

# (Re)constructing selves: Emplaced socio-material practice at the Men's Shed North Shore

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An ethnographic case study

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## **ABSTRACT**

Retirement can bring about significant disruption for men who spend a large amount of their lives in paid employment. When leaving paid employment, men also leave places where they have developed a sense of self, secured resources, found meaning, participated in social networks, and engaged in practices of health and gender. How men respond to such a challenging life stage by creating spaces for participating in positive and affirming practices, is largely overlooked. In this thesis, I explore the ways in which a group of older, retired men jointly (re)construct a sense of self through emplaced socio-material practice in the Men's Shed North Shore. Amid a dearth of literature on men's caring and supportive social relationships, this research contributes to an understanding of the ways men in Aotearoa, New Zealand come to re-know themselves and develop supportive relationships through a shared community project. The research is informed by an ethnographic case-based orientation that draws on participation-observation fieldwork, interviews, and a focus group with men who participate at the Men's Shed North Shore. Findings illustrate the effort these men put into the communal reworking of self, the maintenance of health and dignity in a disruptive life stage, their pragmatic approach to retirement, and their (re)production of place and space. A central focus in the analysis is the importance of socio-material practice in the Shed. In particular, the analysis explores the role of material practice as an essential relational practice in the Shed. Through construction projects, men connect with, and reproduce, the material essence of the Shed, and engage meaningfully with other men. The analysis also demonstrates the importance of material practice for these men in maintaining health and dignity in later life. The men agentively and pragmatically respond to displacement in retirement by (re)constructing a sense of self and re-emplacing themselves through familiar and shared labour practices. The analysis also demonstrates how the daily material activities of the Shed reflect an ongoing enactment of wellbeing, enabled and demonstrated through social interaction and productive activity.

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## PREFACE

Most men spend a large proportion of their lives in paid employment. A job is a practical medium which provides opportunities for monetary remuneration, economic contribution, and the structuring of daily life. Paid employment is also an arena in which men forge identities, engage with others, construct meaning, experience social support, form attachments, and (re)produce patterns of health and gender (Barnes & Parry, 2004; Ormsby, Stanley, & Jaworski, 2010). While some men may look forward to ceasing labour obligations tied to employment when they retire, doing so can mean walking away from valuable practices that grant men access to social, health, and material resources that are entrenched within the social dynamics of paid employment (Barnes & Parry, 2004; Nicholson, 2012; Pease, 2002). We know that activities which are social and meaningful can play important roles in healthy ageing for men in later life (Glass, Leon, Marottoli, & Berkman, 1999). However, we know little of how men (re)develop identities, (re)construct meaning, or continue to interact socially and meaningfully with others in responding to the difficulties of retirement, particularly through material enterprise.

Theories of men's positive and supportive relationships are scarce, not only in the context of later life, but from our understandings of men more generally. Men have been the subject of much criticism from across the social sciences, largely in response to histories of men's structural, economic, and political control and advantage. Critiques are often conceptualised in relation to the enactment of masculinities, particularly hegemonic masculinities (C. Lee & R. Owens, 2002). Attention has been drawn to the implications of these enactments, as well as men's predominance in criminal and violent activity (C. Lee & R. Owens, 2002). Much of the work on men focusses on feminist-oriented critiques of discriminative power structures which exist between men and women, and between particular groups of men. Specifically, feminist research has advocated against sexual determinism, drawing attention to social, political, knowledge, and legal discriminations which have historically constrained women (Friedman, Metelerkamp, & Posel, 1987). The focus on exploring and criticising power imbalances between men and women has brought a reflective awareness and response to patriarchal domination and oppression (Friedman et al., 1987). While research into men's involvement in social issues such as violence and abuse is warranted, the generalisation of anti-social behaviour to men in general carries with it the implication that merely being a man is to be associated with suspicion (Hodgetts & Rua, 2008). Given the dearth of awareness and understanding about the ways in which men do contribute pro-socially and positively to society, there is certainly a need to move beyond deficit views of men, and to pay attention to men's

supportive and relational roles (Bank & Hansford, 2000). By problematizing traditionally deficit-based research orientations toward men, I seek to open up opportunities to (re)consider men as beings who are not only prosocial, but who support each other in coping with adversity in relational ways.

A relatively small but growing body of research and popular commentary is focused on positive elements of men's lives and relationships, and how these can be practiced through material enterprise (Hodgetts & Rua, 2010; J. MacDonald, 2011; Skladzien & O'Dwyer, 2010). Consideration has been given to men engaged in affirmative and supportive experiences that provide them (and others) with function, purpose, opportunities for discussion, intimacy, and shared creativity (Hodgetts & Rua, 2010). Specific attention has been drawn to the social interaction, support, engagement, and belonging men develop through construction projects that happen at community and domestic sheds<sup>1</sup> (Hodgetts & Rua, 2010; Skladzien & O'Dwyer, 2010). Sheds are specific sites where material practices take place, where men's relationships with others develop over the sharing of projects with friends, and where skills are passed on to younger generations (Hodgetts & Rua, 2010). Such contexts are important in providing a space for men to discuss and negotiate tensions and relations which exist within their lives (Smith & Winchester, 1998). Men can draw on such supportive and male-orientated spaces to strengthen their sense of well-being, whilst also playing beneficial roles in wider communities (Skladzien & O'Dwyer, 2010). Sheds provide legitimate and acceptable grounds for men to congregate, and can buffer men from negative perceptions of men and masculinity (Golding, Kimberley, Foley, & Brown, 2008). In particular, sheds can help men (re)negotiate positive male identities that offer alternatives to popular understandings of traditional masculinities and unhealthy or risky practices (Golding & Foley, 2008; Ormsby et al., 2010; Skladzien & O'Dwyer, 2010).

In response to the focus on the role of sheds in men's relationships, a conceptualisation of men as materially expressive beings has emerged. While some men give, receive, and appreciate styles of supportive verbal communication that focuses on the exploration of feelings and personal perspectives (Bank & Hansford, 2000), other men tend towards material forms of coping, such as labour or physical activity (Edwards, McCreanor, Ormsby, Tuwhangai, & Tipene-Leach, 2009). Moreover, the dichotomous differentiation between verbal expression and material practice may break down in some contexts given that 'doing' and talking are not mutually exclusive, but happen at the same time (Hodgetts & Rua, 2010). This conceptualisation is reflected in popular literature, to which, "men define themselves by doing things" (J. Hopkins & Riley, 1998). This 'doing' opens up

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<sup>1</sup> Sheds are simple roofed structures that are typically used as workshops or storage spaces

spaces in which men can be intimate and express their relationships with other men (Hodgetts & Rua, 2010). For some men, 'doing' contributes to their place-based sense of belonging, trust, and support, fostered through participation in shared activities, and also through the accompanying mundane experiences of welcomes, smiles, and time spent together (Hodgetts & Rua, 2010). A shared sense of 'being' and 'doing', then, provides men with familiar and friendly openings which contribute to a sense of connection to particular places and to the people that inhabit them (Dixon & Durrheim, 2004).

This thesis explores the ways in which a group of older men (re)construct a personal, yet shared sense of self through emplaced and embodied social and material practices. Specifically, I draw on the exemplar of the Men's Shed North Shore as an intentional space where older men can participate in positive and affirming practices in response to a challenging life stage. This research responds to the dearth of literature on men's need and ability to create spaces for care and positive social relationships. Rarely are men captured in the literal and purposeful manufacture of restorative and caring spaces, particularly those designed by men to encourage the creation of supportive interpersonal ties. The research contributes to a renewed understanding of the ways in which men in Aotearoa, New Zealand come to know themselves and develop supportive relationships through a shared community project. Many men who participate at Men's Sheds call themselves 'Sheddies' and will be referred to likewise in this thesis.

Throughout this thesis, I draw on a wide range of literature to make sense of the Men's Shed North Shore. In particular, I draw on popular literature, New Zealand history, adult learning, sociology, anthropology, archaeology, and psychology to inform my exploration of how these men make sense of, and conduct, positive and supportive action in the Shed. This is significant, as a range of disciplines hold insights into men's identities as well as the importance of place and practice in understanding everyday life.

Chapter one explores the Men's Shed movement, situating it within a European colonial context. I also draw connections between Men's Sheds and wellbeing in older age that are anchored in a colonial setting of labour and communal wellbeing. This chapter will put into context the relational, environmental, and material influences that imbue these men's social and healthy ageing practices. Such considerations provide the grounds on which to frame an appropriate conceptualisation of the Men's Shed North Shore for this research.

In chapter two, I argue for a (re)conceptualisation of the Men's Shed North Shore through a lens of social interaction, emplacement, object-use, and (re)construction of self. Such a conceptualisation is necessary for understanding supportive relationships that arise from the consumption and production practices of the men who participate in the Shed. As such, I draw particular attention to theory that explores the role of social practice and material objects in everyday life. From this theory, I develop a conceptual framework that focuses on relational being and material enterprise that are essential elements of Men's Sheds. Within this framework, I situate material objects as actors which facilitate the 'fitting in' of action within the Shed. Such practices contribute to the way Sheddies experience, understand, and relate to the world, and to each other.

In chapter three, I discuss the methodological approach used in this research to explore the participants' lived experiences of the Men's Shed North Shore and of the supportive relationships that happen there. I highlight an auto-ethnographic and case-based human-centred research orientation that emphasises detailed exploration of practices which take place within a unique and particular setting, from a view of a social participant who operates within it.

Chapter four presents a tour of the Men's Shed North Shore. This chapter introduces readers to the Shed and to its context as I experienced it during this research, including the construction of the Shed itself, and particular events and objects that were instrumental in my developing understanding of the Shed's social climate. Throughout the chapter, I highlight the importance of researcher-participation in, rather than simply observing, the materially-oriented context of the Shed. Indeed, a particular focus of the chapter is the importance of material practice in drawing together men in the Shed.

In chapter five, I examine the reworking of self that takes place in the Shed in response to leaving paid employment and adjusting to retirement. I focus here on social interaction and physical engagement as the key mechanisms for the joint reconceptualising of self that these men participate in, and how such interaction emerges from shared material and social practices. In particular, I explore how participants come to know the world through labour, and how labour-based practices of 'being' come to be wrapped up in their continued wellbeing, their identities, and sense of belonging and placement. I demonstrate that through the continuation of labour practices, Sheddies are able to position themselves in opposition to socially and physically inactive men whom they perceive as socially isolated and unhealthy.

Chapter six explores participants' intentional development of camaraderie at the Shed. I draw particular attention to the way camaraderie is purposefully worked into the everyday activities of

the Shed, and to the use of objects and space that are taken up in its working. The intentional forming of social bonds is achieved at the Shed between men who are 'placed' in the world in similar ways through embodied and emplaced practices. I demonstrate that Sheddies seek out other men at the Shed and establish a base of rapport and trust by engaging in shared enterprise, then use this as a platform to discuss more personal issues.

In the final chapter, I draw together the findings of this research, and highlight significant contributions to knowledge as well as opening the door for further research. I also draw attention to the purposeful ethos of caring and sharing that is absent from much theoretical conceptualisations of men, yet lies at the heart of the Shed. I finish by illustrating that research into Men's Sheds plays an important role in the support and continuation of the Men's Shed movement in New Zealand.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Men's Sheds and the Men's Shed movement

There is a growing body of literature on the Men's Shed movement in general, and links between the movement and positive health outcomes for older men. This chapter considers the existing literature on Men's Sheds, and touches briefly on the historical backdrop in which the Men's Shed movement evolved. Specifically, I situate contemporary Men's Sheds as larger and more public forms of iconic backyard sheds which emerged from European histories of colonisation in New Zealand and elsewhere. I also explore synergies between the Men's Shed literature and literature on healthy ageing. Given the scarcity of academic writing on Men's Sheds from New Zealand, this review draws primarily on research from Australia.

