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**The Perceived Value of Women's Unpaid Work:**

**As Experienced by Eight New Zealand Women  
Born Between 1922 and 1946.**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Philosophy in Women's Studies  
at Massey University**

**JUNE CAVE**

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## ***Dedication***

***This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my mother Dorothy Ross (nee Nixon) who has been my inspiration. Her love, patience and philosophical approach to life will always be remembered.***

## **Abstract**

At some time in their lives, most New Zealand women have undertaken unpaid work either in the home or in the community. Much of women's unpaid work is concerned with caring and nurturing. Women undertake the major share of child rearing, caring for sick and elderly relatives both within the home and in the community and emotional work within their family. Women also undertake most of the unpaid household maintenance in the home, from domestic labour to decision making and budgeting. Many women act as helpmeet to their husbands in support of their careers. A large proportion of women's unpaid work is connected with both informal and formal voluntary work in the community.

There is no question that this work is valuable, as it is critical to the New Zealand economy. However, many women believe that this work is not always valued by male partners, government policy makers, and in some cases, the women themselves. In certain contexts, this work is valued more than in others. And at certain periods of time this work has been valued more than at other times.

The method chosen for this research was a modified form of the grounded theory approach developed by Glaser and Strauss, as outlined by Kirby and McKenna (1989). The data was collected by conducting qualitative interviews with eight New Zealand women between fifty and seventy years of age. The interviewees were encouraged to relate their experiences of unpaid work and to reflect on their mothers' and daughters' experiences of unpaid work.

The women in this study had much in common, in that they had all been married, had adult children, and had undertaken a variety of unpaid work both within the home and in the community. However, along with the commonalities, there were differences. Six of the women were Pakeha and two were Maori. The twenty year age range among the women, meant that they experienced different economic and historical events. Some of the women came from a higher than average socio-economic level than others and some married into a higher socio-economic level.

The thesis records the interviewees' experiences of unpaid work in their own words, and analyses the data in order to discover whether this work is valued, by whom, in what context, and how over time the evaluation of this work has changed.

This study seeks to show how women's experiences of unpaid work, both in the home and in the community, have been valued, by whom, in what context and whether this evaluation has changed over time. Four specific areas are explored - the expectation that women will carry out the major proportion of unpaid work in the home and in the community - monetary reward for work compared with unpaid work - the sharing of unpaid work either in the home or in the community - and status gained through unpaid work. Because these women reflect on their own mothers' and daughters' experiences of unpaid work, it is possible to identify the changes which have occurred over this time, in the evaluation of women's unpaid work.

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## **Preface**

It must be pointed out that much of the material in this thesis is gleaned from the experiences of the women interviewed. It is their perception of their own experiences of unpaid work both in the home and in the community, with comparisons made to the unpaid work of their mothers and their daughters. I have attempted to analyse these experiences and compare them with each other and with my own experiences of unpaid work, in order to discover whether and by whom this work is valued, in what context is it valued or devalued, and how over time this work is valued more than at other times.

There have been many limitations encountered in writing this thesis. Because of the number of interviewees, and the many categories of women's unpaid work researched, much data was gathered. It has not been possible to use all of this data, due to the required length of the thesis, and much valuable material had to be discarded. Although eight women were interviewed, which is a reasonable number for a Masters thesis, these women represent only a small proportion of the female population of New Zealand, and therefore the views expressed are those experienced by these women, and may not apply to other women.

Another limitation was that I was unable to interview a larger number of Maori women, and the two women whom I did interview, would not represent all Maori women. These two women were both married to Pakeha men, lived in urban environments and could be considered to be in a middle class, socio-economic bracket. Their experiences would not be the same as Maori women on a lower socio-economic bracket, or from a rural marae based environment. All of the women interviewed were heterosexual, and were or had been married. Their experiences may differ from the experiences of women in de facto relationships, unmarried women living alone, either with or without children, or lesbian couples.

