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Crafting masculinities: gender, culture and emotion at work in the surfboard industry

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Publication Details

Warren, A. (2016). Crafting masculinities: gender, culture and emotion at work in the surfboard industry. *Gender, Place and Culture: a journal of feminist geography*, 23 (1), 36-54.

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Keywords

emotion, culture, gender, industry, masculinities, surfboard, crafting, work

Disciplines

Education | Social and Behavioral Sciences

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This paper examines the masculinities of male workers in the context of an emotionally rich form of labour: surfboard making. Contributing to emerging research around the emotional and embodied dimensions of men's working lives the paper maps the cultural, emotional and embodied dimensions of work onto masculine identity construction. Combining cultural economy theory, emotional geographies and in-depth ethnographic methods I reveal how surfboard making has become a gendered form of work; how jobs rely on (and impact) the body and what surfboard making means to workers outside of financial returns. Following a manual labour process, and informed by Western surfing subculture, commercial surfboard making has layered onto male bodies. Men perform 'blokey' masculinities in relations with one another. However, doing manual craft-work evokes close, personal interaction; among co-workers but also through engagements with place and local customers. Felt embodied craft skills help workers personalize boards for individual customers and local breaks. Beneath masculine work cultures and pretensions, surfboard-making is deeply emotional and embodied work. Labour is dependent on haptic knowledges: sense of touch, bodily movement and eye for detail. Contrasting their blokey masculinity surfboard makers rely on intimate links between their bodies, tools, materials, customers and surfing places. These 'strong bodied' men articulate a 'passion' and 'love' for 'soulful' jobs, demonstrating how waged work comprises alternative masculinities, shaped by working culture, relations and labour processes. A cultural economy framework and emotionally engaged research approach is valuable for challenging hegemonic masculinity, important for achieving more inclusive, tolerant and equitable workplaces.

Introduction

Work spaces are key sites for the construction of gender subjectivities and power relations. Masculinities rolled-up in paid work typically disavow emotions, bodies and sensualities. In Western societies men are taught to be ‘hard-bodied’ and emotionally restrained (Gorman-Murray 2013). The stubbornness of ‘unemotional masculinity’ contributes to gender inequality and illustrates the need for new conceptual and empirical engagement ‘with issues of masculinities and emotional lives’ (Seidler 2007, 17). Such research is important for shifting hegemonic masculinity to versions open to gender equality (Connell 2005). This paper examines masculine identities of male workers in the context of an emotionally rich form of labour: surfboard making. Contributing to emerging research around the emotional and embodied dimensions of men’s working lives I aim to map the cultural, emotional and embodied dimensions of work onto masculine identity construction.

The paper’s empirical focus is a group of 135 men who make surfboards for a living. These men work in three iconic surfing locations: southern California, O‘ahu, Hawai‘i and east coast Australia. Since the 1950s surfboards have been commercially manufactured from industrial-style workshops adjacent to popular surfing places. Boards are hand-made for local surfers and prevailing marine conditions. Despite transformation through automated surfboard making technologies customisation via craft-based production is an enduring cultural feature of the surfboard manufacturing industry. Emotional attachments to work, embodied skills and subcultural knowledge are drawn upon to craft products for individual customers. Lurking alongside commercial board making is an equally persistent legacy: a deeply gendered division of labour.

Corresponding to other capitalist industries, jobs in the surfboard industry ‘are not gender neutral; they are created as suitable for particular sexed bodies’ (McDowell 1997, 25). Unsettling discursive assumptions about paid and unpaid work, feminist economic

geographies emphasise the centrality of social constructions (of ethnicity, class and gender) in shaping working relations (Gibson-Graham 1996, McDowell 2013). In advanced economies the social attributes of ‘working bodies’ are increasingly important features of labour market relations (McDowell 2009, Nixon 2009, Banks and Milestone 2011). Workers are no longer merely tasked with carrying out physical or manual labour, but juggle demands around appearance, dress and emotional outlook.

With the rise of interactive service industries, features aligned to social constructions of femininity – aesthetic performance, team work, holistic thinking, empathy and persuasiveness – have become more important for accessing jobs and completing economic transactions (Simpson 2004). Meanwhile declining employment in manufacturing informs discussion about a ‘crisis’ of masculinity (cf. McDowell 2002). Following broad structural shifts from ‘old’ fordist, industrial economies to ‘new’ knowledge intensive, service-led economies notions of idealised hegemonic masculinities, bound-up with labour market participation, are being unsettled.

Yet, despite permutations, positive changes in gender and power structures are occurring unevenly. Gender inequality remains doggedly entrenched in many contemporary workplaces. Dominant models of masculinity maintain conscription to gender binaries – mind/body, competitive/uncompetitive, rationality/emotions (Gorman-Murray 2013). In this paper I analyse male workers who depend *on* emotions and sharpened bodily senses. Commercial surfboard making is an extension of Western surfing subculture. Making high-quality products for individual surfing customers requires emotionally engaged working bodies. But board maker’s emotional and embodied sensitivities push against surfing’s behavioural norms, privileging macho ‘blokey’ masculinity and the sexualisation of women.

In the following section I outline the article’s conceptual approach. To examine masculinities encountered in workplaces I combine cultural economy theory and emotional

geographies literature. The conceptual approach seeks to reveal how surfboard making has become a gendered form of work; how jobs rely on (and in turn impact) the body and what surfboard making means to male workers emotionally, outside of financial returns.

