magazine such as this, which is particularly suitable for the New Zealand “do it yourself” amateur” (NZHH, 1968a, p.13).

---

<sup>19</sup> One way to determine the types of DIY projects homeowners were doing during the 1950s is to scan the pages of the home improvement manuals and magazines published in New Zealand during that era. A particularly useful reference is R. J. Keall’s (1957) book titled *Do It Yourself*– a compilation of the first 100 “how-to” articles the author published in New Zealand newspapers between 1952 and 1957. The book was divided into six main sections, namely: tools and timber; useful things to make; painting and paperhanging; household plumbing; home maintenance and alterations; and concrete, paths and walls. What is most interesting in the book is the advice the author gives the owners of “new” homes, an indication that some owner-occupiers must have acquired their properties only partially finished, choosing to do the landscaping, painting, decorating and floor-coverings themselves. For those in older homes, the advice offered in the book tended to focus on modernising the dwelling (one article providing tips for modernising an old bath, another providing information about bringing an old door up-to-date). Also of note is the advice offered to homeowners for “mixing” raw products before they could be used such as paint and concrete – products which can be bought premixed in today’s DIY stores. One of the longest chapters in the book – “useful things to make” – features step-by-step instruction for making timber artefacts from scratch such as: letter- and milk-boxes, clothes lines, a play pen and blackboard “for the kiddies”, furniture, compost bins, a stepladder, an ironing board cabinet, a small glasshouse, a “fowl-house.” It also contains a two-part article providing step-by-step guidance for “building your own garage”.

Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 5: The first DIY manuals written specifically for New Zealand conditions were published during the 1950s and 60s. Here are four examples from the period (top left: *The NZ Dairy Exporter*, 1946; top right, Keall, 1957; bottom left: *The Christchurch Star-Sun*, c1950; bottom right *Reader's Digest*, 1965).

Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 6: The first New Zealand DIY magazines were published in the late 1960s. Here are the covers of the first volumes of both magazines (top: *NZHH*, 1968; bottom: *HOW*, 1968)

During the 1960s, information was also provided to DIYers at newly developed Building Centres which showcased the latest home building materials and room designs and also provided homeowners with the knowledge and support they needed to manage building projects or to do the work themselves. Building Centres were registered as non-profit making organisations, with shop laws banning them from trading on site in the weekend; however, their key function was to promote the nation's building supplies sector (Gilchrest, 1972). Against the backdrop of the new suburban housing boom and interest in DIY, the centres attracted huge crowds. The Auckland Building and Display Centre (which opened in 1963), to take one example, boasted exponential growth in visitor numbers over its first five years, reaching figures of 500,000 visits per year in the early 1970s (Gilchrest, 1972). At the time, the general manager of this building centre attributed the extraordinary level of public interest to the New Zealanders' enthusiasm for DIY (cited in Gilchrest, 1972). The Christchurch Building Centre (Figure 7, below) which opened in 1966, was also very popular; in the first 12 months 120,000 people visited (*HOW*, 1968a). There, as at all other Building Centres, technical officers were present to answer any questions that the home handyman might have. The centres also held a series of DIY lectures with the "Friday evening Home Handyman series" reported as being particularly popular (covering such topics as decorating, furnishing and colour planning, block laying and bricklaying, insulation, paper hanging and landscaping) (NZHH, 1970a, p.8).

Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 7: DIYers wanted information during the 1960s and while some of this was provided in DIY manuals and magazines, it could also be obtained from the nation's new Building Centres (*HOW*, 1968c)

During the 1950s and 60s, a wide range of consumer goods<sup>20</sup> began to arrive from Europe and America with the increasing number of homeowners creating a particularly strong demand for household gadgets and appliances (Brickell, 2006). Among these imports were home improvement tools, especially electric power drills, designed and manufactured – for the very first<sup>21</sup> time in the mid-1940s (Goldstein, 1998) – specifically for non-professional use<sup>22</sup>. One of the first shipments was a consignment of Black and Decker Electric Home Utility drills and accessories which, according to one newspaper advertisement, were expected to arrive on the 15<sup>th</sup> December 1950, just in time for Christmas. By the mid-1950s several more DIY brands were available in New Zealand, including the KBC Power Chief Drill and Accessory Kit which came in a wall-mountable carry case (Figure 8, page 60). But, like the home appliances that were being imported at the time, these new electric tools were expensive. In 1955, to take a typical example, a KBC Power Chief Drill and Accessory Kit would have cost the consumer £19 which, according to the New Zealand government’s inflation calculator (<http://www.rbnz.govt.nz/statistics>) is the equivalent of \$900 today.

While increasing access to tools and materials<sup>23</sup> marked the start of DIY retailing in New Zealand, one hardware store employee from the 1960s reported that it was the ability to purchase pre-mixed paint in the 1960s that really got the DIY phenomenon moving (Thomas, 1997). Before this, paint need to be mixed by a professional or by following the detailed instructions provided in most DIY manuals, and given that most homes were constructed with wood or at least had timber features, there was a great deal of paint mixing and painting to be done. But in the 1960s, pre-mixed paint for interiors and exteriors became readily available to the public and could be tinted in the shop. “It was really the beginning of the Do-It-Yourself era,” the store employee stated (store employee quote cited in Thomas, 1997, p.43). Owing to

---

<sup>20</sup> Andrewes (1999) argues that consumerism developed in sync with suburbanisation in New Zealand in the 1950s, and at this time the consumption of consumer goods was higher than ever before.

<sup>21</sup> The first power tool to be produced for domestic use in the United Kingdom was the Wolf Club drill, first manufactured in 1949. It was produced by an established industrial tool manufacturer Wolf Electric Tools Limited. The first domestic power tools manufactured in the USA were Black and Decker’s Home Utility range. This was launched in 1946 (The Monopolies and Mergers Commission, 1989).

<sup>22</sup> So new were these electrified tools that through the 1950s and 60s, most stores held workshops and demonstrations to teach homeowners how they were to be used.

<sup>23</sup> During this period, the burgeoning DIY commodity market created a great deal of work for the Consumers Institute of New Zealand, which from 1959 began testing DIY products, making comparisons between quality and price, with a strong focus on safety and health, and accurate labelling and marketing. The result of their work was published quarterly in *Consumer* magazine. A quick scan of these resources shows that DIY products were often at the forefront of their testing with power drills and attachments, lawn mowers, paints, kitset furniture, tool kits and general building materials a regular feature. Over the first ten years of the Institute’s existence, the public requested the testing of electric drills more than any other tool in the “handyman” category (Consumer, 1969a). The Institute first tested electric drills in 1969 and reported the findings in an article titled “A test for the home handyman”. Findings from the testing of DIY tools and materials would eventually form a magazine called *Consumer Home and Garden* (which continues today).

the partial lifting of import restrictions in the 1960s (which had been in place since World War II), the employee also recalled being able to import a wider range of tools and materials – including a variety of wallpapers which sent “the Do-It-Yourselfers into raptures!” (store employee quote cited in Thomas, 1997, p.44).

Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 8: The 1950s and 60s witnessed the arrival of the first power tools specifically designed for the amateur home improver, such as this power drill (*The Press*, 1955a)

The eventual lifting of a total ban on weekend trading, by permitting shops to open on Saturday morning, also helped the DIY sector develop during the 1960s. An editorial in *HOW* magazine (*HOW*, 1968b, p.1) congratulated the Government's decision to loosen the rules; this was a logical step, the editor noted, given that most handyman projects were done outside working hours. While considered a positive development, trading remained constrained under the Shops and Offices Exempted Goods Order (1968) which determined the type of handyman goods that could be sold on Saturdays; one could buy nails and screws but not a hammer or a screwdriver, priming paint but not top coat, putty but not glass. At the time, the editor of *HOW* magazine stressed his disappointment: "Heaven knows why the list is thus limited, or who chose the winners. May a cricket ball come through his bedroom window while he enjoys breakfast in bed some windy Saturday morning" (*HOW*, 1968b, p.1).

Akin to the grocery sector which experienced the arrival of supermarkets and malls in the 1960s (Hutchins, 2008), key players in the hardware and building supplies sector also started to introduce larger retail complexes which, for the first time, took the needs of DIYers seriously. Fletcher Merchants (the main building materials supplier at the time), for example, opened large 'one-stop' building supply outlets across New Zealand catering to both its traditional trade customer-base and the new DIY consumer. In the South Island, the first of these stores (the 40<sup>th</sup> nationwide) opened in 1968 in the suburb of New Brighton (East Christchurch). The *New Zealand Home Handyman and Hobbyist* described the new 4,600 square-foot store as a "handyman's haven," marvelling at the fact that South Island homeowners could now purchase everything for their DIY projects in a single store, from house-foundation materials through to the gear required for the construction of the roof (NZHH, 1968b, p.26). The magazine also marvelled at the services offered to homeowners at the store including measures and quotes, drive-thru assistance, advice on all building materials, quantity estimates for paint, wallboard, timber and all other building supplies, and advice on the many new tools lining the shelves in the store (NZHH, 1968b, p.26).

#### **4.4. DIY in New Zealand in the 1970s and early 1980s**

During the 1970s, DIYing remained a familiar ritual in the everyday lives and weekends of the families living in New Zealand's now well-developed suburbs. Through the 1970s, the New Zealand DIY retail sector also continued to expand, with many stores increasing their

floor-space<sup>24</sup> and adding outdoor timber yards to accommodate an ever-widening range of DIY products.<sup>25</sup> New Zealand DIY manuals and magazines continued to be published and in 1974, New Zealand's first DIY television show was broadcast on national television, hosted by local handyman Bunny Rigold (see Figure 28, page 135). Homeownership rates continued to climb with access to ownership made possible for many via continuing access to cheap government home loans.

Notwithstanding the continuities described above, three key developments occurred through the 1970s and early 1980s, which I will briefly discuss in this section. Firstly, during the early 1970s, there was a gradual slowing of the suburban house-building boom that followed WWII. An emerging global recession had inflated the cost of building and, by extension, buying a *new* home, which resulted in a corresponding decrease in demand for newly constructed dwellings. The New Zealand government became concerned at the situation, conscious of the fact that a decline in new house builds, coupled with a growing population, was a recipe for a housing crisis. In response, the government took an interest in the *existing* housing stock, viewing it (for the first time) as a potentially valuable resource, rather than something to be demolished and replaced (NHC, 1983). In the early 1970s, a Commission of Inquiry was inaugurated to examine the state of housing in New Zealand. Its report was tabled in 1971 and it contained comments about the poor condition of the existing housing stock – particularly pre-WWII homes (NHC, 1983; Salmond, 1986). In response, the government began to encourage people to restore and renovate *older* homes via the provision of home improvement grants to owner-occupiers<sup>26</sup> (NHC, 1983; Salmond, 1986). The government also believed that homeowners living in the suburbs should be encouraged to renovate or expand their *existing* homes (some now 20 years old), and loans for this renewal activity were also provided. As noted by Loomis (1984, p.5), “the government sought to

---

<sup>24</sup> In May 1980, for example, Fletcher Merchants opened its first “Timberlands” hardware store on Mandeville Street in Christchurch – the biggest home handyman and hardware store in the country, featuring three drive-through lanes. The store was called a “hardware paradise” in the New Zealand Wholesale Hardware Federations Journal titled *Hardware Today* (*Hardware Today*, 1980, p.39). The Branch Manager noted that alongside serving professional builders they were also catering to the home improver with “...free play-it-yourself movies about uses of some of the products on sale, a film library, free coffee, courtesy telephones and an advice bureau manned by a large number of ex-builders on the staff” (*Hardware Today*, 1980, p.39).

<sup>25</sup> In 1974, for example, the *New Zealand Home Journal* featured a four page article on new cork tiles developed as wall coverings and commented on how easy they were for the “home handyman” to apply. “All you need is some adhesive,” readers were told, along with a history of the origins of cork (NZHJ, 1974).

<sup>26</sup> Cochran notes that the government recognised the huge resource that the existing and old housing stock represented. This followed the commission of inquiry (housing) which recommended “...that increasing attention be given ... to carrying out and encouraging conservation, rehabilitation and small scale urban renewal ...” (Cochran, 1984, p.47).



“recycle” the existing housing stock, particularly if it could convince private individuals and developers to do the lion’s share” (Loomis, 1984, p.5).

To that end, the government introduced the first home improvement loan scheme in 1972. This was initially restricted to owner-occupiers residing in the inner areas of the country’s four main cities (Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin) where many older dwellings were located, and then extended to those who wanted to alter or extend houses in the suburbs, especially if the aim was to add an extra room for an additional child or an elderly family member who needed home-care (NZOY, 1983). The Home Improvement Loans were available for amounts of up to \$10,000 and were “...not primarily intended as assistance for those who cannot house themselves [but] ...intended to encourage the preservation and upgrading of the existing housing stock” (NHC, 1983, p.58). The most significant loan scheme of the period was the Community and Housing Improvement Programme<sup>27</sup> (CHIP) which was launched in 1979 – a measure which reflected the government’s continuing interest in upgrading the existing housing stock through the 1970s (NHC, 1983). More loan schemes for home improvement followed, including the government’s Sweat Equity scheme through which people could obtain access to low interest mortgages for older dwellings, providing they had the skills to renovate the houses themselves (McTaggart, 2005).

The second, related, development was a cultural shift in the 1970s among the ‘baby boomers’ – young adults who had grown up in the suburbs since WWII – who took an interest in purchasing older, neglected houses located much closer to the city (a fortuitous development for the government, given their growing interest in the existing housing stock). For this new generation of upwardly mobile professionals, many of whom had experienced overseas travel and the liberal youth movements of the 1960s, the inner city was seen as exciting place to live, one more appealing than the humdrum and conformity they had come to associate with life in the suburbs (Stewart, 1992; Parker, 2005b; Derby, 2010; Pool & Du Plessis, 2011).

---

<sup>27</sup> The government invested heavily in CHIP. By 1982, just prior to the programmes abandonment in 1983 (CCC, 2001), 3086 home improvement loans had been administered to homeowners through CHIP to the value of 23.35 million dollars (NZOY, 1983, p.795). CHIP provided small loans directly to homeowners (through local authorities) for the restoration of older dwellings in designated Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs) (McTaggart, 2005). NIA’s were chosen by local authorities on the basis that they were in immediate need of renewal attention and that renewal would be fully integrated into wider urban development strategies (NZOY, 1984). In Christchurch, Avon Loop and Charleston were identified as NIA’s and in these areas many homeowners took advantage of the opportunity to improve their homes using CHIP money; “a good deal was carried out by owners on a do-it-yourself basis but it also provided work for tradesmen who were available because of the fall in demand for new houses” (NHC, 1983, p.17).

The shift in preference towards inner city<sup>28</sup> living and the lifestyle it afforded created a new wave of DIY characterised by the doing-up and modernising old villas and bungalows (Bonny & Reynolds, 1988; Stewart, 1992). “Undaunted by peeling paint, leaky gutters and substandard kitchens and bathrooms, this generation began the trend of restoring villas and ‘gentrifying’<sup>29</sup> the old inner city” (Stewart, 1992, p.78).

The two changes I have described above were significant in regard to the ways in which the DIY tradition and industry developed through the 1970s and early 1980s. Both developments underpinned what became a public “love affair” with older homes (Salmond, 1986, p.11) which, in turn, generated a great deal of demand for information and advice regarding the restoration of old colonial dwellings (first about how to modernise them and then later on how to restore them authentically). The shift also gave rise to a new industry. As Salmond (1986, p.12) noted, a “rehabilitation market” soon emerged producing “...mouldings, turnings, hardware, wallpapers, and furniture in period designs. After years in the wilderness, the demolition yards ... also [came] into their own [becoming] busy and [making] profitable returns.” Guides for buying, fixing up, modernising or authentically restoring old homes soon became available to homeowners and continued to be published through the 1980s, covering everything from planning and implementing projects, to accessing the government’s offering of home improvement loans. Harrap’s (1981, p.22) book titled *Buying and Restoring a House*, is a good case in point.

The third important development from this era was the establishment in 1974 of *Mitre 10* hardware stores. In the early 1970s, small family-owned hardware retailers found it difficult to compete with the larger one-stop building supplies and variety stores – such as Fletchers, Wrightsons and Farmers – which were bulk buying DIY goods from wholesalers, discounting

---

<sup>28</sup> Not all young New Zealanders headed for the cities. Some headed to the countryside to live in self-sufficient communes (doing everything for themselves) – part of what has been called the “back-to-the-land movement” (Wilton, 2011).

<sup>29</sup> Gentrification occurs as upwardly mobile individuals use their income to buy homes in older suburbs – typically those close to city centres – and through renovation, raise local property values which often forces the pre-existing lower income residents to depart (Cullen, 2005). The end result is often the development of exclusive suburbs comprising revitalised and highly priced heritage houses. The social impact of gentrification has been the focus of several housing commentators in New Zealand, including Loomis (1984) who noted that gentrification in Auckland’s inner-city suburbs changed the composition of the population from Polynesian and elderly European renters to mostly European homeowners. In New Zealand in the 1970s and early 1980s, thousands of old inner city houses (and often complete neighbourhoods) were revitalised through the DIY and gentrification processes. The first signs of this phenomenon were witnessed in suburbs on the western margins of Auckland’s central business district, in Freemans Bay and Ponsonby and, soon after, Grey Lynn (Loomis, 1984; McClure, 2008). Loomis (1984) noted that many of these areas became sites of much home renovation activity as the new homeowners sought to carry out renovations on the old houses they had bought. The same was experienced in inner city Wellington (Maclean, 2008) where many once dilapidated houses were renovated and now fetch exclusive prices.

their prices and vigorously advertising their stock (Thomas, 1997). In response, the smaller store owners met to discuss ways of surviving and competing in this trading environment. The group decided to explore the possibility of starting a ‘dealer-owned co-operative’ in New Zealand, a business model involving independently owned hardware stores operating as *one* national brand in order to generate more buying power and to share in the cost of advertising (similar to a franchise) (*Mitre 10*, 1984). Those who met were aware that independent hardware retailers in Australia had successfully adopted a business model of this sort in the late 1950s – and were now collectively operating under the name *Mitre 10 Australia*. The New Zealand group held discussions with representatives from the Australian co-op, eventually gaining permission to set up *Mitre 10 New Zealand* (as a separate entity from the Australian operation). The first stores branded under the *Mitre 10* banner opened in New Zealand in 1974, with each store-owner holding an equal share in a national head office which managed product purchasing, pricing, marketing and market research and nationwide advertising campaigns (*Mitre 10*, 1984). As noted by Thomas (1997), one advantage of joining the co-op was being instantly incorporated into *Mitre 10’s* extensive and ongoing promotional programme – press, radio and mailed brochures. This business model enabled many small operators to survive and thrive through the 1970s; by 1984 there were 102 stores trading under the *Mitre 10* banner, a brand which would become one of New Zealand’s most trusted and recognisable retailers – one dedicated to almost exclusively serving the Kiwi DIY home-improver<sup>30</sup>.

#### **4.5. Restructuring and the changing nature of DIY in the 1990s**

It is important to note at this point that the developments of the 1970s and early 1980s in New Zealand (as discussed above) occurred against the backdrop of a gradually deteriorating local (and global) economy marked by steadily rising levels of unemployment, increasing overseas debt (Wolfe, 2007), falling export prices and the increasing cost of oil (Nixon & Yeabsley, 2010). These wider structural problems peaked in the early 1980s in New Zealand, forcing the Labour government (elected in 1984) to inaugurate a new and radical economic regime, one which involved sweeping away regulations and economic controls, in favour of a non-interventionist, market-led approach (which soon became evident in its approach the housing market). One commentator described the change in this way:

---

<sup>30</sup> The company has recently celebrated 35 years of trading as a New Zealand owned and operated company with a significant nationwide marketing campaign.

For most of the period between 1938 and 1984, import and currency controls regulated New Zealand economic activity with the rest of the world. These controls did not much affect the import of raw materials, but they restricted imports of finished goods, limited purchases by New Zealanders of foreign goods, assets and travel. Controls were abandoned in the 1980s in an effort to improve economic performance and because it was increasingly difficult to operate financial controls (Evans, 2010, online).

The government's restructuring package altered many aspects of everyday life in New Zealand. In the context of this thesis, Perkins and Thorns (1999) have noted that one of the most "dramatic" changes concerned the way in which New Zealanders were able to use their leisure and weekend time – one result of the deregulation of shop trading hours which enabled "seven days a week shopping" (see also Trotter, 1990; Shopland, 1998). For some New Zealanders, the change meant they had to work on one or both days of the weekend, leaving little time for DIY, while for those who continued working the Monday to Friday 37.5 hour week, Saturdays and Sundays now provided new opportunities for weekend shopping and/or to enjoy the new and burgeoning "café culture" (Perkins & Thorns, 1999). As a result, suburban lifestyles began to change as the classic "Kiwi weekend" shifted from one "typified by work on the house and section" (Perkins & Thorns, 2001, p.38) to one *also* involving some of Saturday and Sunday at the mall (for work or pleasure).

The social (and lifestyle) changes of the late 1980s and 1990s, coupled with new and freer regulatory environment, set the scene for a significant transformation of New Zealand's DIY retail sector. The removal of import controls provided unconstrained access, for the first time, to low-cost international wholesalers which in turn enabled retailers to import greater quantities and also a wider range of DIY tools<sup>31</sup> and materials (see also Chapter Nine). Simultaneously, on the international scene, DIY product manufacturers were moving production facilities to countries where the cost of labour was low, a process which enabled New Zealand DIY retailers to gain access to low-cost DIY products. In short, the foundations of New Zealand's 'mass' DIY marketplace were being laid. Two of my key informants described the change in this way:

---

<sup>31</sup> One tool expert quoted in a New Zealand hardware magazine (NZHJ, 2005, pp.30-31), described the 1990s as a decade of "unprecedented change," one which witnessed the introduction of "cordless [technologies] ... lasers, ergonomic hammers, ergonomic everything, keyless chucks, thin-kerf blades, the internet and even cool looking safety glasses. We saw new brands launched, old brands sold, and lost count of the unknown, no-name brands from China and Taiwan". The director of product development for Bosch Power Tools also identifies the 1990s as the year things began to change. Previously, tool manufacturers had tended to specialise in the production of specific tools (Skil for circular saws, Makita for cordless drills etc.) but during the 1990s manufacturers entered domains they had not previously considered. "Competition for market share, accelerated improvements in tools and technology, global manufacturing and changes in distribution channels are the big stories from the past ten years. The driving force for all this change? Simply competition" (NZHJ, 2005, pp.30-31).

*[during the late 1980s and 1990s]...globalisation started to happen and companies like Black and Decker established massive facilities in China and started to have the ability to have excess capacity in their production and people in New Zealand started to look at importing these cheap tools from China. So the major changes in the industry [in the 1990s] occurred through globalisation resulting in the production of cheaper products and the establishment of relationships with global producers and distributors ... the production of making tools lowered dramatically ... China was the industrial base to all of this. We [the New Zealand DIY retail sector] just became part of the channel, part of the market to sell all that stuff (PlaceMakers).*

*Before the 1990s, the DIY tool market was dominated by known premium brands and there was little change in that market. They were relatively expensive in today's terms. But change took place during the 90s driven by Japanese manufacturing, then Taiwanese manufacturing and then Chinese manufacturing. This process resulted in the introduction of pretty good quality products at a cheaper price. But it also eroded the position of the historic premium brands – unless they moved into an off-shore cheap manufacturing location. Many have moved their manufacturing to China and have managed to stay in the race for the DIY dollar. So I guess in the 1990s, along with the price of products going down, was a proliferation of brands in the market (Mitre 10 New Zealand).*

Deregulation also provided a welcoming environment for new DIY retailers to enter the marketplace, pushing competition between stores to a level not seen before in New Zealand. According to one of my key informants, by the mid-1990s a 'price war' had surfaced between the main DIY retailers which saw the "discount bargain bin approach start to enter in" (PlaceMakers). While the arrival of cheap products and subsequent store 'price wars' may well have benefited the DIY consumer, for the DIY retail industry it meant that "gross margins began to fall" (PlaceMakers). As a result, DIY retailers were forced to search for new ways to maintain both volume and gross margins. One way they did this was by mimicking the business model of the then new Warehouse variety stores – arguably the first New Zealand owned and operated 'big-box' retailer. "You can almost track what the Warehouse [did] and mimic that in the hardware and other retail segments" (PlaceMakers). Of most importance was the Warehouse's unique purchasing strategy – importing bulk goods at a very cheap price, often direct from the producer, and then passing on these low costs to the consumer. One of my key informants put it this way:

*When the Warehouse opened, well that was probably the biggest jolt to the system. But it didn't just jolt us. It totally jolted the whole supply chain. In the past we'd buy off the wholesaler*

*who'd be buying off an importer who'd be buying offshore, there were quite a few people in the chain. But that got shortened up as the Warehouse got better at direct buying and the wholesalers disappeared ... Before, all of our products would've been purchased through a wholesale network [but] they were wiped out. At this stage the Warehouse wasn't competition but it revolutionised the way retail was done in New Zealand. The biggest change was that supply lines shortened up and you got rid of wholesalers. But what happens when you get rid of wholesalers? Well you make it challenging for the independent retailers because they can't afford to buy the batch lots that are required for it to be economic – for it to be shipped or imported. So you've seen the end of the corner hardware store – they're becoming a thing of the past (Mitre 10 Owner).*

As DIY retailers started to restructure their purchasing practices in line with those of large variety stores (such as the *Warehouse*), competition in the home improvement retail sector intensified further with the arrival of what one of my key informants called “*adjacent competitors*” – large variety stores, including supermarkets, which also began to import and sell cheap DIY tools. “*For example, the Warehouse moved into gardens and all the tools associated with gardening and then started to get into power tools and so on. K-mart started to get into power tools ... and even the Woolworth supermarket chain had power tools*” (*PlaceMakers*). To retain market share, specialist DIY stores began to provide a suite of in-store DIY services (such as the provision of free information and advice) and new customer loyalty schemes, (such as *PlaceMakers Home Improvement Card* and *Mitre 10's Club 10*) (Story, 1995). They also started to make shopping in DIY stores a more pleasant experience, one part of a shift – rather than just supplying products – towards meeting heightened consumer expectations. This shift started in the late 1980s (Baker, 1988). By the end of that decade, the DIY sector was booming in New Zealand, a period which one industry representative described as the “*renaissance of DIY*” (*Grocers Review*, 1989, p.66).

The 1990s saw the further expansion in size of many DIY stores – some now called ‘home centres’ and some now 3,000 square metres in size (Baker, 1988). The 1990s also saw the arrival of more new DIY retailers, including the Australian-owned venture Howard Smith Limited which opened the largest hardware store in New Zealand – the *Hardwarehouse* – measuring 8,000 square metres; the same venture also opened smaller *Benchmark* stores (Gibson, 1999). Another example of the expansion policy taken by many retailers at the time was *PlaceMakers* development of a massive building supplies centre on Cranford Street in Christchurch which was designed to cater to both professional builders and DIYers, the latter

of whom could get advice from trained staff and/or information from their new series of ‘know-how can-do’ instructional<sup>32</sup> brochures (Craig, 1999).

While the DIY retail sector was growing and adapting to New Zealand’s new ‘consumer society’, the popular media was also beginning to capitalise on the popularity of DIY. For example, during the 1990s in New Zealand and following an international trend (Wichtel, 2001; also see Section 3.2.2.2, page 36, reality home improvement television shows began to screen. Many of these DIY television shows were sponsored by home improvement retailers (such as *Mitre 10*) who used the programmes to promote their products and also to encourage homeowners to execute a home-makeover – offering the advice necessary for them to carry it off. In the late 1990s, *Mitre 10* sponsored *Changing Rooms*, a show involving two neighbours – some of whom had no DIY experience – being provided with \$2,000 and 48 hours to transform a room in each other’s house. The show provided details of the products used in the transformations, such as the colour and brand of paint used to decorate rooms, while also providing tips and techniques for doing the work. (Participants were not, however, entirely left to their own devices, for each of them worked under the guidance of a professional designer.) In one magazine interview Lisa Manning, a media personality who hosted several DIY programmes, reflected on the proliferation of the shows such as *Changing Rooms*, both internationally and in New Zealand:

The phenomenon of this genre of television is fascinating. “Changing Rooms” has run for seven series over in the UK and six series here [New Zealand]. Obviously someone in the UK, and then ... here, identified this obsession that people have with DIY – especially with the whole Kiwi attitude to anything property related – and then reflected that passion on the small screen. We were the first company outside of the UK to make *Changing Rooms*. At that point, years ago, it was a brand new genre, one that introduced a certain game show element to a lifestyle show concept. From its early beginnings it went from indoors, to gardens, to selling properties, to helping friends find properties ... all sorts of elements of ‘the house’ and how it exists. And I think it will continue to develop, since there seems to be an insatiable appetite for it (quotation cited in Johns, 2003, p.26).

*Mitre 10* also sponsored *Dream Home* where two couples (a ‘blue’ and ‘yellow’ team) were given a house each and with the help of a small team of experts – builder, interior decorator and architect – competed to adapt and alter a house into a version of their dream home,

---

<sup>32</sup> In the late 1980s, DIY product packaging also began to provide instructional literature relating to product application, one part of a push by product manufacturers to meet the information needs of the consumer (*Grocers Review*, 1989).

primarily with products sourced from the sponsoring store. According to my key informants, these shows had an immediate effect on store sales:

*Our paint department boomed and the paint colours changed and have just kept changing too. And we track this back to around ten years ago when the first Changing Rooms programmes came on TV. Most of the houses back then were white or off-white and then they started coming in with these bold colours and that's when we saw a lift in our sales of deep-base colours like mixes of reds and blues and darker colours. TV was changing tastes and consumer perceptions (Mitre 10 Owner).*

*...we started to sponsor TV programmes, mostly interior decorating and it actually influenced consumer behaviour in New Zealand. We noticed it in our paint sales ... and I know curtain retailers noticed it too. In fact, at that stage, in the first couple of years we were specifically able to measure our sales of stronger, brighter colours which went up when we started to sponsor Changing Rooms (Mitre 10 Marketing Manager).*

#### **4.6. 21<sup>st</sup> century DIY in New Zealand**

While there are no 'official' statistics on DIY in New Zealand<sup>33</sup> today, its economic and cultural significance can be gauged from information available in the plethora of popular publications that regularly comment on DIY. The *New Zealand Hardware Journal* (NZHJ, 2004), for example, reported market research commissioned by a leading DIY retailer that suggested there were more DIY practitioners per head of population in New Zealand than in any other Western country (also see Jaquier, 2005). That same study revealed that a growing number of 'Kiwi' women (also see BOX 3, pages 133-134) were doing DIY; 61% of the women surveyed having completed a major DIY project within the last two years, 66% of them having used power tools for the first time during that project (NZHJ, 2004). In *The Shed*, a newly published magazine for 'Kiwi' DIYers, Parker (2005a) stated that in 2004 alone, over one million power tools were imported to New Zealand (population 4 million) and that many of these were designed and bought for household use. In an article in *BUILD* magazine, housing economist Ian Page (2002) drew on data available in the 1998 national economic household survey to calculate that New Zealand homeowners spend over NZ\$700

---

<sup>33</sup> I am aware that industry-commissioned marketing research does exist although this not usually available to the public.



million per year on resources for DIY projects. Other commentators estimate that New Zealanders spend<sup>34</sup> around NZ\$1 billion dollars per annum at DIY stores (Bingham, 2003).

#### **4.6.1. DIY coverage in the news media**

Another source of up-to-date information about DIY are newspapers. For instance, during the recent housing ‘boom’ and following economic recession (both of which took place over the long course of my research) myriad news stories were published about DIY, some of which were feature articles and made the cover page (Figure 9, below). During the ‘housing boom,’ DIY was often described as one way in which young New Zealander’s could increase their equity, by ‘doing-up’ and then selling an older house – the so-called ‘house of gain’ (Figure 9, left graphic, below). In contrast, during the economic recession, DIY was framed as a way New Zealanders were coping with economic hardship – ‘making do’ with their current resources – improving their current home rather than moving on and up the so-called “housing ladder” (e.g., Gibson, 2009; Lewis, 2009b; Murdoch, 2009). In addition, New Zealand press journalists have closely followed DIY industry ‘booms’ (e.g., Lewis, 2009a), ‘busts’ (e.g., *Sunday Star Times*, 2006; Kiong, 2008a; Mcentee, 2010) and hardware store expansions, bankruptcies and mergers (e.g., Churchouse, 2010).

Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 9: DIY regularly features in the news media. In these recent examples it is the cover/feature story (*New Zealand Listener*, November 2005 & April 2011)

---

<sup>34</sup> According to the New Zealand Retailers Association, retail sales in the New Zealand “hardware” sector in 2006 turned over NZ\$1,352 million (Albertson, 2007, p.14).

#### **4.6.1.1. Headline one: ‘big box’ DIY retail stores**

While DIY news articles abound, two stories have dominated the headlines over the last 10 years. Firstly, the arrival of ‘big-box’ home improvement superstores in New Zealand (discussed above) and the inter-store competition which followed (a continuation of a trend which began in the mid-1980s) have been the focus of considerable news reporting. These stories started to appear in 2002 when the Australian owned investment company *Wesfarmers* purchased *Howard Smith* holdings with the intention of rebranding the existing stores (including the *Hardwarehouse* and *Benchmark* outlets) as *Bunnings* stores. They also revealed their intention to open fourteen large format *Bunnings* home improvement stores in New Zealand. At the time of the announcement, a representative from one local decorating company commented that “the New Zealand hardware scene [was] poised on the edge of change” (Craig, 2002, p.32). His view was shared by a *PlaceMakers* representative who noted that *Bunnings* would “...have a major impact on the industry, of that there can be no doubt ... it will expose people to products and retail experiences that they haven’t had before and it will also stimulate current players to raise their game” (Craig, 2002, p.32). The announcement of *Wesfarmer’s* plans made headline news across New Zealand, especially in Christchurch, the location of the South Island’s first very large *Bunnings Warehouse*. One newspaper reported that the DIY store would be the biggest in the country, offering 45,000 product lines – or SKU’s (stock keeping units) – under one enormous roof (*Christchurch Star*, 2003). Many other journalists touted (metaphorically at least) that *Wesfarmer’s* intention to open *Bunnings* stores was akin to a declaration of ‘war’ – the Australian newcomer said to be joining the fight for a share of the Kiwi ‘DIY dollar’. The following headlines capture the essence of the reporting and also speak volubly of the nature of DIY retailing today:

**Attack of the killer Bunnings!** (*New Zealand Retail*, July 2002)

**Bunnings launches new store in DIY war** (*The Press*, 13 October 2003)

**Retailers jostle for the DIY dollar** (*The New Zealand Herald*, 25 October 2003)

**Store wars rage for DIY dollar** (*Sunday Star Times*, 26 October 2003)

**Hammer and tongs, it’s ... hardware wars** (*The Dominion Post*, 22 January 2005)

**Battle of the giant hardware barns** (*The New Zealand Herald*, 5 January 2008)

The first *Bunnings* ‘big-box’ store – with a floor print measuring 14,000 square metres – opened at Christchurch’s Tower Junction in 2003, an event which saw *Mitre 10* quickly

respond by opening its own equally large *Mega* format stores in 2004 (McCrone, 2007). The stores not only sold DIY products. Many diversified into home wares such as floor rugs, kettles, BBQ equipment and other indoor/outdoor ‘lifestyle’ products. Flat-pack shelving units and kitset kitchens are also part of the everyday offering:

*Flat pack kitchens are a recent arrival. Doing a kitchen used to involve joinery and joinery shops ... but now because of the whole distribution chain developing and changing, well overnight you can ship the product from Italy, have it delivered to a New Zealand port and then it'll appear on our shelves and then onto the consumer, installed by the owner. So now people can have an entire kitchen for about \$5,000 when it may have cost them \$10,000 (PlaceMakers).*

To cater for the shift towards kitset kitchen and bathrooms, many of the big-boxes have also adopted a store-within-a-store approach – areas of the shop devoted to the display of completed kit-sets with expert service people available for assistance and ordering – all made possible by the sheer size of the buildings.

*One big change has been the “store-within-a-store” approach – bathroom, kitchen and outdoor departments. There’s been a “big push” towards that, enabled by lots of space which needs to be devoted to these areas ... Customers feel like they’re getting into a specialist environment (PlaceMakers).*

The big-boxes have also been designed to appeal to the leisure shopper:

*...we’ve got the sausage sizzles and the DIY clinics every weekend, ladies nights and community fun days. All that stuff is part of what we offer ... we’re not just pricing products and selling them, but we’re providing a service and a lot of that is about educating the customer (Bunnings Marketing Manager).*

McCrone (2007) argued that several key trends had underpinned the rise of these enormous stores and their expansive offerings, with roots in changes which occurred in the mid-1980s. The first was the modern homeowner’s desire to have a ‘dressed up’ home and the associated expectation of consumers for endless choice (where once homeowners were happy with the same sink, they now want a range to choose from). The same might apply to hammers and drills: “*In terms of tools, when we once may have had four hammers we now have 40 to choose from, so width of range is one of our key pillars and there really is something for*

*everyone and every need. We've even got drills from \$15 to \$2,000" (Bunnings Marketing Manager).*

The second trend identified by McCrone (2007) is rapidly changing decorating styles (with colour schemes which may have lasted 20 years, now out of style in five). This trend was supported by many of the DIY retailers I spoke to, and exemplified by the remarks of a key informant who had worked in the painting and decorating industry since the 1980s:

*... twenty years ago, and even before that, it [the paint sector] was more focused on matching the type of paint to the DIY project – people doing stuff, say painting a room ... do you need enamel or water based or glossy and so on – but the emphasis is not about the paint and the project so much now – it's more about the colour and style and that's become a huge marketing exercise ... It's now all about the look of it and the colour, the style ... how you feel about it ... what statement it's making about the person. And there's lots of marketing material out there focusing on that kind of thing – how you feel about it emotionally and also as a seasonal thing as well. Twenty years ago you had a colour chart and it didn't change from year to year to year, you had the same standard colour chart for years on end. Now, they bring out new charts every year – it's become a fashion statement for people rather than just "we're going to paint our house now". It's all been driven by a combination of marketing and consumer demand with the marketing trying to appeal to a broader range of people. Thirty years ago it was your 'kiwi bloke – I'm going to paint my house" kind of thing. But now couples will go, "oh, I want to have a trendy house with the new colours, and the latest carpet and the big TV and all the bits" ... it's the creation of interest that it's all about ... like fashion really ... at the moment colour is a fashion thing and they're driving it very strongly and it includes textured paints and wallpaper and metallic finishes and different sheen levels, things like that, they're all things that you can tweak to change the fashion. Obviously, the more they keep it moving the more people will buy because people want to be in fashion, and fashion, say ten years ago, tended to move more slowly – you could often measure it in decades. Change can occur several times a season now. We've had people come in and say 'we've got all our colours sorted out and this is what we're going to paint the nice new house we've built' and I'll say 'well, we have just got this new range of colours in' and they'll go 'well we'll have to have a look at those then, I'm not having last year's colours, I want the new colours' and people do that ... so the fashion thing has become more important – the desire to change the colour, even if the paintwork is fine. People seem to be changing their colours every few years (Paint Store Owner).*

A similar point (related to the rapid speed of changing interior styles and designs) was made by another one of my key informants:

*It's very interesting that when you bought a home twenty years ago you were stuck with the bathroom. But now they don't cost a lot of money so you can change it. Among the average Kiwi it's fashionable to do that, sometimes just for a new colour. Whatever it is, every ten years we might be able sell someone a whole new unit (Mitre 10 Owner).*

McCrone's (2007) third driver of change towards big-box DIY retailing was recent housing booms and an associated investment in dwellings through renovation. His fourth was the arrival of an abundance of 'cheap stuff', with low-wage countries producing a range of affordable DIY goods – cheap version of items which once would have only been produced for the professional tradesperson. Indeed, tool manufacturers do continue to enter the DIY marketplace with cheap lines of tools. *Makita* is perhaps the most recent with its launch of its *Makita Weekender* range in May 2007 (NZHJ, 2007a, p.18) which has been designed for and is pitched to the serious DIYer who cannot justify spending 'top-dollar' on top quality tools. Affordable laser-guided power tool technologies (which, for example, provide a laser line to guide cutting or a laser light for levelling) are a recent entrant in the DIY marketplace, produced by the world's leading tool manufacturers under brand names which include *Bulls Eye Laser (Black and Decker)*, *Exactline (Ryobi)* and *Laser Marker (Hitachi)* (NZHJ, 2004).

#### **4.6.1.2. Headline two: regulating DIY**

The second, and arguably most enduring, DIY related news story surfaced in 2003 when the government put forward a proposal to reform the New Zealand Building Act, reforms which included, for the first time, specific clauses governing DIY work. (For more details regarding these clauses and the more general regulation of DIY see BOX 1, page 76). These changes – which were part of the government's response to what became known as the 'leaky home crisis' – became the topic of much news reporting, with the public feeling that regulating DIY was a step too far. In response to the public outcry, the government retracted and altered the initial DIY clause. The following headlines capture the tone of the story as it has unfolded in the media; implicitly, they also reflect the high cultural status of DIY in New Zealand:

**DIY under threat in bill proposal** (*Sunday Star Times*, 26 October 2003)

**Legislation may threaten Kiwi can-do approach** (*The Press*, 6 April 2004)

**Beginning of the end of the Kiwi can-do culture** (*The Daily News*, 1 April 2005)

**Killing the Kiwi handyman** (*Organic NZ*, May/June 2006)

**Govt will protect Kiwis' right to DIY, says Minister** (*Taranaki Daily News*, 20 April 2007)

**Govt free Kiwis to take up their DIY building tools** (*The Press*, 1 October 2008)

### **BOX 1: Regulations**

Since the 1950s in New Zealand, DIY magazines have included articles reminding homeowners of the importance of adhering to building regulations when carrying out DIY projects, especially laws governing construction (e.g., Consumer, 1993a), plumbing and electrical work (e.g., Consumer, 1969b, 1993b). For health reasons, plumbing perhaps remains the most regulated activity, with DIYers restricted to minor repairs such as changing washers and taps (Consumer Build, online). Under the Electricity Act the homeowner is permitted to carry a small range of minor wiring and electrical tasks, as long as they own and live on the property where they intend to carry out the work, and that the power to their home has been turned off before they start. Regulation 47 of the Electricity Regulations 1997 provides detailed information about the electrical repairs that can be done by the DIY practitioner, which have been summarised by the Ministry of Economic Development (Ministry of Economic Development, 2008); under the regulation the homeowner may:

1. Replace switches, socket outlets, lamp holders, ceiling roses, water heater switches, thermostats and elements.
2. Repair light fittings.
3. Move repair or replace flexible chords that are connected to permanently connected outlets or ceiling roses.
4. Disconnect and reconnect permanently wired appliances.
5. Move switches, sockets and lighting outlets, but only if they are wired with tough plastic sheathed cables.
6. Install, extend or alter any cables, except the main cables that come from the street to your switchboard (this work must be checked and signed off by a licensed electrical inspector providing the homeowner with a Certificate of Compliance).

Regulations currently governing DIY ‘building’ work are more complex, having changed in recent years. Under the Building Act 2004, all building work in New Zealand – including DIY projects – must comply with the New Zealand Building Code which sets out required construction standards, including acceptable building methods and materials (Palmer, et al., 2005). Under the Act, a building consent must be obtained from the local council (or approved and registered consent authority) before work can start. In order to get consent, one must provide the local authority with the particulars of the project – information the authority will then use to assess whether the work complies with the district plan and other relevant regulations, such as the New Zealand Building Code, the Resource Management Act 1991 and the Historic Places Act 1993 (once building work has started, the local authority carries out inspections to ensure the work is following the plan). Building/DIY work which does not require a building permit includes general repair and maintenance work (as long as it is non-structural), decorating tasks, the making of low retaining walls and fences (under 1.5 and 2 metres, respectively), the construction of decks less than 1 metre above ground-level and building work to enclose open-air porches (providing the area is less than 5 square metres) (Palmer, et al., 2005). While a permit is not required for this DIY work, the project must still comply with the New Zealand Building Code. Shaw (2011) notes that the Kiwi DIYer is legally required to obtain a building consent for any project undertaken involving: (1) activities which may affect the structural integrity of the house; (2) the demolition of existing structures on the property; (3) deck-building, when the planned deck is more than one metre above ground level; (4) the moving of doors or windows; and (5) conversions of garage space to living space (Shaw, 2011). Penalties for non-compliance are up to \$100,000, although there are other serious implications under the Act (Shaw, 2011). If homeowners carry out the work without consent they will be unable to provide the standard sale and purchase warranty. “Under the standard agreement, the vendor warrants that if they have done or caused or permitted to be done work requiring a building consent, the consent was obtained and the work was completed in accordance with the consent” (Shaw, 2011, p.64). If the seller does not provide this warranty (simply by crossing out the relevant contract clauses), the buyer may be put off the sale. Should the homeowner provide the warranty to the buyer who discovers issues at a later date, they may sue for a breach of warranty. (They have six years to do this from the date of sale). There are also insurance implications for building without consent. All building work – even that which does not need consent – must still be carried out in accordance with the Building Act 2004. The DIYer is responsible for the work and may be held liable for defects identified by subsequent purchasers (Shaw, 2011).

#### 4.7. The wider world of DIY

In this short and final section of this contextual-historical chapter, I want to show that DIY home improvement is not just a New Zealand phenomenon, having emerged as a component of everyday life in other countries where homeownership has been (or is becoming) the prevailing tenure form. I also want to briefly discuss the internationalisation of DIY retailing and home improvement product manufacturing (Ogden-Barnes, 2005) which has seen some very large companies (such as *Black and Decker*, *B&Q* and the *Home Depot*) become global household names. This discussion, which I will introduce here, will be expanded in the next chapter where I review the international academic literature on DIY.

A quick search of the Internet clearly shows that DIY is currently a global phenomenon with articles on DIY found on websites maintained in Asia, North and South America, (South) Africa, Australasia and Europe. Further evidence can be found by visiting the websites of international market research companies (such as *Euromonitor* and *Mintel*) which monitor international consumer spending on DIY products and use this information to comment on emerging global DIY trends. *Euromonitor*, for instance, recently measured DIY retail sales in 29 countries, concluding that the global DIY marketplace in 2006 was valued at US\$393 billion – growing as a result of urban growth (in both developed and developing countries) coupled with a worldwide homeownership boom (*Euromonitor*, 2008). That same report noted the emergence of new DIY markets in specific regions, such as Latin America and Eastern Europe. The global nature of DIY also becomes apparent when one surveys instructional home improvement literature, with DIY books and magazines (such as *Practical Householder* and *Popular Mechanics*) published in Britain, Australia and America since at least World War II. Many of these publications were in fact exported to New Zealand during the 1950s and 1960s and can now easily be found in second-hand bookstores. While it is not the purpose of this thesis to compare the DIY projects of homeowners across borders (although see Brogan & Cort (1997) for a market comparison), it is likely that each tradition will have evolved differently, having each emerged in unique social, spatial (housing) and economic contexts.