As will be discussed in detail below, backyard sheds and Men's Sheds have arisen from European settler histories that are shared by New Zealand and Australia. In brief, both countries have long-standing rural traditions and histories of colonisation, migration, and settlement by European populations. During the European colonisation of New Zealand and Australia, isolation from Britain and other trade centres meant high costs for imported goods, and a reduced ability to rely on trade for manufactured goods. European settlers in New Zealand and Australia were required to fashion new goods—or to refurbish old goods—using local resources and ingenuity.

#### 1.1 The historical backdrop of contemporary shed culture in New Zealand

In this section, I examine factors that are considered to have influenced contemporary shed culture in New Zealand. I initially intended that this review would examine a historical backdrop of a wider male culture in New Zealand to put Sheddies' everyday practices into context. After consulting the existing literature on New Zealand men—both academic and popular—it became evident that the focus of this literature is on the development of (assumed) stoicism and silence of Pākehā<sup>2</sup> men in New Zealand. Yet, such assumed male characteristics were not at all evident in my exploration of the Men's Shed North Shore. Consequently, my reading was narrowed to focus on the experiences of

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<sup>2</sup> Pakeha: the term Pakeha has been argued to mean non-Māori (in which Māori is used as a 'normal' referent). Its contemporary use typically denotes New Zealanders of European descent

European colonisation that related to construction projects and shared enterprise which served to put the development of relationships at the Men's Shed North Shore into context. While a 'male culture' is sometimes referred to in the following paragraphs, it is only done so where appropriate in contextualising contemporary Men's Sheds, rather than in its own right. For a more thorough examination of the development of a particular silent and stoic, primarily Pākehā inspired male culture in New Zealand, Phillips (1996) provides a good starting point in which these values are situated in and attributed to New Zealand's colonial past.

New Zealand, Aotearoa<sup>3</sup> has a rich multicultural history. The *Māori*<sup>4</sup> and *Pākehā* worlds of early New Zealand were very disparate and neither culture was homogenous nationwide. For instance, Pākehā culture was a mix of many European origins; Māori culture was tribally-based (M. King, 2003). The brief account of New Zealand's history covered here is a somewhat one-sided view, drawing specific attention to European accounts of European settlement, and the bonds of mateship and camaraderie that ensued. These accounts (including the present thesis) gloss over much of the disruption European settlement brought to Māori people and Māori society, particularly through dubious and illegitimate European acquisition of land and other resources. While I argue that the European men who settled in New Zealand banded together and formed bonds in response to harsh living conditions and arduous labour, many no doubt bonded by engaging in the shared enterprise of systematically suppressing and exterminating the Māori population and Māori traditions. In the wake of disruption, contemporary Māori have been left as second-class citizens in what was once their country, and are currently overrepresented in negative health, poverty, and crime statistics relative to Pākehā. This thesis focuses primarily on a mainstream Pākehā culture as the resulting dominant cultural reality for the men who participated in this research. Given the dominance of Pākehā culture in New Zealand, citizens are expected to be educated, employed, and speak according to Pākehā traditions (M. King, 2003).

Contemporary New Zealand shed culture in particular, has its roots in the experiences of Pākehā history and culture. Thus when New Zealand male culture is being discussed here, what is really being discussed is a culture common to a particular group of Pākehā, New Zealand European males. Three key elements appear to have influenced a contemporary shed culture in New Zealand, which seem to be intimately tied with a particular way of living in colonial New Zealand, particularly for colonial men. The first is the colonial makeup of the early settlers and the corresponding inherited characteristics and values; the second element concerns the predominantly male population of colonial New Zealand; and the third, the difficult conditions of pioneering and hard physical labour

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<sup>3</sup> Aotearoa: Māori name for New Zealand

<sup>4</sup> Māori: indigenous New Zealander

involved in colonising New Zealand's rugged landscape. Each is discussed, below. While Macdonald (1999) has disputed the influence of 'inherited' characteristics and values, both Macdonald (1999) and Phillips (1996) suggest that a distinct male culture emerged from the combination of heavily male-populated communities and difficult living conditions. As such, the colonial and labour-oriented makeup of early European settlers is discussed in its own right, whereas the influences of largely male communities and the pioneering conditions are discussed together.

While many settlers came to New Zealand from Scotland and Ireland (Phillips, 1996), the initial European colonial makeup of early New Zealand is held to be predominantly English (Schick & Dolan, 1999). Early New Zealand was a very 'English' colony, with predominantly English settlers, streets, and squares with English names and even English trees (Bassett, 1990b). Edward Wakefield, a London land agent and surveyor, sought to create a 'vertical slice' of pre-industrial England and its class system—minus the poverty—in New Zealand in the mid-1800s (Bassett, 1990a). This vision involved a nation of settlements led by the gentry<sup>5</sup> (Bassett, 1990a). Early pastoralists and land owners thus originated from Britain; gentry who had money to start their businesses and were able to turn that money into comfortable fortunes and recreate the life of the English gentry in New Zealand (Bassett, 1990b). These gentry were few and were initially dependent on Māori for labour and for food (Bassett, 1990a). In addition to the gentry, there were a number of soldiers (including military pensioners and fencibles), traders, shopkeepers, and working-class settlers (Bassett, 1990a). However, most of New Zealand's early European settlers were labourers and tradesmen (Bassett, 1990a). Despite Wakefield's initial targeting of 'respectable' labourers and tradesmen for his vertical slice of England, most came to escape the economic hardship they experienced in the 'old country' (Bassett, 1990c; M. King, 2003). In England, wages were low while unemployment and poverty were high (Bassett, 1990c); Scotland was troubled by economic depression and religious fragmentation between the Church of Scotland and Free Church Presbyterians; and Ireland had been devastated by the Great Famine (also known as the Irish Potato Famine) (M. King, 2003). Labourers sought the promise of prosperity in a new land and to escape the very class systems that Wakefield had attempted to transplant (M. King, 2003).

Although Wakefield facilitated a sizeable European settlement, the majority of New Zealand's early British settlers came as a result of Julius Vogel's<sup>6</sup> Public Works Scheme of 1870, some 20 years later (Bassett, 1990c). Vogel's plan was to borrow extensively (£10,000,000 to be spent over 10 years) and to transform the landscape of New Zealand (Bassett, 1990c). With this scheme, Vogel sought to convince Europe's agricultural labourers—previously 'beneath' the scope of agents—to immigrate to

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<sup>5</sup> Gentry: a social class entitled to bear coats of arms, though not considered nobility

<sup>6</sup> Julius Vogel: the then colonial treasurer and later Premier of New Zealand



New Zealand. The labourers were to be tenacious, frugal, used to hard physical work, and enduring of terrible labour and living conditions (Bassett, 1990c). The subsequent European settlers were practiced in manual labour, typically from rural parts of Britain, largely itinerant or seasonal workers, and occupationally versatile (Schick & Dolan, 1999). The majority of New Zealand settlers were thus a skewed sample of rural Britain, based on survival skills and practical knowledge (Schick & Dolan, 1999). In popular literature, Hopkins and Riley (2002) have suggested that these skills and knowledge have become part of New Zealand's contemporary national character. However, European men also brought with them certain expectations about manliness and appropriate behaviour that are reflected in mythologies of contemporary New Zealand men, particularly rural men (Schick & Dolan, 1999). Phillips' (1996) analysis of literary records tells us that colonials valued hard work and frowned upon those men not participating in manual labour, such as *paper collared swells*<sup>7</sup>, *new chums*<sup>8</sup>, and *swaggers*<sup>9</sup>.

Throughout its European colonisation, New Zealand was thought of within the European settler society as a 'man's country' (Phillips, 1996). New Zealand's first European visitors—explorers, traders, whalers, and sealers—were typically male (Phillips, 1996). Wakefield's campaigns sought tradesmen and male farm labourers in the 1840s and '50s (Bassett, 1990a), and more men flooded to New Zealand in the gold-rushes of the 1860s (Phillips, 1996). While miners came for the quick fortunes to be made in gold, many stayed to pursue other livelihoods (Phillips, 1996). Vogel's Public Works Scheme brought even more working men in the 1870s (Bassett, 1990c). Until the First World War, the number of Pākehā men in New Zealand greatly outweighed that of women, increasing Pākehā men's immersion in all-male situations (Phillips, 1996). While small numbers of women were present in settler communities (for example, local Māori offered prostitution, and some European men married into Māori households, though mostly for symbiotic access to privilege and resources) (M. King, 2003), the lifestyles of many men and the large absence of European women greatly reduced men's likelihood of getting married and settling down (Bassett, 1990b; M. King, 2003; Phillips, 1996). Large European families were a symbol of gentry affluence, out of reach of working men for whom the price of rent was high and the prospect of saving or land-ownership, unrealistic (Bassett, 1990b).

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<sup>7</sup> Paper collared swell: the European settler equivalent of white collar workers

<sup>8</sup> New chums: the European settler term for aristocrats and new British immigrants

<sup>9</sup> Swaggers: men who arrived at sheep stations at dusk to claim workers' accommodation for the night, but who also avoided work by leaving at dawn

Many men remained itinerant, sought company and support from other men (M. King, 2003; Phillips, 1996), and took comfort in a culture of drink and mateship (Bassett, 1990b). Bands of bushmen in Coromandel, for example, would live in the bush for long periods, isolated from civilisation and with only each other for company (M. King, 2003). Many men travelled from farming station to farming station, looking for work as farm labourers, shepherds, boundary-watchers, and drovers, staying in barracks with other temporary workmen (Phillips, 1996). Phillips suggests that colonial male friendship, or 'mateship', emerged from necessary work and accommodation groups. Men who worked as transient workers were often forced into communal living, and others found it convenient to share housing and cooking (Phillips, 1996). Not all New Zealand men were employed on the frontier; some worked as clerks or shop assistants, and many men deserted pioneer life (Phillips, 1996). However, many more were involved in frontier occupations (Phillips, 1996). Frontier men shared working and living conditions where aching muscles, broken bones, poor accommodation, and wearisome food were also common (Phillips, 1996). The labour of bushmen, road-makers, and railway navvies was back-breaking (Phillips, 1996); wind and rain beleaguered men staying in temporary shelters of canvas and corrugated iron; men stayed in accommodations that did not afford workers privacy; and men often ate what they could get—a diet mostly comprised of mutton, damper<sup>10</sup>, and tea (Bassett, 1990b).

An idiosyncratic Pākehā male culture is thought to have arisen from these difficult and largely all-male situations (M. King, 2003; Phillips, 1996; Schick & Dolan, 1999). Popular literature suggests that the generalised qualities of support, loyalty, reliability, trustworthiness, and honesty emerged as the result of the banding together of men in a difficult colonial past (J. Hopkins & Riley, 2002). The Coromandel bushmen allegedly took pride in working hard, not stealing from one-another, and looking after men that were sick or injured (M. King, 2003). The difficult conditions of early New Zealand—characterised by hard physical labour, monotonous food, and isolation (Bassett, 1990a; Phillips, 1996)—emphasised dominant male values that were inherited from rural Britain (Schick & Dolan, 1999), such as the skill and mateship that accompanied manual labour (Phillips, 1996). Although Wakefield had assured gentry of an easy time in New Zealand, frontier life involved a great deal of hard physical labour for both gentry and workers (Bassett, 1990a), and it was this labour that defined settler experience (Phillips, 1996). Machinery was unavailable or unaffordable, so colonisation of the land had to be done manually: trees were cut with axes, train tracks were dug with picks, and gravel was sluiced with pans (Phillips, 1996). Suppressing the expression of aches, pains, and discomfort was commonplace in such difficult working and living environments (Phillips, 1996).