Performing manual craft-based work evokes close, personal interaction; not only among co-workers but also through engagements with place and consumers purchasing customised products. After outlining my use of in-depth ethnographic methods, deployed inside workplaces, I present empirical results in two overarching sections.

The first empirical section focuses on ‘blokey’ masculinities articulated by male workers in relations with one another (cf. Wheaton 2004, Hopkins and Noble 2009). A degree of homosociality operates in surfboard workshops. Co-worker interactions in workplaces valorise the exploits of heterosexual men and social bonds are maintained by sexualising women (Bird 1996, Flood 2008). The second empirical section explores alternative versions of masculinity embodied in ‘doing’ work and in relations between workers and customers. Surfboard making – shaping, glassing, sanding and polishing – depends on highly tuned embodied and emotive acutities. Workers know customers personally, making boards to suit different body shapes, surfing abilities and local waves. Male workers openly articulate a ‘passion’ and ‘love’ for ‘soulful’ jobs. Alternative masculinities are informed by the emotional pleasures and unique embodied skills related to the work. Not subordinated these ‘softer’ features of male worker’s identities are a celebrated part of the job and utilised to ensure work is high quality. Drawing conclusions I argue the usefulness of cultural economy and emotionally engaged research approaches for mapping masculine working identities. Waged work comprises alternative and often conflicting masculinities, shaped by working cultures, relations and labour processes.

Cultural economy: conceptualising working relations in the surfboard industry

Analysing working relations in commercial surfboard workshops through classical economic and orthodox economic geographical theories can't grasp how the industry works, what factors shape employment relations or what the key issues are facing workers and workshops. Maintaining sensitivity to the 'cultural' logics and values at play within industries situates surfboard manufacturing within a cultural economy framework (cf. Author 2014). In this article cultural economy is used to theorise the values, logics, skills and practices informing paid work. Motivated by personal desires to create more functional products for surfing enjoyment, surfboard makers emphasise the importance of engaging with workers beyond narrow identity categories such as wage labourer (cf. Rogaly 2009). In the surfboard industry meanings and motivations of work; spaces of production, relations among workers and customers are culturally mediated.

Over the last two decades 'cultural economy' frameworks have been deployed in a number of different ways. Because 'the' cultural economy is most evident in certain sectors it has come to stand for the cultural industries (Scott 2000) – widely re-branded as 'creative industries' and incorporating a growing list of activities defined by innovation, intellectual property and entrepreneurialism (see O'Connor 2013). These are industries consisting of small and large firms, with inputs and outputs, workers, workplaces and sometimes unions. However, making the cultural and creative industries different from other forms of capitalist production is their reliance on immaterial and embodied processes, which generate 'symbolic content' – the work of musicians, artists, actors, designers etc. (Reimer 2009).

But a cultural economy *as* cultural/creative industries approach rests on different philosophical ground to the original framework. Culture is treated as an economised component of advanced post-industrial societies, rather than a constituent input actively shaping capitalist relations. Much influential research on the supposed cultural economy of

cities and regions has thus tended to institute a dualism between immaterial, creative production (mind work) and physical, manual 'blue-collar' labour. Assuming the exchange value of finished cultural products depends only on generating symbolic content marginalises worker's skills and the emotional dimensions imbued in material production.

In this article I utilise cultural economy as a theoretical approach to trouble long-standing dichotomies of 'culture' and 'economy' as discrete 'natural' categories (Mitchell 2008, Gibson 2012). Cultural economy theory stresses the entwined nature of economic, cultural, social and political relations (Barnes 2001). The central argument is that culture (as a discursive category encompassing values, beliefs and customs) actively shapes the economic, as much as the economic shapes culture. The goal, therefore, is to change the epistemology of economic knowledges away from the premise of underlying, abstract market-driven forces towards theorising relations between cultures and economies (cf. Peet 2000). Cultural economy attempts to unravel how economies are made and remade through resources, actions, symbols, signs, discourses, technologies and theories (Amin and Thrift 2007). By questioning what it is that constitutes the fabric of 'economies' cultural economy allocates no ontological privilege. Promoted is the inclusion of actors, activities, knowledge and resources situated outside traditional notions of economy.

The conceptual space offered by a cultural economy framework is helpful for implicating the cultural dimensions of masculine identity construction. The surfboard industry has its origins as do-it-yourself (DIY) craftwork focused in coastal suburban tool sheds and temporally organised around day jobs (see Author 2014). Originating outside the 'cash' economy this 'backyard' work was informed by personal desires to go surfing, demonstrating how human actions are much more than the sum of different tactics implemented to gain economic advantage. Cultural values, personal passions and relationships, competitiveness, and local geography shape surfboard-making as an industry as

much as wages, prices and rents. Nevertheless core 'economic' matters of market share and proximity, exploitation, agglomeration and labour markets are still given importance.

Surfboard making is now part of a much wider global surf industry worth US\$10 billion annually. Cultural economy frameworks can't simply reverse a binary, making culture primary and economy secondary. The argument is economies are open, porous entities influenced as much by culture, as culture is by the economic.