While *doing* DIY is clearly a global phenomenon, information published on the websites of the world's three largest home improvement retailers (*Home Depot*, *Lowes* and *B&Q*) highlight the global nature of DIY *retailing*. (But not 'global' (as in 'decentralised') ownership and control.) For example, *Home Depot* – the world's largest DIY retail chain

(Bianchi, 2006) – boasts that it has 2,200 retail outlets spread across the United States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, Mexico, six cities in China and in ten Canadian provinces ([www.homedepot.com](http://www.homedepot.com)). The company also reports owning purchasing offices in America, Canada, China, Mexico and India ([www.homedepot.com](http://www.homedepot.com)). *Lowes*, the second largest DIY store in the world, also reports retail operations in the United States and Canada, and its plans for expansion into Mexico ([www.lowes.com](http://www.lowes.com)). *B&Q* – the largest DIY retailer in the United Kingdom and third largest worldwide – also states online that it has many international stores, including the largest home improvement store in the world located in Beijing, China ([www.diy.com](http://www.diy.com)). Many domestic power and hand tool manufacturers/suppliers are also global companies, such as *Black and Decker* (which also produces *DeWalt* tools among other sub brands) – the largest producer of domestic power tools and associated accessories worldwide (Pemberton et al., 2002). According to Pemberton et al. (2002), *Black and Decker* employs 23,000 people and has manufacturing centres in the US, Britain, China and Mexico. Other examples include *Bosch* (from Germany) and *Hitachi Power Tools* (from Japan). Interestingly, offshore manufacturing has also occurred among New Zealand-based companies. For example, in 2005, *Masport New Zealand* (which produces lawnmowers) shifted 50 per cent of its manufacturing base to China after 64 years of local manufacturing, in order to take advantage of cheaper labour costs (slashing production costs by 25% in the process) and enabling it to remain competitive (NZHJ, 2006, p.30). International DIY retailers and product manufacturers regularly meet at international DIY trade fairs to showcase and sell the latest DIY technologies.

#### **4.8. Chapter summary**

This chapter has provided the necessary background context for this study of DIY home improvement in New Zealand. The chapter started with a brief description of life on New Zealand's colonial frontier (the genesis of the DIY tradition), where material and labour shortages meant that settlers often *had* to build their own house from scratch with the few resources they had at hand (at least until the commercial construction and building supplies sectors were established). I then suggested that the resourceful/self-reliant traits displayed by the colonial settlers – the precursors of the Kiwi DIY attitude – surfaced again, and were passed on between generations, when building materials and/or labour were once more in short supply, such as during the Great Depression and World War II. I then provided an account of DIY in New Zealand after World War II – the prosperous 1950s and 60s when DIY became a popular weekend leisure activity for home 'owners'; one supported by



increasing access to instructional literature and new tools and materials designed specifically for domestic use (for the first time). I carried the narrative through the 1970s and early-1980s, focusing on three key structural changes: first, the government's desire to promote the restoration of the older housing stock through the provision of access to home improvement loans; second, a shift in preference among many 'baby boomers' for buying and 'doing-up' older houses near the inner-city; and third, the establishment of the *Mitre 10* co-operative which helped small independent hardware stores survive in what was becoming an increasingly competitive home improvement marketplace. I then considered the economic restructuring of the mid-1980s and the New Zealand Government's decision to bolster economic activity by adopting a market-led approach necessitating significant levels of economic restructuring. Some of the social and economic ramifications of this transition were described along with their impact on both the DIY culture and home improvement industry. The final section discussed recent developments in the wider world of DIY.

Having provided a contextual-historical backdrop for this study of DIY practice in New Zealand, I now provide the analysis of my interview and survey data – an interpretation<sup>35</sup> which is presented in the five results chapters which follow (beginning with “DIY Thinking”) and which address and answer my first two research questions: what types of DIY projects to current New Zealand homeowners carry out, and how do they conceptualise, plan, resource and execute their DIY activities?

---

<sup>35</sup> As noted earlier in this chapter, my initial literature review, 'sensitised' me to various topic areas and became a useful tool during the closer inspection of my data. The literature review became a resource I used to check and compare my ideas with the theorising of other researchers and to help me with the interpretation of my own data set and develop more refined foci. Where the literature was most useful (i.e., where it contradicted or supported my research findings) I have signposted it in the analysis chapters. Otherwise, the analysis chapters are largely descriptive and interpretive. The literature review also proved to be a valuable resource for the development of Chapter Ten where I seek to reframe my DIY data in social scientific terms.

## 5. DIY Thinking

### 5.1. Introduction

My interviewees all enjoyed thinking, dreaming and talking with significant others about the modifications and improvements they would like to make to their current homes. Their ideas and aspirations for change were usually tied to the potential they saw in their house and land and also their impression of the ‘ideal’ family home. This opening analysis chapter examines my interviewees’ DIY/house ‘thinking’ – a distinct activity which they told me started during the house buying process and then never really stopped over the course of occupation. As discussed in the last section of this chapter, their thoughts were commonly referred to as the ‘DIY list’ – a collection of all their ideas for home improvement projects (both wants and needs) which, in their mind, would make the most of their current homes.

### 5.2. DIY dreams and housing potential

Whether in their first home or beyond, all my interviewees could recite a list of the DIY projects they wanted to do in the home they owned, an inventory of projects they had developed and refined in an on-going household discussion about the way in which their property *could* be enhanced or ‘personalised’ (for a discussion of the home personalisation process see Porteous, 1976). Their thinking in this area was clearly influenced by a range of external stimuli, such as media cues promoting the latest home and garden fashions, and the ideas offered by close family and friends. David and his wife, for example, said that since purchasing their home they had spent a great deal of time reading the latest house and garden magazines and also talking together (and with family and friends) about how they could potentially reconfigure rooms, change colour schemes, fix things and suitably modernise the older parts of their house to reflect their own personal taste, style and lifestyle aspirations. Like many of the interviewees, they enjoyed these initial conceptual conversations, which were not usually bound by thoughts of affordability or available time, or by their DIY capabilities or resources. They were, in David’s words:

*... arm-waving exercises, when you walk around the house waving your arms around trying to figure out what you can do with the place. And we’re always having those, thinking about what we can do and chatting about our big ideas with our circle of friends and Mum and Dad. I mean the place is reasonably tidy but there’s always a constant conversation going on in the*

*house about the changes we'd like to make. In essence, you're constantly thinking about the potential and that's the fun part ... before the DIY actually starts (David).*

A similar perspective was put forward by Sally, who highlighted the continuous nature of the 'arm-waving' exercises that she and her husband carried out as they considered the changes they wanted to make to their first home – the DIY projects they could do together in order to realise their housing dreams and lifestyle aspirations. Like David, this process (the shared construction of an image of their ideal family home) was one that she and her partner enjoyed working through together, one which was also clearly influenced by fashion leads presented in the home lifestyle magazines<sup>36</sup> which they subscribed to:

*It's all about the potential of what you've got and we do talk about it heaps, always, I mean we're brushing our teeth in the morning and we've got our paint colours up on the wall and we're like 'oh, maybe we should have that colour'... Every day, we'll be talking about DIY stuff and our dreams for the place and we've got all the house and garden magazines which I never thought I'd ever read. We just like sitting in our lounge chatting – 'Oh, maybe we should fill in those cracks', or 'maybe we'll just paint them and we won't notice them as much' or 'maybe we can knock out that wall' or 'maybe we could change the garden'. We talk about that all the time really (Sally).*

Shane also made the point that the envisioning of the ideal family home (developing the 'big idea' as he called it) and the associated conceptualisation of potential DIY projects, was something that he and his wife did together and thoroughly enjoyed, even if many of the projects they dreamed up together never actually got started:

*...we're always just sitting on the couch looking around and talking about DIY. Like it was during one of those [conversations] that we decided we'd re-fit the bathroom – put a new bath in and tile around the walls and put a new ceiling in, so it's a bit lower down and it's better insulated ...all that started from one those couch conversations. Sometimes we talk about some big idea and say 'that'll be nice to do', and then we'll say 'but we'll never get around to that'. You know, dreams are free and it's a bit of fun (Shane).*

As is evident in these interview excerpts, among the couples interviewed, the imagining of potential DIY projects and the making of home was clearly an example of social interaction

---

<sup>36</sup> For an in-depth discussion on the influence of lifestyle magazines on New Zealanders' housing aspirations see Leonard, Perkins & Thorns (2004). Also see Perkins and Thorns (2003, p.132) who use the term 'dream-making' in reference to the fact that while the material presented in home lifestyle magazines often describes what is available and where to get it, it also encourages the readers to dream and imagine experiencing living in the ideal family home. Also see Jackson (2006).

toward questions of home design and functionality. They were thinking of making a home together – a place built on the principle of ‘teamwork’, thereby representing a combination of the best of both their ideas (with strong discursive references to ‘us/we’ as distinct from ‘I/me’) (Figure 10, below. Also see Chapter Three, page 34 for a brief review of McElroy’s (2006) historical perspective on the teamwork exhibited by couples during the planning and execution of DIY projects. Bhatti and Church’s (2000) research on gardening is also helpful with respect to the notion of couples making ‘their’ home *together*).

## Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 10: Images of couples formulating DIY projects together (especially deliberating over which colours to use) are easy to locate in the popular print media. This example shows a husband and wife team thinking about a look for their kitchen (*The Press*, 1960a).

Also, in the accounts provided above, references to the ‘potential’ of property were frequently interwoven with my interviewees’ narratives about the making of the ideal home – stories about what the dwelling they owned could become and the lifestyle that it ‘might’ afford. But perhaps more important in the context of this thesis is the central role they all imagined themselves having in the production of their perfect home – DIY designer, builder, interior decorator, etc. This positioning of themselves as the ‘maker’ of home is well illustrated in the following two interview excerpts, which also show that it is the idea and

challenge of improving a property with one's own hands (a process of self-realisation) that is appealing for homeowners to think about:

*You buy a house for the potential – it's such a cliché word, but that is what you buy for, the potential. You can see that someone's done a bad job of it and that you could transform it really easily yourself by just say stripping the wallpaper or painting it, or doing some other project you know, like you could chuck in a French door. You know, you can see in your head how you can improve it (Alan).*

*...we knew the place had heaps of potential. There's not a lot of rotting or deterioration, so we knew we could easily make some improvements. We did a lot of thinking about what we'd do. I think the first thing we talked about doing was just painting the walls and doing the landscaping. We also talked about renovating the kitchen, you know, opening it up a bit. So we had a feel for the potential, what we both wanted out of the place and, you know, you're always discussing those things, you know, thinking about the possibilities (Doug).*

Over the course of my fieldwork, there was a lot of talk about the potential of property (or what was possible) and, pertinent to this thesis, an imagining of the things that could be realised through the carrying out of DIY projects. From these conversations, I distilled three main (mutually constitutive and often overlapping) 'potentials', namely: economic, aesthetic and functional<sup>37</sup>. It is to these potentialities that I now turn.

### **5.2.1. DIY and economic potential**

My interviewees talked a lot about the *economic* potential (or capital gains) that could be realised, or 'squeezed' as one interviewee put it, from the property they owned by carrying out only the most astute DIY projects (i.e., avoiding over-capitalisation) and/or by keeping the dwelling in a good state of repair. This narrative was a particularly strong theme in the interviews I conducted with the younger first and second-home owners who saw DIY as one possible way to improve the value of their house; perceiving that the extra financial capital raised could enable them (like my older interviewees had done) to move up the so-called 'property ladder' – or housing 'conveyor belt' (i.e., using one house to achieve another house).

---

<sup>37</sup> This finding lends support to quantitative research which has suggested that DIY activity is underpinned by 'mixed motives' (see pages 30-31 for a brief discussion of these studies i.e., Brodersen, 2003; SIRC, 2003; Williams, 2004, 2008).

*...we came into this knowing that it's the first step ... it's an old place with potential so we saw it as a chance to get onto that conveyor belt to get us up to where we can afford 'that' place (Terry).*

Some interviewees put forward the view that because house prices had increased over time in New Zealand, it was logical that one should at least keep their house (where they had invested most of their personal equity) in a good state of repair, describing DIY as one way to protect and/or increase the value of their largest financial asset. In this light, the ideal (imagined) home was seen as a commodity with exchange value, one which was likely to increase over time and, therefore, if looked after judiciously by the owners, could provide a good capital return (currently unrealised). (For a discussion regarding the making of capital gains via the housing market in New Zealand see Wistanley & Wistanley, 2006.) As noted above, it was these potential returns through DIY that enabled younger homeowners to move up the 'housing ladder' while for many of my older interviewees, the capital they expected to raise (which could be realised upon exit from owner occupation or through 'down-sizing' in later life) had been earmarked for their retirement or for their children as inheritance. (For an in-depth discussion regarding the intergenerational transfer of housing wealth in New Zealand, see Arcus & Nana, 2005.) One of my older interviewees referred to the role of DIY in this process as "*sweat equity*" (*Charlie*) – the economic return possible from one's investment of time and energy in the making and maintenance of house and home through the life course or, at least, over their housing journey.

### **5.2.2. DIY and aesthetic potential**

Beyond the economic potential of housing, most of the interviewees – young and old – also talked about the *aesthetic* potential of the home which could be realised through a range of decorative home improvements – for example, a change of colour or new wallpaper to provide a specific 'look' or modern style (for more detail see the next chapter on interior decoration – Section 6.2, page 92). While the aesthetic potential of home was often connected to the owners' desire to make the house more visually attractive (usually more fashionable) and, therefore, more pleasing for the occupants to live in, it was also associated with a strong desire to convey their style and good sense of taste to non-household members, especially visiting friends and family. The latter might be referred to as making the most of the home's 'symbolic value' – the potential of the dwelling to say something positive about its owners – a marker of their sense of identity and style. (In the New Zealand context, the relationship

between home and the occupants' identities also features strongly in the work of Perkins & Thorns, 1999, 2001, 2003 (see pages 45-46 of this thesis). The symbolic value of the home – or, the home as an expression of 'self' – is also a strong theme in the international literature on the meaning of home (but not DIY per se). For example see: Cooper, 1976; Kron, 1983; Madigan & Munro, 1996; Despres, 1991; Somerville, 1997; Moore, 2000; Wistanley, 2000.)

### **5.2.3. DIY and functional potential**

The *functional* potential of the property was also a common point of reference i.e., the way in which certain additions or new configurations of existing spaces, could enable the occupants to (better) engage in a variety of desirable home-based activities. Examples include removing a wall to provide a spacious open-plan social space for better family interaction; building a deck as an additional outdoor zone for entertaining guests; or adding and modifying spaces to meet the requirements of a changing household (such as converting the bedroom of a teenager who had left home into an office space, or creating a nursery for a new baby). In short, this reflects the desire or need to make the best use of the property as a living space – what we might call the 'use' or 'utility' value of the property (although there is obvious overlap with symbolic value here, such as a bigger lounge expressing the fact that the owner is, or would like to be thought of as, an 'entertainer').

These imaginings were often related to one's point in the 'lifecycle' (a point also emphasised in the applied quantitative DIY research reviewed in Chapter Three). For example, most of the younger homeowners I spoke to had a lot to say about the potential of the backyard as a space for an active leisure lifestyle for their young children. Hamish noted that one of the big reasons he initially liked and purchased his current property "*... was because it had backyard cricket potential for the kids*". Barry, like many of my older homeowners whose children had "*left-the-nest*", said he often thought about new lifestyle possibilities for the now unused spaces of the home, such as turning the back-yard, once his children's cricket pitch, into a paved area with shade where he could sit "*and read a book and relax*".

Important to all of these ideal visions of home was the consistent picturing of householders interacting in a place which they had built or at least fashioned with their own hands (through DIY) to suite their everyday needs and lifestyle preferences.

### 5.3. DIY and the house buying process

My research participants told me that their conversations about the potential of their property and possible DIY projects featured strongly during the house buying process, indicating that DIY planning (or at least thinking about doing DIY), started early. Most of my interviewees said that they evaluated prospective houses by weighing up the DIY they could or would have to do. Alan, who had purchased his home just six months before the interview, described the way in which he and his fiancée initially engaged in this assessment process and how they started to imagine a range of possible DIY projects – the “*DIY thing*” as he called it – well before they even put in an offer on the property they eventually bought:

*We went in [to the open home] and walked around and started assessing every room for the potential. You go ‘Oh wow, big open room, we could paint this, we could do this and I’d change those’. In a lot of the homes we went to, you’d see couples doing that DIY thing. There would be a man and a woman and they’d be walking around, and every time you bumped into them in the room they’d be thinking on similar DIY lines – ‘yeah, we’d need to paint that, and we’d need to paint this’. I don’t know whether they’re thinking about doing it for the economic gain, you know, a quick re-sale, but we were kind of thinking about it for the kids, the future, the lifestyle and stuff like that (Alan).*

Others pointed out that, pre-purchase, they had thought a lot about the capital gains possible through DIY, along with other factors which contributed to them liking the house, such as the location and size and perceived level of general maintenance. Hamish, for example said he and his wife Zoe, looked for houses which they could make “...*a bit of financial bonus from*” (Hamish) while also meeting their lifestyle preferences. Anna also noted how she and her husband paid attention to the potentialities of their current home pre-purchase, those things they thought could be realised through a range of big and small DIY projects.

*We really did see the potential of this house at the open home. The garden sold me, the wooden floors in the hallways and the bedrooms and we [paid] a reasonable price for it, and we could have ended up with something that needed heaps more work so I think we did OK. I remember when we walked through this house when I first saw it at the first open home and saying ‘Well the first thing on the list is the yellow hallway which has to go’ – just some painting, but the bathroom, well that’s got to go too, so we were thinking big too (Anna).*

Interestingly, the older homeowners I interviewed – who also said they always evaluated the potential of houses before purchasing them – noted that in later life they were more likely to



search for a house that would require *less* DIY – the archetypal ‘low-maintenance’ home constructed of permanent materials and situated on an easy care section. Some interviewees with children and/or those who were experiencing increasing work pressures, also wished they had purchased something similar or, at least, would soon be able to do so soon. These research participants still wanted to do *some* DIY, but believed that a low maintenance home would not demand the same investment of time and energy as older homes. Those raising families or at a very busy point in their careers stressed that they simply did not have the time, money or energy to invest in DIY, while those in later life and in retirement shared the view that because they had “*done it all before*” (*Charlie*) it would be onerous to completely repeat the DIY cycle again and, therefore, were more discerning in their choice of DIY activity (rather than dismissive of DIY per se). These comments drew my attention towards the changing role of DIY (or at least the changing nature of one’s DIY practices and/or motivation) through the life course (see footnote 6, page 29); they indicated that there may be a typical DIY trajectory or ‘journey’, where one starts out energetically doing a wide range of home improvement projects in the ‘first home’ where there is great potential to be realised, and then tapers off as homeowners progress through the life cycle and up the so-called “housing ladder” (Morrow-Jones & Wenning, 2005) – from a cheap, older home to a tidier, more expensive property.

I should point out at this stage that the notion of the potential of property and the links to DIY have not been overlooked by so-called “housing experts” – a group of people described by King (2004) as those who make a living from the sale of residential houses. Residential real estate agents, for example, frequently draw attention (in their advertising rhetoric) to the potential of the houses they have for sale or those properties suitable to buyers for those with the nous for DIY. Much of this marketing material is targeted at first homeowners; real estate agents alluding to the latent economic or use value which could be realised by the ‘handy’ first homeowner willing to take on and improve a cheap ‘doer-upper’ (the everyday terminology for an older house that is in need of maintenance and repair work, but characterised as the ‘makeover dream’ or ‘blank canvas’).

#### **5.4. The DIY ‘list’**

Once a house was purchased – makeover dream or low maintenance home – my research participants’ household discussions about the potential of their property gradually culminated in the formulation of a general ‘list’ of anticipated DIY projects – a loose and shifting

articulation of their overall DIY plans and dreams. For some, the DIY list was simply a rhetorical device used to refer to the DIY projects they had thought about and envisioned doing to bring the house to a form closer to their imagined dream home. For others, however, it was a tangible written schedule of their DIY ambitions. In regards to the latter, Bruce had gone so far as to note down his DIY ambitions in a special DIY projects scrapbook, the pages of which he filled with concept sketches and outlines of ideas for possible projects, an activity he enjoyed for its own sake but also in order to gain feedback (or perhaps the approval of his project ideas) from other people he knew.

*I've got this book that, actually, I really enjoy. I haven't had the chance to do it lately, but I'd normally sit down and just fantasize about the house and I'll draw plans and maps, and measure stuff. For example I've got a diagram of the property in there when we first moved in. And we were trying to work out what we could do with the lawn. This was right at the start, about how we could plant it. Just totally measuring everything, from the width of the property, length, down to the gardens, where the doors are on the house and all that stuff. And I did it to show to other people and get their feedback and to work out the best plan for the backyard. I got lots of photo-copied maps of the house in there, so we can re-plan and design. Information from my mother about cabbage trees, what kind of trees grow well in this area (Bruce).*

Although not as detailed or intensive as Bruce's efforts, Britney had also devised a list of ideas for projects – written down on note paper and attached to the fridge for her husband's referral, with additions registered as they both developed new ideas or identified new problems to be fixed. While some of those I interviewed, such as Sally and Sam, a couple, and also Hamish, did not have a *written* schedule of their DIY plans, they were able to verbally relay a catalogue of all the home improvements they wanted to make. Both quotations below imply that there is really no end to the list, because there is always a continuing assessment among household members of the work to do:

*Our list goes something like this: we'll put the front fence up and then we'll go through the house, painting it. And doing the carpets and flooring and electrical stuff, and tiling if we need to, and then we're going to either add a living room where the kitchen is, and if we have to move the garage down the back. And possibly put another bedroom on there. And then we we'd have to move the garage down the back. So there's that sort of thing. We'll put a deck out the back, a garden out the back too with planter boxes, and palm trees (Sam). Yeah, we definitely want a deck, but I'm even picking that we put one out the front where it gets the afternoon sun.*

*And if we've got that front fence up, we'll have the privacy for that. But we have to get the trees in and established (Sally).*

*Look, there's always a list of stuff I have to do. For example last week I got on and did some major jobs on the list that I've been planning on doing for the past year. One was repairing a leak in the roof. And that only took half an hour, but I'd been thinking about doing it for a year. And I've recently stained the deck which we built a year ago. That's needed a coat of stain for the last year. So we've definitely got a DIY list even though most of it's in my head. I know the stuff I've got to do ... but often jobs do have to get quite desperate before they get to the top of the list (Hamish).*

Terry and Natalie – who also had a mental list (i.e., not written down) – had gone so far as to categorise their DIY activities into ‘urgent jobs’ and ‘wants’. Urgent tasks were those they considered priorities in order to get their house into a state that was fully functional and ‘liveable’, including the replacement of several rotten floorboards and the renovation of the kitchen and bathroom which, in their current state of disrepair, were constant irritants. Their ‘wants’ list included jobs that were not so pressing, such as painting the living area, replacing all the old curtains with modern wooden venetian blinds and repainting the two spare bedrooms. Interestingly, Natalie remarked, it was the aesthetic jobs (the ‘wants’) that they often considered addressing first, prioritised because they were perceived to be easier and cheaper to do and also because they produced an immediate visible change – a personal touch – making the house a ‘nicer’ place to live. She commented that they could simply ‘learn to live with the other stuff’ like the rotten floorboards which she had learnt to step over.

James and Anna had also divided their DIY task list into two similar categories: (1) ‘have to do’ tasks and (2) wants:

*Well, once this is finished [bathroom renovation], that will be the end of the list of “that is what we have to do”. It would be a matter of ... (James). [Anna interrupts] ...the stuff we want to do, not the necessary stuff, things like, painting all those other spare rooms, one biggie that we'd like to do is those windows, kitchen windows. I do tend to think that we're constantly thinking of other things to add to that list! But they're littler things if you know what I mean? The big stuff's going to be out of the way before the end of this year. It's going to be aesthetic stuff like painting other rooms. You know, I'm going to finally get the carpet down. It's going to be little aesthetic stuff. I don't think there will be any big jobs by the end of this year to do. It'll be little bits that we can plod along with (Anna). Under-floor insulation is one that we must do so before winter; we'll have to add that one to the have-to-do list (James).*

In essence, the ‘DIY list’ was an ever-changing inventory of all the DIY projects the homeowner(s) had dreamed-up, considered (or were considering) in order to turn their house into their ideal version of home (or at least the best home they could visualise making from the dwelling they had). Whether written down or not, most important here is that the list was discursively significant – a key feature of the household language of DIY and a clear reflection of the amount of time my research participants had invested in thinking, imagining and talking about their ideal home (and housing potential) and associated DIY ambitions, a process influenced by representations of (the ideal) home in the popular media, personal observations and conversations with other homeowners. As I will discuss later, these often concentrated on the sharing of practical information and advice, not just chats about the ideal home.

## **5.5. Chapter summary**

This chapter has shown that my interviewees did a lot of *thinking* about DIY, all of them indicating that they enjoyed dreaming up projects which would make the most of their current home. For some of my interviewees, this meant thinking about projects which would increase the economic value of their house and land (their largest financial investments), while for others it was thinking about ways to make their dwelling a nicer place to live – more comfortable, functional, beautiful, stylish or modern – and closer in form to their ‘dream home’ (itself an imagined, personalised and idealized space). Most of my interviewees told me that their collection of ideas (all the ‘possibilities’) was something they frequently shared with friends and family who, in response, offered further suggestions and a broad-brush description of the projects they would carry out if the house was theirs. My interviewees also told me that their ideas for change and improvement were influenced by the latest housing fashions observed in the media and their experience of living in the house. While most of my interviewees indicated that there was usually a disjuncture between their lofty DIY/housing dreams and the home improvement projects they *actually* did, they all said that they very much enjoyed ‘being’ imaginative – taking time to pause and freely think and talk about the changes they would like to make to their current home. As I have shown in this chapter, one’s housing aspirations or ‘house thinking’ often resulted in a detailed (and ever-changing) list of DIY projects, but as will be seen in the following chapter, these imagined DIY jobs (conceptualised in the absence of the constraints of time, money and practical ability) were not always the one’s that got done – or at least not done as effortlessly as anticipated!

## 6. Types of DIY

### 6.1. Introduction

The previous chapter showed that my interviewees had many ideas for DIY projects and were all able to articulate a detailed list of everything they wanted to do, or that they knew needed doing, in their current home. In this chapter I describe the DIY projects my interviewees had *actually* done, which ranged from small, quick, relatively inexpensive, one-off repairs (such as oiling a squeaky door) through to major structural alterations spanning several weeks or months and usually involving a great deal of capital investment. I develop this (activities-based) discussion around four different modes of DIY, the most common differentiations the respondents made between different types projects they had done, namely: 1) interior decorating (6.2), 2) house repairs and routine maintenance (6.3) (including exterior painting), 3) building work (6.4) (including structural alterations, additions and room conversions), and 4) gardening, lawn care and landscape construction (6.5). I end the chapter with relevant findings from the DIY survey which I conducted as part of this research.

The chapter is primarily contextual. It helps define DIY, or at least the types of activities my interviewees' thought constituted DIY for them. It shows that defining DIY is not easy i.e., some of the interviewees were unsure if gardening should be called DIY (despite their narratives being laden with references to their gardening, suggesting that the garden it was an extension of the home and, therefore, part of their home improvement repertoire). Similarly, some of the women I interviewed referred to sewing and curtain making as part of the DIY home improving they had done (yet as will be discussed later in the thesis, did not consider their sewing equipment to be DIY tools per se). The chapter also reveals different attitudes towards different kinds of jobs, and reasons for carrying them out. Essentially, the chapter discusses what actually gets done in the home, as opposed to what people dream about doing (as discussed in the previous chapter).

## 6.2. Interior decorating

Interior decorating was one of the most frequent types of DIY<sup>38</sup> carried out by my interviewees, generally done for the purpose of making the interior of the home – or at least one room at a time in it – more visually appealing, up-to-date or representative of the occupants' tastes, identity and personal style. Interior decorating may involve: painting (interior walls, window frames, doors, skirting boards, ceilings, shelves, cabinets and cupboards); hanging wallpaper; installing decorative wall or floor tiles; laying floor coverings; changing drawer and cupboard handles; and removing old paint from timber features to reveal the grain of the wood beneath. Some of the women, such as Sue (Figure 11, below), also included curtain and cushion making, and other crafts in this group of decorative activities.

*I've mainly done a lot of the decorating stuff. I've painted, wallpapered, and made curtains – those sorts of things. I did all the curtains and that was when our first child was about two years old. It wasn't always easy because he was toddling around and he'd be at the bottom of the ladder while I was measuring them up ... the curtains are definitely my specialty (Sue).*

Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 11: Sue hanging self-made curtains (author's photo)

---

<sup>38</sup> This was not surprising, given the findings reported in the international and New Zealand research literature which show that decorating is a very common category of DIY (e.g., Davidson & Leather, 2000; Brodersen, 2003; Clark, Jones & Page, 2006).

While a wide range of individual activities were described by the interviewees under the banner of interior decorating, decorating ‘projects’ often entailed a combination of these tasks. For example, when Barry talked about how he “*did-up the bedroom*” he discussed the way in which he carried out and coordinated a cluster of decorating jobs including: painting the ceiling and skirting boards, sanding back and oiling timber window frames, hanging new wallpaper and painting a set of drawers to match the new décor. Mary, similarly, covered painting, curtain making and floor polishing, in her narrative about the way in which she and her husband Max once ‘decorated’ a sunroom in their home. I will discuss the multifaceted nature of ‘projects’ in more detail in the next chapter, but it is important to note here that a decorating project often encompassed many different DIY tasks.

Overall, it was the relative simplicity and affordability of interior decorating work, coupled with the instant cosmetic impact and personalising effect that it had, which the interviewees seemed to value and enjoy. Terry (a first-home owner), for example, stated that decorating was:

*...one of those things where you can quickly see what you’ve done and the improvements you’ve made which really make it feel like your place, and that’s the really satisfying thing about that type of work (Terry).*

Linda – also a first-home owner and self-confessed “*decorating junky*” – made similar comments:

*You see the colour and rooms change quickly, that’s it – instant results, that’s why I like doing it so much. You select a colour scheme and before you know it you’ve got a new room. I get the decorating bug ... For example, the window, the one that’s near the corner, I’ve sanded that back and oiled it. Well, it’s sort of half done at the moment but it’s a satisfying job. And the entrance way, the floor there needs to be re-sanded, it’s had paint and stuff dropped on it and the ceiling there needs to be painted, because it’s a funny blue colour, similar to the ceiling in here. Our room, I can’t stand that light blue colour. And the windows there need to be stripped back as well. And this is all stuff that I’ll do myself and I know I’ll really enjoy the results ... it’s the easy aesthetic stuff I do like wallpapering and painting – you know the simple cheap stuff which is quickly achievable and looks great ... I love decorating rooms ... quick and simple and it makes a difference that you can see (Linda).*

While all the men and women I spoke to had accomplished a wide range of interior decorating tasks over the course of their home ownership histories, it was the women I spoke

to who seemed to favour decorating the most, and for some, this was the ‘only’ type of DIY they did. Britney, for example, said she only did decorative work because it was “*reasonably uncomplicated*” and left her husband to take care of all other home improvement tasks (perhaps suggesting that decorating is perceived as ‘easy’ as it does not involve a major rebuild but rather making the most of what is already there). Rose, who lived alone and for whom the sharing of tasks was not an option, also limited her involvement in DIY to gardening and the “*simple cosmetic stuff*”, having painted and decorated each and every room in the four houses she had owned and occupied over her thirty years of home ownership. For all other home improvement jobs, especially structural work, Rose relied on professionals to get the work done.

*I bought a ramshackle place in the 1970s – my first home and I did everything to that house. The house was actually quite disgusting when I got it so I went about and painted every room you know, I did all the decorating. I made new curtains. It was all cosmetic stuff and I had to do it or else I couldn't have lived in it. In Cook Street – my second home – I actually changed every room although I got builders in to do the structural building stuff, I always do that. But I did the wallpapering and painting. Most of the work I do is decorative stuff, changing the stuff that I can't stand about the place. And it's always glaringly obvious to me – like the colours. I'm not energetic or enthusiastic enough to tackle the hugely structural jobs or things that need repair, which are usually less obvious to my eye – I'll employ someone if that stuff really needs doing. I know I can knock a few nails in but I don't touch plumbing or electrical – I can't do anything major in those areas. I can't really build things that need precision so I stick to decorating, which I enjoy (Rose).*

Myriad decorating motives were mentioned over the course of the interviews, with many of them highlighting the link between decorating and a desire to impress visitors and houseguests with a well-presented home. Anna and James, for example, said that they repainted their living room in preparation for a family reunion which was soon to be held at their place. Sue said that she painted an “*ugly*” bedroom to freshen it up for a friend who was coming to stay. Barry was instructed by his wife to repaint the living room so that the colour scheme would match the new lounge suite they had just purchased in time for the Christmas Day celebrations which were to be held at their house. Dave redecorated the bathroom of his house before his in-laws came to stay for the summer holidays (Figure 12, page 95):

*The bathroom I just finished a couple of weeks ago. It was old and pretty ugly ... I did it all for the in-laws who I was desperately trying to impress. It sounds mad I know, but you can just*



*imagine what they'd be thinking if they turned up to stay and the bathroom was a bloody shambles ... they'd think I was a lazy bugger, basically (Dave).*

## Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 12: Dave's completed DIY bathroom renovation (author's photo)

While interior decorating was often triggered by the desire to renew an aging or unfashionable interior (and as noted above, underpinned by a desire to impress others) it was also triggered by life events, such as the arrival of a new child. Jerry and his wife, for example, described a “*burst of decorating*” activity just prior to the arrival of their first baby; they painted the nursery which...

*...was dark blue at the time and kind of inappropriate for a baby girl. It didn't take long to give it a splash of paint though and the effect was pretty amazing (Jerry).*

A common spate of interior decorating seemed to occur soon after people had moved into a new property (thereby supporting the findings of Pollakowski (1988) & Bogdon's (1996) applied home improvement research. See page 29 of this thesis). Most reported doing this to personalise the dwelling – to make the new house feel more like ‘their’ home. As one participant noted, interior decorating was a quick and affordable method for “*stamping a mark on a new property*”<sup>39</sup> (Alan). Hazel noted that she and her husband Gary had been

---

<sup>39</sup> A finding also consistent with SIRC's (2003) survey research which explored the motives of British DIYers.

through this “...process to put a mark on the house” and suggested that they “weren’t happy” until this was achieved. Similarly, Barry and his wife Janice – now in their late 50s and living in their sixth home – had decorated all the houses they had lived in within the first few months of occupation, with the aim of changing the inherited colour scheme to better suite their own tastes and provide a sense of ownership.

*...we always decorate inside first, paint and paper, probably all in the first few months. And we’ve often carpeted too. It’s just to get them looking the way we want them to look. We usually don’t like the colours of the preceding people ... it’s usually a colour thing not a wear and tear thing, but mainly because we don’t like the colours ... it’s hard to find comfort in that environment (Barry).*

Dave also talked about ‘moving-in’ DIY – the short-term “aesthetic stuff” that he and his wife were doing in order to initially tidy up their new home. This involved a great deal of decision-making about what was unacceptable for them and, therefore, had to change.

*Ah, well we’ll probably remove this wallpaper. It will be one of the first things that will go. We’ll do some aesthetic stuff. I mean we may at some later date do something major with this room, but for now we’ll just try and see if we can get the walls looking better. The previous owners, they just wallpapered the rooms themselves, and as you can see it’s all coming off at the joins, and they didn’t do a very tidy job on it at all. It just looks awful. If we do this room, probably the wallpaper will come off and we’ll probably either repaint it or wallpaper it. Not sure yet. But the drapes obviously are going to be changed at some stage, and those awful old 1970s Venetian blinds will probably go as well (Dave).*

Max and Mary recalled a similar phase of decorating activity when they moved into their current home, 15 years previously:

*Within the first year we completely upgraded the interior, didn’t we? I think the first thing we did was wallpapering this room. Oh no, the first thing we did, was spruced up the kitchen (Max). No, that was after we did this room, this room was blue and we just didn’t like it at all, not our thing (Mary). That’s right – this is the first thing we did – and it needs doing again actually (Max). Yeah, I can remember starting off in this room, stripping wallpaper. And I thought it would just go down one layer, but I discovered paper on paper on paper. It was like digging. I uncovered all sorts of rubbish. I remember that winter we moved in, all the furniture was in the middle of the room. The kids were around all the time, getting in the way as they do. It took ages. But all the decorating was done when we moved in and now after 15 years I’m plucking up the courage for the second round (Mary).*

It should be noted that a spate of decorating was also carried out just prior to selling a home; with the aim of adding resale value to the house, or at least getting it presentable enough to sell. This process was very different to personalising the home; it was more pragmatic – aimed, first and foremost, at getting the house sold (often via the use of a popular paint colour or, alternatively, a neutral tone so as not to put off any potential buyer).

*When we were selling our house we did the usual once over paint job. We painted the kitchen to get it looking like new again. It was a total waste of time though because we moved out and the next people moved in and two weeks later they repainted it all (laughs). Basically it was painting and tidying up the whole section to make it presentable and saleable. But the big job was painting the whole kitchen. It was to make it look decent to sell (Sue).*

It should also be noted here that while specific spates of interior decorating were often related to specific one-off household events (often connected to transitions in the ‘life-cycle’. See Baker & Kaul, 2002), on-going decorative changes were also common – as part of an effort to keep up with vagaries of interior fashion as promoted in the home and garden lifestyle magazines (Figure 13, below) and other media sources that many of the interviewees subscribed to and/or looked to for inspiration and ideas (Leonard, et al., 2004).

Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 13: ‘Inspiring homes’ - an example of print media read by interviewees (*Your Home and Garden*, December 2010, magazine cover)

### **6.3. House repairs and routine maintenance**

In their narratives about DIY, the interviewees talked a lot about home repairs and maintenance. This distinct category of work covered a wide range of activities, some of them quick and simple ‘one-off’ tasks (such as tightening a loose drawer handle), others routinely practiced (such as mowing the lawn, painting exterior window frames, or annually pruning the roses), and some markedly more complex and time-consuming (such as repairing a broken window, replacing broken/rotten floorboards (Figure 14, below) or fixing a leaky roof). A distinguishing feature of this kind of work was that its purpose was not to *alter or add* something new to the house (such as new wallpaper or curtains), but rather to *maintain* the dwelling’s appearance, integrity, functionality, overall state of repair and, by association, its capital value.

Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 14: Shane fixing a broken floor board (author’s photo)

#### **6.3.1. Maintenance**

The common maintenance tasks my interviewees talked about included washing down the exterior walls of the house and/or paved areas (to remove mould and insect infestations, especially spiders and their webs), unblocking drains and guttering systems. The most *frequently* mentioned routine maintenance task was exterior painting, and while this task had an aesthetic component – the colour scheme for the outer shell of the home – it was rarely talked about with the same enthusiasm as was expressed for interior painting projects. Rather, exterior painting was universally considered monotonous work – an important point of difference in these types of DIY.

Most of the houses my interviewees owned had some form of exterior woodwork which needed painting to maintain the integrity of the timber (see Footnote 11, page 51). For those with brick or concrete block houses this was often limited to windowsills and gables, but for those who owned weatherboard dwellings (a very common house type in New Zealand), exterior painting was a major undertaking, often taking several months or, in some cases, years to complete. Jack said that when he and his wife bought their second home– “a big wooden weatherboard house” – he discovered that exterior painting was an endless and often thankless activity; he grew to dislike the task (which included weatherboard repairs) to such a degree that it was one reason that they moved house thirteen years later. In his words:

*I remember when we moved to Christchurch we bought a big wooden weatherboard house on the hill. There were a few rotten weatherboards and I realised that the paintwork would need doing. It wasn't long before I realised that this was an endless chore and you don't get much immediate reward. I experimented with fillers that I would use to fix broken bits of board and then paint over. And then after a year or so I'd notice that it wasn't working too well ... starting to show through the last coat of paint. I'd have to do it again using a different system. I started to realise that 'hell, this is a never ending chore' and I was looking for a way to get out of it in the end. After thirteen years of that, it was one of the reasons we were keen to move on (Jack).*

Marty, who also owned an old weatherboard house, also reflected on the trials and tribulations of exterior painting, noting that it took him three years to complete – a DIY experience he was keen not to have to repeat:

*Well it needed painting. And before that I'd fixed it, fixed all the rotten weatherboards, and you can't just leave it like that can you? So I guess I started there because the house was basically rotten. I started replacing those rotten boards and that had to be done right away. After that I had to paint the new boards so I just did the whole lot then. I had to do a lot of preparation. I had to sand it and I had to rip out the rotten boards as I went along. I just did one wall at a time. Paint that wall, and then do the next one. The job took three years to complete ... I became pretty disinterested after a while and after all that the only thing I've learnt is that I'm pretty keen not to buy another wooden house that needs painting (Marty).*

For Shane, it was not the exterior painting that he found tedious, but the associated preparatory tasks, especially the initial sanding work.

*...the worst thing I'm guilty of at the moment is not finishing the painting of the house but that's a motivation thing ... the replacement of the weatherboards and things like that. I guess that's*

*coming down to the budget and spending my money in other areas. Plus a lack of motivation with not having the right tools. In terms of the painting, it's the prep work of the exterior painting that is the most monotonous. I don't mind painting at all. I don't have a problem with painting, but it's the prep work, the sanding, it becomes very monotonous (Shane).*

All my interviewees drew attention to the tedious nature of exterior painting, with most noting that they preferred projects which offered more of a practical challenge and a more immediate sense of satisfaction. Glen, for example, said that he preferred to use his DIY time to engage in building work involving the skilful use of tools and, similarly, Alan (Figure 15, below) said that he preferred projects which were diverse in their nature; for both of them exterior painting was neither challenging or exciting enough:

*...it's pretty monotonous ... the painting outside is bit of a 'no-brainer'. I'd rather do projects where you make stuff, get the power saw out, the mask on and the earmuffs on and then its brrmmmmmm as you cut the wood, sand the edges, get your tools on your tool belt, square things up – painting though, it's just up-down, up-down (Glen).*

*I hate exterior painting. It just seems boring. There's no challenge to it really, you just sand and sand and brush and stand there with a pot or paint. It's just a repetition job. Most DIY jobs are really different but painting's always the same. Maybe it's the preparation that's a pain. You've got to scrape back and that type of thing. It's all repetitive (Alan).*

Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 15: Alan painting exterior window sills (author's photo)

### 6.3.2. House repairs

The house repair tasks described by my interviewees were much more varied than the maintenance work they had done, although a scan of my interview transcripts revealed that the most frequent repairs involved fixing: leaking taps or dripping pipes, leaking roofs, rusty guttering, damaged walls or interior paint work, and damaged or jammed doors (i.e., locks, handles and rusty hinges). Like all of the DIY projects discussed in this chapter, the level of expertise required to carry out ‘fix-it’ jobs ultimately determined the type of repairs the person was prepared to attempt themselves (such as fixing broken glass or repair work on steep roofs, which few were happy to do given the danger involved). Building regulations (see BOX 1, page 76) also governed what the homeowners could do by way of repairs, with serious plumbing and electrical repairs nearly always having to be left to trained professionals.

Jack pointed out that repair work was part and parcel of home ownership, especially in New Zealand where “...*the pretty rough weather has a big impact on housing ... and houses age, the materials don’t last forever so there’s always wear and tear to contend with*”. Similarly, Charlie suggested that when you buy a house you always ‘inherit’ repair tasks to do – those which the previous owners may have left unattended.

*The first thing I did here was to repair a very bad leak that we had in the bedroom – I inherited that but didn’t know it until we had our first rainy night. The house had two of those old cast iron fireplaces with the colour tiles up each side. Well to fix the leak I had to rip all those out. The chimney was a problem and this was a common thing with housing back then. Now if your chimney isn’t sound then it doesn’t matter how good your brickwork is, you’ll get water coming in down the sides and into the ceiling when it rains. Now in the room next door there were water stains half way across the ceiling from this sort of problem which the previous owners obviously didn’t care too much about. So I repaired the roof, chimney and redid the bricks and from then on every time I painted the roof I maintained the chimneys and I never had any problems after that (Charlie).*

Most of the homeowners I spoke to had either a mental or written list of repairs they knew they had to do (as discussed in the previous chapter). Many, however, said that they often ignored these jobs, preferring instead to focus on much more stimulating structural or decorative changes, thereby supporting the findings of the New Zealand House Condition Survey which shows that decorating often gets done before repair work, which is often neglected or delayed (Clark, Jones & Page, 2006).

Roof repairs were frequently mentioned among the fix-it tasks my interviewees had done (or knew they should be doing!), especially those with older corrugated iron roofs (a traditional and very widely used roofing material in New Zealand<sup>40</sup>) which, if left unpainted, are prone to rust damage. Bill had repaired a roof and described the repair project he carried out in this way:

*Early on we painted the roof as well, the roof not being in very good shape. We actually went so far as talking to, actually by chance we talked to a guy who was friends with the old owner, and he had been doing a bit of work on the place for her, just as a friend, and he mentioned there were a few rust patches in the roof which he thought needed to be replaced, and we went up and had a look and decided we'd get away with not replacing them so we patched the holes and painted it. Although we did look at getting the roof redone, and getting prices from roofing places and also considered the idea of doing it ourselves, tearing the corrugated iron off and putting new corrugated iron on ourselves (Bill).*

Hamish reported that he had only just got on to repairing a leak in the roof after thinking about it and delaying it for two years, noting that in the end it "...only took half an hour". Over that period he had carried out a range of other DIY tasks, nearly all non-essential decorative or landscape changes. Linda and her husband had also recently repaired a rusty corrugated iron roof, having avoided the job since purchasing their house four years earlier:

*We knew that it [the roof] would need some work done when we bought the place and he thought he could repair it himself. Of course he never got onto it and I couldn't get up there because I was pregnant so I couldn't have a good look. But yeah, he was pretty sure he could repair it adequately. And it was a much cheaper option really. But getting him up there to do the job was a harder task than actually fixing the bloody thing (Linda).*

While a few of my interviewees were obsessive about keeping their homes in a good state of repair, and therefore, actively kept up with the repair work, most were less interested in doing this type of work, unless it was absolutely necessary. These contrasting attitudes were evident in the interviews I conducted with Hamish and Bruce, who were of a similar age and owned homes built in the same period. For Hamish, repair and maintenance activities did not bring about the same level of enjoyment as larger building projects, and therefore, he actively delayed these projects until his wife "ordered [him] to do them". His avoidance of this work

---

<sup>40</sup> Perkins and Thorns (2000) note that it is important not to overlook the influence of the physical structure of houses (which can usually be associated with a nation's house building history) when exploring home making and improvement activities.



was evident during the house tour when he pointed out a range of repairs which had been on his 'to-do' list for a long period time including: painting the exterior windowsills (many of which were in poor condition and showing signs of dry-rot), fixing a large hole in the plaster of the lounge wall, replacing broken and rotten fence palings and a cracked window. He said that he had simply got used to this state of disrepair, but was quick to point out that at least the decor of the house was good. In stark contrast, Bruce said that he had always carried out repair work as soon as he identified a damage or fault. He saw this as his responsibility as a good homeowner and derived a sense of pride from doing the work himself and subsequently producing a well-maintained home. He also pointed out that:

*You maintain your house because it's your biggest financial asset so you want to protect that. It seems pretty stupid to me to let it get into a state of disrepair – where's the logic in that? (Bruce).*

#### **6.4. Building work (alterations and additions)**

Nearly all of the interviewees had completed at least one major building project involving either the alteration, reconfiguration or complete makeover (i.e., more than redecorating) of an existing room, or the installation of a significant new fixture or feature in the house (such as a new heating system or shower unit), and while not the most common type of DIY, these projects were often defining lifetime events. Those who had not engaged in this work included: 1) Natalie and Terry who had only recently moved into their first home and were only just beginning to consider structural changes to their bathroom and kitchen, 2) Alan, also a recent first homeowner, who was carefully planning to undertake a bathroom alteration but had not yet started the work, and 3) Rose, who lived alone and always relied on professionals to carry out these types of jobs.