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<sup>10</sup> Damper: unleavened bread made of flour and water

Skill and versatility were valued necessities on the frontier, where specialised craftsmen were hard to come by (Phillips, 1996). In many parts of the country there were no furniture-makers or builders, so men had to construct goods and huts for themselves (Phillips, 1996). Transport difficulties also meant that produce could not be transported easily for sale, thus frontier men were also required to grow or hunt their own food (Phillips, 1996). Many men were thus proficient in a variety of skills, a 'Jack of all trades', particularly itinerant workers who moved from one job to the next, season to season (Phillips, 1996). Workers found themselves undertaking various jobs that they had little or no experience in, such as repairs and shepherding (Phillips, 1996). In short, New Zealand (Pākehā) men have a long history of companionship grounded in practices of labour and coping with difficult living situations.

## **1.2 Contemporary sheds**

Contemporary shed and DIY (do-it-yourself) traditions are thought to have emerged from the requirements of skill and versatility necessary during the European colonisation of New Zealand (J. Hopkins & Riley, 2002; M. King, 2003). The development of contemporary backyard sheds—as sites in which new ideas take shape, modifications applied, and repairs done—largely reflects the inaccessibility and unaffordability of new goods during European colonisation (J. Hopkins & Riley, 2002). Today, the practice of (re)invention continues, though more out of hobby or cost-saving than necessity.

Backyard sheds are typically situated at personal residences, usually for private use as workshops and storage spaces. Popular literature suggests that while both men and women keep backyard sheds, they are predominantly occupied by men and typically thought of as male-specific spaces (J. Hopkins & Riley, 1998, 2002). Backyard sheds have been considered to be spaces of isolation and retreat (Ballinger, Talbot, & Verrinder, 2009; M. Morgan, Hayes, Williamson, & Ford, 2007). Backyard sheds can thus act as refuges from the pressures of work spaces, and from estrangement that may be experienced by some men in domestic spaces (Glover & Misan, 2012).

While some backyard sheds may tend to be insulated places, many men desire the company of others and prefer to engage in shared enterprise (Glover & Misan, 2012; Golding, 2011b). Backyard sheds can thus become spaces in which social participants gather explicitly for the purpose of social engagement (Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982), and relationships with children, other men, and family can be developed (Hodgetts & Rua, 2010). These are diverse and novel spaces, and are situated in contrast to more structured and routinised domestic spaces and spaces of paid employment

(Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982). Historically, such places are regarded as peripheral spaces to which one can escape for respite from obligations, yet they may be necessary for a sense of wholeness and balance that contributes to wellbeing in home and work spheres (Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982). Backyard sheds, then, act as media through which people can seek continuity and connection, and engage in social participation and form healthy relationships.

The adaptation and repackaging of the backyard shed into community Men's Sheds seems a natural progression, where men meet regularly to socialise and work on practical hands-on projects—typically woodwork and metalwork (Ballinger et al., 2009; Golding, Brown, Foley, Harvey, & Gleeson, 2007), while also sharing and learning from each other's lived experiences (Golding, 2011b), supporting each other, and contributing to the local community (M. Morgan et al., 2007; Vallance & Golding, 2008). Men's Sheds create all-male environments that can, but admittedly may not always, open up safe spaces for gendered interaction in response to retirement, gendered issues, and a desire for connection and companionship (Golding et al., 2007; Skladzien & O'Dwyer, 2010).

Men's Sheds as more formalised community spaces originated in Australia and have been quickly replicated globally (Golding, 2011a). Relatively unheard-of a decade ago (Golding et al., 2008), the number of recognised Men's Sheds in Australia has risen to approximately 550 (Golding, 2011a), though they can be difficult to locate, or even to categorise, as they are not always named as Men's Sheds (Golding et al., 2007). In New Zealand, the number of Men's Sheds grew from one to approximately 36 between 2007 and 2011 (Bruce, 2011) and is steadily increasing. The popularity of the emerging Men's Shed movement in Australia and New Zealand led to the first Australian Men's Shed conference in Victoria in 2005 (Golding, 2011a), and to the first New Zealand conference in Wellington in 2012 (Pettitt, 2012).

The Australian government has recognised the benefit of Men's Sheds by helping to fund the founding of Men's Sheds in Australia (Golding, 2011a), though funding and policy initiatives are still in their infancy (Golding et al., 2008). There is presently no state support for Men's Sheds in New Zealand. Local Men's Sheds endeavour to gain recognition from governing agencies and the public about the benefits of Men's Sheds, actively negotiating opportunities for finance and support. While Men's Sheds in Australia are often linked to community health or adult learning organisations (M. Morgan et al., 2007), Men's Sheds in New Zealand have tended to arise from community initiatives, with the help of funding from local businesses and community grants.

Differences between individual sheds often reflect the grassroots nature of Men's Sheds. Each Men's Shed tends to be established in accordance with the needs of the communities in which they are

developed (Glover & Misan, 2012), thus each differs in structure, purpose, and activity (Golding et al., 2007). The sites themselves come in a range of forms and may take the shape of church halls, barns, learning centres (Golding, 2006), unused school classrooms, or purpose-built workshops. Men's Sheds provide space, tools, and equipment with which to complete projects, and usually an area to socialise in (Golding, 2011b). For many Sheddies, Men's Sheds are places they can enjoy the company and camaraderie of other men, and make new friends (Ballinger et al., 2009; Golding et al., 2008). By participating in Men's Sheds, men come into contact with a diverse range of people that they might not otherwise encounter or choose to associate with, and many enjoy doing so (Ballinger et al., 2009; Golding et al., 2008).

The intentional (re)creation of workshop environments may reflect lifetimes of working and relationship-building in workshops, and leisure time spent in backyard sheds (Golding, 2011b; Golding et al., 2008). The opportunity to continue a life-long pattern of working with other men in workshop settings may be especially inviting if they no longer have access to construction spaces at work or at home<sup>11</sup>. Men's Sheds are thus spaces where the boundary between labour and leisure is blurred. This blurring of a supposed work-leisure binary is evident in the way many Sheddies apply their past technical trades to Men's Sheds, not only through construction, but by negotiating agreements with suppliers, managing the organisation, team building, administration, promotion, construction, or organising inventory.

From a reductionist standpoint, leisure activities could be conceived of as activities in which a pleasurable distraction is provided from everyday work and family life, liberating an individual from worry, obligation, and necessity (Lefebvre, 1991). However, the distinction between work, family life, and leisure is often unclear, and each exist concurrently in modern everyday life (Lefebvre, 1991). Work, family life, and leisure, then, comprise a dialectical relationship, both complementary and contradictory (Lefebvre, 1991). Men's Sheds play an important role in negotiating and amending disturbances to work-leisure balances in the everyday lives of older, retired men.

### **1.3 Men's Sheds and healthy aging**

As will be discussed in detail in chapter five, leaving paid employment can result in substantial disruption to working men's lives (N. Hopkins & Dixon, 2006). Men's Sheds act as familiar and restorative places in which attachments that were severed upon retirement can be (re)formed through positive experiences and relational practices that are embedded in the Men's Shed space

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<sup>11</sup> Few older-age or retired men have access to a backyard shed, workspace, or to tools (Golding et al., 2007)

(Korpela, Ylen, Tyrvaainen, & Silvennoinen, 2009; Pretty, Chipuere, & Bramston, 2003). Indeed, the Men's Shed movement emerged as a social and health intervention, responding to the needs of communities of ageing men leaving paid employment (Golding, 2011a). The quote that follows is a statement from the Men's Shed North Shore website, and emphasises the value Sheddies place on keeping engaged and socially connected (Ballinger et al., 2009), particularly in buffering men against the challenges of later life:

Sheds do not treat men like clients, customers, or patients. They do not treat age as a deficit; there is no ageism. Sheds are a place where older men can rekindle their passion for life, where they can take advantage of opportunities, where they can make friends and share their experiences and where, ultimately, they can be happy (Men's Shed North Shore, 2013)

The quote speaks of the value of Men's Sheds in regards to healthy ageing, which is also reflected in research linking men's self-rated health to their active social engagement and feelings of valuable contribution (Golding, 2011a; Ormsby et al., 2010). The value of Men's Sheds is also found in links between participation and improvements in self-reported wellbeing, particularly self-esteem, happiness, confidence, social skills, community cohesion, and feelings of self-worth (Golding, 2008; Golding et al., 2007; Skladzien & O'Dwyer, 2010).

Sheddies seek to stay fit, socially connected, and healthy through shed participation (Golding, 2011a). Through their participation and tangible contributions, Sheddies become increasingly engaged and enmeshed within social and community networks (Ballinger et al., 2009; Golding, 2011a) which crystallises their inclusion within a socially supportive space (Ormsby et al., 2010). Inclusion is an important determinant of health (Wilkinson & Marmot, 2003) and is manifest in Men's Shed communities through active engagement (Golding, 2011a), making men feel valued and viewed positively, and through contributions such as making products to sell, donating tools and machinery, helping to run their Shed, and promoting the Shed to others (Ballinger et al., 2009). Social inclusion is felt through opportunities to relax, reflect, reminisce, tell stories, and share jokes with other men, in a space where they feel that they can expect to be treated as equals (Ormsby et al., 2010).

Socially supportive environments are also important for men (M. Morgan et al., 2007). Men's Sheds are designed to provide friendly, familiar, and non-judgemental settings for men to feel safe (Golding, 2008). Not surprisingly, Sheddies often feel comfortable discussing issues within these self-built communities (Skladzien & O'Dwyer, 2010). All-male environments open up a safe space for men to talk by minimising the potential for inter-gendered interaction that may discourage some men

from certain forms of disclosure (Golding et al., 2007). Such inclusive and supportive spaces invite Sheddies to talk informally with other men about retirement-related issues (such as unemployment and loss of purpose), age-related difficulties (such as health decline and disability, impotence, and diabetes), and specific health-related issues (Golding, 2011a). These men may not feel comfortable speaking to their partners about such issues (Skladzien & O'Dwyer, 2010). By talking and working together, Sheddies build 'community families' (Vallance & Golding, 2008) which play an important role in achieving wellbeing by providing a safe place, and a positive and supportive environment (Ballinger et al., 2009). In particular, the welcoming and familiar elements of everyday life at Men's Sheds inform the identity (re)formation that takes shape in this shared space (Hodgetts et al., 2010), where subject, space, and identity are drawn together in forming a shared sense of belonging (Dixon & Durrheim, 2004; Gorman-Murray, 2011). Places such as Men's Sheds thus offer crucial spaces and means for developing and situating supportive identities (Cuba & Hummon, 1993). In short, Men's Sheds offer vital links between practice, social inclusion, support, belonging, and wellbeing (Berkman, 1995; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Matud, Ibanez, Bethencourt, Marrero, & Carballeira, 2003).