## Table of Contents

	Page No
ABSTRACT	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
PREFACE	iv
CHAPTER ONE	
Background and Methodology	1
Introduction	1
I. Unpaid Work	3
i. Caring and Nurturing	5
ii. Household Management	6
iii. Voluntary Work	8
II. Valuing Women's Unpaid Work	10
III. Status	12
Methodology	13
Self Analysis	22
Introduction to the Interviewees	22
My Profile	24
Florence	25
Pam	25
Yvonne	26
Jill	27
Catherine	27
Pat	28
Te Ahumi	29
Betty	29
CHAPTER TWO	
Historical Overview	32
Introduction	32
1900-1920s	34
The Great Depression 1929-1935	38
World War II 1939-1945	39
Post World War II	40
The 1950s	42
The 1960s - 1970s	44
Social and Economic Changes of the 1980s and 1990s	46
Conclusion	52
CHAPTER THREE	
Assessments of Our Own Unpaid Work	54
Introduction	54
What Value was Placed on Our Unpaid Work?	56
I. Caring and Nurturing	56
i. Motherhood	56
(a) The Labour of Childbirth	56
(b) Child Rearing	58
(c) Children's Sporting, Cultural and School Activities	64
ii. Caring for Sick and Elderly Relatives	66

iii. Caring for Grandchildren	72
iv. Emotional Work	76
II. Household Maintenance	78
i. Domestic Work	78
ii. Administration	79
iii. Helpmeet	80
iv. Gender Division of Labour	86
III. Informal and Formal Voluntary Work	95
IV. Paid Work vs Unpaid Work	103
Conclusions	113
CHAPTER FOUR	
Reflections on Our Mothers and Daughters Experiences of Unpaid Work	118
Introduction	118
How Has the Evaluation of the Mothers' and Daughters' Unpaid Changed Over Time?	120
I. Caring and Nurturing	120
i. Motherhood	120
(a) The Labour of Childbirth	120
(b) Child Rearing	123
(c) Children's Sporting, Cultural and School Activities	129
II. Household Maintenance	133
i. Domestic Labour	133
ii. Administration	141
iii. Gender Division of Labour	144
III. Informal and Formal Voluntary Work	149
IV. Attitudes Towards Education for Women	154
Conclusions	162
CHAPTER FIVE	
Is Women's Unpaid Work Valued?	166
Introduction	166
Is Women's Unpaid Work Valued?	167
By Whom is Women's Unpaid Work Valued?	168
The Interviewees	168
Male Partners	169
Interviewees Mothers	170
Interviewees Daughters and Their Partners	170
Government Policy Makers	171
In What Context is Women's Unpaid Work Valued or De-valued	172
How Over Time The Evaluation of Women's Unpaid Work Has Changed	173
Possible Future Implications	176
Summary	177
BIBLIOGRAPHY	179
APPENDICES	
Appendix I - Information Sheet	187
Appendix II - Consent Form	189
Appendix III - Letter of Thanks	190
Appendix IV - Voluntary Organisations in Palmerston North in 1995	191

### List of Tables

Table I.	Couple type by unpaid work (inside the home) for the population resident in New Zealand in private dwellings.	4
Table II.	Couple type by unpaid work (outside the home) for the population resident in New Zealand in private dwellings.	9
Table III	Profile of interviewees	31
Table IV	Immigration, emigration, and excess of arrivals over departures - 1860 to 1963	40
Table V	Household transport	48
Table VI	Age of interviewees at marriage, birth of first child and number of children	57
Table VII	Primary earner/decision maker in the households of the interviewees over time	80
Table VIII	Occupations of interviewees before marriage	103
Table IX	Summary of paid work undertaken by mothers both outside and within the home after the birth of their children	146
Table X	Apparent retention rates of females and males to form 6 and form 7, 1970-91.	159
Table XI	Labour force participation rate by age and gender, 1951, 1971 and 1991.	160
Table XII	Percentage of women working twenty or more hours a week in selected male-dominated professions 1971-1991, in which males represented 85 percent or more of employed persons in 1971.	161