The interviewees who talked about this type of work described a wide variety of building projects, ranging from the 'decidedly complex' (such as reconfiguring the layout of the house by, for example, removing the walls between two rooms) to the 'moderately difficult' (such as complete kitchen and bathroom makeovers and other room conversions). Specific examples include: Barry's conversion of a second bathroom into an office space for his wife, whose new job involved working from home (i.e., a change in her personal life circumstances); Bruce's removal of a load-bearing wall (between the kitchen and lounge) to create a more spacious social area for entertaining friends; Jack's conversion of a garage loft to make a hobby-room where his wife could paint; and Hamish's fitting of French doors in an

exterior wall to provide indoor/outdoor flow from the lounge to the front deck for summer entertaining (Figure 16, below). As can be seen in these examples, the catalyst for this type of work was often the need to change the layout of the house to make it more functional or comfortable (which may also include an element of ‘showing off’ to friends), to meet new family needs, to cater to new life circumstances or to meet changing lifestyle preferences. (Again supporting Baker and Kaul’s (2002) suggestion that changing circumstances over the life course may have a significant effect on the type of home improvements carried out.)

While these projects varied in their detail, they generally involved making some change to: the structural framework of the house, electrical wiring and/or plumbing system, and/or the wider building envelope (floors, ceilings, walls, etc.). They were, therefore, markedly more intricate and time-consuming than any of the other DIY tasks the participants had done, and, given their magnitude, generally gave rise to a great deal more research and planning, household disruption and stress. The magnitude of possible mistakes was often elevated with these larger projects, and, by extension, the possibility of remedial work to fix their so-called ‘DIY disasters’ (for a detailed discussion on DIY disasters see Section 8.6). Such instances frequently added to the scale and duration of the job, and often to its overall cost.

Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 16: Hamish's DIY French doors and deck (author's photo)

While the women I spoke to were often instrumental in organising these larger building projects – including the budgeting and hiring of external labour for specialist tasks – it was the men who tended to *do* this kind of work, with their female partners often taking a supportive role (Browne, 2000)<sup>41</sup>. The men I interviewed said that they especially enjoyed building work because it: offered an enormous practical challenge, was not repetitious or monotonous, and generally involved using heavy tools and machinery, provided many learning opportunities and the greatest overall sense of achievement (supporting the view posited by Gelber, 1997, 1999 that DIY has long been an appealing activity for men, for these reasons. See page 32-33 of this thesis).

The scale and complexity of building projects meant that these were often the most expensive forms of DIY that the homeowners had ever done, and, therefore issues of money were to the fore. Some of my interviewees said they had to put off projects so they could save enough to purchase the building supplies that were necessary to start the work (see Section 7.5, page 124 for further discussion about budgeting for, and financing, DIY projects).

Another common feature of these projects was the need for the homeowner to obtain City Council permission before commencing the job, usually by way of the acquisition of a building permit, and/or least to become familiar with and abide by relevant building regulations (especially conventions governing plumbing and electrical work). More often than not this meant that particular stages of a project were carried out by professional contractors, especially when their training and associated qualifications were *required* by law for the work to be done and signed off. For these jobs, some of the interviewees got friends who were qualified tradespeople to lend a hand with the work and then to approve and sign off the project, at a cheap rate or sometimes for free (also see Section 8.2.3, page 147). This provided an opportunity for the homeowner to help out, keeping the project ‘DIY’, to some extent.

The three interviewee narratives of building projects, presented (verbatim) in BOX 2 (page 106) illustrate the diversity and complexity of the building projects these interviewees had undertaken, and the enjoyment that was derived from doing and finishing them. They also nicely reveal the intellectual stimulation, frustrations, household disruptions, costs and risks associated with these bigger DIY ventures. The first example is Dave’s narration of his

---

<sup>41</sup> For a further discussion regarding this gendered division of labour see Sections 3.2.2.1, 3.3.3 and 8.2. Also see Perkins and Thorns (2006) for similar comments regarding gendered nature of the home making process.

experience installing a wood burner in the lounge, a challenge he enjoyed. The second example is Glens' narrative which tells the story of how he laid a new hardwood floor. His story emphasises the newness of the activity for him, the learning that was involved and the satisfaction he derived from the process (and the need to get it right because of the cost). The third is Hazel's narration of a complete bathroom rebuild which took longer than she and her husband Gary anticipated, leading to some household distress.

## **BOX 2: Three building project experiences**

### **Installing a wood burner – Dave's experience**

*There was an old night store heater there but it wasn't very effective ... it would heat this room but that was it. So we changed it, put a fire in and I did the whole lot. I thought I was going to have to pay someone to come in and do it but when I sat down with the plans and went to the council and found out all the consents I thought "I could probably do this myself". And that was probably the most enjoyable part – just sitting down and figuring out how to do it properly. There was some frustration but I never felt that I shouldn't have started. You can see the fire is a wee way out from the wall – that wasn't the initial plan – I wanted the fire set further back. But when I got up into the roof and started planning where the flue was going to go through, there was actually a rafter right in the way, because the eaves on this house come in quite sharply. So I couldn't cut through the rafters, I had to bring the fire out. That was pretty frustrating. That was the only thing that didn't go to plan. Everything else was reasonably straight forward ... you had to be careful when you were cutting the roof. I was a bit apprehensive about making the wrong cut. Because if you cut your roof there's not a lot you can do to fix it easily. But I was pretty meticulous in the planning.*

### **Laying a hardwood floor – Glen's experience**

*I did the hardwood floor in the bedroom and painted the bedroom ... it was satisfying when people came around and said that it was a nice job. It stimulates your brain. I laid a floating solid wood tongue and groove floor and there was a little bit of pressure to get it right because I'd spent over \$2000 on the timber and the nails. I had to sit there planning it out exactly knowing that I had one pack of spare timber and there was no more – it was the end of the line. So I worked out that I had room for only eight mistakes and I didn't really want to make them. Now the first cut I made was a mistake but it was like your brain soon gets into it ... the best part is all the technical bits, like starting off working out what you've got to do. Once I'd got around the first door and got into the main bulk of the hallway and realized it was square then it was just laying the boards, getting them down as quick as possible. Cut them and tap them into place ... I was learning as I went.*

### **Bathroom makeover – Hazel's experience**

*We decided the bathroom was going to be the first major thing ... it was just really gross ... manageable but disgusting. And one day I came home and the bathroom had been ripped back; the Gib [wallboard] had been ripped off, no warning. The bath was on the lawn, the hand basin was tipped upside down outside, and there was Gib and spiders and dust and stuff. And I just thought "ok, that's the end of the bathroom, we don't have any bathroom now" ... Gary was so excited but I don't think he realised what a long haul it was going to be and we could have actually left the bath there while we ripped off all the other stuff, so we could have used it. And I remember we had to go to Gary's sister two doors down for showers.*

## 6.5. Gardening, lawn care and landscape construction

Over the course of these DIY interviews, the interviewees also talked about their gardening and landscaping projects, perhaps signifying that their gardens and outdoor areas were inseparable from their homes (refer Bhatti & Church, 2000) and, by extension, the wider home improvement culture. Even those who raised the fact that gardening was not strictly DIY, because it was done *outside* or that it did not involve the *house* itself, frequently interwove stories about their gardening accomplishments into their broader discussions about the home improvements they had made. Bruce and Jerry, who were both initially sceptical about the link, took time to think about the way in which gardening and DIY were inter-related, eventually arriving at the conclusion that it should be included in the discussion.

*Gardening isn't DIY though, really. I suppose mowing the lawn is – that's home maintenance right, so it's sort of DIY. I suppose it's the same as painting an outside window in a way, which is maintenance and DIY. But I suppose you maintain your garden too, so I suppose it's the same thing ... And if you think about it, building a deck is definitely DIY and that's kind of in the garden ... so I guess it is DIY really (Bruce).*

*I guess when you think of DIY you think of doing stuff yourself that you could have just hired the odd tradesman to come in and do. And I suppose you can do that with the garden as well. You couldn't really hire a landscape gardener though – actually I suppose you could, so then gardening must be DIY (Jerry).*

Overall, gardening projects were among some of the most popular DIY tasks conducted, with high levels of involvement among all of those to whom I spoke (and also those whom I surveyed). This is not in itself a surprise; New Zealanders have long been 'keen' gardeners (Strongman, 1984) an interest buoyed by suitable soils and climate and properties which traditionally have had a great deal of space for vegetable plots, lawns, fruit trees, grape vines and more decorative displays of flowers, trees and shrubs (Perkins & Thorns, 1999). Like all categories of DIY, gardening and landscaping involves a wide-variety of tasks, some very simple (such as weeding the garden), some routinely practiced (such as the weekly task of mowing the lawn or the annual job of pruning roses), and some more technically complex (such as the construction of a retaining wall). Among the interviewees, the common gardening projects they had accomplished included: weeding, pruning and planting (or removing) trees and shrubs, tending vegetable plots, composting and mulching, pest control and lawn fertilising. Many of the interviewees also talked about *doing* landscape

construction, such as building fences, screens and box gardens, and laying concrete paths, irrigation systems and paving stones. Glen described this collection of activities as the most common jobs accomplished by New Zealand homeowners, especially in summer when the weather outdoors was more settled:

*I think that landscape gardening is the typical DIY job people will do, especially in summer when you want the outdoors to look great when you're always outside and stuff. It was certainly the first thing we did when we bought this house. You see knocking out a wall is probably the ultimate DIY job that you might aspire to do one day but a much more common job is landscape gardening because it's not a big deal if you make a mistake and it doesn't really cost you much and its fun and all that. In the weekends in summer you know, you'll always see Kiwis in their gardens or driving to the dump with a load of hedge clippings or concrete they've ripped up (Glen).*

For many interviewees, the creation of a garden (including sowing a lawn) was the very first project they did (or at least started) once they had moved into a new home. Like interior decorating, these activities were considered an inexpensive and relatively simple way to begin personalising the new home environment (making the new property look and feel like *their* place) in order to develop a sense of ownership. Eric, for example, said that he and his wife started developing their garden and lawn, rather than making improvements to the house, because “*gardening wasn't as costly as the big stuff but still made it [the house] ours*” and that it was something they could “*more easily control*”. In their first months of occupation they put down a lawn, pulled out several trees to let in the sun, and planted a small orchid of fruit trees. Dave also started his home improvements in the garden – first because it was “unruly” but also because “*it didn't cost [them] a lot of money ... It was just getting out there with the spade*” (Dave).

For many of those interviewed, gardening itself had become a key ‘home-based’ leisure pursuit<sup>42</sup> (or “practical hobby” as one interviewee put it), providing all the benefits of physical activity, and also an opportunity to be creative and close to nature, from which they derived a great deal of personal satisfaction. Barry confessed that he enjoyed *being in* the garden, so much so that he tended to prioritise gardening over all the other odd-jobs he knew he had to do in around the house and home. For Barry, gardening was therapeutic, a place to escape and recover from a stressful week at work in the office (Figure 17, page 109).

---

<sup>42</sup> See Lynch and Veal (1996) for a detailed overview of home-based leisure, albeit in the Australian context.

Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 17: Barry and Anna at play and working in their respective gardens (author's photos)

Three of the women I spoke to also emphasised the leisure dimensions of gardening, especially the satisfaction they got from the process of creating an outdoor environment which was nice for them as well as their neighbours to look at. They noted that it was not until they became homeowners that they developed an enthusiasm for plants and gardens and expressed their surprise at the amount of spare time they were now spending pottering in their gardens:

*I'd never done any gardening or DIY in my life, honestly. If you asked me if I'd done anything like that five years ago I would have laughed. But it's amazing, when you own a home, how gardening suddenly becomes your hobby (Anna, see Figure 17, previous page).*

*I never thought I'd enjoy gardening – I probably associated gardening with work. But now I get immense satisfaction from doing it and seeing it done ... looking out and thinking 'that's a nice orderly garden'. I potter around the garden a lot, digging and organising the garden bed. At the moment I'm pulling up a brick path and making brick edging for the garden beds (Natalie).*

*I've really come to like the gardening stuff, I just like being outside in the garden. I like doing things with my hands especially with soil and plants. I just had a wee play out there this week ... it's always there, and it always needs to be tended to. We've got a lot of deciduous trees, so there's a lot of leaf raking and tidying ... I quite like it really. I don't think I could ever live in an apartment with only a balcony. I'd have to have a garden (Mary).*

Some of my interviewees had invested a considerable amount of time in planning their gardens, including seeking information and advice from other people. Hamish, for example, had drawn up a landscape plan which, over several months, he presented to his wife, friends and family for their input, ideas and feedback. After a series of recommendations were made (see Figure 18, page 111, for a visual representation of their ideas), and when his wife eventually agreed that the overall plan should be implemented, they both began the work. On the practical advice of Hamish's father, they started in spring by re-sowing the lawn and adding an underground sprinkler system and then planting the larger native tree specimens, mainly because these took a long "...time to establish".



Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 18: Design ideas for the garden provided to Hamish from family and friends

One priority for Hamish's wife Zoe was to have greater privacy in the front yard, so the next job they undertook was to build a front timber fence, screening the front yard from the street. This project was followed by the construction of low box gardens around the boundary fence. After these were completed, Zoe developed a new scheme for the front yard, which she had realised was an under-utilised 'suntrap'. This eventually saw them spending two unanticipated months constructing a large timber deck with built in seats, drawing attention to the fact that Hamish's concept plan was in fact *flexible* and the more general observation that some projects tend to get bigger than expected (also see Section 8.4, page 156 for a discussion about the duration of projects). Other jobs they eventually accomplished together included: the construction a wooden compost bin, planting a fernery down one side of the house and paving an area of the back section for a picnic table. Over the course of all these projects, Hamish's parents had volunteered time to help with the planting of the smaller native vegetation including grasses, flax, small shrubs and groundcovers. From the outset, Hamish and Zoe had only wanted *native* plants, which they perceived were low-maintenance and also provided the modern fashionable look for a garden: "*it was a real granny's garden when we first got the place which wasn't really us at all, pots and flowers, you know, trimmed little hedges, so we've worked hard to bring it into the 21<sup>st</sup> century*" (Zoe).

Like Hamish and Zoe, many of the interviewees talked about the 'type' of garden they were trying to create, and there was a wide range of preferences. Barry said that he and his wife Janice were developing their section into a wild 'cottage' garden, while Jerry and his wife Lucy, who lived near the ocean, were developing a beach theme with driftwood edging, scattered shells and a great number of tussock plants and succulents. With two children, Shane was developing his section into a 'play space' with sandpit, cricket pitch and trampoline dominating the setting. (Figure 19, page 113.)

While many of the younger interviewees, and also those in their mid-life stages, talked about their gardens and sections as a space for entertaining and play, the older research participants tended to emphasise the productive elements of their garden, such as vegetable and fruit growing, and I was particularly struck by the scale, quality and orderliness of their vegetable patches, and their horticultural knowledge. Some of the older participants connected their interest in vegetable gardening to the activities of their parents:

*Back in our day our backyards were all about vegetables. There were no paved barbeque areas or play equipment – just the vegetable plot. The front garden was display and the back was*

*fully functional. We even had a chook house and plenty of fruit trees. That wasn't long ago. We might not have chooks now but we do have a good vegetable plot and that's really important to us (Jack).*

*Well I've always had a veggie garden. At our last place we had heaps of room for it, but when we came here, it was mostly a flower garden. So of course I got stuck with a small pocket of garden for my vegetables. I still enjoy growing spuds and beans, and tomatoes. You name it, I can grow it ... my Dad had a great garden, but he wouldn't let me do much to it, unless it was a project for school ... he reckoned I would stuff it up. He was a real perfectionist (Max).*

*I do a lot of vegetable gardening and my family always have. At the moment I only grow potatoes, leeks, carrots and asparagus. I had a hip replacement and I found it was very difficult for me to plant the small seeds. So, instead of having a variety of small seeds I can make a trench and drop spuds in quite easy. So that's what I did. We've still got two buckets of potatoes and they should last us through to November. So I can nearly get 12 months worth of potatoes out of that crop (Charlie).*

Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 19: Shane's garden designed for his children to play in and enjoy (author's photo)

While most of the interviewees emphasised a particular garden style they were trying to create, some participants had created landscapes which were much freer in form, reflecting their less concentrated approach to gardening and garden planning. Dave and his wife, for example, had developed a more eclectic and experimental garden, comprising a small Japanese segment, rock garden, a 'crazy-path', a small vegetable patch, ornamental flowerbed, and a mixture of exotic and endemic trees. They described how their garden had come together in this way:

*We had a little bit of an idea of what we wanted to do but no real plan. There was no plan really. Well it was just things we wanted to do, like the Japanese garden, but there was no objectives, or we have do it by this certain date, there was nothing like that. Gardens I think are fun to make because of that, you know that you can experiment and it doesn't really matter (Dave).*

In general, all of those of whom I interviewed were keen gardeners, and clearly gardening was one way in which they sought to make their house a home (supporting the findings of Bhatti & Church (2000) and Bhatti (2006)). Like the interiors of their home, their gardens were in a constant process of change, these transformations often influenced by new trends in garden style, but also natural processes. Importantly, most of the participants seemed less daunted by gardening than other forms of DIY – the risks involved were generally low, and therefore, more fun and experimentation could be had, constrained only by the geological characteristics of the section, such as soil type, slope and exposure to the sun, and/or their physical health and capacity.

## **6.6. Survey findings: what DIY gets done?**

To end this chapter, which has so far provided a rich description of the kinds of DIY work the interviewees had undertaken, I present findings from the DIY home improvement household survey I administered as part this research – the DIY tasks my survey respondents had *done* at least once in their current home. How did these compare to my interviewees' DIY activities? For the survey, I developed a list of 21 possible DIY tasks, assembled to achieve an adequate representation of projects requiring different levels of competence with tools, practical skill and DIY 'know-how' and included garden and landscape related projects. The respondents were asked to indicate which of the tasks they had *done* in their current home. Space was also provided for an open-ended alternative i.e., 'other – please specify'.

### 6.6.1. Projects done in the current home

Figure 20 (below) shows the percentage of the respondents who had done each task. In line with the narrative presented above, it shows that the majority had – in their current home – pruned trees/shrubs (87.4%) and mowed their own lawn (84%). About two thirds indicated that they had cleaned out guttering (65.2%), painted the interior of their home (64.3%) and planted a vegetable patch (62.2%) – another highly-ranked gardening activity. Over half of the respondents had washed down the exterior walls of their home (57.9%), while a similar proportion had painted a ceiling (51.3%). About one third of the sample had built a fence (33.8%). A similar percentage had Gib-stopped, plastered or re-plastered a surface in their home (32.3%). By comparison, and as one might expect, smaller proportions of the respondents had engaged in more the complex and structural DIY projects such as building a deck (17.3%), removing an interior wall (14.3%), fitting a bathroom unit (13.9%) or installing a kitchen (12.4%). Overall, and consistent with the interview data, the results show that the most commonly accomplished DIY projects involved gardening activities, interior decorating (especially painting) and minor repairs.

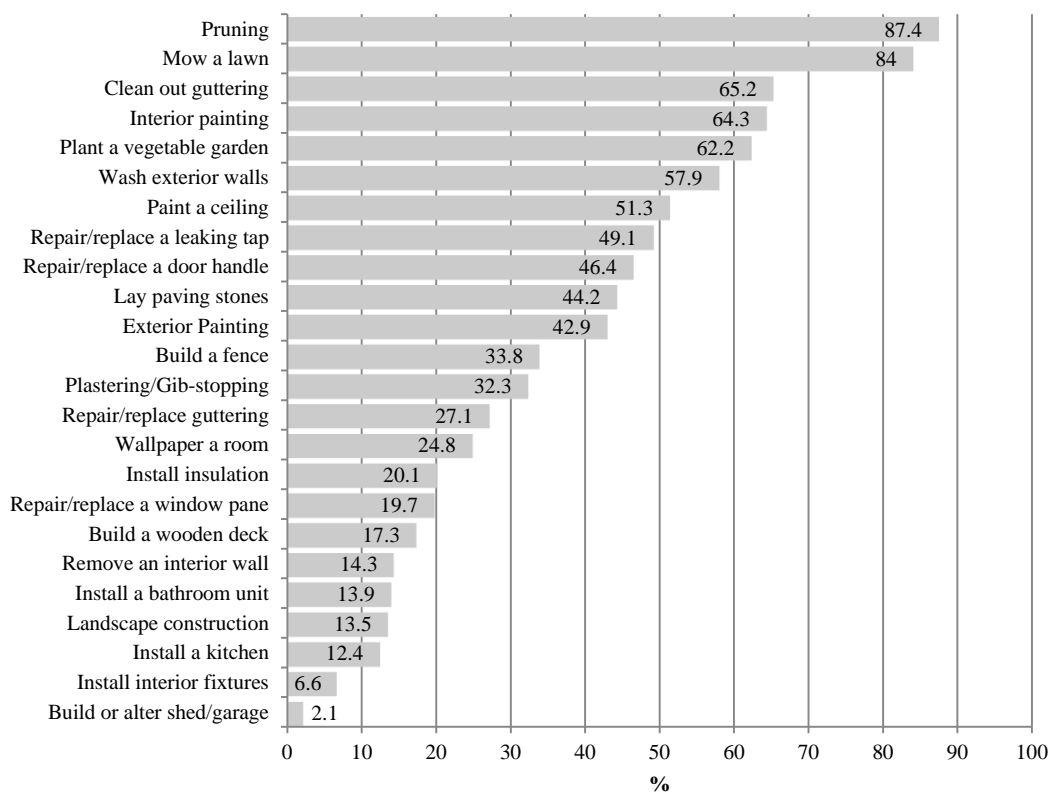


Figure 20: DIY tasks done in the current house and home (n=468)

## 6.7. Chapter summary

This chapter has characterised and described the types of DIY projects my interviewees and survey respondents had done (as opposed to the projects they dreamed of doing). I began by describing the nature of the *interior decorating* work they had carried out. For both men and women, this group of tasks was by far the most common (matched only by *gardening* tasks), and for women it constituted the DIY activity that seemed to provide the greatest sense of enjoyment and satisfaction. Next, I described the activities that the participants discussed under the category of *home repairs and routine maintenance*, including exterior painting and the remedial work they often carried out to fix their own so-called ‘DIY disasters’. A third group of tasks was then described under the broad heading of *building work*. This category comprised more complex building activities – projects which the men I spoke to seemed to especially enjoy. Featuring strongly here were kitchen and bathroom makeovers and the removal of walls for the production of more spacious, open-plan living. Lastly, I described the *gardening and landscape construction* projects that the research participants had undertaken or were doing at the time of the interview, including ornamental planting, sowing lawns, deck and fence building, and the making of outdoor entertainment areas. The chapter has provided a detailed understanding of the ‘types’ of activities which constitute DIY – contextual information which will enable us in the following chapters to zoom in on the *doing* of DIY, exploring how households execute their DIY projects from beginning to end. The next chapter (Chapter Seven) explores and describes the planning activities which, more often than not, precede DIY projects. Chapter Eight explores the bundles of activities and interactions which are involved in the actual execution of projects.

## 7. Planning DIY Projects

### 7.1. Introduction

All my interviewees said that they began their DIY projects with an initial period of *planning*, one which varied in duration and intensity in direct relation to the scale and complexity of the work and the experience, skills and ‘know-how’ of the practitioner(s) involved. At one end of the spectrum were relatively simple and familiar routine maintenance tasks (such as mowing the lawn) which, for all my interviewees, involved very little organising outside of freeing up some time for the job, or, if necessary, purchasing, borrowing or hiring the appropriate gear. At the other end of the spectrum were complex structural DIY projects which generally involved a prolonged period of initial research for the homeowners, and then additional spates of planning, negotiation, purchasing and decision making as the project proceeded through its various stages, each requiring a different combination of tools, materials, skills, information and advice, and/or the enrolment of additional help and expertise when things did not go ‘according to plan’. This chapter provides a detailed description of the flurry of activity which often preceded my interviewees’ DIY projects, including: ‘getting ready’ (7.2); household conversations and the associated production of concept plans and/or the use of industry supplied planning and decision-making tools (Sections 7.3 and 7.4 respectively); budgeting for DIY projects (7.5); and the initial search for information and advice (7.6). Section 7.7 discusses the different (gendered) roles that the men and women I interviewed for this study (i.e., the heterosexual ‘couples’) often assumed in the project planning process.

### 7.2. Getting ready

It was at the outset of the DIY project – or “*point of departure*” as Alan put it (suggesting that his projects were something of a personal *journey*) – that my interviewees said they first started thinking about how to actually turn their ‘idea’ (a modern or more functional kitchen, a new lawn, a deck etc.) into an achievable and affordable set of tasks – in essence, thinking about the practical matters with which they would need to address. Barry, for example, told me that *before starting* projects, he and his wife Janice nearly always considered the cost and timing of the job, the skills and resources needed and, for the “*serious stuff*” especially, the best sequence of tasks. He added that he derived a great deal of enjoyment from these initial household discussions – the conceptualisation and planning that he and his wife did together

(which emphasised the importance of teamwork in the planning of projects)<sup>43</sup> – particularly the initial problem solving:

*We always work through the planning together you know, start with the idea and then do the fine tuning. You see it all come together in your head as you work it out and that's the part we really like ... Before we start the serious stuff I usually draw the concept and think about the cost of materials, and think 'how long will it take, and hell, can I actually do it ?' Like I'm currently planning my pop-up sprinkler system and I've drawn it all up and I'm researching the size of the hose and the nozzles I'll need ... We even plan the timing of our projects like around the seasons, like planning to paint in the warmer months. If you don't plan it you're going to wreck even the smallest job and it'll cost you too much or it'll never get finished. I mean, you do have to know if you can afford it, if you have the skills and you do have to do some rough costing, even if it's just a small project. Sometimes you'll just sit down with your wife and work it out over morning tea with a cup of coffee (Barry).*

Planning a DIY project was a process that, like Barry, all of my interviewees enjoyed. Furthermore, most shared the view that careful planning was essential in order for any project to succeed i.e., to finish within budget, the anticipated timeframe and to an acceptable standard. While a few of my interviewees said that they sometimes 'skipped' the planning stage (engaging in what one interviewee called "*spontaneous DIY*"), most were happy to spend time discussing and/or working out the logistics of their projects before they started the work. Jack, for example, told me that he often spent months working out the technical specifications of a job before beginning, especially when he was about to attempt an unfamiliar task for the very first time. He pointed out that because there was usually 'no-rush' to get DIY projects started, unless it was an urgent repair or when a firm deadline had been set by his wife, then it made sense to take time to prepare, and that it was during this period of planning and research that his excitement for the project really began to build.

Glen, who defined himself as a "*pretty conscientious and keen planner*", noted that he had learned from past errors that preparatory work was not only enjoyable but also wise given the amateurish nature of DIY and, therefore, the real possibility of things going wrong, which might result in what he (and many other interviewees) referred to as a "*DIY disaster*":

---

<sup>43</sup> As noted in the literature review, from an historical perspective, Browne (2000) and McElroy (2006) have also commented on the teamwork evident among couples during the doing of DIY (albeit set around gender specific roles).



*I'm quite happy not to rush straight into a project although I have been guilty of that in the past and that's wasted a lot of time and money ... there's usually always a period of preparation and that'll usually involve my wife feeding me with ideas and me working out how to actually make them into a reality ... and something she'll be happy with ... and I enjoy all that stuff like consulting with people to get the best advice and mapping out the project, you know, getting all the bits and pieces right and thinking about different ways to do the same thing and the best way to go about it. And I've learnt my lesson in the past ... when you don't plan, things inevitably go pear-shaped, the classic DIY disaster, and that's when I get in trouble with the Mrs and it's just not worth it, trust me! And it's DIY remember so you're not expected to be a pro, you can't just jump into a project and expect it to all go well all the time (Glen).*

### **7.3. Concept plans**

The conversations which took place within households as projects were planned and coordinated sometimes materialised in diagrammatic form as initial concept sketches. During my fieldwork, I was shown many of these drawings, some complete with the measurements and calculations the interviewees had made in order to estimate the quantities of the materials needed and the overall cost of the job. Several of them noted that they were also a useful tool for obtaining feedback from non-household members, demonstrating that the planning of a DIY project may extend beyond the immediate household. As one female interviewee put it, plans get drawn up...

*...by my husband to make sure all the bits are in the right place and so I can think about the idea and contribute and so we can show other people so they can have their two-cents worth before we start the work (Linda).*

Another female interviewee said that these initial drawings were part of the process through which she was able to negotiate design and cosmetic aspects of the project with her spouse, which was accepted by both of them as her main strength and interest:

*It's funny because he always sits down and he'll draw up plans all to scale. He did one outline plan [for the bathroom renovation], photocopied it heaps of times and then I sketched in details and we kept going until we came to some sort of agreement. It was bit of a competition to begin with, but the final design was a mix of both of our best ideas, I would say with my design and colour input, that sort of stuff, and his building expertise (Sally).*

The concept plans I was shown were often rough and ready, scribbled down on old pieces of paper or small scraps of wood, and in one case on the rungs of an old wooden ladder. Two

examples follow. The first (Figure 21, below), is Barry's concept sketch for a large outdoor deck and an adjoining 'list' on the same page detailing the number of posts, nails, bags of cement and decking timber that he estimated he would need in order to complete the job. When talking about the sketch, Barry noted that while it was almost always 'his' task to draw up the plans for DIY projects, his wife always provided support in the form of design input and hands-on assistance such as "...*holding the measuring tape*" while he measured up, suggesting the playing out of gender roles within their DIY projects (see Section 3.3.3, page 45).

Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 21: Barry's initial concept sketch for an outdoor deck

The second drawing (Figure 22, below), is Sam's attempt to work out the plumbing parts he would need in order to install a new shower rose and his initial interpretation of how the individual parts might best fit together: one part of a significant bathroom renovation. This was the first time Sam had attempted a plumbing project and, for this reason, he asked his father for some initial input and guidance, demonstrating again that the planning process often involves contributions from non-household members:

*I thought I knew [how to do it] but as I worked through things I pretty quickly realised I had no idea what I was doing so I asked Dad over to walk me through the procedure and we drew up this plan together. I'd have made a mess of it without him ... you don't really want a plumbing disaster on your hands, and I'm pretty sure there's nothing worse than water in a house ... he's done this stuff before so it was a big bonus to tap into his knowledge at the start (Sam).*

Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 22: Sam's planning diagram for the plumbing of a new shower

#### **7.4. Planning tools**

Some of my interviewees said that they also relied on publicly available internet tools to aid them with their technical planning, such as the kitchen planner available on the Bunnings website ([www.bunnings.co.nz](http://www.bunnings.co.nz)) or printed DIY planning guides developed and supplied by the home improvement stores they had visited. The latter can be seen in Figure 23 (below), which shows Terry and Natalie's efforts to plan their kitchen together with a tool they located at a Placemakers store.

Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 23: Terry and Natalie's use of a kitchen planning tool

Other planning tools used by my interviewees included paint colour charts, paint test pots and sample squares of key materials such as tiles, fabric, bench top coatings and floor vinyl, all collected from the home improvement stores they visited during their project planning. Generally, these tools helped them to visualise aesthetic dimensions of the finished project and, ultimately, assisted them in making their final decisions about the colour and style of the products they needed to buy. By far the most commonly used aids were paint-related planning tools, perhaps not surprising given the level of exterior and interior painting that my interviewees told me they undertook. These included colour charts, multimedia colour visualizing tools and ‘paint testers’ – the latter being small pots of tinted paint purchasable from home improvement stores which can be applied over a small space to gain an impression of how different colour tints might look on roofs, walls, ceilings, etc. During the house tours I conducted, I was shown several walls which resembled something of an artist’s palette (Figure 24, below), covered with numerous small patches of paint, evidence of these homeowners’ quest to determine exactly the paint colour they wanted. One interviewee explained her use of these tools in this way:

*You do the little patches and then choose the best [colours] and then do a big patch and you have to do that because there’s just so many colours to choose from ... and paint isn’t cheap, you don’t want to buy a big 10 litre tub and find out you hate the colour and you definitely don’t want to change your mind half way through the project ... we spent hours staring at those patches (Linda).*

Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 24: Sam and Sally's use of test pots and colour charts (author’s photo)

Many of today's home improvement stores have sophisticated paint departments and it is within these departments-within-stores that colour planning aids (along with colour consultants) can easily be accessed. Over the course of this study I collected a large array of colour charts and was struck by the branding associated with them – evidence of the effort which these companies invest in differentiating (or fashioning) paint. A good example is *Resene's* chart for a Bauhaus-inspired colour range developed in collaboration with prominent local clothing designer *Karen Walker*. Another example is the *Dulux Colours of New Zealand* range which links local South and North Island place names to paint tints ([www.dulux.co.nz/Colours\\_of\\_NZ](http://www.dulux.co.nz/Colours_of_NZ)). As also noted earlier (page 74), one of my key informants who had worked in the paint sector for over twenty years believed that these paint aids were evidence of an industry transformation from one “...*focused on matching the type of paint to the project ... say painting a room ... do you need enamel or water based or glossy and so on – to an emphasis on the colour and style ... how you feel about it ... what statement it's making about the person*”. He also mentioned the rise of paint planning internet tools, colour advice websites and more general multimedia tools such as Resene's “...*Paint Easy CD which you just zap into your computer and you have all the different rooms and you put different colours on the walls ... all those things have become much bigger and more popular*”.

## **7.5. Budgeting and finance**

Another common activity my interviewees described when discussing the planning process – especially for large scale DIY projects – was budgeting for the tools and materials needed. From their past experience or from the advice they got from other DIYers, most of my interviewees recognised that resourcing a big project could be a costly affair (with several stating that they often felt they were ‘pouring’ money into their houses via DIY). Yet while many of them tried to cost-out their projects – some going so far as to develop computerised budgets – most reported that their projects always cost them more than they expected. Anna, who described herself as the “*family accountant*”<sup>44</sup> put this down to the fact that she and her husband invariably “*forgot about things*” when they were planning their projects or that they simply underestimated the cost of necessary resources. In response to this problem, Anna said she now always tried to develop a well-researched budget for “*the medium to big stuff [projects]*” and also to monitor and regulate her husband's spending on tools and materials,

---

<sup>44</sup> Again emphasising the adoption or specific roles among DIY couples.

concerned with the fact that he often returned home from hardware stores with items which were not essential for the project. She also noted that the need to remain within these budgets had become more important since she became pregnant with their first child, a view shared by other homeowners who were experiencing financial pressures associated with starting or raising a family (a comment which also draws attention emerging (economic) constraints on DIY at different points in the life cycle):

*The budget is now crucial ... we've got the baby coming along. In fact I had to have a good look at the budget today ... we spent \$400 on Gib-board and I panicked, but it looks like we budgeted for that. It's important that we stay in the budget for the bathroom. We don't have a lot extra and we've got a baby due too, you know, we aim to have this paid off by about August, and we've got a baby to buy stuff for, so it's pretty important to keep an eye on the spending (Anna).*

Alan, who at the time of interviewing was struggling to work out the probable cost of a bathroom renovation, also emphasised the difficulty he experienced when estimating the cost of his DIY projects and accepted that they would always cost more than he anticipated:

*It always ends up costing way more. You kind of know the general things you want to do, such as re-doing the bathroom, but fine tuning those ideas from a vague statement such as re-doing the bathroom to breaking it down and saying 'what type of vanity do you want? What type of bath do you want? Do you want a bath over the shower? Do you want a separate bath? What colours on the walls do you want? Do you want an extractor fan? What type of lights do you want? What type of flooring do you want? Do you want to replace the window joinery? Do you want replace the door?' So you have a vague statement: replace the bathroom. Right, ok, what does that involve? How long will it take? How much will that cost? ... it's hard to visualise these kinds of things and so it's impossible for me to get a fix on the exact costs (Alan).*

For some, especially first homeowners, large DIY projects were often beyond their immediate financial means and, therefore, loans had to be arranged before the project could be launched. A variety of methods were used. James and Anna, for example, negotiated an informal interest-free loan from their parents in order to fund their bathroom and lounge renovation, paying them back in small instalments over the next six months. Shane also borrowed money to finance a renovation project, but did this more formally by extending his mortgage with the bank. Others who needed to finance their DIY purchasing reported using finance cards (Figure 25, page 126), while two of them considered certified home

improvement loan schemes (of which the advertising encourages homeowners to ‘dream’ up bigger projects because they can help you pay for the resources e.g., Figure 26, page 127). One of my interviewees noted that...

*... [home improvement] shops push all sorts of finance deals and loans ... like we used the GE money card at Mitre 10 [Figure 25, below] and paid for the lot, tools and materials, everything we needed ... six month deferred payment and two years interest free ... man, that seemed a pretty good way to do it at the time, and we’re managing to keep up with the repayments, so it’s all good (Sam).*

Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 25: DIY loan advertisement 1 (*Projects*, 2008)



Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 26: DIY loan advertisement 2 (*Projects*, 2007)

Some of my interviewees said that rather than borrowing money, they preferred to save in order to pay for their big DIY projects (although this meant having to delay the work until enough savings had accrued, which was not a problem if there was no deadline to work to). Rose, for example, said she set up a separate DIY savings account for her bedroom redecoration project, putting money aside each week until she had enough to purchase the paint and other necessary materials. Barry and his wife Janice budgeted annually for their DIY, rather than for specific projects, putting away money each week into a designated “home maintenance” account, and drawing on this when needed. Bruce told me that his ex-wife (who he referred to as the household “*treasurer*”) had once set up a savings account for him to use at his discretion for the purchase of tools, what he told me she officially labelled the “*DIY account*” but, in fact, called his “*pocket money*”.

Overall, it was the under-resourced and less experienced first homeowners who drew the most attention to the ‘hidden’ costs of DIY, something my older interviewees said they had also learnt early in their DIY journeys (a point which shows that people gather ‘DIY wisdom’ over the life course, not just practical skills). Most first homeowners were discovering, for the first time, that far from being an inexpensive option, a great proportion of their disposable income was needed in order to purchase the resources for their DIY projects and that this meant that some sacrifices would have to be made. The following two examples demonstrate this point:

*...you do a project and your money just disappears into the house, it’s just amazing how much it can cost ... it does stop you from being able to do other things that you would otherwise have spent your money on. Sam’s stopped motor-cross and we haven’t travelled (Sally). Take something like the new fence we’re planning; the fence will drain our money and stop us from being able to live our usual lifestyle for a couple of weeks. So we tighten up for three-four weeks, and then you get the front fence (Sam).*

*We’re going to sacrifice a holiday down to Queenstown because we’re spending all our money on DIY (James). Because I’m concerned of how much this will cost, and how much stuff we need to buy for the baby. You know cots and stuff like that can get quite pricey. And we would love to go down to Queenstown and have a last weekend down there. So it’s a new phase, a new phase in your life ... We might need to tighten the belt these few months. And we haven’t actually had to do that much. We’ve still gone out partying with everyone. We’ve still gone out for meals. We haven’t had to miss out on much that anyone else has. I think over the next two or three months though we’re going to have to tighten things a wee bit (Anna).*

In Chapter Nine – Tools and Materials – I will talk more about the cost of DIY resources, noting that the arrival of cheap tools and materials has provided a cheap option for those DIYers working to budget, making projects more affordable and, therefore, possible. In that chapter I will also discuss the way in which ‘thrift’ and ‘resourcefulness’ emerged as a theme in the interviews (a way to cut costs and save within projects), with many homeowners stock-piling and re-cycling materials in order to bring down costs and save. Suffice to say here, however, that the cost of the project was often a key consideration during the planning stage.

## **7.6. Information and advice**

Another characteristic of the planning associated with my interviewees’ DIY projects was the search for information and advice (and project planning tools) from outside the household. Barry commented that the need for this type of input was part and parcel of the planning process for home improvement projects because...

*...you’re a DIYer not a pro so you need information and advice to fill the knowledge gap – usually with me it’s a major knowledge gap. Of course there will always be projects that you think you can start without getting help, but for most projects you grab a bit of information from people here and there before you get started (Barry).*

Whatever the specific need for information, my interviewees’ preferred source was a friend or family member who had done a similar project. Anna and James, for example, said that prior to their bathroom renovation they visited friends (other first homeowners they knew) to observe how they had tiled around their bath and the materials they had used, and also to discuss the cost of the work. Sam, another first homeowner, also sought guidance from his friends, “*other handymen*” he trusted and who were willing to answer his questions as he framed up his projects:

*Before we did the bath, I talked to Grant and I talked to Alex. They’re not experts; they’re just other handymen I know. They’re just guys like old school mates that have just done it themselves so they could give me fresh advice. They also gave us a good idea on what to buy and they were happy to help me out when I got stuck a few times (Sam). Yeah, Sam was always calling up Mark [his father] to get advice on plumbing [see Figure 22, page 121, for a resulting project drawing], and now John’s ringing us to ask us for bathroom advice, so a little information network has developed among his mates (Sally).*

Another common source of information was a friend or family member who was formally qualified in a house-related trade (such as plumbing or electrical work) – a person who could offer some *expert* advice at no cost. Hamish described it in this way:

*I really use my friends and family as an advice network – from advice on materials to everything like advice and knowledge. I've got a good group of them who are 'tradies' and they've got a broad range of knowledge from structural engineer, architecture, electrics, and, you know, they're the ones you sometimes turn to (Hamish).*

To take another example, Hazel and Gary said that prior to the execution of their bathroom renovation they consulted a family member who was a qualified plumber for advice about replacing water pipes, water pressure, and the tap ware they were intending to install, advice he was only too happy to provide them for free:

*We did all the pipes, all the plumbing underneath the floor and all the taps and tap ware and that took a couple of phone calls to an uncle who's a plumber. That didn't cost us anything, but just someone on the other end of the phone who knew what they were talking about, the water pressure and stuff, the difficult things, and he was stoked that we called him to ask him for help (Hazel).*

While it was common to source information and advice from friends and family members, (who were also DIYers and/or qualified practitioners), my interviewees also frequently sought initial guidance from staff at home improvement stores. Mark, for example, told me how he had recently visited *Placemakers* – the product and tool retailer – to seek some advice on tiling, a project that he and his wife were not confident in starting without some preliminary instruction. He described the information search in this way:

*...it [tiling] was all new to us. So we went to Placemakers at the Riccarton branch for some tips and I struck a man in the aisle of the tiling department and he would have spent a good half hour or more talking about tiling and the pitfalls and how to do it and what products I needed and how to go up the wall – he was fantastic and gave us the confidence we needed to have a go. If you go to a company like that, they actually employ people who know what they're talking about in their area ... they employ people with a lot of knowledge and experience in different industries – ex-builders and ex-plumbers and they have screeds of knowledge ... I've had plenty of good advice from them (Mark).*

Like Mark, all of my research participants said that they appreciated the information and advice they were able to glean from knowledgeable staff working at home improvement stores. Some, such as Bruce, said that they had developed a strong rapport with particular staff members and through these social encounters, had come to know some employees by their first names. Rose provided a similar story, having developed a strong relationship with the owner of her local decorating store, a woman who had provided her with a great deal of helpful decorating advice over the previous ten years.

In most cases, my interviewees' expectations and evaluations of the staff working at DIY stores were high and most expressed great disappointment when they interacted with an employee who could not provide expert advice on the DIY products in store, answer their technical questions or offer instructional tips. Jack described his feelings about this situation:

*I really like to use our local hardware store. The nearest one is Mitre 10. I find the blokes in there quite skillful and they're great with giving advice. Compared with the massive stores, well I find their staff all young and I don't really feel that they know what I'm talking about when I'm describing what I'm doing and what I need. They seem to have lots of young people but they just don't have the knowledge (Jack).*

All the key informants I interviewed who worked in the home improvement retail sector were aware that homeowners enjoyed and often relied on the information and advice their staff provided and they worked hard to make this information service more readily available. A representative from Placemakers pointed out that their company's slogan *Know-How, Can-Do* partly captured this exchange of information – how his employees were willing and able to solve customers' problems thereby enabling them to do the work within projects, which was also part of a store strategy aimed at getting the customer to return.

*We work very hard on the quality of staff that we recruit and train. We have the view that the DIYer will come into the store and spend time with us and they'll gain knowledge and we'll get a repeat customer relationship (Placemakers).*

Representatives from Mitre 10 and Bunnings provided similar comments:

*One thing that's really popular is in-store information and we try to employ specialists, quite a few tradesmen and plumbers etc. So when the DIYer comes in, they get the service. We get heaps of compliments about our plumber – he gives people all the confidence and information they need to start the job (Mitre 10).*

*People come into the store with an idea and we have experts who can help them work out how to do it. Within departments we hire qualified tradesmen – we have electricians, plumbers, builders in our store. If you have a project you are working on, you can come to the store and get some decent advice from someone who actually knows what they are talking about (Bunnings).*

It is important to note here that home improvement stores offer information and advice to homeowners in a variety of other formats, such as DIY ‘clinics’. Here, information is transmitted in a class-like setting in the store, each clinic providing tuition on a specific DIY project or single building technique or tool. Some are developed and staged especially to meet the needs of female DIYers (so-called ‘SHE.I.Yers’, see BOX 3, pages 133-134) who might be attempting a project for the very first time. A key informant from *Bunnings* had this to say about the educational events which they staged at their outlets:

*We’ve got the DIY clinics every weekend, ladies nights and community fun days ... so we’re not just selling product, we’re also marketing and providing services. And that’s all about trying to educate the customers ... we have dedicated areas for clinics and they get good attendance ... we do marketing for the clinics. The press advertising we do each week lists those clinics and the topics for the clinics (Bunnings).*

While *people* (friends, family and staff at home improvement stores) were the preferred source of DIY information, my interviewees utilised a variety of other instructional media. For example, some turned to the generic information provided in the popular DIY print media (Leonard et al., 2004), such as the home improvement manuals they owned or had inherited from family members, DIY newspaper columns, or the ‘how-to’ brochures produced by today’s hardware stores and DIY product manufacturers. For some, library books were also a information source, although only usually when very specific information was needed.