In addition to cultures of work, emotion and embodiment also matter for understanding worker's employment experiences, identity construction, workplace relations and production processes. Surfboard making is a process felt in the hands and the mind. Using cultural economy to examine the construction and performance of masculinities in commercial surfboard workshops brings into dialogue perspectives, interests and arguments pioneered by post-structural feminism (cf. Gibson-Graham 1996, 2008). Culture, emotion and embodiment are constituent features of economies, particularly for the (re)production of unevenness and inequality. Emotional geographies form a productive accompaniment to a cultural economy framework, used here to explore how waged work comprises alternative masculinities.

Emotional and embodied dimensions of work

An emotionally engaged research approach helps to understand how keen surfers in Hawai'i, California and Australia come to make surfboards for a living; and what significance the work has for them, politically, financially, and socially. Surfboard makers are involved in a form of cultural production brimming with intense human interaction. Such interaction is contingent on diverse embodied skills related to the making of material products (designing, shaping, crafting and selling customised boards). Drawing attention to workplace

interactions, relationships, problems and uncertainties I connect the emotional and embodied dimensions of surfboard production to masculine identity work.

The affective and emotional terrain of economic activities has become increasingly popular subjects from which to grapple with the endemic contradictions, tensions and changes of capitalist economies (Hochschild 1983, Bondi et al. 2004, Amin and Thrift 2007, Christie et al. 2008, Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2008). Recognition of the affective and emotional dimensions of capitalism hides in Marx's *Grundrisse*, where he describes an affective difference between the ideas and representation of capitalist economies and the reality of the social dislocation and alienation they produce (Marx 1972). Analysis of the recent global financial crisis has added further knowledge on the centrality of the emotions in influencing financial decision-making (Earle 2009). Developing the notion of emotional labour Hochschild (1983) recognised how certain spaces and forms of work required heightened emotional performance. In completing particular jobs 'the emotional content of human relations is deliberately laid bare' (Wood and Smith 2004, 535). Male surfboard makers demonstrate how evoking emotion is vital to successfully performing work.

In considering the emotional dimensions of surfboard making I refer to the intimate, conscious and situated bodily feelings, which rely on interpretation and categorisation (Anderson and Smith 2001, Wood and Smith 2004, Pile 2010). While the notion of affect has often been used interchangeably with emotion (see Thrift 2004 for example) the approach taken here is that emotions – while intrinsically related to affect (Pile 2010) – represent conscious, cognitive and personal expressions by our bodies (Bondi 2005, Thien 2005, Sharp 2009). In the context of our everyday experiences these situated self-feelings locate people in networks of human and non-human relations, helping us make sense of the world (Rose 1997). The experiences and performances that challenge us emotionally are spatially,

temporally and socially located (Mackian 2004). As readable sensory responses the emotions have powerful capacity to influence individual action and decision-making.

In discussing ‘the economic’ in light of emotions and bodies, it is necessary to cast in critical light dominant Western cultural interpretations of emotions as markers of softness; femininity and irrational thought (Ettlinger 2004, Sharp 2009). Under patriarchy the emotions have been gendered as female. Through social discourses emotion is denigrated as a trait that should be evacuated from the body in order to make clearer, more cogent decisions – especially in relation to economic behaviours (Christie et al. 2008). However, the discursive construction of emotion and its bodily display as gendered and irrational is problematic. Feminist scholarship has successfully revealed emotion as a critical asset, rather than liability, in completing commercial exchanges (cf. Hochschild 1983, Morini 2007, McDowell 2011).

The sensory expressions of surfboard-makers matter for understanding how the emotions inform commercial operations in workplaces. I therefore paid attention to the emotional engagements occurring in developing, designing, producing and exchanging surfboards across 35 workshops and three separate locations. My overarching focus reflects a growing awareness in geography on the importance of ‘emotional’ inputs in doing work and creating value (Christopherson 2008). Emotions cement relationships and motivate participation in surfboard-making in ways that move outside the collection of a pay cheque. Overlooking the emotional dimensions of surfboard making would neglect an important element of working identities and experiences within the industry.

Crafting custom surfboards promotes emotional responses, not only from the producer, but also consumer(s) (cf. Davidson and Milligan 2004). Sense is made of this reaction by the body, which can help or hinder future relations between people, places and things. Emotions and embodied skills are deeply invested in surfboard making, forming important components of working identities. Troubling abjuration of hard-bodied masculinity

from emotions – both positive and negative – the paper explores the emotional and embodied terrain of men’s working lives.

Ethnographic methods and locating workshops

Empirical research was undertaken with surfboard-makers inside workplaces. Research centred on the three most renowned surfing regions globally: southern California, O‘ahu, Hawai‘i and east coast Australia. Between 2008 and 2013, 135 workers from 35 workshops took part in the study. Overall 14 workshops were located along Australia’s expansive east coast; 11 in southern California (all between Los Angeles and San Diego) and ten on O‘ahu. Surfboard workshops in each region employed between two and 23 workers, operating in close proximity to popular surf breaks. Participating workshops reflected the diverse scales of surfboard production globally. Overall, 15 workshops (43%) exported their boards globally with 14 (40%) selling across national markets. The smallest six workshops (17%) sold boards to surfers within their immediate region. Workshops manufactured between 5000 and 200 boards annually, equating to turnover of US\$3.6 million to US\$140000.

Research with individual workers commenced with guided ‘workshop tours’.

