Introduction

This chapter documents and advances an emerging feminist geography of caring masculinities. Feminist geographers have long sought to investigate the complex spatialities and temporalities of care and caregiving, scrutinizing a range of social spaces of care (McEwan and Goodman 2010) at a number of scales (Atkinson et al. 2011). This scholarship has been instrumental in identifying inequalities in gendered experiences of care and the ways in which these play out in particular spaces and places over the lifecourse, particularly for women, who remain responsible for most unpaid labour.

Recent evidence indicates, however, that an increasing number of older men are now providing informal care (Giesbrecht et al. 2016; Milligan 2009). This has been linked in part, to the ageing population in developed countries, whereby men are living longer and are more likely to take on care responsibilities later in life. Shifts in the gendered landscapes of care have also been identified since the global recession in 2008, whereby men’s unemployment is thought to be creating the conditions for more men to engage in a range of care practices (Boyer et al. 2017). These broader structural processes have implications for the dynamic relationship between changing divisions of labour and the social construction of gendered identities, including masculinities (see McDowell 2004). Yet men’s everyday experiences of caregiving and their interpersonal relationships are frequently overlooked.

This chapter begins by documenting developments in feminist geographical research about care and caregiving and parallel advances in the geographies of masculinities subfield in which men are increasingly recognized as men: that is, as gendered subjects who, like women, experience a range of dependencies and interdependencies across the lifecourse. Findings from two studies, both conducted by the author, are presented to explore the unfolding geographies of men’s gendered and generational experiences of caregiving. Both were based in the UK. The first explored the everyday geographies of grandfatherhood (2007–2011) and the second the unfolding care responsibilities of men living in low-income families and localities in a northern English city (2014–2018). Both shed light on the spatial and temporal dynamics of these men’s relatively invisible practices of caregiving across the lifecourse. The findings highlight the range
of contexts and processes involved in producing opportunities for men to engage in what have elsewhere been conceptualized as ‘caring masculinities’ (Elliott 2016; Hanlon 2011), including the key spaces where these can flourish.

**Geographies of care**

Ten years ago, Lawson (2007) demonstrated that geographers have long been concerned with their ethical responsibility to care. Yet, as she also insightfully noted, contemporary neoliberal trends such as the extension of market relations into caring realms – exemplified by shifts to discourses of personal responsibility and the withdrawal of public provision of social supports (e.g. welfare retrenchment) – were marginalizing care as a subject of critical enquiry at a time when questions of care have never been a more pressing concern. Indeed, her arguments were presented just prior to the widespread imposition of a raft of austerity measures that have further entrenched these processes and have transformed the caring landscape. This landscape characterizes an increasingly uneven redistribution of responsibility from the state to the private and third sectors and to individual families (Lawson 2007; Power and Hall 2017). Since Lawson’s address, the boundaries of this body of work have rapidly expanded (Power and Hall 2017), highlighting the ways in which care is profoundly relational, embodied, emotional and subject to transformation. Feminist geographers have continued to engage with a range of interdisciplinary discourses and perspectives around care and caregiving to carve out what might be distinctive about geographical approaches. Milligan and Wiles (2010) for example, developed the ‘landscapes of care’ framework to capture the complex relationships between people, places and care. The power of this ambitious analytic framework, they argue, is that it helps in teasing out the interplay between macro and micro levels, or the:

> socio-economic, structural and temporal processes that shape[s] the experiences and practices of care at various spatial sites and scales, from the personal and private through to public settings, and from local to regional and national levels, and beyond.

Ibid., 736

Recent debate reflects how gendered landscapes of care are being transformed in an ‘age of austerity’ (Boyer et al. 2017). This scholarship examines the relationship between the changing socio-spatial dynamics of care, the shifting relations between waged work and care work and the gendered politics of care. Drawing on evidence from the US and Scandinavia that men (usually fathers) are increasingly engaging in social reproduction, with transformative potential in the regendering of care, Boyer et al. (2017) consider the impact of austerity in the UK on new gendered patterns of care. They conclude that in the aftermath of the 2008 and 2010/2011 double-dip global recessions, a combination of political and economic transformations is affording an increasing number of men with opportunities to assume greater responsibilities for care, albeit unevenly and influenced by class position. Their work provides the basis for further consideration of diversity in male caregiving in a number of contexts.