Some interviewees had used the Internet to locate information in preparation for their projects, such as on the New Zealand website BuildEazy.com, and internet sites developed in other countries (such as diynetwork.com and You-Tube, the latter of which provides video footage of projects being carried out from start to finish, complete with an instructional narrative). Jack, for example, talked excitedly about the DIY information he had recently discovered online, especially the footage provided on You-Tube of a router being used to cut a kitchen bench top, a project he said he “*had in the pipeline*”.

### BOX 3: SHE.I.Y

Over the last decade, there has been a surge of media interest in the emergence of ‘SHE.I.Y’ (Keane, 2006) both internationally (Brown, 2006) and in New Zealand (NZHJ, 2004; Welham, 2004; Decker, 2005; Temple, 2006; Stewart, 2007; Jervis, 2008; Magill, 2008). The reporting investigates the recent proliferation of DIY information and advice services, DIY classes, tools, websites and multimedia, books, manuals and magazines (Figure 27, page 134) tailored specifically to meet the needs of the women who do, or may want to carry out, their own home improvements. Some media commentators have linked the phenomenon to an increase in the number of single female homeowners who, by either choice (for fun) or necessity (i.e., ‘I don’t have a handyman in the house’ and/or cannot afford to hire professionals’), choose to improve their houses themselves. The market research company *Euromonitor International* (2008) attributes the rise of female DIYing to current changes in the global housing marketplace (in Westernised countries at least) where more single working women with disposable income are purchasing houses themselves, acquiring tools and then using their own practical skills to decorate and maintain their dwelling (also see Brown, 2006). Some commentators have suggested that women from couple households are simply expanding their role in the world of DIY, shifting their involvement from the more traditional position of interior decorator and DIY purchasing decision-maker to fully-fledged DIY practitioner.

While a combination of factors is likely behind the rise of female DIY, tool manufacturers have been quick to tap into this emergent and potentially profitable market segment by manufacturing and distributing DIY tools designed especially for female use. While some have produced “novelty” tools and home improvement accessories such as ladies tool belts (pink or adorned with floral patterning) others have focused on manufacturing high-quality hand and power tools for these more serious female DIYers – implements which are stylish but also smaller, lighter and shaped ergonomically to fit better into the hand of the female home improver (Brown, 2006). An article in the *New Zealand Hardware Journal* (NZHJ, 2007b, p.24) outlined four main characteristics of tools designed for women, namely those that were: easy to start, lightweight (smaller and more portable), versatile with interchangeable parts (to meet the ‘multi-tasking’ tendencies of women), and environmentally friendly (utilising low emission generating and efficient four-cycle engines which also do away with the need to mix petrol and oil).

Many DIY stores have been retrofitted to appeal more to their growing female customer base, such as B&Q which has recently revamped its UK stores in order to be more female-friendly (Attwood, 2007, also see Strategic Direction, 2005) as have US-based Lowes and Home Depot (Euromonitor International, 2008). Empowering women with the knowledge and confidence to use these tools has also become a priority for many retailers. In New Zealand, ‘ladies nights’ where women gather in DIY stores to receive free DIY instruction from key suppliers (often with free food ‘nibbles’ and drinks) have become commonplace and are well-advertised and attended across the country (Welham, 2004; Temple, 2006; Magill, 2008). According to one DIY store manager, these classes enable women to feel “comfortable in what was previously thought of as a male dominated environment” thereby generating a new “key customer” base (Temple, 2006, p.6).

The female DIY phenomenon has also created a new niche market for savvy entrepreneurs and more established home improvement businesses seeking to capitalise on the market shift. For example, many popular home improvement magazines now include columns providing female homeowners with DIY information and advice; for example, the *SHE.I.Y girls guide to renovation know-how* (Figure 27, page 134) which is included in the Australasian magazine *Handyman*, covering everything from landscaping tips to safe chainsaw use. In North America and the UK ‘tool parties’ for women have recently become very popular, involving small gatherings of friends meeting together socially to enjoy food and drink and also the company of a sales representative selling them

DIY tools. These ‘Tupperware-style’ parties were first set up in 2000 in North America by *Tomboy Tools* which now employs over 500 party consultants; the concept has since been exported to Britain where it has also been well-received by female homeowners (Brown, 2006). Website-based companies also encourage women to “have-a-go” at their own home improvements by providing the know-how needed for them to do DIY. One of the first to be launched was American-based [www.bejane.com](http://www.bejane.com); others quickly followed such as the UK-based site [www.pinktoolbox.co.uk](http://www.pinktoolbox.co.uk). Indeed, New Zealand has its own versions of these websites such as Hello Dolly ([www.hellodolly.co.nz](http://www.hellodolly.co.nz)) and DIY Devotees ([www.diydevoteesltd.com](http://www.diydevoteesltd.com)) both of which promote the fun that can be had by carrying out DIY while, at the same time, advertising myriad (often well-branded) home improvement products for women.

Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 27: Illustrations of the female DIY craze (top left: *Keane*, 2006; top right: *NZMJ*, 2006; bottom left: advertising brochure collected 2010; bottom right: Broman, 2004, book cover)



Some of my interviewees identified the broadcast media as a *potential* source of DIY information, such as New Zealand versions of the television programmes *Changing Rooms* and *DIY Rescue* and international shows aired on television such as *60 Minute Makeover* and *Grand Design*. Interestingly, most valued these programmes for the ideas they provided (especially in regard to colour schemes) rather than as a source of step-by-step practical advice. Most found them entertaining and a way to keep-up-to date with the latest housing fashions, but they did not consciously watch these shows expecting to be educated on practical aspects of DIY (thereby supporting the international DIY TV research reviewed in Section 3.2.2.2 (page 36) and wider debates (Powell, 2009; Rosenberg, 2008) associated with the shift over time from instructional DIY media to more ‘entertaining’ forms).

Some interviewees, such as Linda who commented: “...*they excite you to get into DIY*”, suggested that these shows provided the inspiration to start projects. Two of the older interviewees stressed that, in the past, DIY television programmes in New Zealand were much more instructional and therefore more “useful” (as Bruce put it). Bunny Rigold’s DIY show, which aired on New Zealand television in during the 1970s and 80s, for example, resulted in the publication of two DIY manuals authored by the host (Figure 28, below).

Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 28: Bunny Rigold’s (“Television’s Home Handyman”) DIY manual (Rigold, 1976, book cover)

Given the considerable information and advice gathering my interviewees conducted prior to the execution of their projects, I decided to investigate the most common information sources in my DIY survey. I first asked respondents if they had sought information and/or advice about DIY over the last twelve months; about two-thirds of the total sample indicated that they had (69.4%, n=324). The responses showed that the sourcing of information or advice was most prevalent among those in the 20-34 year age group (85.5%), and lessened with age (35-49 = 74%, 50-64 = 66% and 65+ = 61.7%). A probable explanation for this trend is that as one accumulates DIY knowledge over the course of time, the need to seek technical information and advice falls (or, alternatively, people become more realistic about what they can handle with life experience including the unanticipated costs/cost over runs of earlier ‘mega’ projects).

The respondents who had sought information and advice were then asked to indicate who and/or from where they sought the information (Figure 29, below). Over half said they had consulted with staff at a DIY store (52.2%) and with friends (52.2%). Just under half indicated that they had conferred with family members (45.4%) and, similarly, trades-people they knew (42%). These four categories – all of which involve face-to-face interaction with other people – represent the most common sources from which DIY information and advice was obtained, a finding consistent with my interviews. By comparison, just a quarter of those who sought information said they had used the internet (23.8%). A similar proportion said they had consulted the pages of DIY manuals and magazines (22.2%). Just eight per cent sought information and/or advice from television shows.

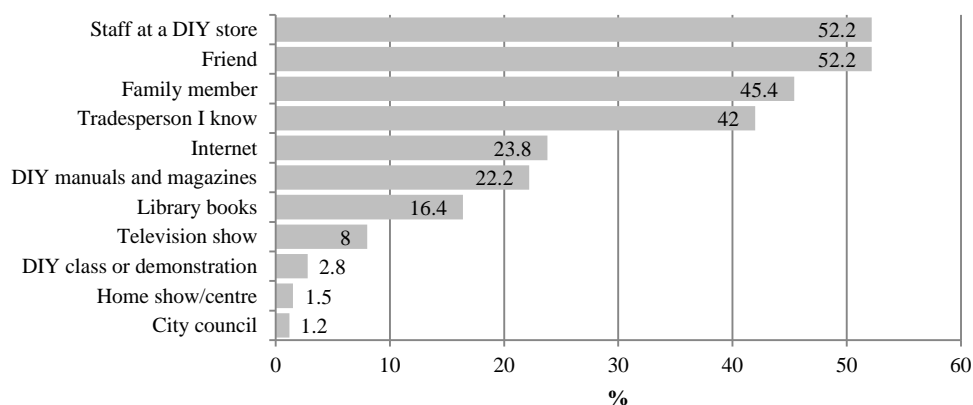


Figure 29: Sources of DIY information/advice – last 12 months (n=324). (Respondents were able to indicate more than one source.)

## 7.7. The gendered nature of project planning

Before considering the way in which the actual physical work within projects is accomplished (in the next chapter), it is important and useful to note here that among the couples I interviewed, there was a subtle gendering of the project planning process (which flowed through into the doing of the work as we will see in the next chapter). (See Footnote 41, page 105, for relevant links back to the literature review.) During the planning of projects it was clear that the men tended to focus their efforts on thinking through the logistics of the project work, such the type of tools required and the quantity of materials needed, while their female counterparts tended to prefer, and very much enjoy, thinking about aesthetic elements of the project, such as the colour of the paint and the type of fixtures and fittings to be used (although as I have shown earlier, they also helped their male counterparts think through project logistics). Natalie, for example, excitedly explained how she recently went to a hardware store by herself to conduct research and to gather brochures on the latest styles of bathroom fixtures and fittings and modern bathroom colours, all in preparation for their bathroom renovation. She said that she enjoyed doing this much more than the actual work, which she left to her husband, and which she called his “*department*”.

*The measuring tape comes out quite often as I think of some new design for the bathroom, and I have to re-measure and see if the idea would work and that's basically the fun bit ... You're certainly not going to find me doing the work, that's Terry's department. I'll be off gathering colour samples and tile samples and, you know, what sort of taps we'll use and the latest designs ... more fun less work ... I'm in charge of the colours ... I'd hate to think what would happen to the place if it was left up to him (Natalie).*

The following exchange between Anna and James emphasises a similar point – that colour and design ‘thinking’ was something that ‘she’ was confident with, enjoyed and took control of, while the actual planning and doing of the work was ‘his’ specialty and interest:

*I don't think I particularly enjoy the work process all that much. No, I enjoy thinking about the plan of what it will look like, like doing this designing stage and I think that's quite nice and I do quite like the final touchy stuff, but the painting and that kind of thing. To me, the process of James doing this bathroom is a process, and the sooner it gets done the better ... but I'm not really involved with the work and the work planning. [Looking at James] I think you probably do enjoy it to a certain extent, but I'm looking forward to it being done and going “Oh, great job” (Anna). The pressures on! Well, sometimes I wonder how much Anna understands what the whole process of building, in comparison with my knowledge of how much ... (James). Oh I*

*don't think I know anything. Absolutely, I don't claim to have any knowledge of the building side of it at all, that's your speciality, I'm the designer (Anna).*

Anna's eagerness to take charge of the artistic/aesthetic aspects of the project became apparent when we talked more about the bathroom renovation that she and her husband were planning to do. Her research efforts and thinking in this area were manifest in a special bathroom 'project folder' which was ...

*...full of pamphlets and full of pages from magazines ... all my research stuff. And that's something I can do, is get on the Internet and I spent a bit of time on the Internet looking at websites that discuss bathroom design and tiles, so I can get an idea of different colour schemes and what kind of flooring we can use. Because that's something I can do, is look at ideas, you know I can't do the building but I can at least get ... one thing I can do is think creatively about what will look good and what colours and what floors and things like that ... magazines from the library and Internet and just talking to other people, getting good advice (Anna).*

My key informants from the home improvement retail sector were well aware of the fact that females were influential in the final purchasing decisions, especially decisions in regards to the colours and textures of materials used within projects.

*Our [customer] numbers are pretty close to 50/50 male and female. But what that doesn't indicate is the influence of the female shopper in the purchase decision, prior to the male entering the store ... the bathroom category for instance, where 85 per cent of the purchases are largely determined by women. The actual purchase may not be made by women, but they're the people that make the decision at the end of the day (Mitre 10 New Zealand marketing representative).*

## **7.8. Chapter summary**

This chapter has explored and described the *planning* activities which commonly occur at the beginning of DIY projects. The activities (and social interactions) which I covered in the chapter included the development of basic concept plans, thinking through anticipated practical and technical problems, discussing and making initial design and colour decisions, and thinking about the costs, skills and resources needed in order to complete the work to an acceptable standard. All my research participants' (although some more than others) said they enjoyed these initial planning activities, particularly the intellectual stimulation, conversations and associated excitement involved in transforming an 'idea' into a realistic

and achievable set of practical tasks. For the couples I interviewed, planning DIY projects typically involved ‘teamwork’ and the playing out of gender roles (often defined by them as his or her “department”). The chapter has also highlighted my research participants’ (often intensive) initial search for information and advice which they felt was necessary before beginning the physical work. For this type of information and advice, my interviewees often called upon close friends and family members – other DIYers within their social network – and staff at home improvement stores. Other resources used by my research participants in their project planning included DIY manuals and magazines, colour charts, multimedia resources, ‘how-to’ brochures, library books, the internet and, to a lesser extent, home makeover television shows. I now turn my attention to matters surrounding the *doing* of the work within my research participants’ DIY projects.

## 8. Doing DIY

### 8.1. Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the *execution* of DIY projects. The chapter has five main sections. In the first section (8.2), I look at the organisation of labour across projects, from those carried out via the efforts of one homeowner alone through to those executed by multiple householders with varying forms of help and cooperation from family, friends, neighbours and paid contractors. In the second section (8.3), I investigate the timing of DIY projects, beginning with a discussion about how my interviewees managed to ‘find’ time for carrying out the work, which often meant diverting time away from other discretionary activities, such as primary leisure interests or social engagements. I then look at the ‘duration’ of DIY projects (Section 8.4), with most of my interviewees noting that their DIY undertakings almost always took more time than they expected – the flow of work often stymied by unexpected contingencies (such as running out of resources or a turn for the worse in the weather). In the fourth section (8.5), I discuss the way in which my interviewees learned, applied and honed the practical skills necessary for carrying out DIY projects, and how their skill repertoire developed over the course of their housing and DIY ‘journey’. This leads to a discussion in the fifth section (8.6), about so-called DIY disasters, which often eventuated when there was a mismatch between DIY skills and know-how and the demands of the project. While my interviewees acknowledged that some of their DIY projects never got finished (perhaps as the result of a DIY disaster or loss of motivation), those which did reach completion were described as a great source of pride and satisfaction and, for this reason, in the sixth and final section (Section 8.7) of the chapter, I explore the significance of the ‘completed project’.

### 8.2. Labour structures – who does what?

#### 8.2.1. Household DIY

Who physically carries out the DIY projects in a household? For the single-homeowners I interviewed for my research, the answer to this question was obvious – there was no choice, with the responsibility for the making and maintenance of home (via DIY should they choose to do it this way) falling squarely on their shoulders. But for the couple-households I interviewed, answers to this question were more varied and complex. In this section of the

chapter I want to discuss some of the ways the couples I spoke to divided up or allocated specific DIY tasks (thereby working alone) and/or worked collaboratively towards the accomplishment of specific DIY projects, demonstrating ‘teamwork’ in the making and maintenance of home. (Subsequent subsections describe how non-household members were also involved in the physical execution of project work.)

Most of my interviewees from couple-households described the execution of DIY projects in their homes as collaborative household interactions, with many of them using the term ‘teamwork’ to describe how their DIY projects were typically accomplished. The notion of teamwork was especially evident in my interviewees’ descriptions of ‘one-off’ interior decorating, building and renovation projects, which were generally regarded as exciting and significant household events and, therefore, something they wanted to physically contribute towards. While the way in which individuals made these contributions varied widely across projects, in all cases it seemed that most couples had struck a working balance based around each other’s capabilities (skills and knowledge) and enthusiasms.

It is important to note at this point of the thesis that most of my interviewees described the experience of working alongside their partner on a DIY project as ‘quality time’. Linda, to take one example, told me that she enjoyed spending time with her husband working on something productive and meaningful. Elaborating, she said:

*...you know Mike, you’re working towards a goal together and that’s a great feeling like you’re making a nicer place together and that’s quite important. When I think about it, he’s away at work for 40 or 50 hours a week, so it’s nice to have some time to be able to work together on something ... towards something, you know, just spending time together (Linda).*

While ‘teamwork’ was a prevalent interview theme among couples, some of my participants who were in couple-households pointed out that they occasionally carried out DIY projects alone. There were several common situations when this occurred. Firstly, some of them felt that by carrying out or ‘dabbling’ in some DIY they were able to momentarily escape from the pressures they felt that existed in their everyday lives, or had built-up over the day or week at work. In this sense, doing DIY was a form of escape and revitalisation. (This finding can tentatively be linked to the research of historians Roland (1958) and Gelber (1997, 1999) who have argued that DIY emerged in the 1950s as a means for working class males to relax – but not rest – after their week at work. The finding more directly supports the findings of the more recent survey research reported by SIRC (2003)). Jerry, for example, said that he

occasionally enjoyed retreating to the quiet of his shed to do some woodworking or simply to tidy up his tools. He found this time alone rejuvenating after a long and stressful day at his busy workplace. When we toured his house he showed me a television cabinet he had built from plywood and constructed in his garage workshop during several of these solitary “*shed-escapes*” (as he called them). James, to take another example, said he also occasionally enjoyed time spent alone pottering around the house, attending to miscellaneous jobs or retiring to his shed to “*chip away at little projects [that he had] on the go*” – time alone which he also found relaxing and reviving. Barry described similar instances as “*time-out*”. While gardening was most often described as a shared household activity (and indeed the couples I spoke to said they thoroughly enjoyed working together in the garden), some of them also said they enjoyed being outside in the garden alone, engaging in some spontaneous weeding or tidying, with no organised project in mind. Linda, for example, said that time alone in the garden (‘gardening’) was, for her, something of a therapeutic experience:

*Everything always seems so busy and rushed for me; I’m always rushing here and there for the children, or to the supermarket or for whatever reason. But when I’m in the garden, you know, just the wheelbarrow and me, just digging around randomly, you know, chatting away to myself and thinking about things, I find myself becoming much more relaxed ... I really enjoy it actually, it’s good medicine for the mind (Linda).*

Secondly, some DIY was carried out alone because the task (or cluster of tasks) was understood to be the responsibility of just one household member. This allocation of responsibility was clearest around routine maintenance tasks, with these jobs commonly assigned to the male of the house (with several of my female interviewees describing such tasks as their spouse’s ‘department’). As such, it was the ‘man about the house’ in these couple-households who generally mowed the lawn, cleared the gutters, and so on. None of the men I spoke to complained about these obligations or considered this position an undesirable one. Instead, most of them perceived it as their way of making a tangible and positive contribution to the ongoing upkeep of the family home. Of course, my female interviewees also engaged in this form of DIY – Anna, for instance, told me that she enjoyed surprising her husband James by occasionally mowing the lawn or having a go at a home repair herself – but that ‘usually’ it was their male spouses who took responsibility for maintaining the physical integrity of the home. The only issue raised in regards to this (and only by two of the men I interviewed) was when they occasionally felt pressured or “*nagged*” (Max) by their spouse to keep up with the maintenance work.



A third reason given for carrying out a project alone – an explanation provided by two of my interviewees – was that they had voluntarily taken full ownership of the work and did not want their partners to “*interfere*” (Linda). This was not because they felt their partners were incompetent and might make a mess of the task, but that they viewed the project as a personal challenge and wanted to complete it alone, from start to finish. The best example of this was Linda’s challenge to herself to plaster and paint the kitchen – a personal project from which she excluded her partner. She summed up her motives in this way: “...*it was my project and my challenge and to be honest, I wanted all the glory*” (Linda).

Before closing this section, it is necessary to consider Charlie’s interesting and unique case which resulted in him, in his view, doing all the DIY by himself. Charlie told me that since he and his wife Elizabeth purchased their first home in the 1940s, it had been his sole responsibility to execute *all* their home and landscaping projects – the only exceptions being vegetable gardening (which he and Elizabeth had always enjoyed doing together) and the making of drapes (which was a task his wife had always done alone). In Charlie’s home there was, therefore, a very clear and distinct gendered division of domestic labour whereby all the DIY done was Charlie’s work while, as he states in the quotation below, his wife Elizabeth<sup>45</sup> took care of all the “housework” (see Oakley, 1974 for a sociological interpretation of housework). Importantly, in elaborating, Charlie told me that this was not a conscious decision, but rather “*just the way it [had] worked itself out*” naturally in their home and, therefore, was an arrangement he had never questioned:

*I do all the DIY around here, all of it, decorating, building, all the work on the house ... it’s certainly my responsibility here and that’s worked out very well with my wife who prefers to tend to the housework and the like. She’s never told me to do it [DIY]; I just get up and do what needs doing with no fuss. My wife does help with some of the decisions of course; like she’ll choose the wallpaper for me to hang, but I’ll always be the one doing the work and it’s always been that way I think – I can’t think of a single project [we’ve done] together ... anyway, its worked wonderfully for us because we’re both just happily contributing to the upkeep of our house in a way we consider enjoyable (Charlie).*

---

<sup>45</sup> Elizabeth did not participate in the interview, choosing to sit in another room while I talked to Charlie. When we first met she told me that she could not participate in the interview as she did not do DIY and was not interested, indicating that she agreed that the DIY done at their place was Charlie’s domain. I never got the opportunity to ask Elizabeth if she enjoyed taking care of the housework, which, in hindsight, would have been a great question to ask.

### 8.2.2. Helping-hands

While by strict definition DIY refers to the execution of home improvement projects by one or more of the owner-occupiers, my interviewees told me that many of their projects had been accomplished with help from family members and friends who were not living in the house. In most cases, this help was used to accomplish large scale projects which could not have been achieved by the homeowner(s) alone (because they did not have the expertise) or accomplished in the timeframe which was available to them (i.e., an extra pair of hands was needed to speed up the work). According to most of my interviewees, this practical help was firmly centred on the convention of reciprocity, an implicit give-and-take social arrangement with one person providing help to another with the understanding that similar help would be available to them in the future. Many of the homeowners to whom I spoke, including Barry, stressed that the notion of reciprocity was a central tenet of the Kiwi DIY tradition:

*...you have to help your mates – that’s all part of it [DIY], very much part of it. And you know, you might need a lift with something one day and if you’ve helped out a friend, you know their help will come your way one day, no question about it (Barry).*

While all my interviewees could recall helping a friend with a DIY project, or receiving similar help at some point in time, it was my male interviewees who had the most to say about this exchange between friends. At the centre of their narratives were two interwoven themes: necessity and ‘mateship’ (or the proving of oneself as a dependable friend) (see Phillips (1987) for further references to and links between mateship and Kiwi masculinity.) My male interviewees reported that they usually only received help from friends on their most serious DIY projects where an extra pair of hands was *needed*, especially when the work simply could not have proceeded without that extra help. The measure of a good ‘mate’, some of them said, was their willingness to lend a hand. Max, for example, recalled how his “*good mates*” helped him mix and pour the cement for a driveway which he and his wife Mary could not have accomplished alone. Hamish described how his “*mates*” helped him remove several trailer loads of shingle from the backyard and replace it with topsoil in preparation for a new lawn; heavy work which was made a great deal easier with the help of several close “*mates*”. Linda pointed out that her husband often “*called in a few of his DIY mates*” when her own assistance was inadequate for the task in question, such as when he needed a hand lifting heavy materials into place. She also explained that the type of work she tended to do (generally decorating and painting) did not usually warrant the recruitment of help:

*Painting and decorating are things you can do yourself at your own pace ... there's no heavy lifting and no great urgency to get it done and it is fun to chip away at it yourself ... decorating is actually quite a personal thing, I think. I have helped a few girlfriends with their projects but it's not all that common among the girls we know, it seems to be a bloke's thing (Linda).*

The male interaction and bonding that occurred during the execution of DIY projects is clear in the quotation below.

*I used to go around to my mate's place when he was doing up his house. I remember spending four hours one day just sitting with him burning paint off the exterior weatherboards just talking about DIY as we went along. He knew all about the lead paints so he had covered his garden in old sheets so we didn't get old burnt lead paint on the plants. He had a rule – if I helped him he'd always shout me a pie. I don't think that it's a spoken rule that there's some reward but you'll normally end up having a few beers shouted if you help someone out. I mean, don't go around helping your mate thinking that you're going to get paid; you do it because it's just a chance to hang out with them (Glen).*

While DIY projects often involved 'mates' helping each other out, they were also described as an activity that brought family members together, thereby providing a platform for enhanced family cohesion and social interaction. This was especially evident during my participant observations, where I witnessed family members dropping by and showing a keen interest in the progress being made and/or spontaneously lending a hand. While immediate family members were frequent 'helpers', most interviewees told me that it was their 'fathers' who took the most interest in their DIY projects and seemed to help them out the most. Linda said that for her, this was a positive aspect of DIY, providing a rare opportunity for her and her husband John to get together and communicate with her father. Jerry and Sam both said that their fathers were also especially keen helpers. Jerry believed that his father simply enjoyed being around the family and that DIY gave him an excuse to visit and spend time with them while feeling good about helping them out in a practical sense. Like Jerry, Sam enjoyed the help he received from his father and also the skills he was able to learn from him:

*It was cool hanging out with Dad, and doing the job ... that was cool. And it was good to have it finished and to say that we'd done it together ... It's good to have a handyman Dad I guess, you can learn so much from them because they've generally done it all (Sam).*

While parent help was always appreciated, James drew attention to the fact that his father sometimes “*overdid it*” – taking over the project which for him had become something of a tolerable annoyance:

*Don't get me wrong, I value his help but he's got a habit of taking over and he's got his own method for everything. If I mention I've got a project on he'll be around the next day with his toolkit! I feel like I'm the lackey and he's the boss ... that can be a bit annoying (James).*

Comments from my older interviewees (all of whom had children of their own and frequently helped them with their home improvement projects) provided further insight into these ‘family DIY encounters’. Jack and Jane, for example, said that they thoroughly enjoyed helping their children with their projects seeing it as a pleasurable form of parental support – helping them to get started in their first homes. They said they were always willing to get in and do the messy jobs because it felt good to demonstrate to their children that they were still capable of doing DIY and also to pass on some of their skills. Simultaneously, it showed their children that they were genuinely interested in being a part of their lives.

*We're always out helping the children with their projects. Our youngest two sons are doing their houses up and we've been around and helped in various ways. It's really nice because you can teach them a few things and you share the tools too. It's like a little kick start for them and a feel good thing for us, it feels good to be part of what they're doing (Jane). Yeah, and the involvement I've had with the boys is out of both interest and wanting to help them along a bit ... it's really satisfying to help them along and to watch them start to get their own maintenance routine going ... I hope they've picked up a few things from me along the way (Jack).*

Charlie shared a similar story; how he always helped his children set up their homes, believing that it was his fatherly ‘duty’ to help his children out in this way. Retired and with plenty of spare time available to him, Charlie held the view that helping his children and grandchildren make and maintain their homes (especially when they were busy working and raising children) was a very good way to spend his time, because it was both productive and social. He also said that he enjoyed helping his children and grandchildren with their DIY for the opportunity to demonstrate his competence and pass on practical skills and knowledge<sup>46</sup>.

---

<sup>46</sup> As reported in the literature, Mansvelt (1997a, 1997b) found that older New Zealand homeowners enjoyed doing DIY around their own homes because it provided them with a sense of personal self-worth and also made them feel productive (thereby challenging the perception of inactivity in older age). My findings also suggest that older New Zealanders also seek opportunities to display their practical nous beyond the confines of their *own* houses and homes.

*I help my boys to set up their homes and now my grandchildren ... The first house one of them built, well I helped build the garage and put down the concrete paths and put up fences and stuff like that. We put a terrace down ... I did another garage at my other boy's house ... I really enjoy it, working with them. I use to get up and say "right, it's Saturday, that's right I'm around at so-and-so's place today". It was part of family life ... First of all I'm their father and its part of the job to help them ... it more of a pleasure than anything else. I did quite a lot of work for the boys and I hope they've picked up a thing or two from me (Charlie).*

### **8.2.3. "Informal" professional help**

Practical help was also occasionally provided to my interviewees by friends or family members who were professional contractors, especially where difficult or regulated work needed to be done. While these 'helpers' often provided their services for free, they sometimes charged 'mate's rates' (a generous tax-free, hourly cash rate worked out between the friends, also known as 'under-the-table' work). Natalie, for example, told me that she had recently contacted a friend who was a professional builder to help her husband Terry with their upcoming bathroom renovation, having realised the disjuncture between the complexity of this job and her husband's level of plumbing and building skill. Natalie had negotiated 'mate's rates' with the friend:

*Well the thing is we have a friend who will come around and he is happy to do the work at mate's rates off the books. He's just got back from overseas and he'd be quite happy for Terry to help him out too, but there's no way in hell Terry's capable of DIYing that. And so, if we're going to do the bathroom, we may as well do it properly. And that's the sort of stuff Terry could help with but not do himself (Natalie).*

David pointed out that a key benefit of this form of help was the professional finish that could be accomplished, that was usually beyond the capabilities of the average amateur handyman or woman. He used the example of some recent help he had received from his step-brother who was a professional plasterer. In exchange "for a few beers," the step-brother dropped by and finished the plastering job he was carrying out, providing a finish which David confessed he could not possibly have achieved.

*I did everything ... stripped out the light switch ... put in a twin heat down light and a 150 millimetre extraction fan ... but the hardest part for me was the plastering and so I convinced my step-brother to help out who's actually a plasterer. He just turned up and said "yep easy"*

*grabbed the rough sanding block and took a couple of millimetres off, swish, swish, in three seconds he'd done it – finished – it looked awesome! (Barry).*

#### **8.2.4. The “working bee”**

While most of my interviewees noted that projects done with a friend or family member were a fun and rewarding experiences, the social emphasis placed on DIY was perhaps strongest in their reference to the ‘working bee’. This event was described by the participants as a one-off occasion, normally associated with a specific home improvement task (usually large in scale or a complete home makeover), involving a *group* of friends and family voluntarily helping out, with the recipients of the labour typically providing the assistants with food and refreshments throughout the day. Linda believed that working bees were a useful method for “*fast tracking DIY projects.*”

While a great deal of work could be achieved over the course of a working bee (for example see Britney’s list of working bee tasks, Figure 30, page 149), most of the interviewees also valued the enjoyment they derived from the interpersonal contact that occurred as the work got done. In the account below, Rose describes her working bee experiences in detail and makes note of the great enjoyment she gleaned from both participating in, and hosting, these events:

*You’ll often get your friends around to help you with a painting project ... I had several working bees at my last house ... they’re always fun and social so you have to make sure people are doing a good job because it can quickly turn into a DIY disaster. I remember one of my friends chopping down a beautiful pear tree I’d recently planted and it wasn’t a mistake either, they’d just decided they didn’t like it and that I didn’t either ... Of course at a working bee everyone’s got an opinion about what you should do with the house and how you should do it. But socially it is quite fun, even painting a friend’s house can be fun ... because you’re doing something and you’re talking at the same time and I think you just feel good about yourself because you’re helping someone. I quite enjoy it. If it’s well run you can have a lot of fun and lots of breaks and you have a few drinks and a bit of food. I enjoy it (Rose).*

Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 30: Britney's list of tasks for an upcoming working bee, getting the house ready for sale

### 8.2.5. DIY/professional mix

To end this sub-section, which has discussed the organisation of labour within project work, it is important to note that some of the DIY projects my interviewees had carried out comprised a mix of household labour and fully paid professional help. This occurred in three main ways: first, the professional doing the job with the homeowner helping out; second, the homeowner doing the preparation/demolition work then handing the job over to the professional; and third, the professional doing a single specialised task within a larger multifaceted project. Furthermore, professionals were also occasionally called in to repair the homeowners' mistakes or their more significant 'DIY disasters' (see Section 8.6, page 165).

Aware of the rules governing electrical work, Barry, for example, said that he had paid an electrician to help him put power out to a garage he had built, although he was quick to point out that the project was still DIY because he "*dug the trench for the cable and helped the guy with the attachment of sockets and switches*". He also used a builder whenever he needed help with "*moving things like windows and doors*". Hamish, as another example, employed an architect to help him draw up the necessary plans for a council permit to remove a load-bearing wall and then employed a builder he knew to help him do the most complex part of the alteration. Jack, an experienced DIYer, was also intending to employ a professional for the more complicated facets of an upcoming DIY project involving a room extension, but intended to "*hover in the background doing the labouring*". Similarly, Marty (who at the time of interview was converting a laundry into a third bedroom and intended to do the bulk of the work himself – Figure 31, 151 page), had employed professionals to do tasks which he knew required a professional level of 'know-how' and expertise (thereby lending support to the research of Brodersen (2003) and Davidson and Leather (2000) – see pages 29-31 of this thesis; which found that European DIYers most often leave complex and potentially dangerous tasks to qualified professionals.)

Other participants, such as Dave, were also aware of the *limitations* of their building and trade knowledge and the implications of getting this type of work wrong, made conscious decisions to employ professionals when necessary in major projects.

*I'm aware that there are certain jobs that you'll need a tradesman to do, I know my limitations. If you start cutting into load-bearing walls and things like that, clearly I'm not a builder, so I'd need someone to come in and do that (Dave).*



## Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 31: Marty's room conversion (taking a tea break) (author's photo)

### **8.3. Finding time**

While all projects involve physical labour, they also take time to complete and for this reason homeowners must find or set-aside time to do the work. Given that DIY projects must be carried out in one's 'free' or 'spare' time, they must be organised around (or take precedence over) other discretionary activities or obligations, including the often spontaneous demands of everyday family life (such as tending to a child's immediate needs). My interviewees told me that for quick, routine, tasks such as mowing the lawn or clearing out gutters, timing was not usually problematic – these short-term tasks were often carried out spontaneously when the appropriate moment of free-time and good weather, coupled with the desire to do the task, presented itself. But for large scale DIY projects carried out over one or several weekends, weeks or even months, time considerations were much more critical.

Linda told me that she and her husband John always thought very carefully about when to carry out their major home improvements, aware from past experiences that time needed to be "*set aside*" (Linda) to ensure these projects flowed uninterrupted to their end, especially if a deadline was in place or their spare time was limited. In one case, she recalled discussing with her husband when to paint the exterior of their house, aware that the project would likely require several weeks of uninterrupted full-time work. After much discussion, they eventually opted to complete the job over their three-week summer holiday break but in order for this to

be achieved, Linda said they both agreed to “*push other things aside*”, such as the tentative plans they had made for camping and several other social engagements.

Time considerations were especially important for projects involving significant changes to rooms which might render them uninhabitable or dysfunctional. This was especially problematic for those with young children and associated fixed routines. But even those who were without children commented on the disruptions associated with this type of DIY project. Hamish, for example, noted that he and his wife Zoe had to think very carefully about the timing and duration of their kitchen renovation, aware that this space would be dysfunctional for several days, and that alternative cooking plans would need to be arranged. In addition, they both formally organised leave from work to ensure they finished this job over a five day period, thereby minimising the disruption. With their kitchen inoperative, Hamish noted that they ate a lot of takeaways that week and used their camp cooker to boil water for cups of tea and to cook instant food, framing this as an exciting and novel part of the experience. Renovations to bathrooms (another frequently used and very functional room) often gave rise to similar challenges, with one of my interviewees (Hazel) noting that while they were conducting bathroom renovations they showered at their friend’s house. Shane went so far as to temporarily move his wife and children out of their family home to his parent’s place while he re-lined and painted the bathroom, parental support for which he was most grateful.

By necessity, some projects were seasonally timed, with many outdoor tasks (especially house and fence painting) executed during the warm and dry summer months. Shane, for example, said that he painted the exterior of his house over the Christmas holidays when the weather was dry and warm and then shifted his focus to indoor decorating over the colder winter months. The seasonal nature of DIY projects was well-recognised by my key informants from the home improvement retail sector who told me that their companies promoted and encouraged the doing of appropriate ‘winter’ or ‘summer’ projects and reminded their customers that they supplied all the necessary products for these jobs (all part of the institutional and commercial structures supporting and encouraging DIY). They were also aware that projects may take several days and, for that reason and via the marketing material they had published, encouraged homeowners carry out their projects over their holiday breaks, weekends and long-weekends (Figure 32, page 153).

Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 32: Since the 1950s, DIY retailers in New Zealand have advertised heavily in the weeks leading up to holiday breaks (top left: *The Press*, 1955b; top right: *The Press*, 1950; bottom left & right: mailed advertising brochures published 2010 and 2007, respectively)

Understandably, finding time for doing DIY was not a big issue for the retirees I interviewed who all said they had ample time for their own projects and also to help younger family members out with theirs. The time predicament, however, was most evident among the working couples I spoke to, especially those who were raising children. Since having children, most of this group found that a great deal of their free time was now devoted to parenting duties (such as nurturing young infants or transporting their children to weekend sport), leaving little time (or energy!) for doing DIY. Linda, to take just one example, said that the arrival of her and her husband John's first child brought about a considerable reduction in the amount of time they were willing and able to spend on DIY.

*It's so different now we have a child because to actually do the DIY you have to find some way for the child to be looked after ... When we were child free you could get into a job and not stop to think about kids so you could focus on getting the job done. We did heaps more before we had our child. It was like the house was our child, getting all our attention. Now she gets the attention and the house gets neglected. It was a quick change in our lives ... we went from full-on energetic handymen to tired parents (Linda).*

That DIY had to be squeezed in around the demands of parenting and family life more generally was something the retirees I spoke to were all too familiar with, having experienced the same situation at a similar point in their own life courses. Max reflected on the change in his life:

*It wasn't really until I retired that I found myself with a lot of spare time – a lot more and you really need the time to do it [DIY]. Retirement freed me up to do a lot of tinkering around and I really enjoy that now. When we were working and had the children at home, we'd always say we'd get around to doing things, but we never really had the time. It wasn't until the kids moved away and I retired that we were able to start doing things around the house (Max).*

Interestingly, the vast majority of the *first* homeowners I interviewed said that they were spending 'all' their spare time doing DIY and while most were happy to do so, some said they were coming to terms with the sacrifices that had to be made in order to get the work done (what Hamish referred to as "*the opportunity costs of doing DIY*"). Sam and Sally, for example, said they were now discovering that DIY consumed a great deal of their leisure time, particularly weekends and public holidays, and therefore had put an end to their normal leisure routine. Sam noted that the recent bathroom renovation he had carried out required him to sacrifice a motor cross ride and socialising at a good friend's flat-warming party. He

added, though, that the project was an enjoyable and satisfying experience and, therefore, he had few regrets.

*It does take up your whole weekends, like last weekend when I spent all weekend doing the shower. I sacrificed going on a decent trail ride and going out Saturday night so I was in good form to do the work Sunday. But it was an enjoyable experience. When it's finished, you look back with satisfaction and it is fun doing it yourself, if you really hated it that much, you wouldn't do it. You'd just go 'screw it', and pay someone and not do the job at all (Sam).*

Following this theme, Alan, another recent first homeowner, noted “...it's a big real change and reality check when your previous leisure time becomes DIY time”. For Alan, this meant saying no (for the first time) to invitations for leisure activities such as the weekend mountain bike rides with his friends that he used to enjoy before he purchased his home. At the time of interview and given these sacrifices, Alan was re-assessing the amount of time he was prepared to devote to DIY, pointing out that since he had purchased a home it was becoming increasingly difficult to find a balance between his home improvement ambitions and the leisure activities he also wanted to pursue. David, who said that he did most of his DIY in weekends, after work and also “over the Easter period,” said he had recently given up his Easter tramping weekend to finish a bathroom project and was surprised to find that he “had just as much fun” doing the work. “It hasn't replaced my tramping interest”, he remarked, “there's a lot of hard work involved, but I certainly wouldn't do it if I hated it”. James and Anna, other first homeowners, had this to say about the opportunity costs they were discovering as being associated with DIY:

*You do lose your weekends going out ... (James). [Anna interrupts] Yeah, maybe the social things during the day, because you're spending time doing this kind of thing. But if something was happening, if there was a BBQ happening somewhere or something, then you would stop doing that and we would go and join...(Anna). [James interrupts] I forget what we used to do in the weekend (James). Yeah that's true. I mean we do spend a lot of our weekends, shopping for stuff (Anna).*

The physical condition of the first-homes these interviewees had bought may help to explain the enormous amount of time they were investing in DIY. Faced with high house prices and with diminutive financial equity, all these informants spoke of being forced to buy older houses at the lower end of the property market – the colloquial ‘doer-uppers’ – houses that

lend themselves well to the DIY ethos. The following excerpt summarises the predicament well:

*At this stage of our life we can't afford a newer house, so we had to buy this old doer-upper ... in the beginning you've got this dream-house in mind, but the only house you can afford, if you want to get your foot in the door, is a house that needs serious work. So you buy it and find yourself doing it [DIY] day and night, all the time (Sally).*

#### **8.4. The duration of DIY projects**

While finding time for carrying out DIY projects was difficult enough for most of my interviewees (with the notable exception of retirees who had time on their hands and were all now living in low maintenance homes), so too was accurately estimating the amount of time needed to complete a specific project. As can be seen in the four accounts below, with the exception of small scale or routine tasks, my interviewees' projects almost always exceeded the length of time they expected them to take.

*...the bathroom, well it involved a lot more work at the time ... we thought oh yeah, we'll just do this and that, but things like tiling around the bath actually took a lot more work and a lot longer than we first thought. I hope the tiles don't fall down one day (Jerry).*

*They [projects] never stay the size you thought. Never, it's always more (Rose).*

*Not being able to start and finish in the timeframe you expect is particularly annoying. You sort of do projects in bits and pieces ... there's the weather interruptions, the stuff-ups and we all eventually fall into that "DIY time trap" (Barry).*

*You can't really appreciate the real long hours DIY takes you until you're in there with a hammer or paintbrush in your hand for all those hours, Sure you can do all the planning you want, but it rarely goes as smoothly as that (Bruce).*

Given the level of DIY project planning my interviewees said they did (as interested in Chapter Seven), I was surprised to hear these comments and asked them to elaborate; to explain why their DIY projects tended to extend in length. In response, they described a wide variety of contingencies which had interrupted the flow of their work in past projects, leading to what Barry refers to above as the "DIY time trap" – the inevitability that a project would take much longer than initially anticipated.

Some interviewees associated delays in their DIY work with the disjuncture between their practical knowledge and the demands of the project they were carrying out. Jerry, for one, said that despite his planning efforts, when he began projects he only ever felt that he “*roughly*” knew what was involved, yet was quick to point out that the exploratory nature of DIY was part of the appeal. He also pointed out that because he was not a professional, he was always oblivious to all the “*little intermediate steps involved – all the nitty-gritty*” which always added more work and time to the project. To demonstrate the point, Jerry, described his recent attempt to reline the lounge and the way in which the unknown and emergent nature of the project resulted in it taking much longer than he anticipated:

*So we planned to pull the wallboard off and thought that was it but naturally we didn't realise that we'd have to pull off this and this, like the light switches and plugs, so we could pull the wallboard off. It seemed so simple when we were thinking and talking about it, but it's when you're doing it that you realise there's always more involved, all the little bits and pieces which take time as well (Jerry).*

Linda made a similar comment when discussing her and her husband John's efforts to paint the exterior of their house. She pointed out that because it was the first time they had done the task (and despite a great deal of preparatory research), they began with no real idea of how much work was involved, only becoming aware of the realities as the project progressed. Shane also noted what he had gradually learnt from his DIY experiences that while a job may look straightforward there was “*always the possibility of more work under the surface*”. Marty provided a similar view noting that his projects always seemed to keep “*going and going ... getting bigger than [he] thought it would ever be*” – putting this down to his inexperience and lack of know-how:

*You can't really see the true size of a job until you've pulled it apart to see what's going on inside the building. For example, that south facing wall I completely replaced. In the beginning I thought I'd only have to replace a few things here and there and it'd be fine. But no, the whole thing had to be ripped out (Marty).*

Mary volunteered a similar story:

*...I was stripping wallpaper and thought I'd just get that one layer off but as I did it I discovered paper on paper on paper. It was like digging and it took me much, much, longer than I wanted and that's often the case with DIY, it's not until you get into it that you become aware of the true size of the job, which can be pretty frustrating (Mary).*

A similar point of frustration often experienced during the execution of DIY projects was the discovery of additional work to be done – an unanticipated *project-within-a-project*. Often these unforeseen contingencies changed the trajectory of the work, calling for a new strategy, new materials and, by extension, a further investment of time and money.

*You start with a rip and a snort and all the enthusiasm in the world and then reality hits you, it all just keeps on going and the money keeps on flowing. We thought we'd have the bathroom finished by February but other stuff happened and the old bath didn't get taken out until March ... we had to replace a bunch of rotten wood which we didn't know was there until we pulled the floor up, so there are always delays (Hazel).*

My interviewees said that it was also common for projects to be stymied by resource issues. Many recalled instances when they ran short of a particular building material part way through the project or found themselves without the right tool for the task at hand. In some instances, this simply required a trip to a local hardware store to obtain what was needed, unless of course, as Bruce pointed out, the DIY stores were closed.