Designed as a form of participant observation, workshop tours were delivered by board makers and began with a walking tour through their work spaces. Board makers led initial research engagements, explaining production processes; use of tools and equipment; organisation of space; divisions of labor and personal aspects of work. Each workshop tour was an opportunity to meet individual workers, learn about their jobs and establish mutual trust. Tours were initially led by a single worker, involving colleagues along the way. Depending on the physical size of factories tours lasted between two and eight hours.

Workshop tours were then supplemented with participation in everyday work.

Adapting Burawoy’s (1998) extended case method, participation in daily workshop activities

was designed to immerse researcher in the experiences and activities of workers. Jobs were completed alongside workers – unloading delivery trucks, carrying tools and equipment, collecting materials, sanding blanks, meeting customers, exchanging finished boards and cleaning workshops. More technical tasks designing, making and sealing surfboards were closely observed with workers able to discuss jobs *in situ*. In several workshops participation lasted four weeks. Contact was maintained with workers through return visits to workshops and regular phone/e-mail communication. Semi-structured interviews with all 35 workshop owners were also undertaken to provide additional information on a workshop's history; workforce; business challenges and planning.

Use of ethnographic methods benefited from residual positioning of surfboard-making within surfing subculture. As an active member of that subculture I was able to establish a measure of 'insider' status. My positionality – as a surfer – became critical for eliciting and interpreting responses from participants that 'outside' researchers might have ignored or misinterpreted. My gender and sexuality were also significant. As a white, heterosexual male body I was granted a level of acceptance and access by male workers sharing homosocial bonds (cf. Flood 2008). It was also important to recognise possible 'blind spots' related to insider status. To overcome potential pitfalls I maintained detailed fieldwork diaries, which critically reflected on participant observation sessions: daily research experiences, encounters and findings. Conversations and interviews in workshops were captured with a hand-held audio recorder. Overall 650 hours of material was recorded.

Analysis of workshop tours, interviews and research diaries followed an adapted form of narrative analysis. Narrative analysis is a sensitive way of writing fieldwork into geographic research 'because it focuses on how people talk about and evaluate places, experiences and situations, as well as what they say' (Wiles et al. 2005, 89). One approach to narrative analysis occurs using several narratives as 'case studies' to demonstrate different

aspects of the same conceptual outcome (cf. Skelton and Valentine 2005). Following this method, differences are brought out across participant's narratives to construct a range of emergent 'themes', reinforcing the same point, from individual perspectives. Utilising a narrative approach, analysis needed to be sensitive to individuals; their thoughts, opinions and stories, providing opportunity to acknowledge how each respondent built up their own ideas, beliefs, networks and experiences. In the empirics that follow pseudonyms are used for workshops, owners and workers as a technique to maintain privacy.

i) 'Blokey' masculinities and surfboard making

This first empirical section explores how surfboard making became a male dominated occupation. As much as manual labour, surfing's subcultural legacies shape gender relations in the surfboard industry. Commercial workshops are spaces where male working bodies perform 'blokey' masculinities in relations with one another.

The gendering of commercial surfboard making

Since the late 1950s, when a viable industry congealed, commercial surfboard-making has been organised around a manual labour process. Jobs in the industry accordingly mapped onto male working bodies (cf. Collinson 1992, McDowell 2011). Workers known as shapers created designs and sculpted boards from casts of 'blank' foam (Figure 1). Glassers or laminators sealed finished shapes with fibreglass cloth and liquefied resin (Figure 2). Two further jobs – sanding and polishing – were devolved from shaping and glassing. In larger workshops these workers helped to speed up an otherwise labour and time intensive production process. However, sanders and polishers often explained that they were 'biding their time' performing more remedial jobs in anticipation for opportunities to shape or glass (Tony, sander, O'ahu).

< Insert Figure 1 about here: Shaping a custom surfboard from a foam blank using a surface form tool, Hawai'i. (source: Author) >

< Insert Figure 2 about here: Layering fibreglass cloth in preparation for glassing a custom surfboard, east coast Australia. (source: Author) >

In discussing their work, men talked about everyday tasks and duties as being naturally masculine: 'hard', 'tiring', 'physical', 'messy' and 'dirty' were common descriptors. An experienced board-maker in Australia outlined the gendered attributes he attached to surfboard-making:

The industry is very old school in a lot of ways. Some of the things that go on in here, well you wouldn't get away with them in other workplaces. Not just health and safety but the conversations and pranks; that sort of thing. We like to call it manufacturing and it's very blokey... Making surfboards is messy. It gets hot and sweaty in the workshop, especially in summer. It's [surfboard-making] suited to blokes that aren't afraid to get their hands dirty and who are surfers of course. (Joe, shaper)

In recent decades growth of knowledge intensive industries has transformed employment landscapes for men and women alike. Masculine identity work bound-up with labour market participation is undergoing transformation (Gorman-Murray 2011). Nonetheless in the surfboard industry gender segregation in workplaces was ubiquitous.

Where women were employed in surfboard workshops (only 11 across 35 workshops), was in defined roles aligned to supposedly 'natural' feminine attributes. In interviewing female workers they told how they had been tasked by male owners with 'looking after financial records, incoming and outgoing orders' (Tracy, O'ahu) or 'handling retail sales, bulk orders, customer complaints and paying bills' (Julie, Australia). None of the 11 women working in the industry were involved in physically making surfboards despite six describing themselves as 'regular' surfers.