**Spaces for caring masculinities**

The history of geographical interest in masculinities and the critical turn towards considerations of spatial accounts of men as men (Jackson 1991) has been well documented (Hopkins and Noble 2009). It has carved an essential space for feminist considerations that are relational and considerate of the power relations both within and between groups of men, and between
men and women (Calasanti 2003).

Sparked by Jackson (1991), who challenged aspatial accounts of men’s lives and drew attention to the socially and culturally constructed nature of masculinity, feminist geographical research has since examined the complex relationship between masculinities and place and the ways in which male identities vary both spatially and temporally (Berg and Longhurst 2003; van Hoven and Hörschelmann 2006). Drawing predominantly on Connell’s (1995) framework of multiple masculinities, which has dominated the theoretical development of the field, geographers have demonstrated effectively the plurality and complexities of masculinities and their inextricable links with other social locations like race, age, ethnicity, sexuality and class, examining them empirically within an ever-wider variety of places and geographical locations (Hopkins and Noble 2009).

The breadth and extent of the subfield has expanded notably, covering a range of empirical topics related to key arenas of men’s lives, from the intimate spaces of the body (Laurendeau 2014; Longhurst, 2005), the home (Pilkey 2014; Tarrant 2016a; Waitt and Gorman-Murray 2007, 2008), the family and domestic labour (Cox 2015; Tarrant 2013), community and sports (Evers 2009), employment (McDowell 2009), and men and migration (Walsh 2011). Many of these themes are consolidated in Gorman-Murray and Hopkins’ (2015) extensive edited collection, Masculinities and Place, which is testament to the collective strength of the masculinities subfield and its feminist standpoint on the relationships between men, masculinities and place.

Many of the above arenas are also arenas of care. The intimate spaces of the body, home and family each relate to aspects of care and caregiving, even if care is not explored explicitly. This includes consideration of the spaces and institutions in which caring by men takes place; men’s self-care and care of the body; caregiving and receiving by men; and care of places. Considerations of care and caregiving have also been prompted in part by parallel conceptual advances in the geographies of age, the lifecourse and intergenerationality (Hopkins and Pain 2007). These concepts have reinvigorated spatial accounts of men’s roles in the family, including as fathers and grandfathers (Aitken 2009; Tarrant 2013, 2016a) and in the institutional contexts in which men give care and receive it, for example in old age (Milligan 2009; Milligan et al. 2013). The recognition that caring occurs across the lifecourse and is experienced from cradle to grave has prompted much of this research about older men. In ageing societies, older men are also increasingly engaging in informal economies of care (Wheelock and Jones 2002), challenging traditional expectations and norms about gender (Russell 2007).

While geographers have examined the complex relationship between masculinities, care and place, another interdisciplinary literature has made progress in conceptualizing ‘caring masculinities’ (Elliott 2016; Hanlon 2011) which geographical research might usefully advance. This largely theoretical conversation considers the analytical potential of applying a feminist ethics of care perspective to men and masculinities (Elliott 2016; Hanlon 2011), already with some useful application to studies of fatherhood (Doucet 2017; Held 2006; Philip 2014). This promising scholarship has undertaken important work in exploring how gendered binaries in relation to work and care might be decoupled by emphasizing that, like women, men also are involved in, and need, care. Elliott’s (2016, 17) conceptualization of ‘caring masculinities’ explicates how the combination of an ethics of care perspective with masculinities scholarship might aid in reconfiguring ‘masculine identities away from values of domination and aggression and toward values of interdependence and care’. Caring masculinities, therefore, require men to reject the practices of domination most associated with hegemonic masculinity, such as ‘physical strength, aggression, virility, professional success, wealth, heterosexual prowess, and self-control over such emotions as hurt, grief, or shame’ (Calasanti 2003, 307). According to Elliott (2016), the embrace of caring masculinities and the rejection
of hegemonic masculinities are constitutive of men’s commitment to gender equality, with prospects for social change.