Marty's narrative below provides excellent insight into the underestimation of material requirements, which meant he often found himself having to return to DIY stores time and time again until he finally had the correct gear and materials for the job – what he considered a significant 'waste' of time:

*When projects go good they're good, but when they go bad it isn't such a pleasure. Like its good when you get to the shop and you've got your plan and your measuring tape and you buy everything you need; you've got what you want and you go home and put it in. When it's going bad you get there and you find out you haven't got anything in your plan right. You've messed up measurements or forgotten them or something like that. You're just wasting time. Sometimes you end up buying stuff that's too big or too small and that wastes even more time and is pretty frustrating (Marty).*

Another factor influencing the rate of progress in DIY projects was the practitioners' changing mood. Most of my interviewees told me that they usually started a project with a great deal of enthusiasm but occasionally lost interest and momentum. This was especially common for projects involving repetitive tasks (such as exterior painting) or when the work involved in a project became more physically demanding than they expected. Barry added that while his enthusiasm for a project remained high when he felt things were going right, it almost always changed when he began to "*feel lost or bored*" – his enthusiasm waning and,



more often than not, leading him to start a new project (leaving the former incomplete). *“The wife gets mad as hell and it causes a bit of tension, so you’ll go back to it later and try and get a bit of traction back and away you go again”* (Barry). Barry pointed out that because there was always another project that *could* be started (and one possibly more exciting and interesting than the current project), it was common for him to walk away from a *“difficult or dull job half finished”*. There were many other examples of this:

*So you might start and finish a window, and then you have to start scraping down another one, and because you don’t like that job you sort of leave it and muddle round with something else, until you get nagged by the wife to start again* (Barry).

*When you’re doing it yourself there’s no real pressure on you to complete within a timeframe, but if you got bored with a project you often finished up with a job half done. And that happens in the odd case; you only get so far before moving on to something more exciting* (Charlie).

My interviewees described a variety of wider forces which had interrupted their DIY projects – many of which were beyond their direct control. Common among them was the onset of bad weather, which had halted some projects in their tracks or stopped them from commencing altogether. Barry, for example, told me that he had to wait several months one summer for a weekend of suitable weather for roof painting, having made several *“frustrating starts”* but each time having to abandon the work due to the onset of rain. Jerry relayed a similar story, having postponed pouring a concrete path because of an unexpected and early spring snowfall, despite having hired a concrete mixer for the day. Charlie, a lawn care enthusiast, also expressed his frustration with the onset of adverse weather, particularly when wet conditions made it impossible for him to mow his prize lawn. Some of my interviewees provided more general comments regarding the effect of the weather on their DIY projects, noting that a gloomy day could often bring about a change in their mood for doing DIY, with them preferring instead to spend their free time *“lounging around the house”* (Anna). It should be noted here that the weather could also be “perfect” for DIY, with several of my interviewees pointing out that a great deal could be achieved in and around the home over a weekend of dry warm weather, providing one had the time and desire that day to engage in DIY.

In addition to the weather, some of my interviewees said their DIY projects were frequently interrupted by friends and family members dropping by their house on social visits. Several said that when visitors did drop by, they always felt obliged to stop what they were doing in

order to entertain their guests. Such stoppages invariably delayed the project (although it should also be noted here that occasionally these unexpected visitors lent a hand, thereby speeding up the work). Alan, reflecting on an interruption to his exterior painting project, provides a good summary of the situation:

*...when you're doing DIY you get interrupted. When Tom and Jules came round the other day I should have said "look sorry guys but I'm busy", but I spent like an hour and a half talking to them when I should have been sanding. When you're doing little things like that, you really need to get done, because they depend on the external elements such as weather, you really need to commit to them, but the flip side is it's also nice to see your friends and it's even better when they offer to lend a hand (Alan).*

During the interviews, my respondents mentioned a wide variety of everyday events which had interrupted their DIY projects; too many to cover in this short section. Examples ranged from the most trivial and fleeting happenings (such as having to get off the ladder to calm a barking dog or tend to a crying child) through to more significant life changes. One such example at this far end of the spectrum was provided by Hamish who said that the DIY projects he was doing came to a halt when he started a new business and found himself working through the weekends.

*It's put a huge amount of stop on the home DIY stuff. If things get busier I'll struggle to fit in even the urgent jobs I need to do ... My DIY has dropped right back. It's not so important now because I've got so much other stuff to do. I do have a list of things to do like replacing the roof, finishing the kitchen and so on and so on ... it's all been put on hold, in fact, to the point where it's probably going backwards at the moment. My priorities have changed and the DIY I have done I've had to fit around the starting of my new business (Hamish).*

Eric told me how the DIY projects he was executing drew to an immediate close when his wife Amy received news that she had attained a job in Australia, forcing them to rethink their plans for the house. Eric said that at the time he had several projects "on the go," all of which were aiming to better accommodate the changing needs of their growing family. Amy's good news, however, meant that these projects had to be abandoned with Eric shifting his efforts to a quick makeover of two unfinished bedrooms and a swift tidy-up of the property to prepare the house for sale. Reflecting on this situation Eric said "...so life events have had an impact on how things [projects] have happened ... our plans changed, all of a sudden, so I never got to make the changes we dreamed about – it was a really difficult time, but that's life" (Eric).

### 8.5. DIY as (skilled) activity

Each and every DIY project will demand one or a cluster of tasks (sanding, hammering, digging, painting, chiselling, etc.) to be carried out – often in a specific sequence – in order to successfully bring the project to completion. For this reason, each project will vary in the demands it places on a homeowner, determined not only by the nature of the work itself (which may range from a single easy act to a complex array of specialised tasks) but also by the homeowners' DIY proficiency – the sum of the practical skills they have developed, their level of DIY knowledge, their physical health/strength and their overall attitude to home improving. It follows that what might be easy or undemanding for one DIYer might well be a nerve-wracking challenge for another. Rose, for example, told me that she found fixing her fence (which involved hammering in a loose row of nails) a challenging job, having not done a lot of hammering before. In stark contrast, my field observations of both Hamish and Jerry suggested that for both these DIYers, hammering was 'second nature' requiring no special effort (and hardly mentioned when we talked about the work they were doing).

Most of my interviewees believed that it was only through 'having-a-go' at DIY projects that one was able to gain and hone their practical skills and develop their DIY knowledge base. In this respect, the carrying out of DIY projects was viewed as an iterative learning process whereby skills were gained gradually, project-by-project, over the course of one's housing and DIY career. As one of my interviewees put it "you just have to have-a-go, there's no better way to learn how to do it and the more you do, the better and more confident you become" (Bruce). A good, simple, example of this is Rose's fence repair project through which she recently gained mastery in hammer use "on the job" as she "had-a-go" at the task without a great deal of prior experience:

*...I knew nothing about fencing and hammering until last week ... but I managed to hit in all those bloody wobbly nails, well I had-a-go at least, as you would expect, and I fixed a few rotten boards too and there's a few tricks that I picked up while on the job, like I worked out how to get the old boards off with the back of the hammer which I hadn't done before ... I feel like I've become a real builder ... now that I can use a hammer properly! (Rose).*

Particularly important in Rose's account above is her desire and willingness to try something new, even after she recognised that she did not have the necessary skills at the outset of the project. Her example nicely captures the essence of the Kiwi have-a-go spirit, and also relates well to what Sennett (2008) conceptualises as material consciousness – the starting point of

technical mastery where a person must be curious enough to *try* working with materials and *try* new approaches in order for practical skills to develop and flourish. The willingness and desire to ‘have-a-go’ at DIY projects (ones you may not have done before), and the acceptance that this is how you learn to be a handy person, was a strong and recurring interview theme.

While the vast majority of my interviewees shared the view that their practical skills were, first and foremost, learnt, tested and refined through first-hand practical experience and experimentation (starting in the first home they owned), this was only part of the story. Many also made connections to their childhood experiences, suggesting that the foundations of their current DIY skill-set and the have-a-go attitude were laid early on in the life course. Hamish, for example, traced his DIY ‘mind-set’ to his childhood observations of his parents carrying out projects in and around the family home (and in this respect his current DIY represented the continuation of a family tradition).

*For me it’s an ingrained interest from seeing my parents do it and especially my father doing it. But I don’t often think about them doing DIY when I’m deciding I’ll do some, but there’s no doubt those lessons are in the mind-set and you just give it a crack, just like your parents would have (Hamish).*

The discussion I had with Hamish about the DIY his parents had accomplished segued into stories of his own attempts at building tree huts with old building materials he salvaged from around the property, and his father’s tools. Hamish was strong in his view that it was through this form of creative play (which his father supported) that he first developed an interest in the DIY culture and some basic practical abilities.

*I remember as a kid building huts with wood – they were a huge part of my childhood. I’d build a hut and bring my friends around and we’d all play in it. I’d spend heaps of time building them and it was all about the challenge of building it, especially if it was a tree-hut and you’d always have just as much fun demolishing it. Me, my brother and mates were all into it and we never really knew how, we just gave it a go. My father did a lot of DIY so I did learn a lot from him, skills like hammering and sawing which we’d always try ourselves. And we wouldn’t buy any materials, we’d just use what was lying around and that Dad let us use (Hamish).*

Sam also traced his DIY ‘mind-set’ back to his childhood when he frequently helped his father out with home improvements around the family home. Similarly, Eric noted that he had helped his parents renovate all the houses they lived in while he was a child and how he

had long looked forward to buying his own home for the opportunity to apply the skills he had learnt. Glen mentioned a series of chores he was *expected* to do around the home as a child (including mowing the lawn) and how these activities helped shape his attitude towards doing DIY today, i.e., DIY was part and parcel of being a good homeowner. He also remembered back to when he was given a fake plastic lawnmower as a Christmas gift which, when pushed, scattered green plastic shreds around a transparent catcher mimicking the cutting of grass.

*I used to follow Dad around the backyard with it. I think Dad cottoned on to the fact that I liked mowing lawns so as soon as I was tall enough to reach the handles of his lawn mower he had me doing them. He even had me mow it in stripes like the soccer fields you see on TV with the striped effect (Glen).*

While fathers featured strongly in my interviewees recollections of the DIY carried out in their family home – significant others whom they watched and learned from – mothers were also remembered as active and inspirational DIYers, although usually carrying out interior decoration together with their husbands or making and sewing curtains for the house. Linda, for example, noted that her

*...Mum was crafty and was always making curtains and that inspired me. Dad made his own things like hammocks and he built a bar once and Mum furnished it and me and my mate drunk in it – team work! And Dad rebuilt the whole house, basically, and Mum did all the decorating and furnishings (Linda).*

While family life was identified as a strong socialising agent (the activities of their parents fostering the DIY spirit), my interviewees also said that their the school experiences were important, with nearly all of them pointing out that their basic practical skills were developed in ‘manual’ class – woodwork, metalwork and sewing – all longstanding components of the New Zealand school curriculum. Other childhood socialising agents mentioned by my interviewees included DIY books for children (Figure 33, page 164), ‘Kid’s columns’ in DIY magazines and fake plastic replicas of power and hand tools manufactured by large home improvement companies such as *Black and Decker*. One interviewee also mentioned taking his child to a weekend DIY clinic for children at a DIY superstore.

While the ‘have-a-go’ attitude and one’s childhood experiences were often associated with one’s skills and skill-development, several of my interviewees added that they sought to learn

(or improve) their DIY skills by reading instructional books or by obtaining knowledge and practical advice from other more experienced DIYers. Several also told me that they had carried skills over from their workplace. Hamish, for example, had helped out on building sites while he was a student. Jack said that he had also learnt skills by closely watching professionals and then copying their techniques in his own future projects. Overall, however, most of my interviewees told me that their skills and knowledge were learnt through doing and that this was a cumulative process i.e., they built-up their practical skills and knowledge (and therefore became more capable DIYers) over the course of their housing and DIY ‘journey’.

Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 33: Corporate sponsored DIY manual for New Zealand ‘kids’ (Kenny & Kenny, 2004, cover)

## 8.6. Botch-ups, blunders and “DIY disasters”

It is important to note at this point in the thesis that while New Zealanders might well be eager to ‘have-a-go’ at DIY projects, they are not master tradespeople and, therefore, things do go wrong. Interestingly, in the discussions I had with my interviewees about ‘doing DIY’, a great deal of emphasis was placed on the mistakes they had made in past projects, which ranged from trivial errors (requiring a rethink of one’s approach and some remedial work) through to much more serious botch-ups – so-called ‘DIY disasters’ – which often required the recruitment of a professional tradesperson to help clean up the mess. (This is a scenario played out on the popular television show *DIY Disasters*.) Given the overall attitude of my interviewees (i.e., the desire they exhibited to ‘have-a-go’ without always having all the skills and resources needed for the task at hand), it came as no surprise to me that DIY projects occasionally went awry. What was surprising, however, was the tendency for my interviewees to talk more about their botch-ups (and the remedial work that followed), than the projects they had accomplished error-free. Data indicated that it was perhaps not the DIY ‘botch-up’ itself that was important but the fact that each catastrophe (big or small) represented, or at least proved, the interviewees’ readiness to take on a home improvement challenge, to push themselves to the limits of their knowledge and skills, sometimes against all the odds.

There were of course instances when disasters were simply the result of clumsiness but, curiously, even these were the stories my interviewees seemed to want to share with me. Among the people I interviewed, instances of practical ineptness were moments to be joked about and indeed their stories of these events were filled with a great deal of laughter and gentle jesting. At one point in my interviewee with Sam and Sally, for example, tears of laughter ran down Sally’s face as she explained how her husband managed to hacksaw through a small portion of the mains water pipe during the final stages of their bathroom renovation, resulting in a small flood in the bathroom and then, after he turned the mains water off, requiring a desperate trip to the hardware store ten minutes before it closed for some advice on how to repair the break and acquire the materials needed for the job. Another example was provided by Bruce who laughed at himself for making the error of painting himself “...into a corner of the roof. I couldn’t get down ... the ladder was on the other side of the house so I just had to wait up there in the heat until the bloody paint dried” (Bruce).

Humorous cartoons depicting blundering home handy “men” are easy to find in New Zealand newspapers, especially those from the 1950s and 1960s when the DIY culture was beginning to boom (e.g., see Figure 34, below). The popular print media has also capitalised on the notion of the inept handyman, having published numerous cartoon books devoted to the subject (e.g., see Fiddy, 1988). The home improvement industry has also latched on to this facet of the DIY culture; New Zealand-based paint manufacturer Resene, for example, having published its own book and website containing the funniest DIY disaster stories sent in by its customers (<http://www.resene.co.nz/homeown/funnydiy.htm>). This works to encourage people to ‘have-a-go’ at DIY, as the consistent message that these books and cartoons promote is that there’s nothing wrong with making a mistake, at least you’re trying!

Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 34: Humorous cartoons mocking the skills of the Kiwi home handyman are easy to find in New Zealand newspapers, especially those from the 1950s and 1960s (left: *The Weekly News*, 1960; right: *The Weekly News*, 1965)



It should be noted here that some of my interviewees also mentioned a more serious version of the “DIY disaster,” encompassing tales of the injuries they had received while doing DIY (although, again, they seemed eager to share these stories with me). Data revealed a wide range of injuries from small cuts and bruises (the stories of which were often accompanied by an admission that the injury was the result of using a tool incorrectly) through to more serious back injuries from lifting heavy goods. Their injuries were not at all unusual; with many New Zealand home handymen and women receiving wounds while carrying out projects. Such events are monitored by the New Zealand Accident Compensation Commission (ACC), the annual figures of which are a popular focus for the news media, which concentrate not only on the extent of the injuries received but also the cost of the medical care. In 2007, ACC figures showed that 40,000 New Zealanders were injured while gardening, six each week were hospitalised by lawnmower injuries and 63 people per day were injured at home while using tools (ACC, 2008). Drawing on ACC data, Kiong (2008b) showed that the treatment of DIY injuries that same year cost the nation \$50 million, with one of the most common treatments being for falls from an unstable ladders while the most serious were for electrocutions and falls through ceilings (Eames & Erikson, 2009). The frequency of these injuries has encouraged ACC to send safety messages to home improvers, sponsoring TV and magazine advertisements and also publishing pamphlets detailing the safest DIY techniques. The rate of injuries has also prompted one newspaper journalist to suggest that “the traditional weekend activity [DIY] is turning the home into the most dangerous place to be” (Eames & Erikson, 2009).

### **8.7. Project completion**

While all my interviewees enjoyed thinking about DIY, planning their DIY projects and ‘having-a-go’ at the work, they also derived positive feelings from the successful completion of their DIY ventures. Given the time and many exigencies associated with project work, which I have discussed above (including timing, ‘DIY disasters’, resource issues, interruptions and so on), I was not at all surprised to find that the ‘finished project’ was a tremendous source of personal satisfaction<sup>47</sup>.

---

<sup>47</sup> The personal sense of satisfaction and achievement derived from carrying out one’s own home improvements is a strong theme in the DIY literature. I will talk more about this in Chapter Ten, Section 10.3.3, page 215.

All my interviewees said that once they finished a project, they almost always took a short moment to take stock of what they had achieved. Many told me that the hustle-and-bustle characterizing project work often meant there was little time for pausing for reflection until the work was done. Max, for example, said that it was only after completing his DIY garage-build that he *“parked [himself] in a deck chair in the new garage and was overcome with pride ... I got a real sense of completion and achievement at that point. I really couldn't believe I'd had actually built a garage!”* Such personal feelings of accomplishment were not limited to the successful completion of complex large-scale DIY projects (although these were certainly described as momentous feats); they were also experienced at the close of routine jobs and easier, short-term tasks. Barry, for example, noted that there was *“...something special about mowing the lawn ... looking back over the freshly cut grass on a Saturday morning ... you're pleased with yourself ... satisfied that you actually got up and did it and that it looks great for the weekend”* (Barry). The same point was made by Anna, who talked about the immense sense of achievement and happiness she derived from the relatively simple task of painting the letterbox, which took her just a few hours:

*It was really easy work compared to what he [husband James] was doing inside at the time [major bathroom renovation] but I remember finishing it in half a day and the neighbour telling me that it looked great and that she'd have to do the same to her letterbox now mine looked so good... you finish something and there's that instant warm feeling of having done it all yourself, having achieved something with your time and hands that looks great – it's like your signature and each finished project makes your home that little bit better* (Anna).

The personal sense of satisfaction that my interviewees derived from a 'finished project' was heightened by the positive comments offered by other household members – their recognition of a job well-done. For Sam, these comments were *“the best part of it. Like it was great to hear Sally [his wife] say the other night when she had a shower “oh, this shower you've made is lovely. Good job!”* (Sam). While partners were a common source of these compliments, so too were children. For instance, Shane described how nice it felt to see his children playing in the sandpit he had built them the great sense of pride he felt when they told him he was a *“clever Dad”*. These positive comments from his children affirmed the good feeling he got out of completing the project – an indication that others recognised and appreciated the time and effort he had invested in the job.

Compliments from non-household members (such as the neighbour who praised Anna for her freshly painted letterbox, see account above) were also highly valued by my interviewees. For instance, Kate described how satisfying it was when a complete stranger cycled past her house and complimented her and her husband Paul on the house painting they had done – the passer-by appreciating the aesthetic changes the couple had made:

*The painting and landscaping made the house look amazing. We were out there the other day doing the finishing touches and a lady cycled past on a bike and she turned and said to us “the house just looks amazing since you’ve painted it. Well-done you’ve done a great job”. I didn’t know her so I asked Paul if he knew her and he said no. But it’s really good when people make comments like that, it’s so satisfying. It’s all about the pride of being a DIYer (Kate).*

My interviewees derived a similar sense of satisfaction from the comments offered by their house-guests and visitors. Rose for example – a single female homeowner – said she “loved it” when her friend Shirley dropped by and complimented her on the decorating work she had done. “It’s quite nice that people notice it and the time you spent working away has had an impact. I suppose it’d be a waste of time if it didn’t have that effect” (Rose). Hamish provided a similar example. He and his wife Zoe had recently held a BBQ for several friends at their house. At that gathering, Hamish said that one of his friends noticed some of the changes he had made, an observation which triggered a lengthy conversation about that project and DIY more generally among the guests. Hamish said that these instances of “show and tell” provided him with a great sense of pride in the home improvements he and Zoe had made:

*I love showing off the changes we’ve made. It’s a pride thing – what we’ve done to improve the house. I seem to tell everyone who visits how I took this wall out and made our living room bigger. I tell them all “you can walk between two rooms now – I did that!” (Hamish).*

Hazel provided a similar story – proudly exhibiting the bathroom renovations that she and her husband Gary had carried out to both visitors and neighbours:

*When visitors come around we love showing them through the house and all the projects we’ve done. We’ve even pulled the neighbours off the street and made them look at the bathroom ... it was like “come and see our bathroom!” We loved it. We’re coming off the bathroom buzz now but there’s always something else to show them. I guess our DIY and the house are a constant source of pride for us (Hazel).*

Some of my interviewees said it quite normal for them to walk their visitors through the house room-by-room to parade their home improvements. Sam and Sally – first homeowners – said this was often the very first thing they did with house guests, the quotation below suggesting that a ‘DIY tour’ of their house for visitors had now become something of a household tradition:

*If you come to our house you know you’re definitely going to get the “DIY tour” – straight-up – and we really enjoy being the guides ... the compliments you get are great (Sally). Yeah, like last week my cousins and aunt dropped by and it was the first thing we did – as soon as they were in the door we marched them from room-to-room showing off what we’d done (Sam). And people are interested aye; they seem to enjoy it ... (Sally). [Sam interrupts] ... yeah they did, and it’s the same when we go out to our friends’ houses, I mean we’ll find ourselves being shown around their places looking at all the things they’ve done and we enjoy that part of it too (Sam).*

## **8.8. Chapter summary**

This chapter has explored a range of matters associated with the *execution* of DIY work. I started by focusing on the different labour structures within my research participants’ DIY projects. I showed that while the term *do-it-yourself* is suggestive of a solitary activity (homeowners doing their *own* home improvements), the accomplishment of their DIY projects also often involved the labour of ‘others’ – non-household members including family (such as parents who felt it was their duty to help their children do-up their homes) and good ‘mates’ who enjoyed helping out. Two time related matters were then considered. First, I explored how my interviewees found time for project-work. Second, I showed that even when time was found, the amount of time needed was often underestimated – projects frequently stymied by resource issues or unexpected contingencies and interruptions. Another issue I discussed was DIY skill acquisition and application, with many of the interviewees reporting that they tended to hone their skills ‘on the job’ (having learnt the basics through earlier processes of childhood socialisation). I noted that occasionally interviewees discovered that there was a disjuncture between their own practical skills and the demands of the project, in some instances resulting in a ‘DIY disaster’. An interesting ‘twist’ here was the positive spin many of them attached their ‘projects-gone-wrong’. This was explained by the fact that the DIY disaster was evidence that a homeowner was at least prepared to try doing their own home improvements – an expression of the highly valued Kiwi ‘have-a-go’ ethos.

## 9. DIY Tools & Materials

### 9.1. Introduction

In this final results chapter I focus on the tools my research participants acquired, used and stored (in their sheds) in order to accomplish their DIY projects. I also discuss DIY materials. I begin the chapter by developing a working definition of ‘DIY tools’ and then describe the different types of tools owned by my interviewees. Next, I explain how their tool collections gradually developed over the course of their housing and DIY journey, including how they physically acquired the different implements necessary for their projects (focusing on the distinction they made between buying, inheriting and receiving them as gifts, and the related phenomenon of tool borrowing). A theme running through the data was a gendered division of ‘interest’ in tools (and, by association, the hardware stores where they may be purchased) with the men I spoke to somewhat more enthused about the ‘hardware’ of the DIY culture than the women I interviewed. Accordingly, I briefly examine the gendered world of DIY tools and tool stores. Next, I provide a brief discussion of tool sheds and garage workshops, the places in the home where their tools were stored. I conclude the chapter with a section on DIY materials – the ‘ingredients’ of the DIY project.

### 9.2. Tools

The home handymen and women I interviewed for this study were unquestionably tool-users, with most noting that there was barely a DIY project that they could have accomplished without the use of one or more tools. As one of my female interviewees put it, “*even easy jobs like sweeping the driveway ... need at least something to help you do the job, you can’t expect to do them without tools of some sort*” (Britney) – a broom in the example provided here. Reminiscent of recent theorising that tools and people can be thought of as hybrids (Shove et al., 2007), Hamish rather philosophically proposed that tools were “*...an extension of the handyman’s body ... [so-much-so] ... that it’s impossible to do it [DIY] without them*”. Dave made a similar remark:

*You can’t do DIY without a few tools. I mean you could do a few temporary repairs and a few easy jobs but, really, you’d be pretty limited in what you could do if you didn’t own any tools at all ... they help you do the work ... so, when I do DIY, it’s basically me and my tools (Dave).*

While simple DIY tasks require the use of only one or two implements, larger, more complex, DIY projects usually involve the acquisition and use of a much wider selection of tools<sup>48</sup>. Take, for example, Barry's construction of an outdoor wooden deck which he said involved the use of: a circular power saw, square and measuring tape to cut the timber to appropriate lengths; a chalk string line, measuring tape, pegs and hammer for marking out the location of post holes; a spade for digging the holes for the posts that secured the overall structure; and a spirit level, electric drill, hammer and nail punch for fastening the timber correctly. The simple point I am making here, and one that I will reiterate throughout this chapter, is that DIY practice and tools (and by extension the hardware marketplace) are inextricably linked i.e., one cannot *do* DIY without first gathering together the necessary tools and then applying the skills to use these effectively. Glen put it this way: "*every project is governed by the tools you own and your ability to use them, so if you've got them all, then there's no end to what you can do*".

Before pursuing this line of inquiry further, it is perhaps necessary to define exactly what I mean by the word "tools" especially in the context of this study of DIY. My starting point is the *Collin's English Dictionary* (Butterfield, 2001, p.831) which is typical among dictionaries in defining a tool as: "an implement such as a hammer, saw, or spade, that is used by hand to help do a particular type of work". That tools 'help' suggests they have agency i.e., they transform the homeowner into a human-agent capable of *making something happen* to the physical structure of their house and home which would be impossible for them to accomplish without them. Based on this somewhat straightforward idea, it is perhaps feasible to offer the following simple definition of a 'DIY tool': *any piece of equipment used by a homeowner to help him or her to directly accomplish a decorating, maintenance, alteration or repair task in and/or around their house and home.*

### **9.3. Tool collections**

Given the connection between tools and the *doing* of DIY, it came as no surprise to me that (once I entered their shed or garage workshop), my interviewees had a lot to say about tools. They also owned, or at least told me that they aspired to own, a large number of them. The shed and toolbox tours I carried out revealed that all of my research participants at least had a basic ensemble of gardening tools and painting gear, a hammer, and a basic set of

---

<sup>48</sup> Pawson and Cant (1983) also made the link between DIY and the need for tools. Their early survey work showed that most New Zealanders were well-resourced in terms of tools, if not *over* resourced (see page 42 of this thesis).

screwdrivers, spanners and wrenches. Cutting implements (especially circular, wood and ‘hack’ saws) were also widely owned. Portable electric drills and sanders were among the most common power tools and ‘push’ or petrol powered lawnmowers also seemed universally owned – perhaps not surprising given that all interviewees had lawns to mow (a typical characteristic of suburban New Zealand homes) and that this job was done frequently.

Overall, the average tool collection possessed by my interviewees mirrored that of the homeowners who responded to my home improvement survey. In the survey, presented respondents with a list of thirty DIY tools and asked them to indicate which were owned in their current home. Figure 35 (below) shows that the most commonly owned tool by those who responded was a garden rake (97.2%), closely followed by a tape measure (97%), painting gear (97%), spade(s)/shovel(s) (96.1%), screwdrivers (95.9%) and a hammer (94.9%).

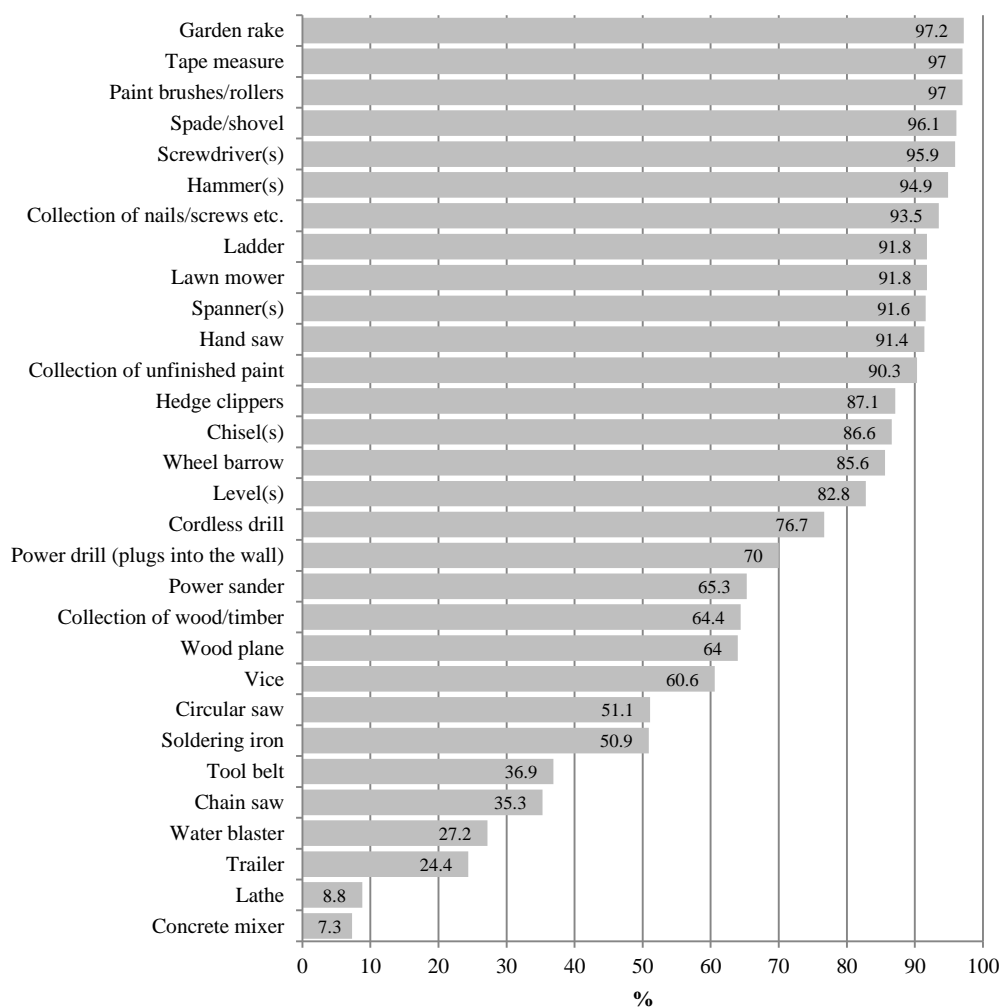


Figure 35: DIY tools owned by the survey respondents (n=466)

While all of my interviewees possessed at least the ‘basic’ implements for doing DIY, a large number of them had, over time, developed much more comprehensive collections. These larger collections generally reflected the homeowners extended and/or more serious involvement in DIY practice, and the diversity of the projects they had done over their history of homeownership. Jack, for example, had a biscuit joiner (a woodworking tool for joining bits of wood together) in his all-inclusive tool collection, an item he initially acquired to build a wooden bookcase in the early 1990s, but since had used for a range of equally difficult tasks (including joining a kitchen bench top which required a ‘biscuit’ join to provide a very neat and strong seam). He also owned a drill press, spot welder, chainsaw, belt sander, jig saw, bevel-edged chisel set, rasps, router, files and an electric concrete mixer. These were all initially purchased for a specific job, after which they were available for him to use in his other projects. Jack’s collection had developed slowly over time and in relation to the growing number of projects he had carried out since purchasing his first home in 1974. His story is similar to the other older homeowners I interviewed and also of that of tool expert Jack Mason who, in the August 1969 edition of *New Zealand Home Handyman*, advised readers that developing a perfect tool collection would take “much time” – his own collection taking 22 years to fully form (Mason, 1969, p.10).

Whatever the size of their current tool collection, all of the homeowners I interviewed said they began their housing journey with just a small set of tools, or, in Rose’s case, none at all. Most said that it was when they purchased their first home that they really began to collect. Terry, for example, purchased a power drill, set of drill bits, handsaw, a screwdriver set and a leather tool belt in his first few months of homeownership, the equipment he needed to accomplish his first DIY projects. Charlie – aged 92 – also traced the starting point of his extensive tool collection to the purchase of his first home in the 1940s. Charlie’s tool collection spoke volubly of his overall DIY experience, i.e., the tools he acquired for the many projects he had accomplished over his history of homeownership. He described his collection, how it had progressively developed along with the space to house them (discussed further in Section 9.7), in this way:

*I’ve got my own collection of tools which I collected up over the years and I finished up with a full set of plumbing tools, a full set of carpentry tools, and set of bricklaying tools and a set of plastering tools and a set of wallpapering tools – the whole lot and I’ve still got most of them in the shed, all bought for one-off projects but used again and again over the years. Some of my boys have borrowed a few at the moment. I got into the electrical tools when they came in*



*about the 1950s and 1960s. I've got a few different power drills, and a skill saw and a jig saw and a router and a belt sander and an electric plane, disc sander – just about all of them. And I still enjoy using them but the problem is now that I haven't got the room. What I would have liked to have done is to have built a special area for me to work in. I've got a workbench and carpenter's vice, and I've got an engineer's vice but I haven't really got enough room to work in. If I shift the car out it gives me space. At one stage it wasn't too bad, but the car we've got now is a bit bigger so I've lost room to move. When I was working, I had a truck that I'd just park in the carport and then I had full use of the garage all the time. If I was doing something at home in the weekend I just went down to the local timber yard and got what I needed for the project, whatever it was, and then worked in the shed (Charlie).*

Barry also owned a comprehensive tool collection which he kept in meticulous order in his garage workshop, an indication of how proud he was of the DIY equipment he owned. His collection also spoke volumes of his long DIY career and the different projects he had completed. He said that over time he had acquired and used “...*just about every tool ever needed for doing DIY*”. But again, like most of my research participants, Barry said he started out with just the basic implements – so few that he was able to keep them in a single drawer in the kitchen of his first home.

Astutely, Barry pointed out that there was not only a correlation between his expanding tool collection and the growing number and range of projects he had undertaken, but also with his growing competency and confidence with tools. (See pages 37-38 of this thesis for similar observations made by Shove et al. (2007, p.43) (in the British context) and the implications of this for “future patterns of [DIY] consumption”.) He observed that as his confidence in his own DIY abilities grew – largely through experimentation within projects – he gradually found himself motivated to carry out more challenging jobs which, in turn, required him to purchase a range of more specialised tools, which he then learned to use. His electric metal saw – now one of his favourite tools – is a good example. Barry purchased this heavy duty power tool in order to remove an unused steel hand rail and adjoining wrought iron fence – a job he said he would not have attempted with the metal saw had he not grown in his confidence with tools: “*nowadays no project is too big and no tool scares me*” he said, a far cry from his experience when he first started out on his DIY journey:

*...nowadays I'll just get straight into it [DIY] ... no hesitation and over the years I've learned all the principles of power tool use and I apply that technical knowledge across my whole tools set ... I know how to use a drill in ways I couldn't have imagined when I first started out and*

*it's the same with my circular saw. I was scared of the thing when I first got it, wow, back in the 70s - I remember being terrified of the blade and cutting through the cable and electrocuting myself and had no confidence in my ability to cut a straight-line, I was so careful with it back then. But now I'll grab it and use it with hardly a thought ... I know what I can do with it and I know what it can do (Barry).*

#### **9.4. Accessing tools**

The way in which my research participants went about accessing tools for their DIY projects (and tool collections) occurred in three main ways. The first and most common method was by purchasing them outright from general home improvement stores or specialist hardware/tool retailers. This was either done on a 'need-it-now' basis for projects which were being carried out or planned, or more spontaneously, in the case of tool enthusiasts who simply wanted to add them to their collection. Shane, for example, had recently purchased an electric circular saw specifically to cut decking timber, but was also "... *guilty of buying a router on the same day which [he] didn't actually need*". Bruce also said that he frequently came home from hardware stores with more than he intended to buy, often enticed by "*sale items*" or "*the bulk bargain bins they [DIY stores] put under your nose at the checkout*" (Bruce). None of my interviewees reported purchasing second hand tools, the only two exceptions being Barry, who purchased a *Black and Decker* power-saw from the TradeMe auction website, and Jerry, who showed me an entry-level electric drop-saw unit which he purchased from a work colleague who was moving overseas.

Secondly, tools were also commonly inherited; passed down by older family members who were either upgrading their collections, were reaching the end of their housing and DIY journeys or who had passed away. Barry, for example, inherited all his late father-in-law's tools, including a *Hitachi* electric drill with accessories which remained his favourite tool – not only for its versatility but also because it was a family heirloom (held for more than its *use* value). Dave had also inherited a multitude of tools from his grandfather who had passed away, doubling up on many of the tools that he already had. Charlie, aged 92 and with failing health, was, at the time of interview, scaling down his DIY projects and, as a result, was thinking about who he should give his extensive tool collection to, which he described as a "*very important decision*". He said he was considering his granddaughter's husband because he "*...was a real hard worker ... a good Kiwi bloke who really enjoys building ... someone who'll use them and look after them ... respect them*". Shane said that his father was "*pretty*

*much past the DIY stage*” and had given him a lot of the tools that he felt that he no longer had a use for. Shane noted that he had no use for many of the tools his father had given him (such as a set of old, odd sized, crescents and plumbing tools), or that he simply did not have the knowledge or skills to use them effectively. Nevertheless, he filed the equipment away in his shed stating that *“the old man would kill me if I threw them out”*.

The third most common method for acquiring DIY tools was as birthday or Christmas gifts, or, for most of the men I spoke to, as Fathers’ Day presents. Not surprisingly, in my newspaper analysis, I found increased tool advertising in newspapers and home related magazines in the days leading up to these occasions, with DIY retailers promoting the concept of ‘giving tools to men’ since at least the early 1950s (Figure 36, page 178).

My research participants said that from time to time they found themselves without the tool(s) they needed to carry out a specific DIY task and, instead of immediately buying what they needed (perhaps unable to afford the item in question or replace or upgrade a broken equivalent), they borrowed from other homeowners they knew, commonly friends, family and neighbours. Alan, for example, said that he once borrowed his neighbour’s electric belt-sander to prepare his exterior windowsills for painting, having realised that his own effort to do the task with sanding block and paper was too slow. Elaborating, he said:

*Back then I couldn’t afford to buy my own decent sander, so I tried the old fashioned way ... just sandpaper. It was hopeless and I knew the next door neighbour had an awesome belt sander so I jumped the fence and asked him if I could borrow it and it wasn’t a problem at all. He even came over to show me how to use it and to check out what I was doing (Alan).*

Marty had also recently borrowed equipment from a friend – plastering gear to finish plaster coating the interior walls of his laundry-to-bedroom conversion before he could begin the interior painting, and noted that borrowing tools was part of, in his words, the *“Kiwi DIY tradition”*. He also said that he made a conscious choice between the tools he wanted in his collection and those he did not want to buy, such as plastering tools which he was not too *“excited about”*:

*I didn’t have any of the gear and my mate had it all, so it made sense to grab his gear for a few days, especially when its stuff like plastering tools which I’m not too excited about buying myself. I don’t buy that sort of stuff ... he’s always borrowing my tools so I’ll borrow his and it works out well (Marty).*

Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 36: Advertisements promoting tools as ideal Christmas gifts for men (top left: *The Press*, 1960b; top right: *The Press*, 1955c; bottom: *The Saturday Evening Post*, 1960, inside cover)

While all the homeowners I interviewed could recall occasions when they had borrowed tools for specific tasks, it was the first-home owners in this study who appeared to be the most active tool borrowers. The first-home owners were carrying out some of the most significant projects yet did not have the most sophisticated tool collections at this early stage in their housing and DIY journey. This paradoxical situation, coupled with the financial constraints associated this stage of the life/housing course, often meant that they had to rely more heavily on borrowing tools from other people within their social networks. As Hazel, a first homeowner, recalled:

*Getting all the tools together was interesting when we started out. Gary begged and borrowed a lot – he did anything he had to do to get them all because we had bugger-all and very little money to buy them. We borrowed a lot from my parents and our mates too. I don't know how many times I drove to Phil's [a plumber friend] to get the crimpers for the plumbing Gary was doing and he'd say "you're still doing plumbing"... I would go "yeah, Gary's going to need them again" and then he'd think he's finished with them, and I'd take them back and then 2 hours later he'd say, "Oh, I need to borrow those bloody crimpers again". So I'd go back round. I might as well have bought them given the amount of times I drove to Phil's place to borrow the bloody things, but that's what we had to do (Hazel).*

Other first homeowners also said that they cast a wide net in order to borrow the tools they needed for their projects. Jerry said that he borrowed tools from a mix of family, friends and neighbours, again an action he defined as part of the “DIY culture”:

*In the past, I've borrowed tools off my father-in-law, my own Dad, my mates and my neighbours and borrowing is all part of the DIY culture. So I'd say "have you got a chisel or hammer?" or whatever, and not many people would ever say you couldn't borrow it, everyone just seems to share things. I've had to do that less now because I've developed a better collection of my own, but in the beginning I needed to borrow just about everything (Jerry).*

Given that tool “borrowing” emerged as a strong interview theme, I decided to include a question in my Christchurch-wide survey to further explore the extent to which tool borrowing occurred among homeowners. The question was structured in two parts. Part One asked the respondents to indicate if they had borrowed tools or equipment for DIY over the last 12 months; just under half reported that they had (48%). Of those who had borrowed tools, 57.2 per cent were male and 42.8 per cent were female. Figure 37 (page 180) shows the proportion of homeowners in each age category who had borrowed tools for their DIY

projects. It shows that homeowners aged 20-34 were more likely than those in all other age categories to have borrowed tools for carrying out DIY. It also shows that the likelihood of having borrowed tools decreased with age. One likely explanation for this, which I have touched on above, is that as homeowners progress through their housing and DIY career, they amass a more complete tool collection, thereby lessening the need to borrow tools from others, which also supports the interview finding that younger first homeowners are likely the most active tool borrowers.

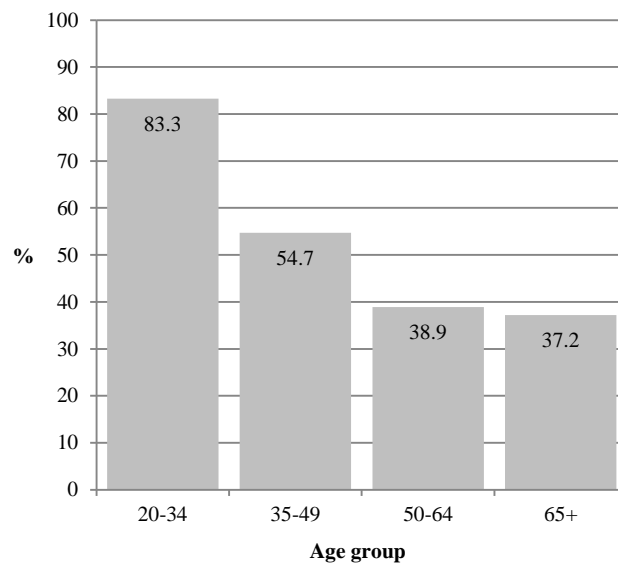


Figure 37: Tool borrowing, by age group – last 12 months (n=464)

Part Two of the question asked those who had borrowed tools over the last twelve month period (n=223) to indicate the source(s) of their tool borrowing. Multiple answers were possible. The most common source of tool borrowing was family members (70.6%), followed by friends (42.7%), neighbours (26.4%) and, lastly, the workplace (4.4%).

For ‘big ticket items’, some of my interviewees said they turned to hire companies to access the equipment they needed for a specific project that they were not prepared to buy or perhaps able to afford. Trailers (Figure 38, page 181), high pressure water blasters and electric concrete mixers were some of the big ticket items my interviewees had hired in order to get specific jobs done. My key informants from the DIY sector also talked about tool hiring, noting that over the last five years they have developed hire centres within their stores, with customers now able to hire the likes of lawn mowers, leaf blowers, rotary hoes, wheel

barrows and more general power tools. One of my key informants believed that a great deal of demand for this type of gear came from those without the space to store such items in their own homes and also those doing one-off projects which required a specialist piece of equipment (what Hamish called “*the right tool for the job*”). While trailers are not ‘tools’ per se, most of my interviewees said that trailers were the tool they hired the most, using them to collect the building supplies they needed or for transporting garden rubbish or demolition waste to the dump. Only Hamish and Jack owned their own trailers and both noted that these items were ‘always’ being borrowed by family members and friends who were doing their own DIY projects. My other interviewees said that it was very common for them to hire a trailer for the day of a project, although, as Alan notes in the quotation below, many hardware stores now provide courtesy trailers to customers for free to transport the building products they have purchased to their homes.

*Trailers are crucial ... If you don't have one it's a problem. But then obviously garages and petrol stations have trailers to hire but they're often quite expensive. Some of the DIY stores have trailers available for free to cart your DIY stuff home. They're really a very important bit of equipment. If you've just got a car and want to carry some spouting home or some lengths of timber and you can't get it in the car, you've got a problem. So a free trailer from a supplier is great but, otherwise, you just hire one for the day (Alan).*

Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 38: Hamish's trailer (often borrowed by friends and family members) (author's photo)

## 9.5. Men and ('their') tools

Among my interviewees there was notable gendered division of 'interest' in the tools necessary for carrying out DIY projects and, by extension, the stores where these resources could be purchased (also palpable in the gift giving advertisements above). (See Gelber 1997, 1999) for a useful historical discussion regarding the handy 'men' and their enthusiasm for working with tools.) For all of the women I spoke to during fieldwork (including those who showed me through their sheds), tools were generally mentioned only in passing and usually as nothing more than the implements required to get a particular job done (i.e., they emphasised tools' basic use value). In stark contrast, the men I spoke to attached a great deal more meaning to the tools they had acquired for DIY, emphasising not only their immediate use value and performance qualities, but also their symbolic importance. Alan's comments are valuable here:

*...power tools have found a new found place in my heart. Power tools, they're every DIY man's dream. How can I get that job done quicker? What power tool do I need? Women dream about clothes and men dream about power tools, you've just got to have them all (Alan).*

Most of the men I interviewed had a story for each of the tools that they owned and for their more general interest in, and introduction to, tools. Several offered narratives related to their childhood when they first started to experiment with their father's tools – building huts, making toys and fixing or maintaining sports gear. When Jack spoke to me about his tool collection, he segued into stories from his childhood, memorably watching his father using tools around the home 65 years ago and exploring his uncle's vast and impressive tool collection, many of which he had inherited, including a ratchet screwdriver, now his most prized possession.