Although Sheddies may derive health benefits from Men's Sheds, the men may not see themselves as being the beneficiaries of healthcare services through Men's Sheds, or even as in need of help (Ballinger et al., 2009). While some Men's Sheds facilitate the dissemination of health information through health seminars and casual conversation (M. Morgan et al., 2007), men typically attend Men's Sheds for a range of reasons other than gaining access to health information (Skladzien & O'Dwyer, 2010). Rather, many men report wanting to improve the community by contributing to constructive projects (Glover & Misan, 2012). They appear to thrive on the pride, purpose, achievement, support, and structure that Men's Sheds inject into their lives (Ballinger et al., 2009). Through engagement and collaboration, Men's Sheds help address the health concerns of older men in which consumers of health information can also become practitioners of it. This dynamic helps men to consume health information and engage in communal health practices without feeling patronised or positioned as dependant health-care users (Golding, 2011a), while at the same time acting as providers and being part of support communities to other men (Ballinger et al., 2009; Golding et al., 2007). The empowerment and respectful approach of Men's Sheds to health promotion and illness prevention may be ideal for this group of older men.

## 1.4 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I explored key elements of a colonial past that are held to have shaped contemporary shed culture in New Zealand. I also discussed the desire for many men to work communally with others in a shared space set aside for joint labour. Indeed, Men's Sheds are a response to men's desire to work with others engaged in material enterprise, as much as they are a healthy ageing initiative. These men come together to cope with a difficult life stage in relational ways. I also touched on the contribution Men's Sheds can make to the lives of older, retired men for whom leaving paid employment may sever social and practical attachments.

In short, the practices of labour and mateship that are (re)produced in Men's Sheds are grounded in European settler traditions of tenacity, versatility, frugality, and material enterprise. Such practices continue to be conducted in backyard sheds, where relationships with others can be formed and nurtured through construction projects. However, some men may find such spaces to be isolating, and may desire to work in more communal settings. Men's Sheds provide a space for older men to carry out traditions of material enterprise and bonding in shared spaces, particularly if they do not have access to their own workshop spaces. Physical labour is thus a way this group of men connect and band together, and anchor themselves in traditions they associate with their 'national character'.

The men who participate at Men's Sheds band together to support and care for each other, as did European colonial men in times of sickness and injury. In Men's Sheds, men cope communally with difficult living circumstances through companionship, joint care, and shared labour. Such spaces provide these men with a sense of community, connection, balance, purpose, and achievement. Men's Sheds thus contribute to men's successful ageing through essential mechanisms of wellbeing such as social inclusion, social and physical engagement, relational practices, and positive experiences.

In the next chapter, I develop a conceptual framework that focuses on relational being and material enterprise that are essential elements of Men's Sheds. In particular, the chapter will explore theoretical conceptualisations which point to the (re)shaping of 'self' through social relationships, object-use, and emplacement. Such an approach is novel in literature on Men's Sheds, as research has tended to focus on quantifying participants' health outcomes. The conceptualisation of a Men's Shed through the 'self' affords the opportunity for dialogue about how men interact socially with others in coping with the difficulties of older age through material enterprise, and how they (re)develop identities and (re)construct meaning in later life in the process.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Conceptualising the Shed through self, relational being, emplacement, and material practice**

In this research, I embrace the position of researcher-as-bricoleur. Bricolage is a multidisciplinary approach to research, which draws on a breadth of relevant theory and methods to form innovative and flexible research strategies (Kincheloe, 2005). From this orientation one can embrace the recognition that life is complex, intersects on material and social planes, and involves a complex layering of context and self (Dicks & Mason, 1998). Bricolage constitutes an orientation to research that is responsive to complexity, being conscious of and informed by a wide scope of paradigms that can aid in interpretation of events in society (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). More specifically, I employ a wide range of knowledge from various social theoretical positions, without situating or binding the research to any particular one. I do so to draw on numerous understandings of human life in seeking not to simply explain the Shed and men's interactions within this space, but to also explore participant interactions, accounts, and experiences in relation to constructs such as paid employment, retirement, the Men's Shed North Shore, Sheddies, and the social and material world more generally (Kincheloe, 2005). This orientation speaks to the core of this thesis, which is the intersection of self, place, and materiality which infuse the relational being of Sheddies at the Men's Shed North Shore.

In attempting to understand the human interactions that take place at the Shed, I draw on the work of scholars who have informed thinking about the self (Goffman, 1959; Hermans, 2001; Hermans, Kempen, & Van Loon, 1992; James, 1890; Salgado & Hermans, 2005), social interactions (Blumer, 1986; Cooley, 1902; Giddens, 1986; Mead, 1934), group identification (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), civic engagements (Putnam, 1995, 2000), emplacement (Cuba & Hummon, 1993; Hodgetts et al., 2010), and the role of material culture in everyday life (Hargreaves, 2011; Hurdley, 2006; Warde, 2005). Their work provides a starting point for the organisation of interpretation through theory and analysis that takes place in this thesis, and is useful in elucidating the social, political, and cultural forces which act on and shape the Shed and aspects of the lives of Sheddies.

This chapter introduces the theory I draw on to conceptualise the Shed, and provides a conceptual framework for the thesis. I use theoretical constructs to conceptualise how Sheddies jointly use physical spaces, social places, and emplaced objects to situate themselves and engage with each other. Of key consideration, is developing an eclectic understanding of how participating Sheddies communally (re)forge elements of their selves, breathe life into positive and supportive relationships, and (re)produce the Shed as a shared space for these men.

## **2.1 Relational selves at the Shed**

Drawing on the work of James (1890), Mead (1934), Salgado and Hermans (2005) and Yang (2006), the underlying approach to this thesis is the notion that humans are relational beings. The position I take in regards to a person's self is that it consists of everything a person calls their own, including their body, material possessions, family, friends, and places they claim connection to (James, 1890). All contribute to the (re)production of one's self, and are essential for understanding human interaction and connection at the Shed. Such a stance makes it difficult, even objectionable, to separate a person's self from the other social beings and material objects that populate their environment(s). This orientation breaks from much contemporary thinking around the self in Anglo-American psychology, which typically conceives of the self as an isolated, independent, autonomous, and disembodied entity (Hermans et al., 1992; Salgado & Hermans, 2005). Indeed, "nobody exists alone—in fact, every human being is, from the very beginning, involved in a relational and communicational process" (Salgado & Hermans, 2005, p. 8). The self is thus bound to the social world and developed through communicative processes with other people, places, and things (Salgado & Hermans, 2005). Consequently, relationships and interactions are fundamental to the construction of who we are.

In interaction with other people and material objects, one's 'self' can be taken up, moulded, given meaning, and deployed in multiple ways (Goffman, 1959; Hermans et al., 1992; James, 1890). Some scholars have gone so far as to propose that people have as many selves as there are others (and groups of others) they encounter (Hermans, 2001; Hermans et al., 1992; James, 1890). The 'self' from this perspective becomes 'selves', as individuals act in varying and sometimes contradictory fashions, depending on the self brought forth when engaging with particular others (Hermans et al., 1992). It is important to note that while one's selves are dynamic and malleable, people develop such selves in light of their personal histories, tendencies, and affiliations (James, 1890). One's life

experiences anchor the selves we construct and deploy, producing an overall consistency throughout people's enacted selves and sense of who we are (James, 1890).

Selves take shape as they are ascribed meaning through social interactions in which other people act toward and define a person's selves (Blumer, 1986; Mead, 1934). Throughout this process, a person may even abstractly position themselves from the stance of others and view their selves as others might (Mead, 1934). In this thesis, the self is approached as a dynamic, relational, and plural process of being in the world that is modified in deployment, depending on the audience, and so is fundamentally linked to 'others' and the situations across which the life is lived. As human beings, we are all interdependent because the audience is an essential element of the self that is brought to the fore and voiced in particular interactions. As one's self shifts, so too does our interaction with other people, places, and objects. As I discuss in chapter five, such thinking regarding the multiplicity of selves is pertinent to the Shed given the shifting contexts these men face when transitioning from paid employment to retirement. This transition is accompanied by changes in social structures, practices, and values which are linked to a significant and shared reworking of self for this group of men.

## **2.2 Emplacement and 'fitting in' through social interaction**

For many men, paid employment provides crucial social structure that offers a sense of purpose and belonging within society. As I explore in chapter six, many men identify with particular social categories which are forged and defined through their place-based experiences of paid and voluntary labour. Their paid employment practices in particular anchor a sense of self in which they fit and belong. Men who participate in the Shed consider their past experiences of paid employment, and use similar means of labour to re-anchor themselves in the world through the Shed. This section considers theoretical ideas I use to conceptualise how Sheddies use the Shed terrain to (re)produce a place-based social structure through social interaction that arises from reflections of the past.

In mainstream psychology, social interaction is often viewed as a medium through which social norms, attitudes, and social identities are transmitted (Blumer, 1986), and as providing the conduit between causative factors of behaviour and human action. As such, the formative role of social interaction and meaning-making in human action has tended to be obscured. The assumption is that we are fully formed before interacting with a particular person. Alternatively, social interactionists posit that, rather than merely being a means of expressing pre-formed selves, interaction produces

human conduct and selves (Blumer, 1986). Further, studying group action requires looking beyond single actions (or 'unit acts'), to view human action as integrated into larger assemblages, or 'strategies of action' (Swidler, 1986). This is because the actions of human beings and the groups we form, exist in constant and ongoing processes in response to social circumstances in which people find themselves (Blumer, 1986). These ongoing social actions can build social connectivity within groups while also delineating groups from one-another. A social structure is thus consequent on individuals' actions towards each other. Situated in this way, human groups (indeed, society) can be conceived of as clusters of people engaged in ongoing processes of fitting together their actions in interacting with one-another (Blumer, 1986). The 'fitting in' action of Sheddies articulates the collectivity that is present at the Men's Shed North Shore, and also reflects broader social, political, and economic structures that shape their lives (Blumer, 1986). Such a conceptualisation was realised by Cooley (1902), who considered the organic links between individuals and the society they exist in as being 'twin-born'. Giddens (1986) similarly linked human agency with social structures, where individuals consider social structures and act within them to modify, evolve, and (re)produce these social structures. Social structures, then, are not rigid, but are malleable to varying degrees depending on the symbolic and material power of the groups concerned. Some groups have more control than others. Social structures can be seen as somewhat stable but ongoing elements of the social fabric that are enacted through everyday interactions in particular places such as a workplace or the Shed. The Shed can be read as a site within which Sheddies (re)produce and (re)shape both the shared social scape of the Shed and their selves in their everyday social interactions.

In chapter six, I explore how Sheddies draw on and reproduce shared understandings to communally shape social interactions at the Shed. Tajfel and Turner's (1979) conceptualisation of human group categorisation is useful in this context to consider how people feel connected to others through shared understandings and enactments of self. In particular, a human group can be considered as a collection of individuals who understand themselves and proximal others as fitting a social category, are emotionally invested in the category that unites them, and share consensus around the group's definition (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social groups and their associated norms and shared ways of doing things are influential in organising the social environment and orientation of social action, but can also be reworked and reshaped communally. Identifying with a social group anchors individuals within a social milieu, and affords a reference with which to ground the self (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). One's social identity, such as 'a Sheddie', can thus be conceived of as their relational self-concept, which develops out of their identification with the Shed and the other Sheddies that participate there (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

In the process of 'fitting in', people consider what other social participants within particular social categories are doing or may do, and adjust their own conduct accordingly (Blumer, 1986). Such ongoing and continuous consideration allows people to modify or cease their planned actions based on the projected action of others, while still organising their own actions in accordance with shared understandings. Because the action of others is an important consideration for people in the execution of one's own action, human action is not merely an arena of personal human expression, but of deliberation and corresponding with others (Blumer, 1986). This is not to say that people always consider their every action in detail. Unintentional action does exist, in which people react unthinkingly to the actions of others. Nevertheless, people still engage in reflection in understanding the wider social meanings of spontaneous acts (Blumer, 1986).