There is great potential for these ideas to be taken forward productively by geographers, who are well placed to develop complex accounts of the social contexts in which caring masculinities might flourish and be supported. In what follows, I describe two empirical studies that are drawn on to consider the contexts in which men’s caring responsibilities for others are being opened up, in this case later in the lifecourse.

**The empirical studies**

Data and findings from two research studies are presented in this chapter. The first, conducted between 2008 to 2011, explored contemporary grandfatherhood and grandfather identities and examined their everyday care practices, lived experiences and intergenerational relationships. The 31 men interviewed were aged 51 to 88, were relatively well resourced financially and had accrued some wealth from secure employment across the lifecourse. For these men, grandfathering reflected the ‘leisure/pleasure’ grandparenting typically associated with a middle-class demographic (May et al. 2012). This meant that their practices of caregiving for grandchildren were readily incorporated into their everyday leisure time post-employment, including some episodic and temporary childcare provided in line with the needs of their adult children.

The second study was a qualitative longitudinal (QL) research project called ‘Men, Poverty and Lifetimes of Care’ (MPLC), which explored men’s care responsibilities across the lifecourse in low-income families. It began with a qualitative secondary analysis (henceforth QSA) of two QL datasets stored in the Timescapes archive, ‘Following Young Fathers’ and ‘Intergenerational Exchange’, and a subsequent additional empirical phase of data generation, including in-depth, qualitative, semi-structured interviews with 26 men aged between 14 and 76. These men were engaging in a diverse range of fathering practices in a number of familial generational positions, including as teenage and young fathers, uncles, grandfathers and great-grandfathers. The recruitment of men across this broad age range produced a dataset that supported an examination of men’s care practices in a range of familial generations. Extending from the first study about grandfatherhood, MPLC explored men’s changing patterns of care over the lifecourse and across households in contexts of financial constraint.

Substantive conclusions about men’s care responsibilities using QSA have been reported elsewhere (Tarrant 2016b; Tarrant and Hughes 2018), and are not the main focus of this chapter. Instead, brief findings are presented from the biographical interviews conducted with eight grandfathers from MPLC. The emerging analyses indicated that these men were typically younger than those in more socio-economically resourced families and that they narrated a ‘rescue and repair’ style of grandparenting (Emmel and Hughes 2014), which differs from the ‘leisure/pleasure’ style observed in the previous study. ‘Rescue and repair’ grandparenting is characterized by the rescue of children from vulnerability and attempts by grandparents to repair intergenerational relationships across familial generations. Caregiving is more intensive and sometimes includes greater dependence on formal health and social care services and/or legal mediation.

Brief analyses from both studies are now presented, demonstrating how spatial and temporal analyses of men’s caregiving and investments in intergenerational relations later in the lifecourse and in different socio-economic positions open up and shut down possibilities for new, gendered patterns of care, influencing contexts for the production of caring masculinities.
The carescapes of grandfatherhood

In the first study, the carescapes concept (Bowlby et al. 2011) helped to explicate the ways in which grandfathering is organized spatially and temporally (Tarrant 2013). Grandfatherhood was described as a social arena in which men variously draw on particular constructions of masculinity in response to their practices of caregiving and processes of ageing. Grandfathers do this in complex and diverse ways, referring to distinctly masculine spaces of care later in life as a response to the spatially embedded ageism that constructs their identities and through comparisons of grandfathering to previous lifecourse subjectivities, such as fathering. While grandfathering constitutes a multitude of performances reflecting ageing (and caring) masculinities, it was notable that some men adhered to the maintenance of a gendered division of labour in family care work, while others were performing alternative masculinities that offered the potential to transform and redefine gendered practices and spaces of care.