*In our first home we had a tool draw in the laundry which had a hammer and a screwdriver in it and a few other funny little tools. We didn't have a drill or any modern things. But I'll never forget my uncle's shed which I think has influenced me a bit regarding tools and things. I was always impressed with his tool collection. I don't remember ever using them but I always talked to him about them. When he died, I was given a lot of his tools and they're really quite precious to me now. They're in my shed now, mixed up with all the other tools I've collected over the years. I've even got a favourite. It's a ratchet screwdriver that you can adjust so it'll screw one way or the other. You can lock it so it's fixed either way. I've run over it a few times with the lawnmower, knocked a bit of wood out of it, but it's still my most prized tool ... very important to me (Jack).*



Terry also attached meaningful narratives to particular tools, especially his ‘favourites’, for reasons beyond their immediate use value. For example, during a tour of his shed, Terry told me “*the story of [his] tool belt*” which he purchased during a day out interacting and bonding with his brother in law – an item which remained very special to him as he viewed it as the catalyst for that social relationship. As can be observed in Terry’s quote below, their shared (male) interest in tools was a platform for their interaction and bonding:

*I’ll have to tell the story of my tool belt. I went shopping with my brother-in-law – off for some male bonding and of course we went to one of the big hardware chains for fun, you know with all the cheap Chinese imports. So we’re off to do this and I come back home and with great pride I might add – with my first tool belt. It was very, very exciting. I’ve since done quite a few little handyman jobs – I think I was feeling very inspired with the new belt, you know you put it on and you really feel the part ... it’s definitely the best thing I own and it still stands as the moment I made a breakthrough with my brother in law (Terry).*

My interviewees (mostly males) also offered detailed accounts of the performance qualities of the tools they owned. Over the course of their DIY careers, they had learnt a great deal about the performance qualities of different tools and based on these experiences, had developed a predilection for particular implements, usually those that were the most versatile or did tasks the fastest. In the two interview excerpts below, for example, Glen and Hamish describe their growing infatuation with their cordless power drills – a tool they both prized for its versatility and its ability to be ‘pushed to the limits’:

*I think that the cordless drill is becoming my number one tool. It’s so handy for everything. With all the wee attachments you can get for it now – like if you’re sanding a door you can get the sanding attachments or discs. It’ll do everything for me and I really push it sometimes ... it’s brilliant (Glen).*

*I’ve always liked tools, even when I was a kid. My favourite would be my drill, a DeWalt, 14.4 Cordless Drill, with a ratchet chuck and dual speeds. It’s fast to recharge and it’s known in the industry as a quality tool. That’s my favourite and I use it for everything, anything from drilling holes in wood to screwing screws in metal, to drilling metal and tightening bolts. I got it when I started building the fence out there but I’ve discovered it can be used for just about anything and I’m sure I haven’t even pushed it to its limits yet (Hamish).*

Barry and Jack also referred to their electric drills – corded and cordless – as their favourite tools, both suggesting that it was a DIY career breakthrough when they finally acquired one because it enabled them do a much wider and more challenging variety of jobs:

*I bought it [cordless drill] because a series of jobs weren't getting done because I didn't have one. Once I got it, I was able to do all those little jobs. Now that tool is part of my collection and is fast becoming my favourite. There are so many attachments you can get for it, especially for turning screws and that type of thing. It's just so quick and efficient, and all the attachments. I mean you can put a sander on it! (Barry).*

*...getting a really good power drill was a big breakthrough. A drill that I could drill concrete with or metal as well as wood and one that I could adjust the speed on – really slow it down. The first one I got was a Black and Decker about 20 years ago and I've only just had to replace it. The trigger on it was driving me nuts. I bought an almost identical replacement with a few added features which sped up the process. I think my drill was my first major tool. With the right attachments you could use it as a skill saw and table saw. I remember doing a bit of DIY work for my son with the Black and Decker, a lot of drilling of stainless steel. But I couldn't get the drill to go through the metal without it wobbling around – it was hopeless. I went on the internet to find out more about how to drill stainless steel. The advice was to get a drill press. I got hold of a second hand press, just a little one, which I could fit the drill to. I could keep the drill at a slow consistent speed with it and apply steady pressure. It was amazing the difference it made (Jack).*

While versatile tools were highly valued, those that saved time (Figure 39, page 185) were also revered by their owners, a facet of DIY tool technology long promoted by those who manufacture and sell this equipment. Cutting tools were especially prized by my interviewees, such as circular saws which took the time and effort out of cutting through timber. Similarly, paint rollers were often mentioned – valorised for their time saving qualities. Marty noted that his belt sander became his “*new favourite tool*” when he discovered the time that could be saved when using it to sand down weatherboard cladding (Marty). Bruce made a similar point:

*My favourite tools are the ones that can do the most damage the quickest. Well, I've got several tools that do that. I really like my chainsaw. You don't use that inside very often, but when you do it's good because it just saves you so much time and it's so quick – it's the ultimate demolition, construction and gardening tool. I also like the power file, because one of the other really horrible things to do is to try and get into small holes, and particularly if you're doing*

*locks. And it doesn't matter what house you own, you are going to end up doing a lock. And the only way you can get into wood without having to sit there for hours with a chisel is with a power file. They're so quick. In Bryant Street, that's how I did them. I just cut them out, you know, I did a lot of the work with a power file – fantastic. So you learn with certain tools. And the favourite ones are really the ones that just do things quickly that otherwise would just take you so much longer (Bruce).*

Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 39: Tools that, among other benefits, *speed* up tasks within a DIY project have long been developed and promoted by tool manufacturers (NZHH, 1970b)

The gendered division of interest in tools and tool stores was perhaps no better emphasised than in the comments made by the females I spoke to during my interviews with home owning couples. In the interview excerpt below, for example, Britney points out that the tools kept in her garage were, without question, her husband's possessions:

*The tools are definitely his ... He gets the odd tool for gifts. Once I bought him a new toolbox, and he got a hammer but it wouldn't fit in the tool box so he just cut the end off. His Dad's given him a lot of his old tools and I don't mind him buying tools, like I don't mind him going and buying power tools and stuff, that's man stuff. He likes that kind of stuff and I definitely don't (Britney).*

The following two interview excerpts between Jillian and Anna and their respective partners, echo Britney's attitude towards tools, providing further evidence of a gendered division of interest in the hardware of the DIY culture:

*I'm not interested in them [tools] like he is. I never liked the mess of tools but nowadays they're much better, less mucky than they used to be. They're not so greasy. Mind you, you'll find a few tools in his shed that if you touch them you'll end up with a big black smudge on your hand – that's why I never go into the shed. It's definitely not my scene out there and they're all his tools anyway ... I don't think I own a single one (Jillian). She'll bring me cups of tea though! (Jack).*

*They're definitely his tools, and that's fine. I mean they're his babies. I wouldn't know what to do with them. He enjoys using them – I don't. He asked me to go get him something the other day, and I thought I knew what he meant but I couldn't find it (Anna). A screwdriver! (James). Yeah, but it was a different kind of a screwdriver! It wasn't just a normal screwdriver was it? How was I to know? (Anna).*

Given what has been said above, it came as no surprise to me that men also derived a great deal more enjoyment than their female counterparts visiting hardware stores to buy tools, talk about tools with 'experts' or simply to engage in tool 'window-shopping' (where there was certainly a pronounced gender divide). In contrast, Hazel said that she found these stores boring and "hated going". She could not even remember the name of the biggest DIY store in town (see her quotation below). She did, however, appreciate the advice she could get in these places, particularly in regards to colour schemes and also appreciated being able to see replica interiors set up (such as complete kitchens and bathrooms) which she said helped her to visualise possibilities for her own home.

*I hate DIY stores. I just get so bored. The only one that I like is that one in Riccarton. I always forget the name, Biggins, Boggings, Buggings or Bunnings – Bunnings, that’s it. Gary will go to the tool section and I’ll go to the kitchen or bathroom department to get ideas ... or I’ll have to pull up a pot of paint, sit on it and start whistling and waiting for him to surface from all the tools with a big grin on his face (Hazel).*

Kate said that she had stopped going to DIY stores with her husband because she found them uninteresting and was tired of having to go with him “*nearly every weekend*”. She also worried about the amount of money he was spending on tools, a concern shared by many of the women I spoke to.

*...we’ve stopped going to DIY stores together because I find them pretty damn boring and I’m getting sick of him asking me to go in the weekends, every weekend, but we haven’t actually ventured there together lately ... I’m trying to get him to save a bit of money, because he’s becoming a little bit compulsive about buying power tools and bits and pieces. He just spent \$600 on a water blaster. So, when he goes to a store – every time – it costs us money. Mind you ... he’s saving a lot of money, because he doesn’t have to get anyone else to do the work. But I’m not really too keen to go to the stores with him (Kate).*

The comments above provided by the females I interviewed were in stark contrast to the narratives provided by my male participants, who all said they thoroughly enjoyed going to DIY stores to look at and/or to buy tools. For them, tool ‘shopping’ – whether buying or just ‘looking’ – was leisure. Hamish, for example, said that he felt “*confident in a DIY store*” and compared this to his wife’s sense of self-confidence in clothing stores. Hamish felt that he knew enough about tools “*...to ask good questions and not feel stupid*”. Barry also said he felt comfortable in DIY stores and enjoyed thinking about the possible projects he could do with the tools he saw.

*I absolutely love going to DIY shops, absolutely love it. I could spend hours just walking around looking at the tools and getting ideas for projects like how could I use that tool? It’s a confidence thing – I know my tools, so it’s a place I’m happy to be in whether I’m just looking around or if I’m there for a specific purpose (Barry).*

Eric went so far as to confess that his urge to shop for DIY gear was a problem, although he was quick to point out that the advent of cheap tools meant his impulsive spending in this area was nowadays less of an issue with his wife. Similarly, Hamish said that he nearly always ended up in the tool department of DIY stores gazing at the latest gadgetry and

occasionally making a spontaneous purchase, which, like Eric, he thought was less of an issue given the low prices of contemporary DIY tools.

*I like to look at the new stuff ... just look at the tools. I look for new equipment and even stuff I won't have a use for – I'll take an interest in that. And I don't necessarily go there to buy something. Sometimes I just go to look but it's pretty unlikely that I'll leave empty handed, especially now they're all so cheap, I just buy them (Hamish).*

## **9.6. Cheap tools**

Like Hamish and Eric (above), all of the participants in this research – males and females – were cognisant of the fact that tool prices had fallen dramatically in recent years, making them much more accessible to the average homeowner. Bruce and Sam (both tool shopping enthusiasts) commented (see quotes below) on how this phenomenon had enabled them to procure hardware items which were once well beyond their financial means. This included what Bruce called “*big ticket tools*” for one-off jobs which in the past he would have had to borrow or hire when needed. The availability of cheap tools also meant it was possible to get the ‘right tool for the job’ (albeit a low-quality option) rather than having to improvise with the tools one had at hand, and which often led to problems.

*Quite often you don't have the right tools, and it used to be that the tools were too expensive, so you made do with tools that weren't the right one for the job which could cause problems for you. You might realise that you'll only need it for a one-off project, so you're reluctant to buy it, and then of course things get delayed and that creates a bit of tension. I've used screwdrivers for chisels and the wrong type of saw, but you get by. You never have the right sort of planes. But thankfully tools are much cheaper now. They're designed to throw away after a limited amount of use, and they're really cheap, and you can afford to get them for those one-off jobs. And for one job, they do the job properly. In the past, I've had to borrow tools off my father-in-law mainly and neighbour. So I'd say, 'Have you got a chisel or hammer?', or whatever. You sort of shared things. But now that they're cheaper, it's just a matter of going in and buying the tools. I mean, what was \$100 not long ago, is only twenty bucks now. I think it's a benefit, because you can actually get the proper tools for the job. I think the most recent one I bought was my angle grinder. Because of the angle that the cutting disc is on, you can use it for sanding and for cutting metal and sharpening blades and anything. It's just a multi-purpose weapon really. I got it at the Warehouse for about 19 bucks (Bruce).*

*Tools are so cheap. Tools are almost disposable, you can easily afford to buy a ridiculous amount of tools, and you almost just use them once, they're that cheap. And I think that's a*

*huge thing. That has changed things. I mean what we put up in our shower I actually had all the right tools, not necessarily the best tools in terms of quality, but everything I needed I could afford (Sam).*

While most of those of whom I interviewed were excited by the arrival of cheap tool brands (especially the first homeowners I spoke with), some older interviewees expressed concern about the quality of this hardware. A frequent comment was that these cheap tools were of poor quality and not built to last.

*You can get a great variety of things now, whatever you're after you can get it and probably afford it. Different prices, different sizes, different shapes. Not like it used to be when you could only go and buy one of those and one of those and when it was all pretty expensive. When we first moved into a home, we had a little hardware store around the corner and things have got so much cheaper than back then, but they're definitely not as good quality as they used to be. I've still got tools I got in the 70's but I'm pretty sure the cheapies you get now won't last more than a few years or [a few] projects (Barry).*

*As a rule I don't buy cheap tools. I know that if a tool does not work properly, then you generally end up hating it. But there are some tools that get high usage, like a drill. I got a Makita Drill, because I know that they get an absolute hammering. And everyone curses the cheap drills (Max).*

These older interviewees were also concerned that the advent of cheap power tools had resulted in younger generations losing their ability to use hand tools, preferring instead to buy a cheap power machine for the job they were doing. Two of my older research participants believed that the progression from hand tools to power tools was once a rite of passage in New Zealand (i.e., becoming a Kiwi bloke), one which was now being eroded by easy access to the cheap power tool brands.

*I can't remember working on any job in my first 20 years of home ownership where there were any machine tools available to me. We mixed concrete with a shovel and barrow. It was some years later that I got my hands on a powered concrete mixer. Nowadays the concrete comes from the ready mix bag so you don't even require a mixer, so there's less practical skill involved for the mixer. When I started out, most people had practical skills and skills with hand tools, definitely more skill with hand tools, most definitely. They developed these by using hand tools working with raw materials ... but these cheap, funny looking, plastic tools won't provide that opportunity (Charlie).*

*Before I got an electric plane I used sandpaper on bits of wood, and rasps. But with those, you're there for hours, there's dust everywhere and you've got nowhere. But the electric plane, it's a great tool. But I waited for years before I got one – that's just the way it was – everyone did their apprenticeship with the hand tools. But I specifically remember saying one day 'that's what I want', so I saved and finally went out and bought one and the job gets done in quarter of the time. Nowadays there's no need to save, I guess, or slave away for years with hand tools like we did (Jack).*

### **9.7. Tool storage (sheds)**

Nearly all of my research participants kept their tools in a shed or a garage workshop (Figure 40, page 192). Some also had a small garden shed or shelter designated for gardening implements, which they preferred to keep separate from their hand- and power-tools. The only exception was Eric, who did not have a garage or shed in his current home, so kept most of his tools in the three-tiered plastic toolbox inside the house in the laundry. A range of gardening and lawn care equipment were stacked under the car port.

Nearly all of the shed or garage tool collections were neatly organised in draws or on shelves, often with a select range mounted on wooden panels for easy access, with lines traced around each implement to ensure its return to the correct place. There were two exceptions to this orderliness: firstly, Hamish, whose tool collection was spread through the garage in what seemed like total disarray, although he argued that he “...could find any tool in a second”; and secondly, James, whose shed was equally disordered but, according to him, was in fact more like “*organised chaos*”. Overall, however, well-ordered sheds were the norm and were one aspect of the New Zealand DIY culture which was admired by some female interviewees:

*... all our neighbours and Dad had amazingly organized workshops ... with the stencil around the outside of every tool, every tool in its right place, everything hung up neatly. We had a neighbour who was always out in the shed. He was one of those meticulous handymen. He was very confident in the shed; he could make or fix anything. The shed was his kingdom (Jill).*

*My clearest memories of my Granddad are from when we used to come down here on holidays for two or three months, and after he had his stroke he couldn't do much around the house and he used to be a very handy man. But the one thing he could do is still go out to the shed. So he would go out there day after day and spend hour after hour just re-arranging things. And that is something I clearly associate with my Grandfather. He had all those little jars of nails all lined up. My Mum and Aunt often talk about the time after both my grandparents died, clearing*



*out that shed. He had packets of things he had never opened, because he was just hoarding all this stuff. He had the most amazing collection of hand tools. And he knew where everything was, like, you'd walk in there and think he'd never be able to find what you wanted, but you'd ask for a screw of a certain type, he'd get it (Natalie).*

Another strong theme to emerge in this study was that sheds and garage workshops are almost exclusively male domains, although this is not an entirely new observation in New Zealand. Just over a decade ago, popular social commentator Jim Hopkins (1998) published *Blokes and Sheds*, a eulogy to the many Kiwi males who in their sheds, workshops and garages expressed their creativity, ingenuity and productive capacity by *doing* DIY. “The fact is” he wrote, “men define themselves by doing” and, more specifically, by working with their hands (Hopkins, 1998, p.9). Hopkins visited the sheds of New Zealand males across the country, discovering not only the outcomes of their work, their tool collections and hoardings of nails, screws, timber and paint, but also the strong attachment many New Zealand men have with these domains of the home, often detached from the house itself. Three quotes from *Blokes and Sheds* echo the narratives of my own interviewees: 1) “It’s a bloke’s area. I feel at home here” (p.106), 2) “Dad was a shed addict, so am I” (p.32), and 3) “A bloke’s lost if he hasn’t got his workshop” (p.30). In a similar vein, many of my male interviewees described the shed as a special place to spend time, a “man-space” as both Hamish and Barry explained:

*The shed is where I spend heaps of time doing stuff, not me and Jane – ‘we’ never go out there. I guess that’s my man-space ... All my tools are kept in the shed and I’ve got the key for it. Jane doesn’t have the key to the shed. There is one around the house but she doesn’t have it on her key ring. So, it’s just me and my shed (Hamish).*

*The shed has always been my space, always. When it wasn’t, it was only because of storage issues, but I would eventually push everything out so it was my space again. Unfortunately, I never had a decent shed, which is quite sad really. Probably by the time I get to that stage of having my own decent shed, I’ll be too old to be doing DIY. In the beginning, the shed’s an escape. It’s a place to go and work out what you’re going to do, whether it’s painting, planes or machines or making something or building something. You need somewhere to work. Somewhere you can make sawdust or metal filings or fumes. You need somewhere to put your dirty stuff. You don’t want that stuff inside, and you need covered space because invariably you end up doing DIY stuff on a rainy day. So you just need an area to do it in. And also, there’s a lot of satisfaction in doing something yourself out in the shed (Barry).*

Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 40: The interiors of interviewees' tool sheds (author's photos)

## 9.8. DIY materials

DIY retail stores in New Zealand stock thousands of different tools and building materials (referred to by my key informants from the DIY retail sector as ‘SKUs’ or Stock Keeping Units) and for each and every one there are usually several international and/or local brands from which the DIYer can choose. One need only briefly walk the aisles of a big-box home improvement store to see the extensive range of building supplies – located in areas or aisles signposted in order to direct the consumer to the category they may want – plumbing, electrical, landscape, timber, roofing, fasteners, locks and latches, sealants, paints, abrasives (such as sandpaper) and adhesives. Like tools, DIY materials – the ingredients of any DIY project – vary greatly in their cost and quality from very cheap, low-quality items (often sourced from international low-cost suppliers) to much more expensive, high-quality variants.

While some building materials can be defined as ‘raw’ (such as lengths of untreated timber or bags of powdered cement) others have been designed, processed and packaged specifically with the novice in mind (i.e., they are easy to use). A good example is the self-adhesive floor tile, an innovation which removes the need for gluing the tiles, thereby making flooring projects easier, cleaner and faster to complete. Many of my interviewees were enthralled when they discovered materials designed to simplify and speed up the work process. Linda, for example, spoke excitedly of her recent discovery of quick dry interior paint that did not require a primer or undercoat, thereby speeding up and greatly simplifying the painting project she was doing: “...it’s just two or three coats from the same tin! It dries so fast that you can actually slap that many coats on in a day and then, “dah-dah!” job done – time to sit down with a wine and admire your work! (Linda). James also marvelled at the qualities of some of the DIY materials he had used for his bathroom renovation, especially those designed to make tasks easier for the amateur home renovator to use:

*... I don’t think I would have been able to do it [bathroom renovation] myself without some of the products I got my hands on ... it seemed like there was some fancy new thing for everything ... like I got my hands on an under-floor heating kit designed for beginners like me to install without a big fuss ... the plumbing was like Lego ... I just had to follow the instructions, 1, 2, 3 it all popped together and done. The new glues and sealants are all pretty amazing too, like pre-mixed for this and that – tiles, the plumbing and the wall linings – you know, they’ve [the DIY industry] thought of everything to make it easier for you (James).*

While most of my interviewees were very keen on these new DIY product developments, several of my older participants were less impressed. Charlie, for example, my oldest interviewee, believed the advent of these easy-to-use materials was taking the skill out of DIY practice (a similar comment to that which he made about new tool technologies in Section 9.6).<sup>49</sup> He used the development and availability of lock-together plastic plumbing fittings to make his point, followed by references to pre-mixed DIY products:

*I think all the new technology is making it easier for people to do DIY and the result of that will be a loss of practical dexterity. Take plastic spouting for a start, you don't have to learn to solder do you? Before the plastic stuff came about, you make up your lengths of guttering on the ground or on the bench but ultimately when you got it up there you have to solder a joint to keep it in place. That's probably the hardest part of doing the spouting and everything was soldered. I doubt there's a present day home handyman who could solder a joint – there's no occasion for him to try or to learn. And it's not just plastic spouting, we even had to mix our own paint and I can't imagine a homeowner today being able to that either – it's all done for you nowadays. I also had to mix my own wallpaper paste and sometimes I didn't make it strong enough. But today they do it differently – today you just reverse it, put it in the tub and pull it up and straight onto the wall – all pre-pasted. As long as you're careful it's easy, but where's the skill in that, I'd like to ask? (Charlie).*

Jack (who was in his early seventies) made a similar point, recalling how he had to mix and tint the paint he used on his first home himself, a far cry (he pointed out) from the situation today where paint can be purchased in pre-mixed tubs of various quantities, then tinted in store (at a small cost) by paint specialists and to the customers exact liking – needing only a stir once home to prepare it for application. He described the contrast (or change over time) in this way:

*My first do-it-yourself job was painting and I mixed the paint myself ... I had five gallons of linseed oil and lead and tints but the only colours you could have were cream in those days. There was no ready-mix paint. You had to mix in a dryer – paint dryer – I forget now what I used. Anyhow, I mixed the paint up myself and finished off with the average cream. Most houses those days were just a shade of cream – one slightly darker than the other one and that's about it. The variety of tinting was small – there were about four or five. I'm amazed with the paint you get today – you're just straight home in the car and it's all ready to go (Jack).*

---

<sup>49</sup> Charlie's comments might be interpreted as the reflections of a 'craftsman hobbyist' (Roland, 1958) – a person who enjoys the challenge of manipulating raw materials in the 'making' process. (See page 40 of this thesis.)

Advances in building material technology have no doubt made many materials easier for amateurs to use, thereby bringing a wider range of projects within the reach of the average DIYer. However, my interviewees also identified products that remained extremely difficult to use or manipulate. The most frequently mentioned was interior wall-board plaster which most of the research participants found difficult to mix and apply, while others simply avoided trying, well-aware from the experiences and advice of friends and family that plastering was one job best left to the professionals.

*Plastering has to be the hardest job, hard because you actually need to be quite skilled to use the stuff and if you mess it up, it's expensive to fix. And it's just one of those things, it doesn't matter how hard you try or how much advice you get, you have to be a bloody expert to get it right. If you cock up the plastering of a wall, then you've got to get someone else in or start again, believe me. I've been there and done that and I'm not going there again. It's just one of those jobs that I'm now prepared to pay someone to do (Shane).*

*I had to look after Gary when he was plastering. Although I had to get out of the way when he threw a wobbly because it was getting difficult – yeah, plastering, that involved the most wobbly throwing. He'd mix it up and you know when it starts to go hard before you put it on, and he just spit the dummy. But I just knew if there was any plastering going on, to get out of the way or pop in with cups of tea or beer. I don't think he'll do it again (Hazel).*

While myriad criteria can be used to categorise building materials (such as the different cataloguing systems used by hardware stores) my interviewees most commonly made the distinction between *non-decorative* and *decorative* and materials, and mainly talked about the latter category. Decorative materials were those my interviewees used to create a visual *effect* – a desirable ‘style’, ‘look’ or ‘personal touch’. Examples of these types of materials include wall and floor coverings (paints, stains, wallpapers, tiles and vinyl etc.), tap ware, laminated or stained wood panels and shelving, and electrical fittings (such as decorative light shades and switch and plug covers). While these materials do all “perform” (such as paint which seals and protects, or shelving which holds books) the advertising for decorative home improvement products have long also promoted their *aesthetic* qualities (Leonard et al., 2004). Given the fashionable attributes of these products, decorative materials were frequently altered, discarded or replaced by my research participants, as housing fashions changed. Rose, for example, recalled wallpapering one of the houses she had previously owned with floral wallpapers – a different one for each room – and then, three years later, painting over the paper, going for the “modern look with a feature wall in each room”.

### 9.8.1. Materials, thrift and resourcefulness

While materials for DIY projects were generally purchased new from home improvement stores, many of my interviewees said they also enjoyed rummaging around demolition yards or second-hand building supply outlets for the resources they needed. Some of them did this because they liked to recycle while others simply enjoyed foraging for a bargain (perhaps not being able to afford any other option).

*You find the products yourself by going to second hand stores, Musgrove's, for example, second hand demolition yards. For example, those French doors were from 'Musies' and they were a steal. We couldn't have got new ones ... too expensive (Hamish).*

*The mantelpiece there came from CRC Salvage. I don't mind going to those places, I prefer CRC Salvage and the Pump House, because I can forage around and find things and that's something I have a bit of fun doing (Hazel).*

*I really enjoy going to demolition yards to rummage around for bits and pieces I might need. I'm almost on first name terms with a lot of the staff. When we first moved in to this place we asked the owners what needed doing first. They told us the spouting – you know the guttering needed replacing. I went to the local demolition yard and got some second-hand guttering and put it all up. I guess I'm a recycler (Jack).*

*I think anyone in Christchurch who does DIY would probably know about various places like Musgroves or Sal's Salvage. If you ever try and do anything on a budget and if you can get quality stuff second-hand, you'll know about places like demolition yards ... I tour around those places all the time looking for bargains (David)*

David pointed out that finding a use for a redundant material was especially satisfying. He tried to make use of everything he could acquire. He was particularly proud of his resourcefulness and where he had used products was a talking point. For example:

*Take the fireplace-surround ... I could have purchased one that was pre-made and put that in. But not only were they expensive but they were rather flimsy looking things, so I ended up buying some recycled rimu four-by-two from Musgroves and just some slate type paving, some old concrete pavers really and put those all in myself. It was cheap and really adds to the effect (David).*

My interviewees also pointed out that they 'hoarded' materials, evidence of which was palpable in their sheds or around the section where a wide range of materials were stored –

items they had collected from various sources or left over and saved from their own previous jobs. Dave, for example, had a stack of decking timber balanced in the rafters of his garage, the leftovers from a project his father had done. Dave said he had “...*rescued the wood from the dump heap*” and intended to use it to build a boxed vegetable garden. He told me “... *you can never have enough spare wood lying around, there’s always a use for it*” (Dave). While stacks of timber were commonplace in the sheds and garages of my interviewees, so too were shelves or cupboards containing partially full tins of paint (Figure 41, below), the leftovers from their past painting projects – “*saved*”, as Hamish put it, “*just in case there might be a use for it in the future*”. Among the items my interviewees had stored in their sheds and garage workshops were: jars of nails (some old, some new), washers, screws, nuts and bolts; stacks of old bricks and paving stones; and off-cuts of wire, plaster board, plywood, rope and string.

Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 41: James’s collection of ‘leftover’ paint and adhesives (author’s photo)

The existence of an informal network of exchange also surfaced as a major theme in the discussions about materials. My interviewees provided many examples of trading materials with friends and neighbours. Max and Jill told me about when they went visiting their friend's house and noticed an old upturned plastic bath on the lawn. Their friends had just completed a major bathroom makeover and, in that process, had replaced the old plastic bath with a newer model. In exchange for some electrical advice, Max was given the bath which he picked up later with his father's trailer and then installed in his own home.

Sally and Sam were keen to recycle building materials. Some of the materials they reused were from their own projects, while others were sourced from other homeowners they knew who were doing renovations and no longer had a use for them. Sally enjoyed this partly because this lowered the overall cost of the project but more so for the enjoyment and satisfaction she derived from "being" a recycler and the challenge it added to projects. Sally referred to being one link in a cycle of exchange.

*We got an old bath that Bill and Jane removed from their place and stuck it our new bathroom ... it was better than our old crusty yellow one. It's really cool to be able to use their bath, not just going and buying another one. Now we've to get rid of the one we've removed but someone will take it and use it. We've listed it on TradeMe [online auction website] for \$1 and we've had a few calls already. We'll try and use whatever materials I can get my hands on (Sally).*

Remembering back to his first home, Barry also recalled recycling building materials (using the salvaged materials from one project in another). Nowadays, however, Barry said he did not do this so much; he now had a modern home and did not want to use old materials. He could now also afford new materials.

An interesting point to note here is that while the women I spoke to did not speak a lot about tools, they did talk fondly of decorative materials, particularly paint and fabrics. This came as no surprise, given the gendered division of labour which was evident among households. Men's interest in tools was likely connected to their role as the executors of structural work, while the women I spoke to seemed more interested in the outcomes of projects – or the aesthetic/visual effect of the materials they used in their decorating projects.

## **9.9. Chapter summary**

This chapter has explored the materiality of DIY practice. Inspected first were the tools that my research participants necessarily acquired and used in order to accomplish their home



improvement projects, and also how, over the course of their housing careers, they developed, stored and looked after their tool ‘collections’. Emphasised in the conversation was a gendered interest in tools, (and the sheds where they were kept), with the men interviewed outwardly more enthused with ‘their’ tools and workshops, than the females with whom I spoke. Second, I discussed matters surrounding the acquisition and use of building supplies – particularly decorative materials used for home improving. The chapter demonstrates the inextricable link between DIY practice (as described over the previous analysis chapters) and the consumption of building ‘hardware’ which is usually, but not always, acquired from the home improvement marketplace. The discussion provides a useful segue into the next chapter which seeks to explain DIY in social scientific terms and, in particular, captures the essence of my own conceptual ‘wrestling’ with both the *productive* and *consumptive* dimensions of DIY practice.

## 10. Reframing DIY

### 10.1. Introduction

Over the preceding interpretive chapters I have emphasised the story of one group of New Zealand homeowners who, during the course of their short or long home-ownership journeys, had employed their own practical skills, knowledge, creativity, imagination, social networks and material and economic resources to personalise and alter their houses and gardens – *actively* producing their (“DIYed”) home. The naturalistic approach I used for the study (outlined in detail in Chapter Two) produced a “rich description” (Geertz, 1973) of the DIY practices of my research participants, revealing what DIY gets done (Chapter Six), by whom in their households (Chapter Eight) and also how they commonly conceptualise and plan (Chapters Five & Seven), execute (Chapter Eight) and resource (Chapter Nine), their home improvement projects.

Chapter Five focused on my research participants’ DIY dreams – the projects they had contemplated doing in order to make their current house their ideal family home. This activity – which I framed in a discussion about house ‘potential’ – was one all of them seemed to enjoy. Chapter Six – a contextual chapter – focused on the projects my interviewees had actually done, rather than what they had contemplated doing, and also outlined the four activity categories which constituted DIY for them. These activities included: interior decorating, home repairs and maintenance, building work and gardening (including lawn care and landscape construction). In Chapter Seven I explored how my research participants planned their DIY projects. For many projects, this was when the interviewees began to think about the logistics of the ensuing work (for example, timing and costs), design aspects (such as which colour paint to use), and collect the necessary tools, materials, information and advice. Chapter Eight looked at the execution of project work. I began this examination by investigating the question of who does the work, after which two time related matters were considered: how people allocate time to DIY and also the problems they sometimes encountered as they try to get the work done within the timeframes they had set themselves. Skill application, ‘DIY disasters’ and matters surrounding the completion of projects, were also discussed. In Chapter Nine, I shifted my focus away from the actual work process to the material culture of DIY – the tools and materials needed and used, and the spaces in the home where these key resources were kept – sheds and garage workshops. In

that chapter I also investigated how my research participants acquired the resources for their projects (buying, inheriting and receiving them as gifts), which included a discussion of their tools store experiences. Collectively, these interpretive chapters – which were spearheaded with a contextual-historical narrative (Chapter Four) – addressed my first and second research questions (see pages 2 and 3): what constitutes DIY practice for New Zealand homeowners and how does the work get done?

In this chapter I address my third research question: how can DIY practice – as recounted by my 27 interviewees – now be characterised in social scientific terms? As noted in the Introduction, I have deliberately delayed my main and conclusive theoretical discussion until this penultimate thesis chapter, preferring not to introduce a large body of theory ‘up-front’ and then disperse it through the analysis chapters, as is common practice. The current arrangement more accurately reflects my research journey i.e., where I finally ‘arrived’ in my theoretical thinking about DIY practice.

I start the discussion in the chapter by problematising the account of DIY which I have presented in the previous interpretive chapters, suggesting that the DIY practices of individuals cannot fully be understood without some consideration of the wider societal “structures” and forms which constrain, enable and shape those activities (and which have been perhaps understated in the micro-sociological account of DIY practice presented thus far). As an entry point for that discussion, I briefly review Zygmunt Bauman’s (2000) theory (or meta-narrative) of “liquid modernity” and the synergies that body of work has with the social theorising of Anthony Giddens (1991a, 1991b, 2009). This opening macro-sociological conversation draws attention to the wider societal forces and forms surrounding DIY practice, particularly the role and influence of the commercial home improvement sector. My review of these theories segues into a discussion about the interplay between identity formation and consumption in the liquid (or late) modern era. It also provides an understanding of the critical notion – evident in Bauman’s (2001, 2007) work at least – that our everyday practices (such as DIY) are deeply entrenched in cycles of consumption and associated commercial relations (such as our engagement with product advertising) – so much so that in Bauman’s view we are nothing but a society of ‘consumers’ defined by what we buy.

While recognising in this chapter that ‘consumption’ is certainly a key and inescapable dimension of DIY (and it was certainly evident in this thesis as one cannot think to participate in DIY without consuming tools and materials), I will argue that beyond ‘shopping’ there

exists an important cluster of *productive*<sup>50</sup> human actions encompassing practical skills and abilities, innovative thinking, creativity, emotions, conversations and ‘teamwork’. Put another way, my practice-based account of DIY has shown that while people certainly engage in the world as consumers, they also (in the performances of their everyday lives) take on the role and identity of ‘producers’ which, in the context of this thesis, involves them actively *making* their own homes and gardens (Perkins & Thorns, 1999; Bhatti & Church, 2000).

After this chapter’s opening and broader contextual-theoretical conversation, I reflect (conceptually) on the minutiae of DIY activity, making particular note of the relationship between consumption and production, as was evident in the home improvement projects-based narratives of my interviewees. This dialogue is presented in a discussion based around three key principles of DIY practice<sup>51</sup>:

1. DIY practice as an outward and active expression of identity tied up in the desire to ‘personalise’ the home.
2. DIY practice as an active response to the need ‘adapt’ the home to the changing requirements of household members.
3. DIY practice as people actively ‘enjoying’ the home (as a site of productive work).

This three-pronged framework signposts the recent paradigm shift towards ‘practice-based’ accounts of human action in social science. This approach to the study of human action and social life more generally, shows that consumption is just one component of a bundle of activities through which people reflexively, actively and creatively engage in and also (re)produce their and social and material worlds, while simultaneously ‘building’ and maintaining their identities (Barnett, Cloke, Clarke & Malpass, 2011; Schatzki, 1996; Shove et al., 2007).

---

<sup>50</sup> It is important to note at this point in the chapter that I employ the term ‘production’ to refer to people *making* things for themselves, as opposed to the use of the term ‘production’ in broader consumption-production debates. My use of the term in this way stems from the actor-focused nature of this thesis and is best seen as part of the move to studies of ‘practice,’ which I will introduce in Section 10.3.

<sup>51</sup> In Chapter Five (‘DIY Thinking’) I devised a similar set of principles associated with the potential of home, including: economic potential (5.2.1), aesthetic potential (5.2.2) and functional potential (5.2.3). The reader may note that I have dropped the economic dimension in the current re-framing of DIY practice, replacing it with ‘enjoying the home’. This decision reflects the limited economic talk in my data; my research participants not tending to focus on the economic principles of DIY as they recounted their *lived* DIY experiences, focusing instead on the material outcomes of their projects and the personal satisfaction they derived from the process of doing their own home improvements.

## **10.2. DIY, consumption and the conditions of liquid modernity**

The ‘DIYed home’ can perhaps best be understood as a product of the relationship between human action (i.e., people actively and consciously carrying out DIY projects) and the wider societal ‘structures’ which shape, enable and constrain that activity. The obvious structures exposed in this thesis and which can be seen to have an effect on DIY practice and its outcomes include: government regulations (such as the New Zealand Electricity Act and the Building Act 2004, see Section 4.6.1.2, page 75, and also BOX 1 page 76); employment relations (which may, for instance, dictate when one has time off work for doing DIY, such as ‘long weekends’); one’s level of remuneration (which influences one’s level of discretionary income for buying tools and materials); and the offerings and vagaries of the marketplace (i.e., the ever changing array of tools and materials which make DIY projects possible and which greatly influence the outcome (or ‘look’ and quality) of the work). Many of these changes can be associated with the deregulation of the New Zealand economy in the 1980s and early 1990s (as detailed in Section 4.5, page 65), which shows that structures are fixed but open to change and alteration. Less obvious structures revealed which have an effect on DIY have included conventions and rules that are socially, culturally and historically derived (and often reinforced by the DIY sector through well-established and emergent practices of commercial advertising and DIY retailing), such as the cultural expectation in New Zealand that the good keen ‘Kiwi’ (male especially) should at least ‘have-a-go’ at doing their own home improvement projects – and also help their ‘mates’ do theirs, or at least lend them the tools to do so. In these ways, relations of production and consumption assume a dialectical process.

While gender conventions have been changing in Western society in recent decades and generally have become more fluid or ‘liquid’ (Bauman, 2000) – shifts encouraged by the DIY industry in the hope of creating new markets for products (see BOX 3, pages 133-134) – my data have shown that *traditional* gender conventions continue to have a predominant influence on the nature of DIY practice in New Zealand. Among the couples who participated in this study, the different roles they took within DIY projects were, more often than not, aligned with the conventional view that building, repairs and maintenance tasks (including exterior painting) were largely male responsibilities (reminiscent of the themes expounded in much of the historical work I reviewed in Chapter Three), while decorating activities were more often shared, family affairs, involving ‘teamwork’. Among the couples who participated in this study, women also often emerged as the primary organisers and managers of projects,

with influence over many of the aesthetic and design choices made, but not the ‘tools’ purchased (see Section 9.5). My data showed that these gendered roles have been produced, shaped and reinforced by a variety of societal forces. These include childhood socialisation processes, such as New Zealand children watching their Mums and Dads carrying out home improvements (see pages 162-164), and popular media representations of gendered roles in DIY projects, which have been pervasive in New Zealand since at least the World War II. Typical representations include men working outside and women decorating inside, or women supporting and encouraging their ‘handy’ husbands or partners (Figure 42, below. Also see Figures 34 and 36).

Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 42: Representations of gendered roles in DIY projects have been pervasive in New Zealand since at least the 1950s (top: *The Press*, 1955d; bottom: *Readers Digest*, 1965, p.12).

The relationship between human action and societal structures and conventions (such as hegemonic gender expectations) is well-recognised by social theorists such as Bhaskar (1979, pp.45-46) who argued that one cannot be reduced to the other (i.e., both need to be taken into account):

...society must be regarded as an ensemble of structures, practices and conventions which people reproduce or transform, but which would not exist unless they did so. Society does not exist independently of human activity... but it is not the product of it... Society, then, provides necessary conditions for intentional human action, and intentional human action is a necessary condition for it... Neither can, however, be identified with, reduced to, explained in terms of, or reconstructed from the other.

Discourses pertaining to the relationship between human action and structure are particularly strong in the social science literatures associated with the onset of late or ‘liquid’ modernity (e.g., Bauman, 2001; Giddens, 1991a, 1991b, 2009) a body of work to which I now turn.

### **10.2.1. Late and ‘liquid’ modernity**

Over the last two decades, a number of prominent social theorists have claimed that during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, advanced capitalist societies (such as New Zealand) emerged into a new and distinct phase of modernity. This new historical period has been closely associated with globalisation, the ascent of mass consumerism, and unprecedented, rapid and accelerating processes of social, economic and technological change (Bauman, 2000, 2001, 2007; Beck, 1991; Giddens, 1991a, 1991b, 2002, 2009; Poder, 2008; Slater, 1997). In line with these observations, Giddens (2002) suggests that we now live, work and play in a “runaway world”, one marked by flux, anxiety and uncertainty and constant rounds of restructuring which have undermined society’s once more stable structure.

Bauman (2000, 2007) provides an interesting lens through which to explore the terrain of this new and distinct historical period – an epoch he calls ‘liquid modernity’. Like Giddens<sup>52</sup>, Bauman argues that life before the ‘liquid modern’ era was decidedly more predictable and solid, with people’s identity and behaviour firmly governed by long-standing structures such as historically derived traditions, conventions and customs, and a range of stable and trusted social institutions, such as the workplace, church and nation state. Bauman (2001) argues that in liquid modern times, many of these pillars of society now exist in a constant and rapid state of transformation, while others have virtually ‘evaporated’ (Poder, 2008, referring to

---

<sup>52</sup> Giddens prefers to use the term “late modernity” for this new epoch.

Bauman). Without such solid reference points, it is argued, today's individuals are left floating free from institutional and community ties, able to build and maintain their own individualised identities – a 'DIY' approach – a process said to involve the reflexive agency of the individual (Giddens, 2009). In the context of debates surrounding liquid modernity, the term reflexivity (and its associations with identity building) is particularly important. It refers to rise of the self-determined individual and their new individualised existences, which are ostensibly freed from the constraints or traditional 'structures' of former times (Bauman, 2001).

... 'individualisation' consists of transforming human 'identity' from a 'given' into a 'task', and charging actors with the responsibility for performing that task and for the consequences (and also the side effects) of their performance; in other words, it consists in establishing a *je jure* 'autonomy' (though not necessarily the *de facto* one) ... needing to become what one is the feature of modern living ... Modernity replaces the determination of social standing with a compulsive and obligatory self-determination [making decisions for oneself] (Bauman, 2001, p.124).

Giddens (1991b) posited that amidst the flux of late modernity, individuals continuously assess who they are and/or who they would like to be and, if necessary, re-make themselves around these more desirable concepts of 'self' – a process he described as a life-long reflexive "identity project". Giddens (2009) suggested that nowadays our identities are now much more open to this change process – that is, we can, over time, and even within the space of a day, adopt one or several new identities, and leave old ones behind (Giddens, 2009). According to Bauman (2001), in the liquid modern era, individuals continually evaluate and actively (re)form their own identities, largely via the acquisition of carefully chosen commodities from the marketplace – their identities expressed through what they *consume*. This is possible because one can now "acquire the market goods that can be used to display an identity, of course, instead of having it emerge from a way of life" (Harris, 2005, pp.157-158). Bauman (2001) cautioned that while today's 'identity builders' are certainly free to pick and construct their identities in this way (that is, from the shop shelf), the selection process is not entirely unproblematic; the problem is not how to get a new identity but rather which identity to select, and how to keep-up-to-date with what is appropriate and/or fashionable. This creates anxiety, on which the culture industries feed and which trigger production-consumption cycles. *Which* designer's "designer-kitchen"? Tiled floors or carpeted? If tiled, then Italian? Will lighting be chandeliers or 'spots' on the ceiling? Which paint? Textured or metallic, or low or high sheen? How much of this can I do myself?



While this all suggests that modern day “identity builders” are *trapped* in cycles of consumption, Bauman (2001) suggests that they in fact are able to find “freedom” (of a kind) in the marketplace – freedom to shop around and, ostensibly, choose the *distinct* identity they want from the ever-increasing range of commodities on offer. Yet this only leaves the DIY consumer with more decisions to make. *Which* model, speed and style of power drill do I need and/or desire? Should we buy the expensive celebrity-endorsed paint, or could we ‘make-do’ with a cheaper low-quality variant?

There is of course no shortage of help and advice for today’s ‘identity builders’ (Bauman, 2007), the market offering a plethora of advice for consumers to help them make the ‘correct’ choice and appropriately carry off their identity. As Jackson (2005, p.395) has noted, “as ‘traditional’ sources of identity have declined in significance, new sources of authority have risen to guide people through the potential minefield of consumer choice (examples [also cited in this thesis] would include the proliferation of consumer lifestyle magazines and the popularity of TV ‘makeover’ programmes such as *Changing Rooms* and *Ground Force*)” (Jackson, 2005, p.395; also see Leonard et al., 2004). While the proliferation and use of commodified forms of DIY product information and advice and decision-making tools, have been discussed at various points in this thesis (including kitchen planners (Figure 23, page 122) and colour charts (Figure 24, page 123) and DIY magazines and television shows), informal social networks also emerged as a significant and influential source of product information and advice. Put simply, my interviewees frequently consulted other homeowner-DIYers in their social network. What shade of paint did *you* use? How did *you* create that fresh look? Which store did *you* get those plants from? How did *you* build that deck? What do you think of *our* garden plans? ...any suggestions? (for example, see Figure 18, page 111).

### **10.2.2. Consumer society**

This brings in discussions of the late modern ‘consumer society’ which are now at the centre of a burgeoning sociology literature which discusses specific consumer practices (see Section 3.2.2.3, page 37 for a discussion of ‘ordinary’ and ‘craft’ consumption) and/or attempts to trace the ascent of consumerism, more generally (see for example Bauman, 2007; Campbell, 2005; Corrigan, 1997; Featherstone, 1991; Lury, 1996; Mansvelt, 2005; Miles 1998; Paterson, 2006; Shove et al., 2007). In Bauman’s (1999, p.36) view...

...when we call it a consumer society, we have in mind something more than the trivial and sedate circumstance that all members of that society are consumers – all *human* beings, and not just human

beings, have been consumers since time immemorial. What we do have in mind is that ours is a “consumer society” in the similarly profound and fundamental sense in which the society of our predecessors, modern society in the industrial phase, used to be a “producer society”. That older type of modern society once engaged its members primarily as producers and soldiers; society shaped its members by dictating the need to play those two roles, and the norm that society held up to its members was the ability and the willingness to play them. In its present late-modern (Giddens), second-modern (Beck), or postmodern stage, modern society has little need for mass industrial labour and conscript armies, but it needs—and engages—its members in their capacity as consumers.

Geographers have also waded in on these debates, with a particular interest in the emergence of markers in the landscape such as the development of enormous shopping complexes (see Pawson 1996, also see Figure 1, page 2 for a New Zealand example), which reflect society’s modern consumption impulse. Pawson (1996, p.318), to take one specific example, discusses the emergence of large retail complexes in New Zealand in the 1990s – buildings he calls “icons of the decade” (and, in the context of this thesis, the expansion in size of DIY stores during the 1990s certainly lends support to his observation). Pawson (1996) argued that through the 1990s, these large consumption centres became ‘leisure landscapes’ with people flocking to them not only to purchase the goods they needed, (and there were more to select from than ever before), but also to indulge in shopping for shopping’s sake.<sup>53</sup> Many of these ideas have been united in the complimentary ‘cultures of consumption’ literature where, since at least the mid-1990s, the link between identity formation, consumption and consumer landscapes – the “buyosphere” (Hine, 2002, pp.65-66) – has been a primary focus of research.