From engagements with workers it became apparent that subcultural membership, values and beliefs explained gender relations in commercial surfboard-making (cf. Evers 2009) – as much as the nature of the labour. Commercial production was, ostensibly, an extension of Western surfing subculture. Pre-colonial forms of Hawaiian surfing were aligned to what Westerners would categorise as a feminine reading of the body – the ocean was valued as a nurturing, spiritual space (Walker 2011). Surfing among Pacific Island cultures prioritised elegance and gracefulness by riding surfboards in rhythm with each wave's natural movements. Men and women participated on even terms (Walker 2011). Meanwhile, early surfing in California and Australia was experimental and new. In the 1910s and 1920s women participated unselfconsciously as much as men did, in a comparatively liberated era (Author 2014). After World War II, however, surfing was increasingly influenced by more conservative cultural values and societal norms.

In the 1950s and 1960s the surf zone became increasingly stereotyped as a wild and dangerous space where brave and courageous bodies could test themselves in large and powerful waves (Booth 1995). A nascent surf media (magazines and surf-based film production), along with judging at professional events, prioritised the performance of fast and aggressive surfing or riding the biggest waves possible. Surfing came to privilege hegemonic masculine attributes of aggression, courage and fearlessness (Evers 2009). Women, always an underestimated presence on Californian and Australian beaches, were typecast as weak surfers by male counterparts (cf. Evers 2009). Crucially wider gender values pertaining to Western surfing subculture washed into commercial surfboard workshops as a viable industry coalesced in California, Hawai'i and Australia. Gender stereotypes surrounding surfing in the ocean layered onto those emanating from surfboard workshops. Making surfboards was thus framed as a male occupation. As with surfing subculture professional board making became

a masculine domain where men performed 'blokey' masculinities constituted primarily through social relations among co-workers.

Co-worker relations and doing 'blokey' masculinity

During the working day relations between workers were concentrated in workshops: small shaping bays, sanding and glassing rooms. However, worker interaction in each of the three case study regions flowed into other local spaces: popular surfing spots, beachside car parks, social bars and pubs. Fellow workers from a business, local customers and workers from competing labels were part of wider social groups. In terms of in-house production, friendship was a key feature of the job. Creative secrets were at times fiercely protected by older expert craftsman, yet because most makers had been working alongside the same individuals for many years they came to form strong social bonds with colleagues. These relations extended after a day's work was finished and flowed well beyond the factory.

Surfboard workshops and social hangouts combined paid labour and subculture united by a passion and enthusiasm for surfing. Blokey mateship became a perceptible feature of the workplace:

The blokes who work in here – we're all pretty close mates, you know. We work hard during the week. On Fridays we open some beers and we have a joke and share some stories. That's a big part of the job. It's a small crew here, just six of us, so we become pretty close. We're always talking about our next surf trip or the latest chick one of the boys is rooting. [laughs] You know how it is. (Cameron, shaper, Australia)

Men worked, surfed and socialised together, forming close friendships and displaying a sense of homosociality (Flood 2008). As part of their social bonding worker's masculinities frequently involved the exclusion and sexualisation of women. Here blokey performances by

surfboard-makers were similar to the 'laddish' masculinity Wheaton (2004) identified among young male windsurfers in the UK.

One example of the sexualisation of women within masculine surfboard-making cultures occurred in a southern California workshop. A young female surfer walked into the workshop seeking help from a shaper to fix her damaged board. Word quickly travelled around the factory that a 'hot chick' was 'out front' (Brian, shaper). Three other men moved to the front section of the workshop so they could 'check her out' (Brian). When the young woman left, the men joked about 'what she would be like in bed' (Todd, glasser). Rather than a legitimate surfing body, the male workers reduced the young woman to a sexual object.

Co-worker conversations also included discussion of sex with women. Rarely talked about in terms of surfing abilities – unlike male counterparts – women were discussed in terms of sexual desire and conquest. In Western surfing subculture male surfers commonly portray women as sexual objects rather than legitimate surfing bodies (Waite and Warren 2008). The sexual objectification of women was common in surfboard workshops demonstrated in personal conversations, behaviours, language and posters displaying naked women. Male board makers revealed how sexist discourses flooded into factories via wider surfing culture, which similarly shaped economic relations: worker interactions, values and accepted practices.

The relational nature of blokey masculinity was also demonstrated at a workshop on O'ahu (cf. Hopkins and Noble 2009). On a quiet afternoon a conversation had begun between five male workers and centred on the topic of female surfboard shapers. A respected shaper interjected into the conversation:

Yeah that's my two favourite things right there: women and surfboards. I picture this hot little female shaper right... She jumps out of bed in the morning and races down to her shaping room. There she is bending over the blank, slowly caressing her fingers

along the stringer [centre line of the board]. Big (emphasises)! Big and wide she screams. And when she leans over the blank her panties creep up her butt and her tits pop [motions with his hands] out just a little. (Billy, shaper, O‘ahu)

The deeply sexist story was received with laughter by Billy’s work colleagues and sparked a series of new conversations around personal sexual fantasies. Another board maker noted how there was ‘nothing quite like the thought of a hot chick shaping a blank’. Through their relations worker’s masculinity came to mean ‘viewing women as sexual objects’ (Bird 1996, 120), rather than skilled and legitimate surfers or board makers.