It is important to note here, that it is not normative rules and roles that always generate social action, but processes of social interaction that sustain group mores. It follows, then, that people do not always act mechanically in accordance with the requirements of a social structure (Blumer, 1986). Rather, each person acts in accordance with how they interpret a situation and how they feel they are being called upon to act. Repetitive iterations of an act are affirmed or challenged through social interaction, and although members of a group participate in established and recurring action, each iteration of the action can be fashioned anew (Blumer, 1986). Thus, each iteration of an action undergoes a process of interpretation, consideration of others' viewpoints and responses, and deployment. From such a stance, we can recognise that structurally-sanctioned actions may change and shift in response to challenges or to changes in affirmations, other objects, and shifting contexts. Picking up this very point in chapter six, I explore Sheddies' (re)production of (pro)social action, and how such action reflects Sheddies' response to shifts in context from paid employment to the Shed.

Social interaction happens *somewhere*, and this somewhere plays a role in the things that happen there (Allen, 2011). In this thesis I make the distinction between space and place in understanding the self as shaped through emplaced social interactions. There are longstanding debates about the meaning of, and distinctions between, space and place (Agnew, 2011). Here, I consider spaces to be physical locations that house the spatial arrangement of objects. Places are specific sites (material and social) that are invested with meaning and understandings which guide the practices that take shape there (Harrison & Dourish, 1996). Indeed, "we are located in 'space', but we act in 'place'" (Harrison & Dourish, 1996, p. 69). This is not to say that space and place are discrete phenomena. These are woven together so that "place implies space, and each home is a place in space" (Sack, 1997, p. 16). As I explore below, places and spaces are connected through objects, practices, and

relationships, where places and spaces provide the resources for one-another to take shape (Agnew, 2011). Spaces and places are thus fundamental constituents of social interaction, as it is within these material and social locales that people focus their attention and act toward objects in particular ways. The inclusion of space and place in the analysis of social interaction is necessary for a more in-depth conceptualisation of the action that takes shape in the Shed.

Patterns of social action or practice create places (Gross, 1999), are ingrained in the development and shaping of the modern world (Thrift, 2000a), and give rise to material and social locales such as the Shed. Because such physical spaces exist outside of their conceptualisation and theoretical (de)construction by human beings (Allen, 2011), they can be considered as containers of people, objects, and interactions, at the same time as they are also objects which come to have meaning through interaction. Places such as the Shed are thus linked inextricably with the people, objects, and (inter)action that reside there. For my reading of the Men's Shed North Shore, the physical Shed may be read as a material object and space which houses the daily happenings of the Sheddies, at the same time as it is a social place which is (re)produced through ongoing interactions between Sheddies and objects. Sheddies, the Shed, the material objects that are brought into usefulness there, and Sheddies' reasons and purposes for convening, are all bound together in a milieu of social interaction.

Mundane events in our lives often take shape in such specific places, so that everyday life is 'emplaced' (Hodgetts et al., 2010). Place-based activity, interactions, and objects instil places with meaning for the people who inhabit them (Cuba & Hummon, 1993). Particular selves are thus brought forth as people respond to such meaningful places (James, 1890), so that elements of people's selves can be conceived of as place-based (Altman, 1975; Hodgetts et al., 2010; James, 1890). Places provide people with important markers of their emplaced selves, and anchor them to the other people and objects they have engaged with there (Cuba & Hummon, 1993). Place is thus an important apparatus through which selves are located and (re)constructed. Ongoing events and interactions that happen in places offer opportunities to reinforce or reinvent selves through place-based practices that affirm or contest their sense of continuity, belonging, shared ownership, and relational being (Charleston, 2009; Hernandez, Hidalgo, Salazar-Laplace, & Hess, 2007; Korpela et al., 2009; Pretty et al., 2003; Snell & Hodgetts, 2007; Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996). Positive and affirming places such as Men's Sheds contribute to the (re)construction and restoration of self (Hartig & Staats, 2003; Korpela, Ylen, Tyrvaainen, & Silvennoinen, 2008). Positive bonds to place are not permanent, but can change and breakdown, particularly if positive selves are not affirmed (Brown & Perkins, 1992; Eacott & Sonn, 2006).

Briefly, people are embodied and emplaced beings who occupy material and social worlds simultaneously. The shared construction and affirmation of self is thus intrinsically linked to an intersection of place, space, object use, and social interaction. The shared understandings and everyday actions or practices of the Shed are what constitute the Shed's social structure and work to reproduce it (Geertz, 1973). Interactions and selves that take shape in the Men's Shed North Shore create patterned ways of being and understanding that are particular to the Shed and to the emplaced Sheddies that inhabit it (Bourdieu, 1990). The Men's Shed North Shore is thus a primary site for Sheddies' shared practices and selves. At the same time, these men (re)construct expectations about the practices that take shape in the Shed (Altman, 1993). Relationships, objects, and place thus mutually define the Shed (O'Donnell, Tharp, & Wilson, 1993).

### **2.3 The interaction between human and non-human 'actors' at the Shed**

As discussed above, objects, places, selves, and practice are interwoven and reaffirm each other (Snell & Hodgetts, 2007). Objects, then, are important (non-human) actors in people's development of themselves and their social identities, so when people discuss the objects embedded in the spaces in which they live their lives, they also discuss themselves, their understandings of the social world, their experiences and location in it, and the groups to which they belong (Hurdley, 2006). This is particularly evident in Men's Sheds, where objects are purposefully used to facilitate members' material and social participation in jointly reworking their sense of self. In this way, social interactions give life to objects, at the same time as group life is transformed in accordance with the flow of meaning-making toward objects (Blumer, 1986). Relationships that involve objects and people can be thought of as links within a system or network, in which objects and people are bound, are appropriated, and operate in correspondence with one-another (Allen, 2011). Group membership and participation make accessible to members the objects that are present within such a network, so that objects are taken up in the course of social interaction and group work (Bourdieu, 1986). By drawing attention to Sheddies' narratives regarding objects, I come to better understand the interplay between the Sheddies' material and social realities (Allen, 2011; Mills, 1959; Thrift, 2000a), and engage in a common vocabulary where objects point to broader social constructs present in participants' everyday lives (Hodgetts & Rua, 2010).

People make use of material objects through personal agency and active engagements in the world (Warde, 2005). People's being in the world is therefore articulated through the objects they collect

and consume (Noble, 2004). Cohen and Taylor (1976), and Hodgetts and colleagues (2010) have considered how objects are taken up by people as they create opportunities for embedding themselves in the world. Indeed, it is through bodies, material objects, and related social positions, that people come to understand the world by way of practices and narratives that incorporate their bodies, the use of objects, and the treatment of subjects in particular ways (Hargreaves, 2011; Hurdley, 2006; Reckwitz, 2002). Because the carrying out of social life involves objects which are taken up and used (Hodgetts, Hayward, & Stolte, 2013; Reckwitz, 2002), the social is also located in objects which comprise elements of social action or practice (Reckwitz, 2002). Material objects that texture the material and social landscapes of the Shed can, thus, be considered essential elements of the everyday networks and practices of the Shed. In interacting with and talking about such objects, people's subjectivities and understandings become available to one-another, and constitute opportunities for communal sense-making (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Further, the very language that people use to indicate and jointly consider objects, grounds and orders their shared experiences of objects (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In this research, material objects, being at the heart of the Men's Shed North Shore, provide critical apparatus with which to conceptualise the social and material practice of the men who participate there.

In interacting, people and objects are transformed as they come to give meaning to each other (Blumer, 1986; Heidegger, 1953). Objects come into being (materially and abstractly), are affirmed, change, and are discarded in the doing of group life. Objects come to be perceived and brought into the minds of people, who develop such meanings through social interactions. Because social interactions and constructions are central elements in the up-take and use of objects, objects can be considered useful only in relation to other things which combine in the performance of human actions (Heidegger, 1953). For example, a hammer is only a useful tool in the Shed if there are also nails to be hammered, and timber for the nails to be hammered into. Neither object is useful unless a Sheddie is also present to bring the other three together. At the same time, men are called into the world as Sheddies through their use of objects such as tools and construction projects (Heidegger, 1953). In short, human and non-human actors are mutually defining, give rise to one-another, and are brought together through everyday practices (Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner, 2006). They are a function of their networks, are connected, and can be readily mobilised and infused with meaning by other actors through social interactions.

Interactions between (human and non-human) actors do not occur in a vacuum, and are materially and historically grounded. In the first instance, people can adopt a shared attitude prevalent in a particular social group with which they fit and engage, apply it to an actor, and may use and act



towards that actor in a similar way to other members of the social group (Mead, 1934). When acting toward an actor that has been indicated by the group to which one belongs, a person may do so in co-operative and organised ways with others of the same group (Mead, 1934). Members of the group, thus, enter into a set of socially, materially, and place-based relations (Mead, 1934). When forming actions in regard to a newly encountered actor or situation, people consider their previous schema of object meanings and interpretations (Blumer, 1986). The formation of action toward new actors is thus connected to those previously encountered. The resulting action, whether similar or markedly different, is connected to the past, and can be considered in continuity with previous actors, social interaction, and action (Blumer, 1986). In chapter six, I explore the ways in which the Shed is (re)produced through consideration of past interactions with human and non-human actors encountered in paid employment. Sheddies use the Shed and the actors located there to jointly reproduce and contest social action that occurred in such experiences.

## **2.4 Chapter summary**

Above, I have explored theoretical conceptualisations from across a range of disciplines to create a responsive and flexible conceptual framework for this research that can inform my interpretation of goings on in the Shed. In particular, I pointed to the (re)construction of self through socially and materially embedded and place-based practices that are the focus of the Shed.

The primary theoretical conceptualisation of this research considers Sheddies' construction of self as a core focus of the Shed. Place is evidently an important element in the construction of self that happens there. Scholarship on place-based and multiple selves provides a fitting orientation from which to theorise the Shed and men's relationships within this place, and in the context of the reworking of self that accompanies significant shifts in life circumstances for these men. When leaving paid employment, many men leave behind social structures that have provided them with a sense of who they are and where they fit into society. As these men transition to the Shed, they encounter human and non-human actors with which to (re)construct selves that are unique to the Shed, and bring forth jointly constructed and place-based selves. Wrapped up in the (re)construction of self in the Shed is the emplaced 'fitting in' of action. The fitting in of action is important for people to feel they belong with a social group and fit into a particular place. As these men jointly fit their action together, they shape and (re)produce the social structure of the Shed. The social structure of the Shed is thus rendered 'readable' through an exploration of the shared understandings and social interactions that Sheddies engage in.

Taking this conceptual work further, I have argued that, in the context of the Shed, men not only participate in construction projects, but are shaped by the material objects that are taken up, brought into being, and given meaning there. Objects such as tools and building materials call these men into the world as 'Sheddies', and also communicate a shared identity. Human and non-human actors are thus mutually defining at the Shed, and give rise to one-another through everyday practices that are emplaced there.

In the next chapter, I introduce the methodological framework I used in exploring Sheddies' (re)construction of self through socially and materially embedded and place-based practices. This involved an intensive ethnographic case study approach through which I too was anchored materially and socially to the Shed.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **An ethnographic case study approach**

A key objective of this research was to explore the ways in which Sheddies (re)construct a shared sense of self through social, material, and place-based processes. An ethnographic (Emerson, 1995; Whitehead, 2004, 2005; P. Willis & Trondman, 2000; Zemliansky, 2008a), case-based approach (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012; Radley & Chamberlain, 2012) was utilised to understand the nature of Sheddies' shed-based relations by producing an 'insider's' account. This methodological basis allowed me to enter into the context of the participants to witness social interaction and relationship development as it was carried out in participants' lives (Blumer, 1986). In this chapter, I explore the methodological approach to the research and introduce the Sheddies who participated. I also detail the various methods of data collection that were used in the research. The first stage of the ethnographic approach involved fieldwork and auto-ethnography (Anderson, 2006; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Spry, 2001) over a 14 month period (March 2012 – April 2013). This work focussed on participation-observation and sustained social contact (P. Willis & Trondman, 2000) to explore the mundane taken-for-granted activities and struggles of participants' everyday lives at the Shed (Emerson, 1995). The second stage of the research involved a semi-structured focus group discussion and interviews to explore emergent themes and issues in more depth.