The buyosphere is both a set of shopping opportunities and a state of mind. It encompasses the shopping streets of the city, the mall, the supermarket, the home shopping channels, advertisements and the internet. But what calls it into being is the willingness and desire of those who inhabit it to imagine their lives differently, to believe that, by making choices, they can express and empower themselves. There are no fixed identities in the buyosphere. The buyosphere is a place of windows and mirrors. The windows allow us to be voyeurs, glimpsing countless transforming possibilities. Once, only the finest things in life were seen only by the powerful. In the buyosphere, everything is on display. You can look at the best, and if you have the money, you can buy it. The mirrors of the buyosphere help us to see ourselves as part of the spectacle, and challenge us to consider what we might become. Few people can go past a mirror without at least glancing at it and retail designers know that a mirror is always an effective way to slow down the rush of traffic and induce shoppers to look around. Mirrors induce purchasing by forcing us to doubt our own completeness. In the buyosphere, you spend time considering whether a lamp – or a

---

<sup>53</sup> For a discussion about shopping as leisure, or people seeking enjoyment through shopping and consumption see Harris, 2005; Paterson, 2006.

stuffed boa constrictor –will complete or clutter your living room. Or you try on the garment. “For size,” says the sales-clerk. But you know that’s fiction. What you’re really trying on is an identity ... shopping invites us to engage in the play that can lead to self-discovery.

### **10.3. DIY as a consumptive and productive practice**

While macro-sociological accounts of late or liquid modernity and the associated rise of consumer society helpfully attend to the growing significance of consumption in the everyday lives of today’s individuals, they do very little to help us understand what people actually *do* with the commodities they buy. What happens post-acquisition once goods (drills, nails, wallpaper etc.) are taken from the marketplace into the domestic sphere for use? Based on Bauman’s (2007) general thesis, one could be forgiven for thinking that all people do is shop – unwittingly lured into the “buyosphere” (Hine, 2002) by advertising for another round of identity-related consumption. While my data certainly support the view that we need consumables to engage in DIY (paint, timber and hammers are examples) such that the DIYer must at some point “go shopping”, and while they are concerned with the symbolic relevance of some DIY products, they must also *carry out* their projects. As we have seen over the previous interpretive chapters, this involves engaging in a vast array of *productive* and situated practical activities requiring an investment of time, energy, care and effort to be invested. Indeed, all my interviewees identified with their roles as “producers” – being “DIYers” – while, at the same time, recognising that they were consumers of DIY products.

Barnett et al. (2011) have recently argued that practice-based accounts of consumption provide a more balanced view of social life, than the consumption society thesis suggests (Bauman, 2007), and for this reason I briefly explore their work here. What is practice? To answer this, Barnett et al. (2011) turn to the work of Schatzki (2002, pp.70-72) who suggests that practice can, at its most simple level, be conceptualised as a “bundle of [human] activities”. Schatzki (1996) proposes that there are two distinguishable practices: dispersed and integrated. “Dispersed practices are open-ended features of many activities, and include actions such as describing, walking, handwriting, listening and so on. Integrative practices are bundles of activities, such as cooking, motoring, or being a football fan, and they contain particular combinations of dispersed practices bound together by normative ends and emotions shared by those performing the practice” (Barnett et al., 2011, referring to Schatzki, 1996). We might describe the different activities which are often applied across DIY projects as *dispersed* practices, such as sawing, hammering, and sanding and so on, while the “bundle” of activities associated with a specific project would be an example of integrative

practices – “decorating” being a good example. Barnett et al. (2011) also offer Reckwitz’s (2002, p.249) definition whereby *practice* is a “routinised type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, ‘things’ and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge”.

The central plank of the argument posited by Barnett and colleagues (2011) is that qualitative practice-based studies of peoples’ everyday activities – integrated and dispersed – reveal that there is much more to “consuming” than the shopping “experience”. Practice-based accounts of what people actually do in their everyday lives show that beyond their engagement with the marketplace, consumers are also productive, active and creative agents, even if their practices involve buying and using “stuff” (Barnett et al., 2011). The concept of “practice” and studies of it enable us to see this by acknowledging “...the way reasoning and reflexivity are folded into the things people do in ordinary ways” (Barnett et al., 2011, p.64); in other words we are not simply mindless shoppers seeking to cure our anxieties. Practice-based accounts of consumption and everyday life also show that there is more to shopping than the goal of ‘identity building’ (Bauman, 2001), revealing that, beyond symbolic outcomes, consumption is often tied to the basic necessities of living and the social relations and duties associated with domestic life (such as fixing a leaking roof in order to keep ones family dry) – what they call “consumption-as-necessity” (Barnett et al., 2011, p.67). In sum, Barnett et al. (2011) suggest that while consumption (as shopping) certainly precedes peoples’ practices and, for that reason, is important to understand, studies of the former too frequently lose sight of what goes on past the shop counter, a criticism lodged as early as 1984 by Michel de Certeau in his writing about the nature of “consumer production” in *The Practice of Everyday Life*. The practice-based perspective – studying how people use goods to produce and maintain their everyday existences – allows one to move beyond that sticking point.

Following Toffler (1980) and Kotler (1986), George Ritzer (2009) is another scholar who has sought to move beyond the “dichotomisation” between production and consumption which, he argues, has plagued theoretical thinking in the social sciences for many decades.<sup>54</sup> Ritzer (2009) does this by introducing the notion of the “prosumer” – which speaks to the fact that we are in our actions almost always simultaneously involved in production (creating some

---

<sup>54</sup> Ritzer also reminds us that consumption has always involved production and production has always involved consumption.

“thing”) and consumption. Ritzer (2009) acknowledges that his thinking in this area began when he was developing his now well-referenced “McDonaldisation of society” thesis – how customers were put to *work* in the act of consumption (such as having to carry their meals to their tables in fast-food restaurants, perhaps adding their own toppings to their meals at self-service counters on their way to their seat). The main tenet of Ritzer’s (2009) more recent work, which is particularly useful in the context of this thesis, is the idea that consumption is always embedded in wider productive activities (and vice versa) i.e., people almost always make some “thing” with the items they have purchased (cooking and indeed DIY being good examples) which may also include *constructing* their identity. This idea draws parallels with Campbell’s (2005) notion of “ensemble activity” as explained earlier in the review of the DIY literature (see Chapter Three, page 39). Ritzer (2009) also notes that in the act of consuming products, one also consumes time (see Section 8.3, page 151 for empirical support of this view) and energy while simultaneously producing an experience (which may range from awful to pleasant).

All in all, there is abundant evidence in this thesis that my interviewees were both producers and consumers – “prosumers” in Ritzer’s (2009) sense – consuming DIY products in a range of productive activities associated with the making and maintenance of home. In the remainder of this chapter I look more closely at what they were actually “doing” as “prosumers”. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, the discussion is structured around three overarching themes distilled from the interview data: personalising, adapting and enjoying the home (the three essences of DIY practice. See Footnote 51, page 202).

### **10.3.1. Personalising**

A key theme that emerged from my data was that my research participants carried out DIY projects in order to “personalise” their homes and gardens – which, as I soon argue, can also be articulated as an outward and material expression of their identities (Belk, 1988). The personalising motive was often expressed through variants of the phrase “*you’re trying to stamp your mark on the property*” (for an example, see page 95). By far the most common “personalising activities” research participants carried out, and explicitly talked about, were painting the house in colours they had personally selected (often after careful thought) and/or by modifying the garden to reflect a general “style” or personal interest (Bhatti & Church, 2000). Good examples include Jerry and Lucy’s beach-themed garden which they said reflected their joint interest (or shared identity) in surfing and the ocean and the choice

Hamish made to only plant ‘natives’ because they were fashionable *at the time*, despite a tacit understanding that what is the modern look now might appear painfully dated in several years (Bauman, 2007). Decorating and garden-making were largely favoured as personalising activities because they were considered relatively easy and affordable tasks which could provide the instant visual impact their creators wanted – a symbolic marker of their identity or the much anticipated “personal touch”. Some of my research participants felt strongly that it was not until they added their own unique touches to the house and garden that the property began to feel like *their* home and, for this reason, many of them started to personalise their dwelling shortly after they moved in (see ‘moving in DIY’, pages 95-96) and then never really stopped. This ongoing process of personalisation seemed to heighten my interviewees’ sense of ownership of, and personal attachment to, their property, the latter evident in such statements referred to earlier as “*the little changes we’ve made since we got the place have really made a difference. We had our initial reservations, like the yellow bathroom, but we’ve changed that and we love the place now*” (Linda). It seemed that the more personalising projects my research participants completed themselves (i.e., as DIY), the more attached they became to their dwellings and, by extension, the more they enjoyed ‘being’ there. This outcome of the thesis supports Porteous’s (1976) notion that people may gain a heightened sense of contentment, happiness and security from personalised surroundings (also see Dupuis & Thorns, 1998). It also seemed that personalising the property by way of DIY was a key dimension of the home-making process, as outlined by Perkins and Thorns (2003; Section 3.3.4, page 45 of this thesis).

While the personalised ‘DIYed home’ was a place where the owners enjoyed living and felt and grew further attached to, it was also (as noted above) an important, and often deliberately crafted, symbolic expression of their identity. (This of course meshes well with Bauman’s (2001) notion of the act of identity ‘building’, yet Bauman does not detail, in any empirical sense, how this building actually occurs). Porteous (1976, p.384) has noted that, as personalisation takes place, the home begins to mirror “... how the individual sees himself [sic], how he wishes to see himself, or how he wishes others to see him. The house, then, is a means of projecting an image both inwardly and outwardly”. (See Cooper, 1976; Lofgren, 1990; Madigan & Munro, 1996; Bhatti & Church, 2000; Clarke, 2001 and Wistanley, 2000, for further discussions relating to the symbolic significance of peoples’ houses and gardens.)

As seen in Chapter Seven (especially Section 7.4, page 122), research participants often spent a great deal of time contemplating and planning the aesthetic and design dimensions of their DIY projects, keen to incorporate creative visual elements (such as specific colour schemes or designer fittings and fixtures) which they believed best reflected their personal sense of style and taste. In essence, they were ‘dressing’ their house for effect. One particularly good example was provided by Sam and Sally who painted their bathroom a shade of blue which matched the album cover of their favourite international band, Nirvana’s *Nevermind*. They were very keen to avoid using the plain natural colours other people were painting their houses, eager to differentiate themselves as brighter and bolder individuals.

McCracken’s (1986, 1988) theorising of consumer “rituals” is instructive in relation to the personalising effects of DIY and, by extension, how identity is materialised (Bauman, 2001). How do consumers transform commodities they have purchased from the marketplace (including their houses) into more personally meaningful material possessions (such as a “home”)? McCracken (1986, 1988) referred to “possession rituals” – what people do post-purchase in order to develop a sense of ownership of a possession. He closely associates these types of activities with the ‘personalisation’ process, whereby the owner seeks to attach symbolic markers of their “selves” to the possession (which indicates that they have ‘taken’ possession). McCracken (1986, 1988) also refers to “divestment rituals” whereby the owner of a personalised commodity, such as a home, *de-personalises* that item before selling it on in the (house) market, or when purchasing a pre-owned commodity (such as a new home), seeks to “erase the meaning” the previous owner may have left behind. This was most evident in this thesis in the spate of projects carried out almost ritualistically each time a research participant moved into a new dwelling, as they sought to make the house feel and indeed look more like their home (pages 95 to 96) – erasing signs of previous ownership, infusing the home with signs and symbols of their own personality.

Similar to McCracken’s ‘possession ritual’, Belk (1988, p.140) refers to “post-acquisition object bonding” which occurs not only through the application of obvious markers of (new) ownership (such as a creative new colour scheme or the making of an alteration), but also through an overt assertion of *control* over the possession. Indeed, the notion of control also emerged through my interviews, with many research participants valuing the fact that they now *could* personalise the home they owned, which was not possible before they became

homeowners. In this sense, personalising activities can also be framed as an expression of *control* over one's own physical and living environment (also see Dupuis and Thorns, 1998).

### **10.3.2. Adapting**

The second key theme that stood out in my data was that my research participants were carrying out DIY projects in order to 'adapt' their homes to meet the changing *needs* of their household. This second central motive was often expressed through variants of the phrase "*you're making the place work for you*" (Jerry). We might think of this as making the home "fit-for-purpose" or more functional. In view of that, my research lends some qualitative support to the exhortations of Baker and Kaul (2002, p.566) who noted in their quantitative work "...that the home improvement process can be better understood by putting it in a broader context of household life-cycle changes and in the context of how homes are adapted to changing family circumstances. There are times in the household's life-cycle when home improvements – particularly discretionary home improvements – are likely to be undertaken". Such needs-based DIY (see Sections 6.3.1 and 6.3.2 for some good examples) and the consumption it may trigger also seems to support the concept of "consumption-as-necessity" as recently proposed by Barnett et al. (2011). It also may reveal the limitations of liquid modernity thesis (Bauman, 2000, 2001, 2007) in explaining DIY, because the latter neglects the workings and significance of very ordinary and mundane forms of consumption (see Shove et al., 2007).

When my research participants spoke about the DIY projects they had done or were planning, they often did so in ways which linked to key changes in the lives of household members, or the family more generally, and the *need* to adapt their houses and homes to these new situations. When Shane, for example, explained the changes he had made to the backyard of the family home – the laying of a new lawn suitable for backyard cricket – he did so in reference to his young son's new interest in this sport and his need for a place to practice. This backyard adaptation project can therefore be linked to a particular stage in his child's development and his associated need for a purpose-built space in or around the home. In contrast, Barry talked about changing his backyard from a cricket pitch into a garden space for him and his wife to enjoy, now that their children had grown older and "left the nest". As such, this adaption project can be associated with changes in the couple's later lives associated with children moving out of the home and the opportunities for new uses of redundant space. Another example of this was Jack's (page 92) conversion of a garage loft



(which was once his son's bedroom) into a studio for his wife to use in pursuit of her new painting interest – her so-called “retirement hobby”. Here again we see a combination of life-cycle changes and new interests triggering DIY projects involving changes to spaces of the home. Thus, beyond the desire to personalise their homes, DIY projects were also often underpinned by a *need* to structurally alter the property to meet emergent household needs – a process which was ongoing, emergent and contingent.

It is important at this point in the discussion to note that the adaption and personalisation processes often overlapped, incorporating elements of both. However, the important distinction I want to make is that home personalisation projects were usually triggered by the *desire* to make the house more visually appealing and representative of the tastes and personal styles of the occupants (and by extension their identities), while adaptation projects were usually triggered by a *need* to make the house more functional for the family, particularly as its members progressed through their life-cycle changes (marriage, first home, children, retirement, etc.). Barnett et al's (2011) concept of “consumption-as-necessity” is an appropriate interpretive tool for this aspect of DIY motivation.

### **10.3.3. Enjoying**

It is important to note that beyond the aim of personalising, adapting and protecting their homes, my interviewees also carried out their own home improvements projects because they *enjoyed* the home as a site of work or, put another way, working on the home. For all of them, DIY (although not all types of DIY work for everyone) was a mainspring of pride, personal satisfaction and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994) which are the positive intrinsic rewards usually associated with “productive” leisure activities and meaningful work (Blackshaw, 2010; Campbell, 2005; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Gelber, 1999; Mansvelt, 1997a, 1997b; Sennett, 2008; Stebbins, 2009). In fact, many of my interviewees were explicit in their view that if it were not for the positive subjective rewards they felt were attainable from DIY, they would simply pay a professional to do the work for them. As noted by Sam and Barry:

*It is fun doing it yourself. If you really hated it that much, you wouldn't do it. You'd just go “screw it” and pay someone to do it for you ... and that's the point ... you just do it because you know you are going to get a lot of pleasure out of it and that's the cool bit (Sam).*

*...there's no question that there's a lot of hard work involved and that there are economic benefits for doing it yourself – like huge savings to be made ... but that's definitely not the*

*reason you do it. I find working on your own home rewarding and for that reason I'm happy to do it (Barry).*

The overall positive characterisation of DIY practice which emerged in my research was not entirely unexpected. My initial review of the DIY literature (Chapter Three) had heightened my awareness of the fact that DIY can be a fun and rewarding experience – even when a project is a long haul. To briefly recap, Roland (1958) argued that because DIY was a practical and creative process, it was highly satisfying work, especially for those individuals who did not gain such satisfaction from their paid employment (for a similar argument, see Gelber 1997, 1999). Similarly, Jackson (2006, also see Sennett, 2008) noted that DIY was “self-actualising” work – project practitioners able to realise their full creative and productive potential via the accomplishment of challenging practical projects which, in the end, embodied their creative energy and practical skills. Mansvelt (1997a, 1997b) noted that it was the productive and work-like nature of DIY that was appealing for older homeowners who derived a great sense of achievement and self-worth from DIY. As such, Mansvelt (1997a; 1997b) suggested that, theoretically, DIY was neither wholly work nor leisure, but best seen as a leisure-work hybrid. Indeed, the research findings reported in this thesis support the idea that DIY is best conceptualised as a *composite* of work and leisure (as opposed to one or the other of these constructs) – involving homeowner(s) productively “labouring” towards specific material goals – a new deck, a modernised bathroom, a tidier garden, a repaired roof and, soon – while simultaneously “enjoying” the activity.

Over the course of my fieldwork, two dimensions of the “DIY experience” stood out as being *particularly* enjoyable on the part of my interviewees. First, all of them emphasised the great sense of “personal fulfilment” they derived from carrying out (and, more often than not completing), challenging, creative and productive projects (Campbell, 2005; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Gelber, 1997, 1999; Jackson, 2006; Mansvelt, 1997a, 1997b; Roland, 1958; Sennett, 2008). Second, all of my research participants said they enjoyed the sense of “freedom” they felt when executing DIY projects. Most of them enjoying the feeling of being in charge and in control (the self-determined and self-reliant Kiwi homeowner) when doing DIY – feeling *free* to make their own decisions and choices, change the direction of the work, experiment with techniques, playfully joke around and work at their own pace. This sense of freedom was a novel and particularly enjoyable experience for the first-home owners I interviewed, all of whom talked about their recent freedom from the constraints associated with renting – now *homeowners* able to seize control of and improve their

domestic surroundings in whatever way they pleased. Some DIY projects also provided my interviewees with a sense of freedom from the constraints and stresses of their everyday lives – a moment to escape or “lose themselves” in project work, even if that means just pottering around the house and garden or “being” in the shed (pages 141 to 142). Engaging in DIY also provided a feeling of *freedom* from the structures of the formal labour economy (i.e., not having to pay labourers to attend to their home improvements) which was very appealing to think about, especially in terms of the money that could be saved.

#### **10.4. Chapter summary**

In this penultimate chapter I have sought to explain DIY activity in social scientific terms. I began the chapter by drawing attention to the wider societal ‘structures’ which shape, enable and constrain DIY, nesting that discussion in the work of Bauman who, over the last two decades, has written volubly on the structural conditions of our time. I pointed out that while Bauman’s theoretical work does provide a useful backdrop for understanding DIY activity as an expression of modern day (identity-related) ‘consumption’, it does very little to move us towards an understanding of the ‘productive’ elements of DIY i.e., how, within the structural conditions of our time, people actually make their “DIYed homes” and for what purpose. Given these shortcomings, I then turned to the new and emerging literature on social practice which helped demonstrate that people (DIYers in the context of this thesis) are both consumers *and* producers, in the sense that while they must engage in the marketplace, they also actively *construct* their worlds – DIY activity one expression of this dialectical process. A practice-based interpretation of my primary data revealed three key principles of DIY activity (involving both consumption and production, or ‘prosuming’ to borrow Ritzer’s (2009) term): ‘personalising’ the home, ‘adapting’ the home and ‘enjoying’ the home (as a site of work). These three principles of DIY practice were explained in social scientific terms, with examples from my fieldwork signposted in the conversation.

## 11. Conclusion: The 'DIYed Home'

In mid-2009, after the completion of both my fieldwork and initial analysis, Lindi and I purchased our first home (Figure 43, below), a two bedroom bungalow in East Christchurch, 900 metres from the beach. Delighted as we were with the dwelling, it was not our 'dream' home; our diminutive mortgage and other financial limitations (my student loan, for example) having forced us to purchase a classic 'doer-upper' i.e., a cheap house in need of a decorative makeover and myriad essential repairs. While rundown and at the bottom rung of the so-called "housing ladder" (Morrow-Jones & Wenning, 2005), the house was proudly 'ours' – the locale where we excitedly began our lives as first homeowners and, by association, fully-fledged 'Kiwi DIYers'. As all my research participants had done, immediately after 'moving in' (refer page 94), Lindi and I spent many *enjoyable* weekends *working* together on the property, 'personalising' the rooms and the gardens with our own signature look (Section 10.3.1). We also 'adapted' different areas of the house to meet our own specific needs (Section 10.3.2); a spare bedroom transformed into my PhD office, for example. In order to do these tasks, we found ourselves spending a lot of time and money at home improvement stores – "prosuming" in Ritzer's (2009) terms (see pages 210-211 of this thesis) – and also engaging in the obligatory conversations one has with friends and family as they seek advice on which tools and materials to buy.

Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 43: The author's 'DIYed home', Christmas Day, 2009 (author's photo)

In February 2011, a shallow 6.3 magnitude earthquake struck Christchurch, hitting the central city and eastern suburbs (where we lived) particularly hard. In our community, the process of liquefaction – triggered by the violent shockwaves which emanated through the subsurface of the land – forced a great deal of river silt and water to the surface, flooding the area and forcing thousands of dwellings off their foundations. I will never forget my long walk home that evening, many of the once smooth roads rendered impassable to cars due to surface cracking and/or flooding. When I finally arrived home, I found Lindi standing on the street, clearly distraught and being comforted by a neighbour; the surreal backdrop to that scene was our ‘DIYed home’, partially submerged in water, filled with silt (Figure 44, below), broken and on an obvious lean. In the days which followed the event (having camped in a tent in our backyard), we were forced to leave, the property deemed unsafe and uninhabitable by our insurance company. Appreciatively, we were moved into emergency rental accommodation – a strangely impersonal space which we still occupy, one we are unable to modify, personalise and *make* our own – a dwelling we do not find so easy to enjoy.

Pictures removed due to Copyright

Figure 44: The author’s earthquake-damaged ‘DIYed’ home (photo taken June 2011); the process of liquefaction deposited 65 cubic metres of river silt in and around the dwelling, rendering it immediately uninhabitable (author’s photo)

Shortly before submitting this thesis, we learned that our damaged home will be demolished, having now ‘officially’ been categorised as irreparable. We are of course not alone. Thousands of Christchurch homeowners now find themselves in a similar housing situation, including several of those who shared their DIY stories in this thesis (Alan, Marty, Shane and Kathryn, and Barry and Janice, for example). Many, if not most, Christchurch residents now find themselves living in partially damaged homes, including Hamish, who told me he was determined to fix his own earthquake damaged home himself – evidence of his gritty Kiwi ‘can-do’ DIY attitude (and perhaps also, a good example of ‘disaster DIY’, as opposed to a ‘DIY disaster’).

Lindi and I recently visited our damaged property to clean out the garage and retrieve the last of our possessions. As we were sorting through the tools and other ‘hoarded’ materials that were in the shed (evidence of our own past home improvement activities and trips to the hardware store), we spent a great deal of time reflecting on our short DIY careers. While rummaging through the mess, we found an anonymous paint splattered ladder which had been left behind after a ‘working bee’ (refer to page 148), a point of laughter given that we had no idea to whom it belonged. We also talked about Lindi’s uncle who had generously given me his prized electric drill before he moved to Australia, and the significance of this friendly gesture. We also spent time sorting through what seemed like dozens of half-used cans of paint, product left over from our past decorating projects – evidence of the colour choices we made to reflect *our* sense of style (reminiscent of the theorising of Porteous, 1976 and also Bauman, 2007). We also joked about our ‘incomplete’ projects: how we ‘almost’ finished the kitchen renovation and ‘nearly’ completed painting the exterior of the house, proof of our own inability to estimate the time needed to complete these projects (which was also common among my interviewees – see Section 8.4). Most poignantly, we remembered the DIY projects we had enjoyed finishing together – the markings of our “joint approach” to home- and garden-making (Bhatti & Church, 2000, p.192) – and how ‘our’ hard work had transformed our first house from a dilapidated doer-upper to a place we proudly called ‘our home’ – a material representation of our shared (DIY) identities – an extension of our ‘selves’ (Belk, 1988).

As evident in the autobiographical narrative above and in the DIY stories my research participants have shared in this thesis, the outcome of DIY *practice* is the ‘DIYed home’, the ideal expression of the relationship between people, products and place. This is a

personalised place, but not just because it reflects one's sense of 'style' and consumption choices, which may be used to communicate a particular identity (Porteous, 1976; Belk, 1988; Bauman, 2007) but because it also embodies one's skills, energy and effort – thereby standing as a symbolic representation of the owner's productive, reflexive and creative selves. (This is a fact which becomes all the more apparent when one *loses* their home.) For these reasons, the 'DIYed home' is not just a place to live, but is also a mainspring of personal experience, meaning and pride; an ongoing and inherently creative family project (one which is remembered and retold once the house is sold). It is a place which is commonly talked about with others and proudly exhibited to houseguests – a socially and physically constructed *place* – 'personalised', 'adapted' and to be enjoyed.

It is important to add that the 'DIYed home' has also emerged in this study as a material representation of the fundamental desire of many New Zealanders to meet their own *basic* needs, thereby tapping into what is expected of the capable, thrifty and self-reliant Kiwi homeowner. Lawns *need* mowing. Gutters *need* clearing. Leaky taps and roofs *need* fixing. The 'ideal' image of the New Zealand homeowner aptly tending to such ordinary and rudimentary tasks (as opposed to employing a professional to do the work for them) has a long history and continues to be normalised through socialisation processes and commercial forces, both which remind New Zealanders that doing DIY *is* the 'Kiwi way'. This message is perhaps no better captured than in *Mitre 10's* 2009 television commercial which reminds New Zealanders that "DIY: it's in our DNA".

## References

- ACC (2008). *Safety begins at home: how to stay safe as houses when you're doing DIY*. Brochure ACC4786. Accident Compensation Corporation, New Zealand.
- Agar, M. (1991). The right brain strikes back. In N. G. Fielding & R. M. Lee (Eds.), *Using Computers in Qualitative Research* (181-194). London: Sage Publications.
- Albertson, J. (2007). *The retail market in New Zealand: an analysis*. A report prepared for the New Zealand Retailers Association, March 2007.
- Allon, F. (2008). *Renovation Nation: Our Obsession with Home*. Australia: UNSW Press.
- Andrewes, F. (1999). The man in the grey flannel suit: white-collar masculinity in post-war New Zealand. In C. Daley & D. Montgomerie (Eds.), *The Gendered Kiwi* (Chapter 8). Auckland: Auckland University Press.
- Arcus, M. & Nana, G. (2005). *Intergenerational and interfamilial transfers of wealth and housing*. A report prepared by Business and Economic Research Limited for Centre for Housing Research Aotearoa New Zealand. Accessed 26 April 2011 from: <http://www.chranz.co.nz/pdfs/intergenerational-interfamilial-transfers-wealth-housing.pdf>.
- Arden, S. & Bowman, I. (2004) *The New Zealand Period House: A Conservation Guide*. Auckland: Random House New Zealand.
- Atkinson, P (2006). Do it yourself: democracy and design. *Journal of Design History*, 19(1), 1-10.
- Attwood, K. (2007). DIY chain to attract female customers. *The Independent*, 21 September, 54-55.
- Babbie, E. (2001). *The Practice of Social Research*. Belmont: Wadsworth Thomson Learning.
- Baker, D. (1988). Has Mitre 10 hit the nail? *Marketing*, March, 48-52.
- Baker, K. & Kaul, B. (2002). Using multi period variables in the analysis of home improvement decisions by homeowners. *Real Estate Economics*, 30(4), 551-566.
- Bandura, A. (1994). Self-efficacy. In V. S. Ramachandran (Ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Human Behaviour* (Vol. 4, 71-81). New York: Academic Press.
- Barnett, C., Cloke, P., Clarke, N. & Malpass, A. (2011). *Globalising Responsibility: The Political Rationalities of Ethical Consumption*. United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Barnett, S. & Wolfe, R. (1997). *New Zealand! New Zealand! In Praise of Kiwiana*. Auckland: Clairmont Press.
- Bauman, Z. (1999). The self in a consumer society. *The Hedgehog Review*, Fall, 35-40.
- Bauman, Z. (2000). *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bauman, Z. (2001). Identity in the Globalising World. *Social Anthropology*, 9(2), 121-129.
- Bauman, Z. (2007). *Consuming Life*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Beck, U. (1991). *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. London: Sage.
- Belk, R. (1988). Possessions and the extended self. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15(2), 139-168.
- Bell, C. (1996). *Inventing New Zealand: Everyday Myths of Pakeha Identity*. Auckland: Penguin Books.



- Bell, C & Lyall, J. (2001). Aesthetic leisure. In C. Bell (Ed), *Sociology of Everyday Life in New Zealand* (Chapter 8). New Zealand: Dunmore Press.
- Bell, E. (2001). Do-it-yourself, home repair, and remodelling. In M. T. Inge & D. Hall (Eds.), *The Greenwood Guide to American Popular Culture, Volume 1* (465-489). USA & London: Greenwood Press.
- Bhaskar, R. (1979). *The Possibility of Naturalism: A Philosophical Critique of the Contemporary Human Sciences*. Brighton: Harvester.
- Bhatti, M. (2006). 'When I'm in the garden I can create my own paradise': Homes and gardens in later life. *The Sociological Review*, 54, 342-362.
- Bhatti, M. & Church, A. (2000). 'I never promised you a rose garden': gender, leisure and home-making. *Leisure Studies*, 19, 183-197.
- Bianchi, C. (2006). Home Depot in Chile: case study. *Journal of Business Research*, 59, 391-393.
- Bingham, E. (2003). Retailers Jostle for the DIY Dollar. *The New Zealand Herald*, 25 October. Accessed 3 November 2011 from: [http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1&objectid=3530677](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=3530677)
- Black, J. (2005). Don't move, improve. *New Zealand Listener*, November 5-11, 13-17.
- Blackshaw, T. (2010). *Leisure*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.
- Bogdon, A. (1996). Homeowner renovation and repair: the decision to hire someone else to do the project. *Journal of Housing Economics*, 5, 323-350.
- Bonny, S. & Reynolds, M. (1988). *New Zealand Houses Today*. New Zealand Weldon.
- Bowen, G. A. (2008). Naturalistic inquiry and the saturation concept: a research note. *Qualitative Research*, 8(1), 137-152.
- Brickell, C. (2006). The Politics of Post-War Consumer Culture. *New Zealand Journal of History*, 40(2), 133-155.
- Brodersen, S. (2003). *Do-it-yourself work: maintenance and improvement of homes* (Study no. 11). The Rockwell Foundation Research Unit, Copenhagen.
- Brogan, D. M. & Cort, S. G. (1997). Industry corner: DIY home products: a global perspective – do-it-yourself. *Business Economics*, January, 4.
- Brotherton, B. (2008). *Researching Hospitality and Tourism*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Broman, S. (2004). *Built like a Women*. USA: Murdoch Books.
- Brown, J. (2006). Women tool up for independence with DIY parties. *The Independent*, 3 January. Accessed 10 April 2011 from: [www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas).
- Browne, J. (2000). Decisions in DIY: women, home improvements and advertising in post-war Britain. In M. R. Andrews, M. M. Talbot (Eds.), *All the World and her Husband: Women in Twentieth-Century Consumer Culture* (Chapter 9). London: Cassell.
- Butterfield, J. (Ed.). (2001). *Collins English Dictionary*. Great Britain: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Campbell, C. (2005). The craft consumer: culture, craft and consumption in a postmodern society. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 5(1), 23-42.

- CCC (2001). *Our Environment: Christchurch City Council's Environmental Newsletter – Special Edition, Charleston Update, February 2001*. Accessed 23 November 2010 from: <http://archived.ccc.govt.nz/ourenvironment/2000Charleston/CharlestonUpdate.pdf>.
- CCC (2010). *Christchurch City Fact Pack 2010*. Monitoring and Research Team, Strategy and Planning Group, Christchurch City Council. Accessed 12 June 2011 from: <http://resources.ccc.govt.nz/files/FactPack2010-docs.pdf>.
- Churchouse, N. (2010). Special agent head Mitre 10. *The Timaru Herald*, 27 March, 9.
- Clark, S., Jones, M. & Page, I. (2006). *2005 House Condition Survey*. Study Report no. 142. New Zealand, Building Research Association of New Zealand (BRANZ).
- Clarke, A. (2001). The aesthetics of social aspiration. In D. Miller (Ed.), *Home possessions* (23-46). Oxford: Berg.
- Clarke, D., Doel, M. & Housiaux, K. (2003). *The Consumption Reader*. London: Routledge.
- Clifton, J. (2010). Choice Bro. *New Zealand Listener*, June 3-9, 14-18.
- Coffey, A. & Atkinson, P. (1996). *Making Sense of Qualitative Data*. London: Sage.
- Cochran, C. (1984). *Restoring a New Zealand House*. Wellington: New Zealand Historic Places Trust.
- Conrich, I. & Woods, D. (2000). Introduction. In I. Conrich and D. Woods (Eds.), *New Zealand – A Pastoral Paradise? Studies in New Zealand Culture No.6* (8-10). England: Kakapo Books.
- Consumer (1969a). Electric drills and some attachments. *Consumer*, 49, 48-59.
- Consumer (1969b). Electrical wiring regulations. *Consumer*, 53, 175.
- Consumer (1993a). Consumer law: what you should know about fencing law. *Consumer*, March, 32.
- Consumer (1993b). Consumer law: DIY electrical work. *Consumer*, May, 32.
- Consumer Build (online). *Plumbing, drainage and gas*. Consumer Build. Accessed 8 November 2007 from: [http://www.consumerbuild.org.nz/publish/diy/printer\\_diylegal-plumbing.php](http://www.consumerbuild.org.nz/publish/diy/printer_diylegal-plumbing.php).
- Cooper, C. (1976). The house as symbol of self. In H. Proshansky, W. Ittelson & L. Rivilin (Eds.), *Environmental Psychology* (435-448). USA: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Corrigan, P. (1997). *The Sociology of Consumption*. London: Sage.
- Cottrell, W. (2006). *Furniture of the New Zealand Colonial Era: An Illustrated History 1830-1900*. Auckland: Reed Publishing (NZ) LTD.
- Craig, M. (1999). The Warehouse, Petone. *Retail*, December, 21-14.
- Craig, M. (2002). Attack of the Killer Bunnings! *New Zealand Retail*, July, 30-33.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. United States: Harper Perennial.
- Cullen, C. (2005). Gentrification. *Survey Quarterly*, 42, 18-22.
- Davey, J. (2006). Ageing in place: the views of older homeowners on maintenance, renovation and adaptation. *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand*, Issue 27, 128-141.
- Davidson, A. (1994). *A Home of One's Own: Housing Policy in Sweden and New Zealand, From the 1840's to the 1990's*. Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell International.
- Davidson, M. & Leather, P. (2000). Choice or necessity? A review of the role of DIY in tackling house repair and maintenance. *Construction Management and Economics*, 18(7), 747-756.

- Davidson, C. & Tolich, M. (2003). Charting Research Design. In C. Davidson & M. Tolich (Eds.), *Social Science Research in New Zealand: Many Pathways to Understanding* (103-120). Auckland: Pearson Education New Zealand Limited.
- De Certeau, M. (1988). *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- De Joux, M. (1985). *The Family, Leisure and Recreation*. Research Unit, Department of Internal Affairs. Wellington: Department of Internal Affairs.
- Decker, D. (2005). Doing it for themselves. *The Dominion Post*, 11 August, D1.
- Derby, M. (2010). *Suburbs - New suburbs, 1950s–1970s*. TeAra – Encyclopaedia of New Zealand. Accessed 23 July 2011 from: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/suburbs/5>. (Updated 26-Nov-10).
- Despres, C. (1991). The meaning of home: literature review and directions for future research and theoretical development. *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research*, 8(2), 96-115.
- DIA (1940). *Making New Zealand: Pictorial Surveys of a Century* (Volume 2, Number 22). Auckland: Wilson and Horton Ltd.
- Dingle, T. (2000). Necessity the mother of invention, or do-it-yourself. In P. Troy (Ed.), *A History of European Housing in Australia* (Chapter 4). United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- DTZ (2004). Changes in the structure of the New Zealand housing market. A report produced by DTZ New Zealand for the Centre for Housing Research Aotearoa New Zealand (CHRANZ). Accessed 26 April 2007 from: <http://www.chranz.co.nz/pdfs/chranz-exe-summary-final.pdf>.
- DTZ (2005). *Housing tenure aspirations and attainment*. A report produced by DTZ New Zealand for the Centre for Housing Research Aotearoa New Zealand (CHRANZ) and Building Research. Accessed 26 April 2011 from: <http://www.chranz.co.nz/pdfs/housing-tenure-aspirations-and-attainment.pdf>.
- Dupuis, A. & Thorns, D. (1998). Home, home ownership and the search for ontological security. *The Sociological Review*, 46(1), 24-47.
- Eames, D. & Erikson, A. (2009). Accidents cost the country \$640m. *The New Zealand Herald*, Saturday, September 5, 1.
- Euromonitor (2008). *DIY World: Key Drivers and Prospects*. Accessed 1 October 2008 from: <http://portal.euromonitor.com/passport/DocumentView.aspx>.
- Evans, L. (2010). *Law and the economy: Regulation of economic activities*. Te Ara - the Encyclopaedia of New Zealand. Accessed 3 December 2010 from: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/law-and-the-economy/3>.
- Featherstone, M. (1991). *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*. London: Sage.
- Ferguson, G. (1994). *Building the New Zealand Dream*. Palmerston North: Dunmore Press.
- Fiddy, R. (1988). *The Crazy World of the Handyman*. United Kingdom: Exley Publications Ltd.
- Fink, A., Frey, J. & Oishi, S. (1995). *The Survey Kit*. California: SAGE Publications.
- Fountain, J. (2002). *Behind the Brochures: The (Re)construction of touristic place images in Akaroa*. A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. Lincoln University, Canterbury, New Zealand.
- Gabriel, M. & Jacobs, K. (2008). The post-social turn: challenges for housing research. *Housing Studies*, 23(4), 527-540.
- Gelber, S. (1997). Do-it-yourself: constructing, repairing and maintaining domestic masculinity. *American Quarterly*, 49(1), 66-112.

- Gelber, S. (1999). Do-it-yourself: expected leisure. In S. Gelber (Ed), *Hobbies: Leisure and the Culture of Work in America* (Chapter 10). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Geertz, C. (1973). Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture. In C. Geertz (Ed.), *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (3-30). New York: Basic Books.
- Gershuny, J. (1978). *After Industrial Society? The Emerging Self-Service Economy*. London: Macmillan.
- Gershuny, J. (1979). The informal economy: its role in post-industrial society. *Futures, February*, 3-15.
- Gibson, A. (1999). The growing business. *Retail, June*, 27-37.
- Gibson, A. (2009). DIY fills the gaps. *The New Zealand Herald, 14 October*, 5.
- Giddens, A. (1991a). *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Giddens, A. (1991b). *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Giddens (2002). *Runaway World: How Globalisation is Reshaping our Lives*. London: Profile.
- Giddens, A. (2009). *Sociology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gilchrest, J. (1972). Ideas for every home. *New Zealand Home Journal, April*, 16-17.
- Gilmore, S. (1987). Coordination and convention: the organisation of the concert world. *Symbolic Interaction, 10*, 209-228.
- Goldstein, C. (1998). *Do-It-Yourself: Home Improvement in 20<sup>th</sup>-Century America*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press.
- Grocers Review (1989). Do it yourself stuck on profits. *Grocers Review, March*, 66-67.
- Hammersley, M. (2000). *Taking Sides in Social Research*. London: Routledge.
- Hammond, J. (1979). *Bush Carpenters: Pioneer Homes in New Zealand*. New Zealand: John McIndoe Limited.
- Hardware Today (1980). Hardware Paradise. *Hardware Today, May*, 39.
- Hardware Today (1981). Major hardware store caters for customers' requirements. *Hardware Today, February*, 9.
- Harrap, N. (1981). *Buying and Restoring a House*. Wellington: Neil Harrap.
- Harris, D. (2005). *Key Concepts in Leisure Studies*. London: Sage Publications.
- Head, W. (2005). Boom in Big Box DIY. *New Zealand Retail, June*, 42-44.
- Herbst, P. (2007). Big Box Bonanza. *New Zealand Hardware Journal, June*, 4-7.
- Hillary Commission (1991). *Leisure. Life in New Zealand Survey: Volume IV*. Hillary Commission Report prepared by University of Otago. Wellington: Hillary Commission.
- Hine, T. (2002). *I Want That! How we all became Shoppers*. New York: Perennial.
- Hopkins, J. (1998). *Blokes and Sheds*. New Zealand: HarperCollins.
- HOW (1968). Front Cover. *HOW: New Zealand's Magazine for the Home Handyman, 1*, cover page.
- HOW (1968a). Looking around the Building Centres. *HOW: New Zealand's Magazine for the Home Handyman, 1*, 36-37.
- HOW (1968b). Editorial: Saturday Shopping. *HOW: New Zealand's Magazine for the Home Handyman, 3*, 1.

- HOW (1968c). Building centre advertisement. *HOW: New Zealand's Magazine for the Home Handyman* 1, 15.
- HOW (1969a). How to fix those old world lead lights. *HOW: New Zealand's Magazine for the Home Handyman*, 5, 8-9.
- HOW (1969b). Cut that old fireplace down to size! *HOW: New Zealand's Magazine for the Home Handyman*, 5, 13-14.
- Hutchins, G. (2008). *The Swinging Sixties: When New Zealand Changed Forever*. New Zealand: HarperCollins Publishers Limited.
- Jackson, P. (2005). Identities. In P. Cloke, M. Crang & M. Goodwin (Eds.), *Introducing Human Geographies* (Second Edition, Chapter 28). UK: Hodder Arnold.
- Jackson, A. (2006). Labour as leisure: the Mirror Dinghy and DIY sailors. *Journal of Design History*, 19(1), 57-67.
- Janning, M. & Menard, L. (2006). I would never do that in my own home: gender, audience, reflexivity, and the decorating television culture. *Electronic Journal of Sociology*. Accessed 14 November 2011 from: [http://www.sociology.org/content/2006/tier1/janning\\_mennard.html](http://www.sociology.org/content/2006/tier1/janning_mennard.html).
- Jaquiere, A. (2005). Hammer and Tongs its Hardware Wars. *The Dominion Post*, 22 January, 1.
- Jervis, A. (2008). Sisters doing it (for themselves). *Projects*, 2(6), 24-31.
- Johns, G. (2003). Interview with Lisa Manning. *Kiwi Property Investor Magazine*, September, 25-28.
- Johnston, R. J. (1976). *The New Zealanders: How they Live and Work*. New York: Praeger Publishers.
- Keall, R. E. (1957). *Do it yourself*. Wellington: Blundell Brothers Limited.
- Keane, Y. (2006). SHE.I.Y: the girls guide to renovation know-how. *Handyman Magazine*, September, 75-81.
- Kenny, L. & Kenny, R. (2004). *DIY for Kids: Book One*. Auckland: HarperCollins Publishers.
- King, P. (2004). *Private Dwelling: Contemplating the use of Housing*. USA: Taylor & Francis Group.
- Kiong, E. (2008a). Housing slump puts DIY stores at risk. *The New Zealand Herald*, 13 October. Accessed 14 November 2011 from: [http://www.nzherald.co.nz/business/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=3&objectid=10537123](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/business/news/article.cfm?c_id=3&objectid=10537123).
- Kiong, E. (2008b). \$50m hospital bill for our DIY disasters. *The New Zealand Herald*, 4 January, 1.
- Kotler, P. (1986). Prosumers: A New Type of Consumer? *Futurist*, 20, 24-29.
- Kron, J. (1983). *Home-Psych: The Social Psychology of Home and Decoration*. New York: Clarkson N. Potter.
- Larson, V. (2008). The North & South Survey. She'll be right (fingers crossed). *North & South*, July, 40-45.
- Lawson, S. (1964). When it comes to tackling the outdoor painting jobs. *Woman's Weekly*, 28 March, 22-23.
- Leonard, L., Perkins, H. & Thorns, D. (2004). Presenting and creating home: the influence of popular and building trade print media in the construction of home. *Housing Theory and Society*, 21(3), 7-110.
- Lewis, T. (2008a). Introduction: revealing the makeover show. *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, 22(4), 441-446.

- Lewis, T. (2008b). Changing rooms, biggest losers and backyard blitzes: a history of makeover television in the United Kingdom, United States and Australia. *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, 22(4), 447-458.
- Lewis, R. (2009a). DIY booming again. *The New Zealand Herald*, 22 February, 33.
- Lewis, R. (2009b). The rise and rise of DIY. *The Herald on Sunday*, 8 March, 4.
- Lincoln, Y. S. (1985). The Substance of the Emergent Paradigm: Implications for Researchers. In Y. S. Lincoln (Ed.), *Organizational Theory and Inquiry: The Paradigm Revolution* (137–157). California: Sage.
- Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Littlewood, A. & Munro, M. (1996). Explaining disrepair: examining owner-occupiers' repair and maintenance behaviour. *Housing Studies*, 11(4), 503-525.
- Lofgren, O. (1990). Consuming Interests. *Culture and History*, 7, 7-36.
- Lofland, J. & Lofland, L. H. (1995). *Analysing Social Settings. A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis* (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition). Belmont: Wadsworth.
- Loomis, T. (1984). *Renovation and Social Change: A Case Study*. Occasional Paper No. 1. The Social Research and Development Trust, Auckland, New Zealand.
- Lowes, N. M. (1990). The effect of central government policy on the New Zealand house. *New Zealand Real Estate*, 41(8), 31-39.
- Lury, C. (1996). *Consumer Culture*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Lynch, P. & Simpson, C. (1993). Gender and leisure. In H. C. Perkins & G. Cushman (Eds.), *Leisure, Recreation and Tourism* (Chapter 5). Auckland: Longman Paul Limited.
- Lynch, R. & Veal, A. J. (1996). *Australian Leisure*. Australia: Longman.
- Maclean, C. (2008). *Wellington Places*. TeAra – Encyclopaedia of New Zealand. Accessed 3 October 2010 from: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/Places/Wellington/WellingtonPlaces/en>.
- Madigan, R. & Munro, M. (1996). House beautiful: style and consumption in the home. *Sociology*, 30(1), 41-57.
- Magill, J. (2008). Kiwi handyman an endangered species? *Our Homes Today*. Accessed 9 November 2009 from: <http://www.ourhometoday.co.nz/cms/jesma/2008/10>.
- Mansvelt, J. (1997a), Working at leisure: critical geographies of ageing. *Area*, 29, 289-298.
- Mansvelt, J. (1997b). Playing at home? Emplacement, embodiment and the active retiree in New Zealand/Aotearoa. *New Zealand Geographer*, 53(2), 57-61.
- Mansvelt, J. (2005). *Geographies of Consumption*. London: Sage Publications.
- Massey, D. (1995). Places and their pasts. *History Workshop Journal*, 39, 182-192.
- Mason, J. (1969). Plan your home workshop according to your needs. *New Zealand Home Handyman*, 2(9), 10-11.
- May, T. (1993). *Social Research, Issues, Methods and Process*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- McClure, M. (2008). *Auckland Places*. TeAra – Encyclopaedia of New Zealand. Accessed 3 October 2008 from: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/Places/Auckland/AucklandPlaces/en>.
- McCracken, G. (1986). Culture and consumption: a theoretical account of the structure and movement of the cultural meaning of consumer goods. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 13, 71-84.