Subcultural credibility was not only achieved by demonstrating quality work and a surfing identity. Open discussion of sex reinforced membership in the homosocial make-up of workshops, while further excluding women from the industry (cf. Wheaton 2004). To be ‘one of the boys’ – as Australian workers often described – involved the sharing of stories and adventures. In addition to surfing ability, sex with women, particularly for younger men, became a way to gain peer acceptance. Yet, older men also openly shared experiences from their own youth – partying, drinking, surfing trips and sex. In this way a sense of camaraderie was generated in workshops across generations.

Underpinning talk of women, sex and blokey surfing cultures was the intensely heteronormative construction of space (Waitt and Warren 2008). Homophobic undercurrents were readily detectable in surfboard workshops. While it was acceptable for men within a workshop to ‘have a perv’ on the ‘hot chick’, on another occasion male workers used terms like ‘poofters’, ‘homos’ and ‘fags’ in describing two male customers being served in a workshop that were interpreted as being gay (Research diary entry, April 2010). The thought of a fellow surfboard-maker being queer, for most workers, disrupted normalised understandings of their job and workplace as heterosexual and blokey (Embrick et al. 2007).

For the men, 'strong' heterosexual bodies were wrapped up with understandings of surfing subculture and surfboard-making as a paid career.

Worker's blokey masculinity was performed and negotiated through the spaces of surfboard workshops. Blokey mateship was a tangible element of life as a surfboard maker. For Chino and several other men surfboard-making was characterised by having 'strong bodies' (shaper, California). Strong bodies were, however, malleable. Not devoid of emotions or sensual experiences strong bodies were both physical and embodied attribute; prone to change, break-down and poor health. While the sexualisation of women permeated work spaces, and co-worker interaction in workshops valorised male heterosexuality, alternative and often competing masculinities were readily detectable. Strong bodies were flushed with emotion and unique embodied skills.

ii) A 'soulful' pursuit: crafting alternative masculinities

When workers talked with customers, sketched out new designs, used tools to shape or glass boards, they revealed complex, nuanced expressions of masculinity. Alternative masculinities were uncovered in the production of custom surfboards and in the close, personal exchanges between makers and surfing customers. Application of embodied knowledge and strong emotional responses elicited by their work defined alternative masculinities.

Embodied work skills

Embodied senses (feel, touch and sight) were critical for making customised surfboards.

Worker's needed to be in-touch with their bodily senses. Bobby, a native Hawaiian (*Kanaka Maoli*), described the personal process involved in performing his work:

After I meet with my customer I start to visualise their board. Then I get my hands on the blank. I have to imagine that board coming to life and I need to feel it with my

body. I use the measurements I've designed to check each shape but you picture it in your mind, the different elements of the board; its tail shape, width, thickness, rocker, rails all of this. You put all the different elements together and make something that brings all this joy. That is so cool [laughs].

The skills needed to hand-make custom surfboards were deeply embodied. Shapers emphasised their ability to 'feel', 'visualise' and bring 'joy' to customers through their work.

Makers drew from an embodied toolkit of skills:

I work like this [shifts his hands up and down the board] to feel the rail, you know I can feel the difference between this rail [left hand side of the board] and this rail [right hand side]. Looking at it, I can also see the difference between this part of the board [near the tail] and this part of the board [near the nose]. All that comes down to feel, sight and time in the shaping bay. If I was to measure it and only go off those measurements then it doesn't necessarily feel right. The job is hands on, and what feels good. (Stu, shaper, Australia)

It was also important to be accomplished with the use of different manual tools, and equally, tactile control of, and feel with, the hands. The importance of felt senses in performing and evaluating work was articulated by a shaper with 40 years of experience in the industry:

If you want to be a good designer and shaper you must learn how to feel the board, see how it is going to turn out before you've even started making it. You have to imagine the design in your mind and picture how you'll shape it together for your customer... I have found that I rely most on my senses and how a board feels. I visualise and really get into the right frame of mind where I feel good about how the board is coming together. (Taylor, Australia)

Blokey male surfboard makers openly described the bodily skills they used to produce unique and original products. These surfboard-makers materialised conceptual designs into physical,

finished products. The combination of craft skills ingrained rarity and artistic value in customised products.

Individual board-makers became renowned for their haptic, sensual talents designing and crafting a variety of different surfboard styles. Skilled application of haptic knowledges was an over-riding symbol of quality workmanship (Paterson 2009). Dave, Wayne and Toby in Australia were experts in designing and crafting light, fast and maneuverable boards – a reflection of local waves and surfing style. Meanwhile, in Hawai‘i, Jeff, Ken and Richie were experts at making boards refined for large and powerful waves that frequented the North Shore of O‘ahu. Underlying physical geography was important for surfboard design and manufacture. In southern California, Greg, Gary and Shane were skilled at shaping ‘hybrid’ boards: fusing design concepts from longboarding (increased paddling and buoyancy) with those of shortboard maneuverability.