Most notable was that, for some men, perceptions of masculinity mattered. In describing their practices as grandfathers, many reinforced the ideals of hegemonic or traditional masculinity to make sense of their identities in later life. In alignment with existing research (Barker 2008; Brandth and Kvande 2001) concerning fathering, for example, grandfathers constructed a distinctly masculine concept of caring (Barker 2008) that did not replicate the care given by their wives. Many, for example, drew on spatial metaphors and gendered divisions of labour to distinguish gendered differences between their own practices and those of their wives:

I think the children see … my wife, more as the provider of food and home comforts if that’s? and I’m more the Butlins Redcoat you know, like I always take them swimming or, riding their bike on the prom, well we sometimes do … I’m hopeless at dressing them and bathing them.

Philip, age 61, still married

While a dominant narrative, some of the participants also indicated the potential for change. Some men had primary-care responsibilities for children, meaning that fathering and grandfathering opened up opportunities for engaging in care practices later in the lifecourse that they had not been able to engage in as younger fathers. Many described their involvement in practices of social reproduction, like changing nappies and giving feeds, although they often framed themselves as last in line to conduct these practices if wives, daughters and sons were present. In some instances, having children later in life with new partners opened up these opportunities further. For these men in particular, their caring practices were highly visible and sometimes considered unusual by others, particularly in public spaces:

when [daughter, age 7] was born, I used to be the one off a lot [working from home] but, went to playgroups with her and so, you can imagine that was slightly difficult, not only because I was a man, that was difficult enough because there were very few men main carers. There might be one other man or two other men, but of course they were 20 years younger than me, so I was this older man! So that was you know, nine years ago I was, already then 50 whatever I was, 54 or something, in amongst all these young women with babies and I was odd, I got some funny looks, and people say ‘Who’s that old grandad?’

Gerald, age 63, remarried
Being viewed with caution in public places was not uncommon. Here, David describes this caution when showing an interest in children:

I like children you know. Unfortunately in this day and age you’re not really allowed to like children in the same way, and it’s spoiling … it’s a shame, you know, because like I see children in buggies and they look cute and you know, pull faces at them and you know [current partner] will say ‘Stop that, you’ll get arrested, ‘What, for pulling faces?!’

David, age 51, remarried

Gerald and David highlight the different ways in which their care responsibilities and interactions with children become subject to surveillance by others in public spaces. For these men, the school playground and the street are key arenas in which their ageing bodies and assumed heterosexuality are viewed with suspicion. While these men are in positions to regender care in the family and in the homespace, the gender and age-related norms and expectations about caregiving intersect and remain pervasive in public spaces.

Low-income grandfathering

In contrast to the first study, the MPLC study examined fathering and grandfathering in low-income family contexts. In line with previous studies (Emmel and Hughes 2014), this study found that, in poverty contexts, older generations are increasingly required to step in to provide care for children. Yet such contexts can also reduce men’s abilities to invest in their grandchildren’s futures effectively. The intensification of family hardships and responsibilities to provide care for children in the decade following the imposition of austerity is particularly prevalent in this study. Austerity is impacting on families deeply, as Paul, a 61-year-old grandfather with legal responsibility as a kinship carer for three grandchildren, states: ‘It’s just a hard life and the government’s going to make it harder … I mean financially, you know, to look after a child.’ Despite evidence that men in low-income families are taking on unanticipated care responsibilities for children later in life, many are still judged and assessed on their capabilities to care on the basis of their identities as older men. While the more-resourceful grandfathers experience this marginalization in public spaces, the participants in the MPLC study experience it in their homes as well. Here, Sam, age 51, discusses being assessed by social services to gain legal responsibility for his 4-year-old grandson. He had a long and difficult battle with social services to be considered for assessment, having raised concerns of possible abuse and neglect when his grandson was originally placed with his mother and maternal grandmother. Despite actively raising concerns and stating his desire to become the primary carer for his grandson, the process had been fraught with challenges to his identity and, in the following discussion, his home. In the following excerpt, he describes an encounter with a social worker during an assessment:

‘Right, OK, something else that might go against you …’, she starts throwing all these things up. She said it was a ‘very manly house’. I said that there was flowers in the vase. She said it was full of boys. And I said – ‘Of course, I ain’t got no daughters.’ I asked if she wanted me to put make-up on and do me hair, and to tell me what she meant by that. She just said it didn’t matter.