#### **3.1.1 Stage one: Participation-observation and journaling**

In stage one of the research, a prolonged period of participation-observation provided a means for me to get to know and engage in a range of activities with the Sheddies (Emerson, 1995). Immersion in contexts such as the Shed, privileges researchers with seeing how participants experience and respond to life events and the precipitating circumstances, and allows researchers to respond to these events themselves (Emerson, 1995). My participation in shared practices afforded Sheddies and I opportunities to familiarise with each other. It also provided me with insights into some of the dilemmas and uncertainties of everyday life that Sheddies encounter, as well as their individual and collective understandings of these events (Emerson, 1995), and the socio-political and cultural processes at work (Whitehead, 2004). Witnessing the Sheddies' everyday lives at the Shed in action also opened up a space for me to feel greater empathy around Sheddies' experiences and

happenings (Emerson, 1995). At the same time, Sheddies were able to familiarise themselves with the presence of a visibly younger male who was known to scribble field-notes in a notebook from time-to-time, had noticeably little working knowledge of tools or materials, and kept asking questions about the most mundane and taken-for-granted of everyday practices.

Focussing on a single Men's Shed through an ethnographic case-based approach allowed me close researcher-participant relationships by granting me considerable time with individual Sheddies and opportunities to jointly experience their everyday Shed experiences (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012). The building of personal relationships through participation in construction projects was essential for building rapport and for understanding relationships at the Men's Shed North Shore. By building trust, rapport, and on-going relationships with Sheddies through participation in material projects, and working towards their social advantage, I also sought to avoid what Drew (2006) has described as the Seagull Imperative (where the researcher swoops in, defecates on everything, and flies away).

When I initially became a member of the Men's Shed North Shore, the physical structure of the Shed had yet to materialise. Despite the absence of a physical shed, the Board of Trustees were fundraising and campaigning for members via stalls set up at various community events. Once the outer shell of the Shed was constructed by paid contractors, the Trustees invited the men who had signed up to be members to help furnish the interior of the Shed. My participation at the Shed was comprised predominantly of the furnishing of the Shed, and is discussed in greater detail in chapter four. At this stage in the research, I participated at the Shed twice a week, on Mondays and Wednesdays, typically from 10am to 4pm. At this time, the Shed was open on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays, from 9am to 4pm. When the Shed was first opened to members (March, 2012), fewer than 10 men were attending the Shed on any given day. By the end of my participation (April, 2013), this number had increased to around 50 men. At first, I carried a notebook about my person and attempted to record my observations at regular intervals throughout the day. However, I soon realised that doing so seemed to make some Sheddies uncomfortable, while also limiting my conscious presence at the Shed. I decided to leave my notebook at home, and to make notes of my observations at the end of the day. I found that by doing so, I was able to focus more on building rapport and on my own experiences of participation.

Trust and rapport were built largely through my active participation in the activities of the shed, particularly its construction, as well as participating as a paying member (\$50NZD per annum plus a \$20NZD voluntary donation). Activities included relocating equipment, repairing machinery, trussing

and framing walls, preparing the interior of the Shed for insulation, taking part in various carpentry projects to fashion tools, digging and removing earth, installing kitchen amenities, and so on. These are some of the material practices through which I worked to engage with my participants and conducted my fieldwork. I became a member of the Shed community rather than a 'detached observer'. The majority of Sheddies I interviewed supported my efforts to participate in the activities of the Shed. My involvement in construction activities was such that it was frequently (and jokingly) commented that if I didn't gain a Ph.D. from my work, then at least I would have the beginnings of a career as a carpenter (or engineer, or sweeper, depending on the project I was undertaking at the time). I later adopted this comment to build rapport with the new Sheddies I encountered, as it always seemed to get a laugh.

It is important to add that the impact of establishing friendships with the participants was bidirectional. As my fieldwork progressed and friendships with Sheddies evolved, I found myself questioning the ethical use of relationship-building as a method of soliciting information from people who might not have given it to me otherwise. I also experienced a tension between the pressures of my own academic agenda and trying to put the Sheddies at ease (c.f. Willis, 2010), given my understanding of their preconceptions and reservations about me as an academic and researcher. I balanced these concerns by focusing on practical outcomes for the Men's Shed at the same time that I worked to meet the academic requirements for obtaining a Ph.D.

Several things seemed to facilitate my acceptance into the social structure of the Shed. These included my participating in shared activities, which involved specifically getting my hands or clothes dirty. This extended to potentially hazardous activities such as working atop ladders or makeshift scaffolding, as well as habitually donning overalls as part of my 'uniform'. I also made efforts to meet and greet all Sheddies, and to develop friendships with them by offering to help them with their tasks. This was particularly the case if I had perceived uneasiness from them around me or if I had felt a favourable connection with particular Sheddies. The participants are men who bond through labour and projects, rather than through intellectual and sedentary deliberations. For this reason, it was perhaps unsurprising that the men did not connect with me when I presented myself too formally as a 'researcher'. It soon became clear that as an outsider, my first priority was to engage in the productive activities and functions within the lifeworld of the Shed in order to build rapport.

One event in particular seemed especially helpful. Following the external construction of the Shed, I joined a small group of Sheddies to help relocate equipment from the Chairman's personal

residence. After demonstrating my intent to participate in productive activity through physical labour, the members of this particular group responded by engaging with me in a more inclusionary manner, through welcoming acts such as meeting my gaze and shaking hands with me. To set the scene, we were engaged in transporting heavy machinery and building materials from an external site to the Shed:

*I was introduced to the members present by a Trustee. However, I received no response to my introduction as a researcher. When I mentioned and quickly explained my topic, I was 'stone-walled', one member even looked away and around the room... [After my involvement in the moving of materials,] a few members were quick to shake my hand and tell me their name. Two were still a little hesitant (e.g. they wouldn't meet my eyes in passing) and I had to seek them out to introduce myself personally. Both members had shown disinterest when I introduced myself as researcher. However, after getting stuck-in (by jumping into the back of the truck and handing out the larger, heavier timber), [the Sheddies] started to warm up to me (by meeting my eye and smiling while working).*

– Journal entry: March 26, 2012

Through the use of particular shared practices, I was able to engage more with the other men at the Shed. This was a crucial turning point in my transition from an 'outsider', to the early stages of acceptance into the social community of the Shed. In this instance, I was able to relate to these men through labour (P. Willis, 1977). My willingness to participate in labour practices played an immensely important role in my joining the camaraderie of the Shed, which was demonstrated via engaging with objects and sharing labour. Labouring at the Shed is not just about creating objects or achieving outcomes such as transporting timber, but about engaging in mutual practice, demonstrating co-operation, and engaging with other men as equal operatives. This was an important and useful occasion for me to set the tone for my participation. The Sheddies were able to see that I was prepared to work hard and get my hands dirty. After this event, I was often asked to do jobs, or was given tasks when I asked for them. I came to consider that being asked to complete a task represents acceptance and inclusion in this community as well as their faith in my competence and ability to be of use. I was also invited to Trustee meetings and took part in non-production days such as the Christmas get-together and the Grand Opening.

In short, my participation-observational approach comprised anything but inconspicuous observation. My very presence and attempts to be involved impacted on the Shed around me, both unconsciously and purposefully, until I became part of the atmosphere itself. Each time I was

present on site, I actively sought out members who were new to me, and introduced myself and my research intentions. Eventually, I became one of the attractions on the tours Trustees gave to new members. On each tour, I was introduced to new members as their researcher and then invited to explain my research with each introduction.

### **3.1.2 Stage two: adding value to the ethnographic approach through a group discussion and interviews**

Choosing to use a single exemplar of the North Shore Men's Shed proved useful in exploring these men's experiences in-depth, allowing for the complex nature of Sheddies' relationships that may not have been captured through the use of more reductionist techniques which attempt to generalise human behaviour through orderly, predictive, and decontextualised models (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012). My research provides concrete demonstrations of Sheddies' experiences and particular events within the Shed (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012; Radley & Chamberlain, 2012). Focussed fieldwork allowed me greater access and deeper understanding of Sheddies' practices than could laboratory or survey methods (Emerson, 1995; Whitehead, 2005), at the same time divulging cultural meanings that may not have been available to an 'outsider' (Zemliansky, 2008a).

Close collaborative relationships were important in this research, and reflect aspects of an action research approach (Estacio, 2012) where dialogue between researchers and participants serves to create accounts of meaning and practical use to participants (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012). By focussing on the practical application of interpretations which arose from this case study, I was able to move increasingly towards praxis by working *with* those who are involved, prompting me to produce research that can be of benefit to improving Sheddies' lives, rather than for merely conducting research for its own sake (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012). By positioning the Men's Shed North Shore as an exemplar, I hope that this research will highlight the significance of Sheddies' supportive practices, and communicate Sheddies' positive experiences to those with the power to support and bolster the Men's Shed movement (cf. Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012). In this way, this research constitutes a research strategy toward addressing socio-political issues faced by participants (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012).

My approach and use of an insider's account aided me in increasing the emic validity of my representation of participants (Whitehead, 2004; Zemliansky, 2008a). Emic validity is defined as an understanding of participants through their lifeworlds and meaning-making practices. My ethnographic fieldwork comprised a fundamental means of accessing participants' lifeworlds and enabled me to better interpret the accounts they later provided in more formal interviews

(Whitehead, 2005). It also meant that my interviews could be more conversational and participative in style. In comparison to out-of-context or one-off interviews, an ethnographic approach where interviews were nestled within ongoing interactions offered a more robust way of accessing and interpreting participants' everyday lives (Whitehead, 2005).

My focus on understanding participants' experiences from their perspective led me to build on my own experiences and observations by incorporating a semi-structured focus group discussion and interviews. These qualitative techniques were specifically selected to deepen the substance of my account of Sheddies' experiences (Emerson, 1995). Preparing the group discussion and interviews involved consultation with my academic supervisors and particular Sheddies. Throughout this process, much reflection was given to what I had learned about the Men's Shed North Shore in terms of appropriate language, and about approaching research topics that would be of mutual interest for both the research and participants. I also conferred with Sheddies I had become familiar with, about the interviews and discussion group, to gauge their responses. The research process was thus an ongoing inductive process which comprised negotiation to best suit the interests of multiple stakeholders, but which was also conducted in accordance with the rights, interests, and empowerment of participants in mind. The end result is an ethical and in-depth understanding of the contexts and processes that are significant to participants (Whitehead, 2005).