Many other board-makers, including Charlie (O‘ahu) and Timmy (California), expressed deep felt connections between their work and their bodies. Rather than control and discipline of bodies – attributes traditionally ascribed to strong, hegemonic masculine identities – male surfboard makers demonstrated the shifting emotional terrain upon which surfboards were made and identities were constructed. Worker’s relied on embodied knowledge, imparted on surfboards through the skilled use of specialised tools: planers, saws, surface forms and sanding blocks, and highly refined sense of touch.

The creative labor of surfboard-makers was cognisant of other forms of craft production such as furniture or musical instrument-making; all of which require specific embodied skills and haptic perception (Sennett 2008). For example, several shapers used a certain brand of electric planer (a Skil 100) because it provided a ‘much finer and delicate sense of touch’ over other models (Greg, shaper, California). Through repetitive and sustained use of their tools (planers, sanding blocks, rubber squeegees etc.), board makers

developed heightened senses of feel and touch. Basic tools became extensions of working bodies. Such haptic perception, refined over years of work, were ritual features of masculine working identities. A shaper in southern California outlined the significance of embodiment for working in the surfboard industry:

The main thing for shapers that do it by hand is trying to get this rail and that rail the same... I'm constantly working by feel and touch, and looking at every detail of the board. You *really* [emphasises] have to refine your body's senses. I've been in restaurants where I'm sitting at a table and I grab the table and I start feeling to see if it's the same shape on each side. I talk to other shapers who do the same thing.

(Graham, shaper)

Workers used their attuned haptic knowledge to ensure boards were made to precise dimensions. Many shapers told how they could accurately locate the smallest imperfections in foam shape or thickness in a fiberglass coat, by feel alone. Such imperfections were invisible to untrained senses and measuring tools such as calipers.

Learning surfboard making on the job, informally and over many years, is how workers gained their unique haptic abilities, which allowed them to perceive an object's curvature, edges, symmetry and texture (cf. Paterson 2009). This is what Flanagan and Lederman (2001) called somatosensory perception, a heightened ability to perceive patterns affecting the skin's surface. Custom surfboard making connected working bodies to materials, waves, tools, work spaces and emotions. In performing their work men relied on a close affinity between haptic knowledges and emotional responses.

Emotional dimensions of surfboard making

Being a surfboard-maker legitimised, to the wider world, passions for surfing – a means to turn a subcultural pastime into a 'proper paid job' (Dean, shaper, O'ahu). With no formal

training pathways into surfboard manufacturing, the ability to find meaningful paid work in the industry was driven by personal ambitions and passions. In discussing the nature of their employment during interviews and in performing work, participants explicitly described the ‘artistic’, ‘magical’, ‘inspiring’ and ‘soulful’ process of ‘making surfboards for a living’ (Paul, shaper, O‘ahu). However, when mistakes were made, customer’s complained or worker’s had disagreements negative emotional responses were also observable: frustration, jealousy, disappointment, anger and self-doubt. The robust emotional terrain of surfboard making aligned to a feminine reading of the body and sharply contrasted ‘blokey’ masculinities observed in relations between co-workers.

Surfboard makers were modestly paid workers. Full wages were earned only during the busiest few months of the year when local orders for custom surfboards peaked. Pleasures of the work were not derived from financial rewards. Instead social and cultural factors were primary in motivating and informing working lives:

No. We don’t get rich building surfboards. There’s a popular saying: “If you want to make a million dollars in the surfboard industry, then you better start with two million.” But if you look deeper the wealth is in the relationships. (Chino, shaper, California)

The sentiment articulated by Chino in southern California was shared by Ben in Hawai‘i, who spoke about the rewards and motivations for his work in explicitly emotional ways:

I shape each board like I want the thing to be perfect. It’s not just that shaping is a job – okay it is – but [pauses] it has something more behind it. You know all this creativity and history are there. It’s a feeling, you know? I get it when I’m making a board for someone... they see it, touch it and then go out and ride it. They come back and share that joy with me. Tell me how great it felt. That is such a cool thing. (Ben, shaper, Hawai‘i)

Worker's emotional responses were a distinctive feature of the custom surfboard industry.

Makers creating high quality products were able to see them being used by customers. Shane in California was another who neatly described the emotional pay-offs of his work:

I just get such a thrill from doing this. The whole darn thing; from designing to putting the sweat and tears into the board to get it to the way you think it will work for each surfer. ...When they ride a wave on your board and tell you how good it felt, man I just get a lot of joy out of that right there. ...Now I'm like, yeah bring it on – let me have a go at shaping it! (shaper)

Pivotal was the pleasure of making objects that workers had the opportunity to see being used by others for their own enjoyment. There was a striking difference between craft-based customised surfboard production and other forms of commodity production where physical and figurative distance is maintained between makers (workers) and customers (consumers).

Stuart on the famous Gold Coast of Australia expressed the sense of satisfaction and pleasure he felt when customers offered positive feedback on his work:

A young tradie [tradesman], picked up his board went straight out for a surf and an hour later he comes running into the factory. He is still dripping wet – he hadn't even bothered drying himself off [laughs]. He starts yelling, "Where is Stu? Where is he?" We thought "oh no what's wrong" But he goes "I've just got to tell him, the board is amazing [emphasises]. Oh my god, this is the best board I have ever ridden." He was that excited he ran straight from the beach into the shaping room to tell me. That's the beautiful thing about the job.