Sam’s narrative indicates that gender biases and assumptions still permeate interventions in social work (e.g. Scourfield 2010), here in relation to who is recognized as capable of taking on
the care of a child and in relation to the physical presentation and gendered character of Sam’s home. He is the most-resourced person in his family and has continued to express a desire to be recognized as the prime carer for his grandson, yet his capability to provide a good home was judged on the material presentation of his home.

Despite experiencing a range of challenges in becoming legally recognized as a kinship carer, the decision to become primary caregiver can be beneficial. Here Pearce, age 57, explains the pragmatic decision that he and his wife made about caring for their two grandchildren:

[wife] were on a lot more money than me, and I were having a stressful job. So I just said right, I will jack it in. I’ll look after the kids. But it were a massive learning curve because I’ve never done it before. I mean, when my kids were growing up, I were working on nights for nine years and I went full time on days, but I never had to deal with small ones. At the time, my kids were 9 and 10, when I came off nights. So it were a massive learning curve for me and really, really hard. I can see what women sort of complain about when they’ve got kids round their feet all day, and it’s nice when my wife comes home. We get these to bed and we can talk and I’ve got adult conversation. It’s really, really strange.

Poignant here is the notable impact that becoming the primary carer for his grandchildren had had on Pearce’s relationship with his wife. He explained that, in switching roles, they have come to understand each other better. As reported elsewhere (Giesbrecht et al. 2016), this involves learning and a revaluing of care by men, highlighting the possibilities of the regendering of care for supporting processes of gender equality.

### Conclusion

This chapter considers how ‘caring masculinities’ might be taken forward in productive ways by feminist geographers through empirical considerations of the spaces and times in which men provide care. The findings presented highlight the range of contexts in which the production and practices of caring masculinities might be possible and encouraged to flourish, and also where they continue to be viewed with caution. In examining older men’s care practices, the gendered norms and expectations in relation to space and place are made visible, highlighting some, albeit modest, changes in men’s care practices in public and intimate arenas such as the home, and also some evidence of continued caution in public spaces.

In mapping out the ways in which geographers have problematized care, this chapter confirms that there is still a need for a critical focus on care in what are our challenging contemporary socio-economic and political times and contexts (Lawson 2007). In low-income families in particular, austerity has produced the conditions in which men as grandfathers are increasingly required to take on primary-care responsibilities for children, yet this is done so in a neoliberal context that is antithetical to care in its emphasis on personal responsibility and individualization (Cox 2010; Jarvis 2007; McDowell 2004). The challenges of providing full-time care for children in unanticipated circumstances are further exacerbated by the retrenchment of the welfare state and government policy, which the men anticipate will make their caring responsibilities harder to manage. This is worrying, given that, as Pearce’s narrative demonstrates, when men have the opportunity to engage in caring this can lead to more egalitarian relationships between men and women. At present, the gender equality project is highly individualized and is not being supported to flourish at the structural level (see also Tarrant 2018).
Taken together, these two studies indicate that there is great potential to take forward a geographical and feminist agenda that focuses on the contexts in which caregiving is regendered (Boyer et al. 2017). This might include attention to the intimate spaces and stages of the lifecourse in which caring masculinities are practised, as well as the sustainability of the broader structural processes at play that either hinder or support men’s engagements in caregiving across the lifecourse. There is also value in extending the focus from Western societies to those in the Global South or in situations of classic patriarchy. Given the possibilities that attention to care practices among older men have to invert patriarchal power relations within households, there is scope to challenge the absence of studies on men and care in these contexts, including developing understandings of how both caring and masculinity are constructed, viewed and maintained across global contexts.

Notes
1 This study was funded by the Leverhulme Trust between October 2014 and June 2018.
2 www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk.
3 Butlins is a chain of holiday camps in the UK. ‘The Redcoats’ are its frontline staff.

Key readings

References


Anna Tarrant