### **3.2 Ethics and engagements in the Shed**

The inductive approach which resulted in the two stages to the research, meant that I made two applications to the School of Psychology Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Waikato. Once the initial application for the ethnographic fieldwork was granted (in March, 2012) I made contact with the Chairman of the Men's Shed North Shore Trust, and presented him with the host information sheet in appendix one. I then presented the same sheet to the Board of Trustees, and gave them the opportunity to raise concerns and to make changes. As part of this process, I obtained written permission from the Trustees to participate in the activities of the Shed, to observe Sheddies, to record my observations, and to approach Sheddies about informing and participating in the research. While each of the Trustees came to talk to me individually about the project, no concerns were raised. My presence and research intentions were first communicated to members of the Men's Shed North Shore in the May 2012 issue of the Shed's monthly newsletter. A copy of my participant information sheet (presented in appendix two) was made available in the Shed's lunchroom for members to take and read. It was important to me that the second stage of the



research emerged from the first. After participating at the Men's Shed North Shore for a period of 14 months (March, 2012 - April, 2013), establishing a high level of rapport and amassing a large amount of journal information, it was appropriate to include group discussion and interview methods into the research design. Amendments to the ethics application were granted in April 2013 for conducting the focus group discussion and interviews.

As described earlier, I went to the Shed, watched, got to know people, and got involved. I took notes along the way. Largely, my participant-observation notes were recorded in a journal at the end of each participation day, using bullet points to summarise the events of the day. However, I found that my notes became more expansive as my fieldwork progressed. By the end of stage one, my notes were taking a full day to complete, and were done the day following my participation. An adapted form of a double-entry method described by Zemliansky (2008b) was incorporated into the journal work to promote continued analysis and reflection throughout my participation. In the present case, I divided my journal pages into two columns: one for recording my observations and thoughts, and one for recording after-thoughts, reflections, explanations, and queries that arose at the time of recording and re-reading. The Board of Trustees, as well as the Sheddies I made friends with or worked alongside, proved to be crucial informants and added valuable insights during this process. Informants were particularly useful in discussing and mapping the dynamics of the groups, and answering questions I had about my observations, particularly about members, the everyday routines of the Shed, and situations that 'stood out' to me. The time spent reflecting on the activities of the Shed enabled me to capture Sheddies' perspectives as well as reflect on my own.

I also found empirical materials from secondary sources to be useful in complementing field-work, and deepening my understandings of the Shed. These secondary sources assisted me in understanding participants' actions (Zemliansky, 2008a). They provided part of the context for my interpretations, and aided me in generating relevant questions to be further explored with the Sheddies (Whitehead, 2005). Newsletters and newspaper articles provided me with information about the Shed's history, language, and socio-political context (Zemliansky, 2008a). In particular, the newsletters as well as Sheddies' lunchtime discussions about other media informed my understanding of their priorities and language-use, and guided my interviewing and group discussion questions. Newspaper and online articles, as well as the Men's Shed North Shore website and blog were useful for following the progress of the Shed, and for keeping up to date on projects I was not

directly involved with. The Shed's monthly newsletter (entitled *Sheddies Chatter*) was also helpful in keeping current with the progress of the construction of the Shed as well as matters the Trustees saw as important to relay to Sheddies. Further, secondary sources also provided insight into the challenges Sheddies face in establishing a Men's Shed. In particular, there are a number of newspaper articles which report opposition from neighbours who raise concerns such as the potential for excessive levels of noise. These news articles illustrate the struggles some men face in trying to establish positive and supportive spaces for men.

I employed group discussion and interview methods to gain a more in-depth and more focused understanding of participants and the Shed than was possible through observation alone (Whitehead, 2005; Zemliansky, 2008b). With one exception (in which the interview was carried out the day before), the interviews took place in the weeks following the group discussion. To guide me in the group discussion, I drafted a 'facilitator reference' sheet to remind me of housekeeping subjects (such as audio recording and participants' right to choose not to answer questions), and topics to discuss (see appendix three).

The group discussion centred on three broad themes: the Shed, Sheddies, and place. The focus of the topic, 'the Shed', was to warm participants up to discussion, and to gain insight into shared understandings of the Men's Shed North Shore. The second topic, 'Sheddies', focussed on their conceptualisations and expectations of the men who might frequent the Shed. In the third topic, 'place', I tried to get a feel for particular spaces in the Shed that were of importance to them and the happenings that take place in these spaces. The interviews also centred on similar themes: the Shed, Sheddies, and participation. The topic, 'the Shed', was designed to initiate discussion, but also to gain insight into personal circumstances that led to the interviewee's participation at the Men's Shed North Shore. The second topic, 'the Sheddies', focussed on the interviewee's personal relationships with other Sheddies and the evolution of these relationships. In the third topic, 'participation', I asked interviewees to talk about their personal involvement in the Shed and its everyday happenings.

Throughout stage two, I drew heavily on ‘Rogerian’ counselling skills<sup>12</sup> to more fully encourage participants to discuss the wide range of their experiences at the Shed. In particular, I focussed on communicating my understanding of what participants were discussing, making reflective or clarifying statements (Jacobs & Reupert, 2014), and adopting the role of a ‘naïve enquirer’. The naïve enquirer role (an enactment by which ‘obvious’ questions are asked to further explore everyday taken-for-granted assumptions and happenings) was particularly useful in exploring participants’ everyday lives and seemingly mundane practices. By using this semi-structured style, I was able to capture information that was both of relevance to the study and of importance to Sheddies as indicated by the trajectories of their narratives. It also allowed me greater flexibility through spontaneous questioning.

### **3.3 Stage two participants**

A total of 12 Sheddies participated in stage two of the research. Seven of the 12 men participated in both the group discussion and an interview. Two of the 12 men participated in the group discussion only. Three of the 12 participated in an interview only. Actual names of participants involved in the group discussion or interviews were used where they requested I do so. Six participants requested pseudonyms and not all provided details about their age. Gleaning demographic information was difficult, as many participants did not return consent forms, preferring instead to provide verbal consent, which was audio recorded. I had hoped to include descriptive summaries of participants’ here, but while a few were happy to give details about their circumstance, others preferred not to divulge such information, and some preferred not to be identifiable from the information given. The ages, ethnicities, occupations at the time of the research, and aspects of the research the participants engaged in, are presented in table 1. Many Sheddies declined to take part in stage two of the research, but were more than happy to chat more casually and be observed in the Shed. In respecting their wishes not to take part in stage two, I have also removed their names from journal entries that appear in this thesis that resulted from data collection at stage one.

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<sup>12</sup> Carl Rogers identified empathy, unconditional positive regard, and genuineness as important for effective client-therapist relationships. Rogerian counselling is based on clients’ experiences of being heard and understood by counsellors (C Rogers, 1957; C. Rogers, 1959).

*Table 1. Participant information (at time of stage two of the research)*

Participant	Participated in Group Discussion	Participated in interview	Age	Occupation	Ethnicity
Dave	✓	✓	74	Employed part-time	NZ European
Deasy	✓	✓	82	Retired	NZ European
George	✓	✓	82	Retired	NZ European
Jerry	✓	✓	81	Retired	English
John	-	✓	-	Retired	English
Rat	✓	✓	67	Retired	NZ European
Ross Mc	-	✓	-	Retired	NZ European
Ross M	-	✓	-	Retired	English
Skip	✓	✓	67	Employed part-time	NZ European
Tuatara	✓	✓	62	Self-employed	NZ European
Mike	✓	-	-	Retired	NZ European
Fred	✓	-	75	Retired	South African

### 3.4 Analysis process

As a bricoleur, I drew on such constructs as auto-ethnography, discursive analysis, phenomenology, literary analysis, and so on, in a fluid and participant-responsive approach to exploring participants' Shed-based activities. My open-ended approach allowed a broader interpretation of the data than by choosing to 'fit' Sheddies' experiences into a particular framework. This involved taking an inductive orientation that sought to generate an interpretation from a case study rather than deductively confirming or refuting an existing theory (Emerson, 1995). The open-ended approach also helped me to attempt to interpret Sheddies' realities in the Shed as they might understand their own (Whitehead, 2004). This is not to say that I ignored existing theory or drew on it uncritically, but rather moved back-and-forth between appropriate theory and field-notes, shaping my interpretation and analysis of field-data (Emerson, 1995).

While not having a distinct hypothesis, I did have an idea about what I hoped to learn. Naturally, this had an impact on the activities of the Shed that I attended to and participated in, at the expense of others. At the same time, my experiences generated questions to be answered through further field-work and conversation. Whitehead (2004) refers to this as the process (formulating questions) and products (answering questions) of ethnography. The formulation of questions through time spent among participants helped me to answer questions that were of significance to participants, and which were attempted to be answered from participants' perspectives. At the crux of generating

questions, was extensive fieldwork and an open-ended exploration of Sheddies' practices. A flexible and participatory research approach was ideal in a research context which produced unanticipated findings, and allowed for changes to preconceived ideas (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012).

Acknowledging that I was entering a new social space with my own preconceptions, notions of absolute objectivity were clearly not relevant (Zemliansky, 2008a). Not trying to design all my questions and procedures before my encounters in the Shed, opened up space for me to act in an engaged and responsive manner, to make methodological and analytical choices along the way that reflected a combination of my own assumptions about what I saw and what the participants said and did. Specifically, my approach to fieldwork and interpretation of my own and others' responses, reflects Emerson's (1995) stance in which research 'truths' are contingent upon the perceptions of the researcher, the activities they have participated in, and the people they have encountered in the process. I also concur with Whitehead's (2004) argument that different ethnographers researching the same context could develop different findings due to personal differences and differing fieldwork dynamics.

My approach required me to engage in processes of reflexivity, and to be aware of my basis for interpretations and assumptions underlying my conceptualisation of Sheddies (Whitehead, 2004). I found it helpful to draw Sheddies into this process, where they could act in dual roles as both participants and adjudicators of the research. This reflexive dialectic opened up opportunities for the exploration of multiple 'truths' and various interpretations of the Shed, rather than trying to uncover one universal 'truth' (Emerson, 1995), reflecting a constructivist stance that participants' realities are jointly constructed with others in their social worlds (Whitehead, 2004). My use of ongoing fieldwork, reflexivity, and triangulation reflects my earlier assertion that Sheddies' lifeworlds are continuously (re)constructed with others in their attempts to understand theirs and others' actions (Emerson, 1995), including my own. Likewise, Radley and Chamberlain (2012) suggest that participants portray themselves in particular ways, and that it is likely that participants' portrayals will vary as a function of who they feel is observing them. In this way, the findings of this thesis should be conceptualised as joint products of both myself and my participants.

The analysis itself was an ongoing process that took place throughout and beyond my empirical engagements. While journaling and reflecting on entries, I was concurrently searching academic literature for appropriate ideas to aid the interpretation of my observations. The analysis drew on a range of qualitative techniques that evolved as the research and reading continued. Of particular use in making sense of participants' transcripts were the identification of recurring themes or patterns within the data. This process was informed by (but not limited to) common practices in qualitative

analysis such as reading and re-reading empirical materials, and dividing the data set into themes, which were particularly helpful in rendering the material manageable. I then used my journal entries and informal discussions with key informants to triangulate and explore this data. The themes were then subject to (re)interpretation with the help of various academic frameworks and theories. Here, continued back-and-forth interactions with empirical materials and the literature informed my interpretation and sense-making of the participants' lifeworlds. The participants themselves were also involved in aspects of the analytic process, such as Rat and Tuatara's use of theory from English literature, which I discuss in chapter five. The end product is a collection of compelling extracts and interpretations which relate back to the aims of the project.

### **3.5 Chapter summary**

In this chapter, I detailed the methodological framework I used in exploring Sheddies' (re)construction of self through socially and materially embedded and place-based practices. This involved an intensive ethnographic case study approach which incorporated extensive fieldwork, interviews, and a focus group.

My ethnographic work in the Shed facilitated my access to the labour practices that take place there. In turn, I learnt that such practices provide important entry points for members to participate in the Shed's social structure. By participating in the Shed's place-based labour practices, I was able to establish rapport with the Sheddies, and become more than an aloof onlooker, but a contributing and familiar member of the Shed.