While transactions between workshops and customers were ostensibly financial ones, the labour performed by workers involved a substantial emotional dimension. This couldn't be measured or analysed in the same way as personal wages or business turnover. Nevertheless, the emotional rewards were palpable and openly celebrated by male workers. The positive

emotional rewards of surfboard making went far in explaining why workers were so deeply connected to their jobs unrelated to modest wages and difficult working conditions.

The emotional terrain of surfboard making was also comprised of negative emotions such as anger, frustration, fear and worry – emotions often overlooked in the analysis of working lives. Hand-shapers, in particular, expressed worry and anger about reduced working hours and wages as automated shaping technologies were increasingly transforming the industry and its employment conditions (Author 2014). At times the passions for an artistic, cultural form of work and a desire to maintain hand-shaping connections made workers more vulnerable to exploitation. Hand-shapers felt responsible for the survival of artisanal skills and worried about future uncertainties. In other words there was a sinister side to ‘loving the job’, which left workers attached to jobs where rates of pay had been stagnant for 15 years; work had become casualized, subcontracted and precarious. In surfboard making negative emotions were readily detected alongside the positive emotional experiences of work.

Close worker/customer relationships were another cultural feature of commercial surfboard production. Boundaries between working and surfing identities were blurry. Custom workshops were sustained by repeat local customers who returned two or three times a year for the promise of a better quality, personalised surfboard. Loyal customers usually received a 20 to 25 percent discount on their boards over first-time customers. An exchange in Hawai‘i neatly demonstrated the personal connections and emotional attachments between workers and local customers:

Author: Ok, you’ve been getting boards here for 30 years, so can I ask why you keep coming back?

Customer: Nearly 40 years actually. [laughs] Bobby made my first board in 1973. We have been friends surfing together for all that time and we’re from the same neighbourhood...the thing is I watch him sometimes working and we talk about how

my board is riding and what we can do for my next one. [laughs] His boards are perfect... classic thing is Bobby is still so stoked on surfing, it's infectious to be around.

While a competitive commercial environment, surfboard manufacturing was also a collective of sorts, of craftsmen, who felt great pride in, and passion for, their work.

Despite masculinised work cultures and pretensions, surfboard-making was then an emotionally loaded form of work. Male participants spoke about their work in explicitly emotional ways, contradicting other performances of blokey masculinity depicted in relations with co-workers. Older workers in their 50s and 60s more willingly articulated an understanding of their work in emotional ways, compared with younger men. Macho posturing remained mostly a young man's conceit. Careers in the surfboard industry were not, in the end, especially glamorous either. Instead, what a career making surfboards provided was a sense of mateship and cultural membership, and pride in making functional, high quality and artful things workers got to see being used. Here was an occupational group dominated by men who experienced lively working conditions in emotionally extroverted workplaces. Masculine identity work was much more than blokey egocentrism; performance was deeply marked by embodied skills and emotional experiences. Rather than being subordinated the 'softer' features of worker's identities were a conspicuous and celebrated part of the job.

Conclusions

This article has examined the cultural, emotional and embodied dimensions of masculine identity construction in spaces of paid employment. Surfboard makers demonstrate how masculinities are performed in multiple ways; in relations with co-workers, tools and materials, local surfing subcultures, and engagements with the very people purchasing

finished products. Spaces of work (both paid and unpaid) are saturated with gendered meanings and discourses. The polarised and segmented nature of contemporary economies means that different types of work have become congruent with particular gendered identities (McDowell 2011). Jobs in any capitalist industry are not ‘empty slots to be filled’, but nor do workers ‘enter the labour market... with fixed and immoveable gender attributes’ (McDowell 1997, 25). With worker’s social attributes increasingly important features of labour markets, surfboard-makers illustrate the relational and contested nature of masculine identities.

In commercial surfboard workshops blokey masculinity remains persistent. Being ‘one of the boys’ involves sharing heterosexual encounters, displaying strong bodies and an ability to complete physical labour. Yet, when men perform work they constantly draw from embodied skills. Male workers in the surfboard industry possess unique haptic knowledges. These bodily sensations and responses arise through making customised products. Emotional attachments also motivate working careers in an industry where financial returns are mediocre.

The emotional, embodied dimensions of the job challenge conceptions of strong bodied male workers as emotionally desensitised and out of touch with their bodies. Men’s bodies are sensuous sites where emotions are generated, received and experienced (Gorman-Murray 2013). For surfboard makers the emotions – how they feel about their work; about a particular customer; local surf break or board design – are the connective tissue between their bodies and high quality craft work. Feelings of pleasure, pride and enjoyment sit alongside anxieties and frustration as things don’t always go to plan. To make quality customised products requires emotional engagements and embodied skills. Surfboard makers thus highlight why the study of masculinities in workplaces shouldn’t neglect the multifarious lived experiences of performing human labour. In capitalist economies work (paid and unpaid) is emotional activity incorporating a spectrum of conventional gender attributes.

A final point that surfboard makers underscore echoes the arguments of Linda McDowell (2011): embodiment matters for doing (and researching) workplace masculinities. More research on men's embodiment is necessary to explore the changes and challenges to hegemonic masculinities, especially in the arena of paid work. Cultural economy and emotionally engaged research approaches are valuable for exploring gender relations in different work contexts. Such an approach, grounded in empirical analysis, can help the process of recasting hegemonic masculinity, necessary to achieve more inclusive, tolerant and equitable workplaces.

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