- McCracken, G. (1988). *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities*. USA: Indiana University Press.
- McCrone, J. (2007). Treasure Sheds. *The Press*, 24-25 November, D1-D2.
- McElroy, R. (2006). Labouring at leisure: aspects of lifestyle and the rise of home improvement. In G. Smyth & J. Croft (Eds.), *Our House: The Representation of Domestic Space in Modern Culture* (Chapter 4). New York and Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Mcentee, C. (2010). Mitre 10 stores in receivership as focus goes “mega”. *The Dominion Post*, 10 January, 2.
- McTaggart, S. (2005). *Monitoring the Impact of Social Policy, 1980-2001. Report on Significant Policy Events*. Occasional Paper Series: Resource Report 1. Department of Sociology, University of Auckland, New Zealand.
- Melchionne, K. (1999). Of bookworms and busybees: cultural theory in the age of do-it-yourselfing. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 57(2), 247-255.
- Melling, G. (1994). A Short History of the New Zealand House. In D. Cull, S. Niven, G. Melling & G. Chimirri (Contributing Authors), *Open Home* (17-31). Auckland: Random House.
- Mendelsohn, R. (1977). Empirical evidence on home improvements. *Journal of Urban Economics*, 4, 459-468.
- Miles, S. (1998). *Consumerism – as a way of life*. London: Sage.
- Miles, M. B. & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*. Sage, London.
- Ministry of Economic Development (2008). *A guide to doing your own electrical work safely and legally*. Accessed 3 July 2011 from: <http://www.energysafety.govt.nz/upload/31994/brochure.pdf>.
- Mitchell, A. (1972). *The Half-Gallon Quarter Acre Pavlova Paradise*. New Zealand: Whitcombe and Tombs.
- Mitre 10 (1984). *25 years of Silver Service*. Produced by Glenvale Publications for Mitre 10 (Australasia) Holdings Limited, Australia.
- Montgomery, C. (1992). Explaining home improvement in the context of household investment in residential housing. *Journal of Urban Economics*, 32, 326-350.
- Moore, J. (2000). Placing home in context. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 20, 207-217.
- Morrell, W. P. & Hall, D. O. W. (1957). *A History of New Zealand Life*. Wellington: Whitcombe and Tombs Limited.
- Morrow-Jones, H. & Wenning, M. (2005). The housing ladder, the housing life cycle and the housing life course: upward and downward movement among repeat home-buyers in a US metropolitan housing market. *Urban Studies*, 42, 1739-1754.
- Mulgan, A. (1944). *From Track to Highway. A Short History of New Zealand*. Wellington: Whitcombe and Tombs Limited.
- Munro, M. & Leather, P. (2000). Nest-building or investing in the future? Owner-occupiers' home improvement behaviour. *Policy and Politics*, 28(4), 511-526.
- Murdoch, H. (2009). Financial squeeze leads Kiwis to sharpen DIY skills. *The Press*, 5 August, A3.
- Neuman, W. L. (1997). *Social Research Methods. Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

- New Zealand Dairy Exporter (1946). *Do It Yourself: Tells you how*. Wellington: The NZ Dairy Exporter Newspaper Company, Ltd.
- New Zealand Listener (2005). Front Cover. *New Zealand Listener*, 5-11 November, cover page.
- New Zealand Listener (2011). Cover Page. *New Zealand Listener*, 9-15 April, cover page.
- Nixon, C. & Yeabsley, J. (2010). *Overseas trade policy*. TeAra – Encyclopaedia of New Zealand. Accessed 16 June 2011 from: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/overseas-trade-policy>.
- Norris, N. & Walker, R. (2005). Naturalistic Inquiry. In B. Somekh & C. Lewin (Eds.), *Research Methods in the Social Sciences* (131-137). London: SAGE Publications.
- NHC (1983). *Housing in New Zealand: Five-Yearly Report*. Wellington: National Housing Commission.
- NZHH (1967). Front Cover. *New Zealand Home Handyman*, 1(1), cover page.
- NZHH (1968a). Reader reaction to your magazine. *New Zealand Home Handyman*, 1(3), 13.
- NZHH (1968b). New Brighton “Hometown”. *New Zealand Home Handyman*, 1(3), 26.
- NZHH (1970a). One-stop building materials display, sales centre in Wellington. *New Zealand Home Handyman*, 3(3), 8.
- NZHH (1970b). Speed brush advertisement. *New Zealand Home Handyman*, 4(1), 11.
- NZHJ (1974). Cork isn’t just for bottles. *New Zealand Home Journal*, March, 12-15.
- NZHJ (2004). Gone are the Days of the Handyman? *New Zealand Hardware Journal*, February, 29.
- NZHJ (2005). 2005: Growth and Sustainability. *New Zealand Hardware Journal*, February, 4-7.
- NZHJ (2006). Painting Advertisement. *New Zealand Hardware Journal*, September, 37.
- NZHJ (2007a). Working on the weekend. *New Zealand Hardware Journal*, April, 18.
- NZHJ (2007b). Girls spend more. *New Zealand Hardware Journal*, May, 24.
- NZOY (1983). *New Zealand Official Yearbook 1983 (88<sup>th</sup> Edition)*. Department of Statistics, Wellington, New Zealand.
- NZOY (1984). *New Zealand Official Yearbook 1984 (89<sup>th</sup> Edition)*. Department of Statistics, Wellington, New Zealand.
- NZOY (1990). *New Zealand Official Yearbook 1990 (94<sup>th</sup> Edition)*. Department of Statistics. Wellington, New Zealand.
- Oakley, A. (1974). *The Sociology of Housework*. Oxford: Martin Robertson.
- Ogden-Barnes, S. (2005). The world of retail: change in the supermarket and DIY sectors. *Business Date*, 13(4), 1-4.
- Olssen, A., McDonald, H., Grimes, A. & Stillman, S. (2010). *A State Housing Database: 1993-2009*. Motu Working Paper 10-13. Motu Economic and Public Policy Research. New Zealand.
- Osgerby, B. (2001). *Playboys in Paradise: Masculinity, Youth and Leisure-style in Modern America*. Oxford and New York: Berg.
- Owen, A. (2000). The Days of Do-It-Yourself. *New Zealand Memories*, October/November, 5-8.
- Page, I. (2002). Will You Do-It-Yourself in the Future? *Build*, October/November, 6-7.
- Pahl, R. (1980). Employment, work and the domestic division of labour. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 4, 1-20.



- Palmer, R., Steeds, B. & Chowdhury, D. (2005). *Nailing the Red Tape: A Builders Guide to New Zealand Law*. Wellington: Brookers Limited.
- Parker, A. (2005). One Million Power Tools a Year: New Zealand Goes Crazy. *The Shed, October*, 12-19.
- Parker, J. (2005b). *Frontier of Dreams: The Story of New Zealand 1947-2005*. Auckland: Scholastic New Zealand Limited.
- Patton, M. Q. (2004). Naturalistic Inquiry. In M. S. Lewis-Beck, A. Bryman & T. F. Liao (Eds.), *The SAGE Encyclopaedia of Social Science Research Methods* (Volume 2, 714-715). California: Thousand Oaks.
- Paterson, M. (2006). *Consumption and Everyday Life*. London: Routledge.
- Pawson, E. (1996). Landscapes of Consumption. In R. Le Heron & E. Pawson (1996). *Changing Places: New Zealand in the Nineties* (Chapter 10). Auckland: Longman Paul.
- Pawson, E. & Cant, G. (1983). Re-defining work: the role of informal household activities. In R. Bedford & A. Sturman (Eds.), *Canterbury at the Crossroads* (359-372). Canterbury: New Zealand Geographical Society.
- Pemberton, J. D., Stonehouse, G. H. & Francis, M. S. (2002). Black and Decker – towards a knowledge-centric organisation. *Knowledge and Process Management*, 9(3), 178-189.
- Perkins, H. (1988). Bulldozers in the Southern Part of Heaven: defending place against rapid growth. Part 1: local residents' interpretations of rapid growth in a free-standing service-class town. *Environment and Planning A*, 20, 285-308.
- Perkins, H. & Thorns, D. (1999). House and home and their interaction with changes in New Zealand's urban system, households and family structures. *Housing Theory and Society*, 16, 124-135.
- Perkins, H. & Thorns, D. (2000). *Making a home: housing, lifestyle and social interaction*. Paper presented at the ENHR 2000 Conference in Gavle, Sweden, 26-30 June 2000.
- Perkins, H. & Thorns, D. (2001). Houses, homes and New Zealanders' everyday lives. In C. Bell (Ed.), *Sociology of Everyday Life in New Zealand* (Chapter 2). New Zealand: Dunmore Press Limited.
- Perkins, H. & Thorns, D. (2003). The making of home in a global world: Aotearoa as an exemplar. In R. Forest and J. Lee (Eds.), *Housing and Social Change: East-West Perspectives*. London: Routledge.
- Perkins, H. & Thorns, D. (2006). Magazines shape our homes. *BUILD, June/July*, 96-97.
- Perkins, H., Thorns, D. & Winstanley, A. (2008). House and home: methodology and methods for exploring meaning and structure. In P. J. Maginn, S. Thompson & M. Tonts (Eds.), *Qualitative Housing Analysis: An International Perspective* (Chapter 2). United Kingdom: Emerald.
- Phillips, J. (1987). *A Man's Country: The Image of the Pakeha Male – A History*. Auckland: Penguin Books.
- Poder, P. (2008). Bauman on freedom – consumer freedom as the integration mechanism of liquid society. In M. H. Jacobson & P. Poder (Eds.), *The Sociology of Zygmunt Bauman: Challenges and Critiques* (Chapter 5). England: Ashgate Publishing Limited.
- Pollakowski, H. O. (1988). *The determinants of residential renovation and repair activity*. Final Report Prepared for the Office of Policy Development and Research, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.
- Pool, I. & Du Plessis, R. (2011). *Families: a history - Baby boom continues: 1960s – early 1970s*. TeAra – Encyclopaedia of New Zealand. Accessed 22 June 2011 from: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/families-a-history/6>.

- Porteous, D. (1976). Home: the territorial core. *Geographical Review*, 66(4), 383-390.
- Poteman, M. (1989). Interest rates, income and home improvement decisions. *Journal of Urban Economics*, 25, 282-294.
- Powell, H. (2009). Time, television and the decline of DIY. *Home Cultures*, 6(1), 89-108.
- Projects (2007). Home improvement loan advertisement. *Projects Magazine*, August/September, 113.
- Projects (2008). Home improvement loan advertisement. *Projects Magazine*, October/November, 39.
- Prus, R. (1996). *Symbolic Interaction and Ethnographic Research: Intersubjectivity and the Study of Human Lived Experience*. USA: State University of New York Press.
- Reader's Digest (1965). *Reader's Digest Do-It-Yourself Manual*. Wellington: The Reader's Digest Association Pty. Ltd.
- Reckwitz, A. (2002). Toward a theory of social practices: a development in culturalist theorising. *European Journal of Cultural Theory*, 5, 243-263.
- Rigold, B. (1976). *The New Zealand Handyman's Guide*. Auckland: Paul Hamlyn.
- Ritzer, G. (2009). *Focusing on the prosumer: on correcting an error in the history of social theory*. Paper to be presented at a conference on the prosumer at Wolfgang Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main FB Gesellschaftswissenschaften Institut für Gesellschafts und Politikanalyse. Accessed 21 October 2011 from: <http://www.georgeritzer.com/docs/Focusing%20on%20the%20Prosumer.pdf>.
- Robb, M. & Howarth, G. (1977). *Recreation in New Zealand: Preliminary Report*. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Recreation and Sport.
- Roland, A. (1958). Do-it-yourself: a Walden for the millions? *American Quarterly*, Volume X, 2(1), 154-164.
- Rosenberg, B. C. (2008). Property and home-makeover television: risk, thrift and taste. *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, 22(4), 505-513.
- Rosenblum, B. (1978). Style as social process. *American Sociological Review*, 43, 422-438.
- Russell, D. G. & Wilson, N. C. (1991). *Life in New Zealand Commission Report Volume 1: Executive Overview*. Dunedin: University of Otago.
- Salmond, J. (1986). *Old New Zealand Houses 1800-1940*. Auckland: Heinemann Reed.
- Schatzki, T. R. (1996). *Social Practices: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Human Activity and the Social*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schatzki, T. R. (2002). *The Site of the Social: A Philosophical Account of the Constitution of Social Life and Change*. USA: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Schatzman, L. & Strauss, A. (1973). *Field Research: Strategies for Natural Sociology*. USA: Prentice-Hall.
- Schrader, B. (2005). *We call it Home: A History of State Housing in New Zealand*. Auckland: Reed.
- Sennett, R. (2008). *The Craftsman*. England: Penguin Books.
- Shaw, K. (2011). The changing face of DIY. *Build*, February/March, 64.
- Shaw, L. & Brookes, B. (1999). Constructing homes: gender and advertising in home and building: 1936-1970. *New Zealand Journal of History*, 33, 200-220.
- Shopland, A. (1998). Never on a Sunday. *New Zealand Listener*, 5-12 September, 36.

- Shove, E., Watson, M., Hand, M. & Ingram, J. (2007). *The Design of Everyday Life*. Oxford & New York: BERG.
- SIRC (2003). Two great British obsessions: tea and DIY. Accessed 26 July 2005 from: [http://www.sirc.org/publik/tea\\_and\\_diy.html](http://www.sirc.org/publik/tea_and_diy.html).
- Slater, D. (1997). *Consumer Culture and Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Somerville, P. (1997). The social construction of home. *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research*, 14(3), 226-245.
- Statistics New Zealand (2001). *Around the Clock: Findings from the New Zealand Time Use Survey 1998-99*. Wellington: Statistics New Zealand.
- Stebbins, R. A. (2009). *Personal Decisions in the Public Square: beyond Problem Solving into a Positive Sociology*. New Jersey: Transaction Publishers.
- Stewart, D. (1992). *The New Zealand Villa Past and Present*. Auckland: Penguin Books.
- Stewart, R. (2007). DIY workshops fill gap in skills training for women. *Community News*, 28 October, 10-11.
- Story, M. (1995). Building new markets. *Marketing*, December, 24-30.
- Strategic Direction (2005). B&Q's moves to target female customers. *Strategic Direction*, 21(6), 24.
- Strongman, T. (1984). *The Gardens of Canterbury*. Wellington: A. H. & A. W. Reed Ltd.
- Sunday Star Times (2006). The rise and fall of the house of Levene. *Sunday Star Times*, 8 January, Business Section, C15.
- Sztompka, P. (2008). The focus on everyday life: a new turn in sociology. *European Review*, 16, 23-37.
- Tait, D. (1984). *New Zealand Recreation Survey 1974-75*. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Recreation and Sport.
- Temple, P. (2006). Girls and the D-I-Y Fad. *New Zealand Hardware Journal*, February, 6-7.
- The Christchurch Star-Sun (c1950). *New Zealand Picture Handyman*. Christchurch: The Christchurch Star-Sun.
- The Monopolies and Mergers Commission (1989). *Black and Decker: a report on the course of conduct pursued by Black & Decker in relation to the supply of power tools and portable work benches intended for domestic use*. Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry by command of her majesty.
- The Press (1950). Holiday painting advertisement. *The Press*, 5 December, 9.
- The Press (1955a). Drill advertisement. *The Press*, 4 October, 9.
- The Press (1955b). Xmas painting advertisement. *The Press*, 7 December, 11.
- The Press (1955c). Tools advertisement. *The Press*, 7 December, 10.
- The Press (1955d). Taubmans paint advertisement. *The Press*, 1 December, 5.
- The Press (1960a). Dulux advertisement. *The Press*, 18 October, 23.
- The Press (1960b). Black and Decker Advertisement. *The Press*, 2 December, 6.
- The Saturday Evening Post (1960). Black and Decker Advertisement. *The Saturday Evening Post*, 3 December, inside cover.
- The Star (1922). Hardships of the pioneers: the struggle for existence. *The Star*, 26 August, n.p.

- The Weekly News (1960). DIY cartoon. *The Weekly News*, 7 December, 23.
- The Weekly News (1965). DIY cartoon. *The Weekly News*, 27 October, 64.
- Thomas, S. (1997). *W. H. Collins & Co. Ltd. 1889 – 1989: A Short History of a Trail-blazing Retailer*. Ashburton, New Zealand: W. H. Collins & Co. Limited.
- Thorns, D. & Schrader, B. (2010). *Suburban Growth*. TeAra – Encyclopaedia of New Zealand. Accessed 31 March 2011 from: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/city-history-and-people/6>.
- Toffler, A. (1980). *Future Shock*. New York: William Morrow and Co.
- Tolich, M. & Davidson, C. (2003). Collecting the Data. In C. Davidson & M. Tolich (Eds.), *Social Science Research in New Zealand: Many Pathways to Understanding* (122-153). Auckland: Pearson Education New Zealand Limited.
- Trotter, C. (1990). Sunday shopping's winners and losers. *The Dominion*, 6 January, 11.
- van Manen, M. (1997). Phenomenology of practice. *Phenomenology and Practice*, 1(1), 11-30.
- Watson, M. & Shove, E. (2008). Product, competence, project and practice: DIY and the dynamics of craft consumption. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 8(1), 69-89.
- Welham, K. (2004). Doing it for themselves. *The Press*, 13 March, D4.
- Wichtel, D. (2001). It's tool time! *New Zealand Listener*, 15 September, 77.
- Williams, C. C. (2004). A lifestyle choice? Evaluating the motives of do-it-yourself consumers. *International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management*, 32, 270-278.
- Williams, C. C. (2008). Re-thinking the motives of do-it-yourself (DIY) consumers. *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research*, 18(3), 311-323.
- Wilson, J. (2007). *Unpacking the big OE*. A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. Lincoln University, Canterbury, New Zealand.
- Wilton, C. (2011). *Communes and communities – Communes: 1960s and 1970s*. TeAra – Encyclopaedia of New Zealand. Accessed 11 November 2011 from: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/communes -and-communities/2>. (Updated 31-Mar-11).
- Winstanley, A. (2000). *Housing, Home and Women's Identity*. A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand.
- Winstanley, P. & Winstanley, S. (2006). *Buying a home isn't everything: how renting can work for you*. New Zealand: New Holland Publishers.
- Wolfe, R. (2007). *Looking Back: New Zealand 1900-2005*. New Zealand: Whitcoulls.
- Your Home and Garden (2010). Front Cover. *Your Home and Garden*, December, cover page.

# Appendix 1: Information Sheet for Interviewees

Dear Sir/Madam,

I would like to invite you to participate in a research project titled DIY (Do-It-Yourself) Home Improvement in New Zealand. The study is part of my Doctor of Philosophy degree at Lincoln University.

New Zealand has a strong DIY tradition, one that is particularly evident among the many 'kiwi' homeowners who have a go at 'doing-up' their house and home. Despite the popularity of home DIY in New Zealand, very little research has been conducted in the topic area. For that reason, very little is known about: why people like (or perhaps dislike) DIY; what motivates people to DIY; how people acquire their DIY 'know-how'; what constitutes the total DIY experience; and what homeowners believe they attain from doing DIY. To learn more about these things, this study will examine the *meaning* of DIY from the viewpoint of 'kiwi' homeowners.

Should you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to partake in an informal interview at your home. I will seek your permission to tape record the interview. During the interview, you will be asked to: (1) express your views on various aspects of home DIY and (2) talk about your past DIY experiences and current DIY projects. I expect that the interview will take between 30 minutes and 2 hours to complete. The exact duration of the interview, however, will be entirely up to you. In addition to the interview, you may be asked to showcase your past and/or current DIY projects, and your DIY tool collection and workshop. At this time, and with your permission, photographs will be taken. The research will be conducted between March and November 2006.

All the information you provide will be confidential and only available to my supervisors and myself. To ensure that you remain anonymous throughout the study, I will not use your name or any personally identifying information: during the processing of data; in the final report; or, in the instance that the study (or any part of it) be published. You can withdraw from the study, including the withdrawal of any information you have provided, anytime within the four week period after your interview.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please contact my supervisors or myself via the following contact details:

<i>Supervisor</i>	<i>Associate Supervisor</i>	<i>Researcher</i>
Professor Harvey Perkins	Bob Gidlow	Michael Mackay
Environment, Society and Design	ESDD	ESDD
Lincoln University	Lincoln University	Lincoln University
Phone: 325 3820 ext 8765	Phone: 325 3820 ext 8766	Phone: 021 188 2637
Perkins@lincoln.ac.nz	Gidlow@lincoln.ac.nz	mackaym2@lincoln.ac.nz

The project has been reviewed and approved by the Lincoln University Human Ethics Committee.

Thank you for taking time to read and consider the above information.

Yours Sincerely

Michael Mackay  
Lincoln University PhD Candidate

## **Appendix 2: Consent Form for Interviewees**

### **DIY (Do-It-Yourself) Home Improvement in New Zealand**

I have read and understand the description of this project. I agree to participate in the project, and I consent to the publication of the results of the project with the understanding that my anonymity will be preserved. I understand also that I may at any time withdraw from the project, including the withdrawal of any information I have provided.

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 3: Information Sheet for Key Informants

Dear Sir/Madam,

I would like to invite you to participate in a research project titled DIY (Do-It-Yourself) Home Improvement in New Zealand. The study is part of my Doctor of Philosophy degree at Lincoln University.

New Zealand has a strong DIY tradition, one that is particularly evident among the many 'kiwi' homeowners who have a go at 'doing-up' their house and home. Despite the popularity of home DIY in New Zealand, very little research has been conducted in the topic area. For that reason, very little is known about: why people like (or perhaps dislike) DIY; what motivates people to DIY; how people acquire their DIY 'know-how'; what constitutes the total DIY experience; and what homeowners believe they attain from doing DIY. To learn more about these things, this study will examine the *meaning* of DIY from the viewpoint of 'kiwi' homeowners.

An important part of the study will be to devise a social history and contemporary description of the DIY industry and culture in New Zealand. It is for this reason that I am calling upon your expertise and knowledge. I am particularly interested in hearing your views on [insert the specific interview topic here]. Should you be willing to offer your viewpoint on this subject, you will be asked to partake in an informal interview; the duration, time and location of which will be entirely up to you (please note, however, that the research will be conducted between March and November 2006). I will seek your permission to tape record the interview.

All the information you provide will be confidential and only available to my supervisors and myself. To ensure that you remain anonymous throughout the study, I will not use your personal name or any personally identifying information: during the processing of data; in the final report; or, in the instance that the study (or any part of it) be published. However, as you will be interviewed in your 'professional' capacity, then you will be identified by the agency or group for whom you represent. Should you volunteer information that you recognise conflicts with your professional capacity during the interview, you will be referred to in more generic terms, e.g., employee of a major DIY related retailing business.

You can withdraw from the study, including the withdrawal of any information you have provided, anytime within the four week period after your interview. If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please contact my supervisors or myself via the following contact details:

<i>Supervisor</i>	<i>Associate Supervisor</i>	<i>Researcher</i>
Professor Harvey Perkins	Bob Gidlow	Michael Mackay
Lincoln University	Lincoln University	Lincoln University
Phone: 325 3820 ext 8765	Phone: 325 3820 ext 8766	Phone: 021 188 2637
Perkins@lincoln.ac.nz	Gidlow@lincoln.ac.nz	mackaym2@lincoln.ac.nz

The project has been reviewed and approved by the Lincoln University Human Ethics Committee.

Thank you for taking time to read and consider the above information.

Yours Sincerely

Michael Mackay  
Lincoln University PhD Candidate

## **Appendix 4: Consent Form for Key Informants**

### **DIY (Do-It-Yourself) Home Improvement in New Zealand**

I have read and understand the description of this project. I agree to be interviewed. I agree/disagree to be tape-recorded (please circle one).

I understand that I am being interviewed in my professional capacity, and therefore, that I will be identified in the final research report by my group or agency name. I understand also that, should I volunteer information that I recognise conflicts with my professional capacity, I will be referred to in more generic terms.

I understand also that I have four weeks from the date of my interview to withdraw from the project, including the withdrawal of any information I have provided.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix 5: Questionnaire

### Christchurch Homeowners' DIY Home Improvement Survey – 2007

Before you begin the survey, it is important for you to know exactly what we mean by DIY.

DIY, which stands for 'do-it-yourself', occurs when *you* (or members of your household): decorate, alter, build, maintain or repair any part of the house and home rather than paying a professional tradesperson to do the work for you.

DIY can include small tasks (such as replacing a door handle), and big projects (such as building a new room). DIY can also include gardening work (such as planting a lawn) and landscape construction (such as building a deck or laying paving stones). What makes the activity a 'DIY' project is that you (or other household members) have a hand in doing all or some of the work, and that the work is unpaid.

...please ensure you answer every question

**1** Have you done *any* DIY at your current home? <sub>1</sub>  Yes <sub>2</sub>  No ► If you answered 'No', please go to *question 12*.

**2** Are you planning to do *any* DIY at your current home over the next 12 months? <sub>1</sub>  Yes <sub>2</sub>  No

**3** Here is a list of possible DIY tasks. Please tick  the box or boxes to indicate which of these tasks you have done at your current home, and any you are planning to do over the next 12 months.

Possible DIY Projects	I have <u>done</u> this DIY project	I am <u>planning</u> to do this DIY project in the next 12 months
Repair/replace a broken window pane	<sub>1</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>	<sub>2</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>
Repair/replace a leaking tap	<sub>1</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>	<sub>2</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>
Repair/replace guttering	<sub>1</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>	<sub>2</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>
Remove an interior wall	<sub>1</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>	<sub>2</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>
Install a new kitchen	<sub>1</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>	<sub>2</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>
Install a new shower/bathroom unit	<sub>1</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>	<sub>2</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>
Clean out guttering	<sub>1</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>	<sub>2</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>
Wash down exterior walls	<sub>1</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>	<sub>2</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>
Paint exterior window sills	<sub>1</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>	<sub>2</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>
Wallpaper a room	<sub>1</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>	<sub>2</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>
Paint/re-paint an interior wall	<sub>1</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>	<sub>2</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>
Paint/re-paint a ceiling	<sub>1</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>	<sub>2</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>
Repair/replace a door handle	<sub>1</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>	<sub>2</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>
Plastering and/or Gib-stopping	<sub>1</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>	<sub>2</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>
Install underfloor and/or roof insulation	<sub>1</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>	<sub>2</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>
Prune a tree and/or hedge	<sub>1</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>	<sub>2</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>
Plant a vegetable garden	<sub>1</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>	<sub>2</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>
Mow a lawn	<sub>1</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>	<sub>2</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>
Build a fence	<sub>1</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>	<sub>2</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>
Build a wooden deck	<sub>1</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>	<sub>2</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>
Lay some paving stones	<sub>1</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>	<sub>2</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify) ►	<sub>1</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>	<sub>2</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify) ►	<sub>1</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>	<sub>2</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify) ►	<sub>1</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>	<sub>2</sub> <input type="checkbox"/>

**4** Please estimate how much you spent on tools/materials for your DIY projects over the last 12 months?

- |  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| 1 <input type="checkbox"/> \$0               | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> \$1,500 to \$1,999 | 9 <input type="checkbox"/> \$3,500 to \$3,999  |
| 2 <input type="checkbox"/> \$1 to \$499      | 6 <input type="checkbox"/> \$2,000 to \$2,499 | 10 <input type="checkbox"/> \$4,000 to \$9,999 |
| 3 <input type="checkbox"/> \$500 to \$999    | 7 <input type="checkbox"/> \$2,500 to \$2,999 | 11 <input type="checkbox"/> \$10,000 or more   |
| 4 <input type="checkbox"/> \$1,000 to \$1499 | 8 <input type="checkbox"/> \$3,000 to \$3,499 | 12 <input type="checkbox"/> I don't know       |

**5** Over the last 12 months, have you borrowed any tools or equipment for your DIY projects?

- 1  Yes                      2  No

↓

If yes, please tick  the box or boxes below to show who you borrowed the tools/equipment from.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Family member(s) | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> Neighbour(s)                     |
| 2 <input type="checkbox"/> Friend(s)        | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> Other(s) (please specify): ..... |

**6** Over the last 12 months, have you hired any tools or equipment for your DIY projects?    1  Yes    2  No

**7** Over the last 12 months, did you help a friend/neighbour/family member with a DIY project?    1  Yes    2  No

**8** Over the last 12 months, did a friend/neighbour/family member help you with a DIY project?    1  Yes    2  No

**9** Over the last 12 months, did you seek any information, ideas and/or advice about a DIY project you were doing?

- 1  Yes                      2  No

↓

If yes, who/where did you get the information, ideas and/or advice from? More than one box may be ticked

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Friend                | 7 <input type="checkbox"/> Staff member at a DIY store                                    |
| 2 <input type="checkbox"/> Tradesmen I knew      | 8 <input type="checkbox"/> DIY class or demonstration                                     |
| 3 <input type="checkbox"/> Family member         | 9 <input type="checkbox"/> Television show  |
| 4 <input type="checkbox"/> Internet              | 10 <input type="checkbox"/> "I have not asked for advice, I do my DIY by trial and error" |
| 5 <input type="checkbox"/> Library books         | 11 <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): .....                                 |
| 6 <input type="checkbox"/> DIY manuals/magazines | 12 <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): .....                                 |

**10** A typical DIY project might have 6 stages, from thinking up the idea for a project to talking about the end result with friends and family. Thinking about the DIY projects you have done at your current home, please rate your usual level of involvement in each of the stages by circling the appropriate number using the following scale:

1 = Never Involved → 5 = Highly involved

Possible stages of a DIY project	Never involved	Rarely involved	Sometimes involved	Involved	Highly involved
Thinking/dreaming up the DIY project	1	2	3	4	5
Planning (eg. selecting colours/materials, drawing a plan)	1	2	3	4	5
Budgeting	1	2	3	4	5
Shopping for the tools and materials	1	2	3	4	5
Doing the work	1	2	3	4	5
Talking about the project with others once finished	1	2	3	4	5

**11**

Here is a list of statements that may explain why you do DIY.

For each of the statements, please rate your agreement or disagreement by circling the appropriate number using the following scale:

1 = I strongly disagree with this statement → 5 = I strongly agree with the statement

I do DIY because...	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I cannot afford to pay a tradesperson to do the work for me	1	2	3	4	5
I do not like paying for work that I know I can do myself	1	2	3	4	5
I can do all the work in my own time and at my own speed	1	2	3	4	5
It's part of 'kiwi' culture	1	2	3	4	5
It allows me to stamp my mark on the property	1	2	3	4	5
I like fixing/making things – being productive/creative	1	2	3	4	5
I know I can save money by doing it myself	1	2	3	4	5
My partner/husband/wife expects me to do the work	1	2	3	4	5
I prefer not to have tradespeople in my home	1	2	3	4	5
To make my house and home more attractive	1	2	3	4	5
It's something completely different from my work	1	2	3	4	5
I can control all aspects of the project	1	2	3	4	5
To make my house and home more functional	1	2	3	4	5
I want to raise the value of my property, my biggest asset	1	2	3	4	5
It's gives me something fun to do in my free-time	1	2	3	4	5
My friends and family are all doing DIY	1	2	3	4	5
I want to prove to others that I can do DIY	1	2	3	4	5
I enjoy testing my practical skills and abilities	1	2	3	4	5
So that my house and home suits my (family's) changing needs	1	2	3	4	5
If you want something done properly, you have to do-it-yourself	1	2	3	4	5
Other reason for doing DIY (please specify) ►					
Other reason for doing DIY (please specify) ►					
Other reason for doing DIY (Please specify) ►					
Other reason for doing DIY (please specify) ►					

12

Please tick  the boxes below to indicate which of the following tools and equipment you own?

1 <input type="checkbox"/> Cordless drill	11 <input type="checkbox"/> Wheel barrow	21 <input type="checkbox"/> Tape measure
2 <input type="checkbox"/> Circular saw	12 <input type="checkbox"/> Spade/shovel	22 <input type="checkbox"/> Ladder
3 <input type="checkbox"/> Power sander	13 <input type="checkbox"/> Lathe	23 <input type="checkbox"/> Trailer
4 <input type="checkbox"/> Power drill (plugs into wall)	14 <input type="checkbox"/> Hedge clippers	24 <input type="checkbox"/> Collection of nails/screws etc.
5 <input type="checkbox"/> Hand saw	15 <input type="checkbox"/> Water blaster	25 <input type="checkbox"/> Spanner(s)
6 <input type="checkbox"/> Hammer(s)	16 <input type="checkbox"/> Chain saw	26 <input type="checkbox"/> Collection of unfinished paint
7 <input type="checkbox"/> Chisel(s)	17 <input type="checkbox"/> Concrete mixer	27 <input type="checkbox"/> Vice
8 <input type="checkbox"/> Wood plane	18 <input type="checkbox"/> Lawn mower	28 <input type="checkbox"/> Collection of wood/timber
9 <input type="checkbox"/> Level(s)	19 <input type="checkbox"/> Screwdriver(s)	29 <input type="checkbox"/> Tool belt
10 <input type="checkbox"/> Garden rake	20 <input type="checkbox"/> Paint brushes/rollers	30 <input type="checkbox"/> Soldering iron

13

Here are some home improvement tasks that you could encounter in the future.

For each task, we would like you to think about your current circumstances (such as your: family and work commitments, financial situation, available time, health, and past experiences of DIY) and then decide if you would:

1. Do the task yourself (DIY)
2. Expect that your partner, husband or wife who lives with you would do the task (DIY)
3. Ask a relative or friend to do the task
4. Employ a professional tradesperson

To answer, please tick  the box or boxes to indicate how you would probably get each task done.

PLEASE TICK MORE THAN ONE BOX IF YOU THINK YOU WOULD USE A COMBINATION OF OPTIONS TO DO THE TASK

For example, if you think that you and your partner would probably do the task together then you would tick the 'Myself' box and also the 'Partner' box.

Possible DIY Project	Myself (DIY)	Partner, husband or wife (DIY)	Friend or relative	Tradesperson
Repair a broken window pane	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
Repair a leaking tap	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
Remove an interior wall	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
Install a new kitchen	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
Clean out guttering	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
Paint exterior window sills	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
Wallpaper a room	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
Paint/re-paint an interior wall	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
Plastering and/or Gib-stopping	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
Install underfloor or roof insulation	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
Prune a tree and/or hedge	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
Mow the lawn	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
Build a wooden deck	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
Lay some paving stones	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>

**14 ABOUT YOURSELF**

This information will be used to build a profile of the people that have responded to the survey. To ensure your anonymity, **YOUR NAME AND ADDRESS ARE NOT REQUIRED.**

**A** What is your age in years? Please specify: .....

**B** Are you:  Male  Female

**C** What ethnic group do you consider yourself a part?

- NZ European  Maori  Asian  
 European  Pacific Island  Other (please specify): .....

**D** Please choose one of the following options below to show your highest educational qualification.

Please tick  one box only

- No qualification  Bachelor/higher degree  Other (please specify): .....  
 High school qualification  Trade qualification

**E** What is your main employment status?

Please tick  one box only

- Unemployed  In unpaid employment  Student  
 In paid full-time employment  Home-maker  Other (please specify): .....  
 In paid part-time employment  Retired .....

**F** What is your main occupation? Please be specific (for example: teacher or builder): .....

**G** Please choose from the options below to show all the people that live in your house.

More than one box may be ticked

- I live alone  My mother  
 My legal husband or wife  My father  
 My partner or de facto boyfriend/girlfriend  My flatmate(s) → How many? .....  
 My son(s) and / or daughter(s)  Other (please specify): .....  
↓  
How many children live with you? .....

**H** What is the total number of people that live at your current address? Please specify: .....

**I** Approximately, what is your total annual personal income before tax?

Please tick  one box only

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$9,999 or less      | <input type="checkbox"/> \$50,000 to \$59,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$100,000 to \$109,000 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$10,000 to \$19,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$60,000 to \$69,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$110,000 to \$119,999 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$20,000 to \$29,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$70,000 to \$79,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$120,000 to \$129,000 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$30,000 to \$39,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$80,000 to \$89,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$130,000 to \$139,000 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$40,000 to \$49,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$90,000 to \$99,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$140,000 or more      |

**J** Approximately, what is your total combined annual household income before tax?

Please tick  one box only

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$9,999 or less      | <input type="checkbox"/> \$50,000 to \$59,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$100,000 to \$109,000 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$10,000 to \$19,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$60,000 to \$69,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$110,000 to \$119,999 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$20,000 to \$29,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$70,000 to \$79,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$120,000 to \$129,000 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$30,000 to \$39,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$80,000 to \$89,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$130,000 to \$139,000 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$40,000 to \$49,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$90,000 to \$99,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$140,000 or more      |

**15 ABOUT YOUR HOUSE AND HOME**

This information will be used to build a profile of the houses of the people that have responded to the survey. To ensure you anonymity, **YOUR NAME AND ADDRESS ARE NOT REQUIRED.**

**A When did you move into your current home?**

Month: ..... Year: .....

**B Do you currently have a mortgage (or other formal loan arrangement) to finance your home?**

1  Yes                      2  No

**C What suburb is the house you currently live in located? Please specify: .....**

**D How do you describe the type of house you currently live in?**

Please tick  one box only

1  House                      3  Unit                      5  Other, please specify: .....  
2  Apartment                      4  Townhouse

**E How many houses have you owned?**

Please tick  one box only

1  This is my 1<sup>st</sup> home  
2  This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> home I have owned  
3  This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> home I have owned  
4  This is the 4<sup>th</sup> home I have owned  
5  This is the 5<sup>th</sup> home I have owned  
6  I have owned 6 or more homes

**F Approximately when was your house built?**

Please tick  one box only

1  1920s or earlier      3  1940s      5  1960s      7  1980s      9  2000s  
2  1930s      4  1950s      6  1970s      8  1990s

**G How many bedrooms does your home have?**

Please tick  one box only

1  1 bedroom  
2  2 bedrooms  
3  3 bedrooms  
4  4 bedrooms  
5  5 bedrooms  
6  6 or more bedrooms

**H Approximately what is the current market value of your home?**

Please tick  one box only

1  Less than \$199,999                      4  \$300,000 to \$349,999                      7  \$450,000 to \$499,999  
2  \$200,000 to \$249,999                      5  \$350,000 to \$399,999                      8  \$500,000 to \$549,999  
3  \$250,000 to \$299,999                      6  \$400,000 to \$449,999                      9  \$550,000 or more

**Thank you for your cooperation in completing the survey.**

Remember the information you have provided is anonymous and confidential. There is no way that you or your contact details can be linked to the survey. Please place the survey into the **FREEPOST** envelope provided (there is no need to attach a stamp) and return it as soon as possible.

## Appendix 6: Cover Letter (Survey)



**Lincoln  
University**  
*Te Whare Wānaka o Aoraki*

### DIY Home Improvement Survey 2007

*I need your help!*

I would like to invite you to participate in research I am undertaking for my postgraduate studies at Lincoln University. My research is looking at DIY home improvement in New Zealand.

If you are a **homeowner**, you could make a valuable contribution to the study by spending 10-15 minutes completing the survey form and then posting it back to me in the **FREEPOST** envelope provided. Even if you don't do DIY – or don't like doing DIY – I am still interested in your views and opinions.

If you **do not own your own home** then you do not need to complete or return the survey forms.

Please note that participation in the research is voluntary. If you do not wish to participate, you do not need to complete or return the survey forms.

Two survey forms are enclosed. If you are the sole owner of your home then please complete **one** of the survey forms. If you own your home together with another occupant (such as your partner, husband or wife) then – if possible – please complete **one form each**.

Please note that **I do not ask you for your name and address** and therefore there is no way that you or your contact details can be linked to the information you provide. Also, please note that there are no right or wrong answers. I am interested in your experiences and opinions.

The Centre for Housing Research Aotearoa New Zealand (CHRANZ) has provided a student grant to support the research. The project has been approved by the Lincoln University Human Ethics Committee.

If you have any questions you would like answered before you complete the questionnaire, please feel free to contact me, (Mike Mackay), or my supervisor (Professor Harvey Perkins). Our contact details are:

Mike Mackay  
E-mail [mackaym2@lincoln.ac.nz](mailto:mackaym2@lincoln.ac.nz)  
Phone (03) 325 2811 extension 8281  
Fax (03) 325-3857

Professor Harvey Perkins  
E-mail [perkins@lincoln.ac.nz](mailto:perkins@lincoln.ac.nz)  
Phone (03) 325 2811 extension 8765  
Fax (03) 325-3857

Environment, Society and Design Division  
LINCOLN UNIVERSITY  
PO Box 84  
Lincoln 7647  
Canterbury

Environment, Society and Design Division  
LINCOLN UNIVERSITY  
PO Box 84  
Lincoln 7647  
Canterbury

Thank you for your help.

Yours sincerely

Mike Mackay  
PhD Candidate  
Environment Society and Design Division  
Lincoln University  
New Zealand

## Appendix 7: Survey Method and Sample

The target population for the DIY survey was homeowners residing in the Christchurch urban area who had participated in at least one DIY project in their current home. My decision to canvass home ‘owners’ was made on the basis of findings from previous studies of DIY which I had encountered in my literature review, particularly Pawson and Cant’s (1984) earlier work in Christchurch on self-provisioning and Brodersen’s (2004) more recent findings from DIY surveys administered in Europe. Both studies found that property ‘ownership’ was the main precursor for DIY, with renters much less likely to invest time and money in the upkeep and/or improvement of their lodgings. Thus, my decision to survey home ‘owners’ was largely pragmatic – targeted at those *most likely* to have done DIY.

In an attempt to generate a representative sample of homeowners, I drew respondents from ten different areas in Christchurch city, each selected on the basis of its socio-economic deprivation rating. These ratings were acquired from the New Zealand Deprivation Index 2006 (NZDep2006) which combines nine variables from the census – key indicators of socio-economic deprivation – and then assigns each suburb with a score ranging from 1 (low deprivation) to 10 (high deprivation). For the purposes of this study, one suburb in Christchurch for each level of deprivation was randomly selected for canvassing. After the ten suburbs were chosen, I generated a random sample of twelve streets for each area. This was done by numbering all the streets within the official boundaries of each suburb on a map and then – via the use of a computerized random number generator – selecting twelve streets for canvassing in each location. Once streets were selected, I hand-delivered ‘survey packs’ to all mail boxes (except those marked with ‘no circulars’), starting at the first randomly selected street and continuing until the allocated number of packs for each suburb ( $n=120$ ) had been distributed. Each survey pack contained two pre-printed questionnaires (Appendix 2) – one for each joint homeowner if required – a cover letter with instructions (Appendix 3) and a stamped return-envelope. In this manner, 2,400 individual survey forms were delivered to 1,200 homes across all ten suburbs. The lowest number of streets used to deliver all 120 packs in a specific suburb was four, but for most suburbs seven to ten streets were used. Delivery occurred over a one week period in September 2007. The deadline for responding was left open for three weeks from the final day of delivery. No record of addresses was kept, thus reminder letters could not be sent.



Across all ten suburbs, 52 questionnaires were returned by homeowners who had not engaged in DIY. The response rate (completed and returned surveys) for each area unit is presented below in Table 2.

Table 2: Response rate by Christchurch suburb

Suburb	NZDep2006 score	Responses (n)	Response rate (%)	% of total sample
Cashmere	1	54	22.5	11.5
Strowan	2	64	26.6	13.7
St Martins	3	46	19.2	9.8
Burnside	4	42	17.5	9
Parklands	5	69	28.7	14.7
Islington	6	51	21.3	10.9
North Beach	7	62	25.8	13.2
Shirley	8	16	6.7**	3.4
Casebrook	9	51	21.3	10.9
Aranui	10	13	5.4**	2.8
Total		468		100

\*\* Given the lower level of 'owned' homes in these suburbs, a low response rate was expected

The sampling technique developed for this study of DIY successfully generated a representative sample of Christchurch homeowners (assessed by comparing the sample to the owner-occupier household profile for the wider Canterbury Region (DTZ New Zealand, 2007) and, where necessary, New Zealand Census data. The highlights of the survey sample were:

- 1. Gender:** more males (56.8%) responded than females (43.2%).
- 2. Age:** representative of owner-occupiers in the Canterbury region, with the majority aged 50+ (60.9%). When age was analysed by gender, however, males were over-represented among those aged 50+.
- 3. Ethnicity:** the majority identified with the New Zealand European ethnic group (85.7%) – an expected result given the ethnic composition of the Christchurch population.
- 4. Highest qualification:** a high number of the respondents held a university qualification (37%), compared to the overall Canterbury regional owner-occupier profile (16.5%).
- 5. Employment status:** over half of the respondents had full-time jobs (52.2%), while a further 15 per cent worked part-time. About a quarter of those sampled were retired.

6. **Household income:** the majority (68.9%) reported household earnings *above* the Christchurch average which in 2006 was \$48,200 for all households (including renters).
7. **Household composition:** ‘couple’ (45.7%) and ‘couple-with-children’ (38.9%) households prevailed.
8. **Length of tenure:** 40.4 per cent had lived in their home for five years or less compared with 59 per cent of homeowners nationally. Thus, the sample included a relatively high number of ‘settled’ homeowners, compared to the New Zealand norm.
9. **House age:** broadly representative of the Christchurch residential housing stock; most built during the period 1950-1970.
10. **House value:** most of the homes were similarly valued to the average sale price for properties in Christchurch during the survey period.
11. **House type:** most were separate, 3-bedroom homes thereby matching Perkins and Thorn’s (2001, p.37) description of the iconic ‘kiwi-home’; “...single family, one-storey houses, typically the three-bedroom ‘bungalow...’ each on their own section of land.