This approach permitted me with a greater understanding of Sheddies' Shed-based lifeworlds than could detached and decontextualized methods alone. It also allowed me to shape the research with participants' viewpoints and benefit in mind. This approach was recognised by the Sheddies involved in this research, and granted me closer proximity to 'hard to reach' members of the Shed. After I had spent a considerable period of time participating at the Shed, I incorporated semi-structured interviews and a focus group into the research design to further enrich my understandings of the Shed and the men that participate there.

The analytic process was a collaborative and ongoing development which occurred throughout the duration of my participation in the Shed. Using a researcher-as-bricoleur approach, I drew on literature from across the social sciences and beyond, to shape my interpretation of the data. I also drew participants into this process. As I explore in chapter five, some participants even shared with me theory from English literature which they use to understand men's experiences of retirement.

The end product of this research is an 'insider's account' which arises from a focus on practicality and meaning for participants, and resulted from working *with* participants, rather than conducting research *on* them. The next chapter presents the first of three chapters in which I explore data that emerged from this research. It details the Shed as a site for this research and puts into context the data that emerged from my participation.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **The research site**

This chapter presents a tour of the Men's Shed North Shore and of the conduct of everyday life there (cf. de Certeau, 1984). I begin by locating the Shed materially and socially, and move on to cover the construction of the Shed itself, the general ambiance of the Shed throughout my participation, and important objects that were present during my participation. These objects represent valuable entry points for me to engage with the social and material realms of the Shed, and provided focal points for my participation in, and reflection on, the Shed. While discussing these objects, I also introduce some key characters who came to the fore in this period of the Shed's development, and the objects that anchor them within the context of the Shed. While doing so, I present these men as agentive and as tailoring how they presented themselves to me through their interactions (Radley & Chamberlain, 2012). This chapter not only situates the Shed, but also situates the men and I as engaged in dynamic relations that created the social scape of the Shed.

#### **4.1 Locating the Shed**

The Men's Shed North Shore is situated at Elliott Reserve, Glenfield, on Auckland's North Shore. The area is perhaps more mixed than is apparent in aggregate statistics and public perceptions. The 2013 census data indicate that Glenfield's income, age, and gender statistics are largely reflective of the greater Auckland region (Statistics New Zealand, n.d.). The median income for Glenfield residents aged 15 years and over was \$29,300, compared to \$29,600 for the greater Auckland region, with 38% receiving an annual income of \$20,000 or less (compared with 39% for the greater Auckland region), and 25% receiving an annual income of \$50,000 or more (compared to 29%). In regards to age demographics, 10% (431) of Glenfield residents were aged 65 years or over (with roughly equal numbers of older men and women) compared to 11.5% (162,788) of the greater Auckland population, which is, again, reflective of the greater Auckland region. Such figures offer a very broad picture, which can hide the diversity within Glenfield and income polarisation. An article in the North Shore Times states that the wider North Shore area has an erroneous reputation as being a particularly affluent area (L. Willis, 2013). The Birkenhead-Northcote Community Co-ordinator was interviewed for the article, commenting that "the stereotyping of the Shore as affluent makes it a



real struggle to get funding for vital projects” and that “there are pockets of poverty, [and] plenty of middle income earners” (L. Willis, 2013).

When I made initial contact with the Chairman of the Board of Trustees about participating at the Shed, the physical Shed itself had not yet been built. The Auckland City Council had approved building and resource consents for the construction of the Shed on the Glenfield site under a 10x10 year lease<sup>13</sup>. The building and earth-work was funded through grants from various community organisations, including the Birkenhead Licensing Trust<sup>14</sup>. Machinery and hand tools had been donated from the public and from local businesses, and were being stored at the Chairman’s personal residence. A 300m<sup>2</sup> concrete floor slab was laid in February 2012, and the kitset exterior of the Shed was erected by contractors in March 2012. This kitset structure is an aluminium garage-type unit built over an aluminium frame. The Shed is situated physically on land owned by the Auckland City Council and is adjacent to a popular tennis club. On the opposite side of the tennis club is a children’s playground. The walkway that runs between the Shed and tennis club is frequented by a wide range of local people who attend the tennis club or playground, or who use the walkway as a thoroughfare.

After completion of the kitset build, the keys for the Shed were handed over to the Trustees. While some tradesmen were hired for such tasks as plumbing, insulation, and drain laying, a core group of the Shed’s earliest paying members completed the electrical work, trussing and framing, tiling work, and insulation preparation on the interior of the Shed, as well as landscaping on the area immediately exterior to the Shed. The number of hours worked by Sheddies in constructing the Shed interior were recorded by the Trustees for the purpose of acquiring future funding, providing evidence of time spent working on projects that may be considered of benefit to the local community. More than 2,700 hours were recorded in the first nine months. The overall fit-out process took 13 months. During this time, I participated in the fit-out of the Shed and witnessed bonds between Sheddies develop and grow through our participation. Indeed, the data collected for this thesis focuses on the connections that were established during this time in the Shed’s conception. Figure 1 shows photographs of the Shed at various stages of its development, from concrete slab to internal fit-out by a core group of Sheddies. The internal fit-out of the Shed lasted until the shed’s official opening in April, 2013.

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<sup>13</sup> A 10x10 year lease is a ten-year lease with nine additional ten-year lease options, leading to a possible total lease of 100 years.

<sup>14</sup> The Birkenhead Licensing Trust was established by the New Zealand Parliament in 1967 to control the operation of licensed gaming premises in the Birkenhead area, though it no longer serves this purpose. The Trust is currently a ‘net proceeds committee’ of the Lion Foundation, responsible for approving grant funding to local community groups in Birkenhead and surrounding areas from gaming funds (Birkenhead Licensing Trust, n.d.).



*Figure 1. Photographs depicting the physical construction of the Men's Shed North Shore*

The photographs in figure 1 represent a transformation of the Shed's physical space, the interior of which was completed by its members, the Sheddies. As the physical structure of the Shed took shape, it provided and became the material means by which Sheddies developed relationships. The photographs depict not just the evolution of physical space, but also point to tangible evidence of the relationships that made it possible, and which endured long past the completion of the Shed's material development. As I touched on in chapter two, Sheddies' relationships should be conceptualised through consideration of the physical environment and material practice of the Shed, given the imbued and mutually shaping nature of objects in people's social networks. Physical locations within the Shed (the workshop, lunchroom, and office) were shaped by the Sheddies themselves, and the layout of such spaces can continue to be modified to accommodate the changing spatial needs of Sheddies. For example, workshop equipment and furniture is often moved to accommodate large projects which require particular social dynamics to achieve them, such as the collaborative efforts and input of multiple Sheddies. The development and modification of

spatial arrangements at the Shed renders visible the dynamic interplay between the social and material in the Shed, and their mutually defining nature (O'Donnell et al., 1993).

A core group of Sheddies consistently attended the Shed during this early stage. This core group were afforded a notable opportunity to work together and connect, due to the large-scale and labour-intensive nature of the Shed's fit-out. These men mingled and worked together in a constant flux in small teams. The makeup of these teams depended on the temporary demands of fit-out projects and milestones. The fluidity of work-team networks during the fit-out was governed by material requirements, with men being assigned and reassigned to work teams depending on the men present, and the physical requirements of each task. The project-based malleability of work-teams reflects the sociable and flexible nature of Sheddies in working together collaboratively. Projects such as the Shed's fit-out carry with them aspirational shared goals which draw Sheddies together and open up opportunities to engage and connect with a range of other men. This particular group developed and shared a sense of pride and ownership that stems from the seminal construction efforts that took place during the construction of the Shed:

*"In the end, I think that most of us who worked on the actual interior of this can feel, 'hey, we did a bloody good job, here', you know, that sort of, as a team we did well"*

- Ross M

In reminiscing on the Shed's fit-out, Ross draws on a sense of achievement and congratulatory reverence he anticipates is shared by others in this core group. Such historical achievements continue to texture the everyday practices of the Shed with appreciation. The very walls of the Shed are not just products of Sheddie labour, but offer a visual demonstration of the fruits of their solidarity and collaborative effort, and work to crystallise the relational ties of this core group. For these men, the Shed is both a monument and micro-space through which to establish a sense of connection to the ethos of collaboration and achievement in the Shed (Cassim, Stolte, & Hodgetts, 2015).

The internal physical space of the Men's Shed North Shore (see Figure 2) houses the gathering of men interested in shared social and physical activity. The collection of particular machinery for woodwork and metalwork projects renders visible the expected material practice that takes place at

the Shed. The open-plan setup and shared workstations in the workshop further imply the expectation of collaboration and open observation.



*Figure 2. Photos of the Shed's workshop space, and organisation of practical and symbolic objects such as tools*

The intentional gathering of functional objects for the express purposes of material productivity makes obvious the intent of these men to take part in construction projects and specific forms of material practice. On visiting the Shed for the first time, one's attention is drawn to the objects that might be used to participate both physically and socially at the Shed:

*"When I saw the shed, I thought, 'that'd be good. I like tools. I like cars and making things.' I could instantly see this huge workshop full of tools and people in there making things"*

- Tuatara

When entering the Shed, men observe objects that symbolise specific forms of activity, and this leads them to expect particular forms of object-use and communal practice. Such objects and practices, and the Shed space, provide refraction points through which these men come to place themselves in the Shed, and how they can relate to others there (Hodgetts et al., 2013; Hurdley, 2006; Reckwitz, 2002). These men respond to familiar objects such as tools, and to practices such as ‘making things’, that are emplaced in the Shed. In this way, Sheddies can come to understand and place themselves through engaging with particular activities, objects, and people present in the Shed (Heidegger, 1982). At the same time, these men draw on place-based markers to (re)anchor a sense of self and of continuity (Cuba & Hummon, 1993).

The gathering of specific objects and like-minded men with an interest in engaging in particular forms of physical and social interaction was highlighted by Tuatara, who reflects on the Shed as a place specifically for Sheddies, and that Sheddies are ‘in their place’ at the Shed:

*“When I saw that ad for the Shed, I thought, ‘wow, that’s great. That’s a social thing. It’s a making place. It’s a place where I can learn. Maybe I can show some people some of the techniques that I know’. So I think mainly what I’ve picked up from what the others have just said [in the group discussion], about this thing of having some people around, people a lot like that project, People in Place<sup>15</sup>. That was really good. That sums it up for me”*

– Tuatara

As the quote illustrates, when Tuatara first imagined the Shed, he felt a strong sense of connection since the Shed aligned with his values around sociability, creative projects, learning, sharing, and belonging. Tuatara anticipates his emplacement in the Shed, as he recognises it as a place where he has something to offer the group, and can establish his fit by demonstrating his competence to other Sheddies through the use of place-based objects and practices. The Shed exemplifies a place where common interests of ‘making’ and being social happen together, and where Sheddies can find a good person-place fit, and flourish. Sheddies such as Tuatara respond positively to this and feel ‘placed’. The gathering of a place-based group opens up a wide range of social and practical opportunities for Sheddies to engage with other similarly ‘placed’ men.

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<sup>15</sup> In his interview, Tuatara made reference to a book entitled ‘*People in Place*’, a research project looking at the history of early modern London (1550-1720) which focussed on the history of particular families and houses.

As can be seen on the floor plan of the Shed in figure 3, the largest area of the Shed (which contains the labels, 'model making', 'woodwork', and 'engineering') is given over to the workshop which houses the productive activity of the Shed. The second largest area is the lunchroom (labelled 'kitchen/lounge') in which work-breaks and meals are taken. Both areas are sites for social participation and intentional camaraderie development. These are key themes discussed in chapters five and six.

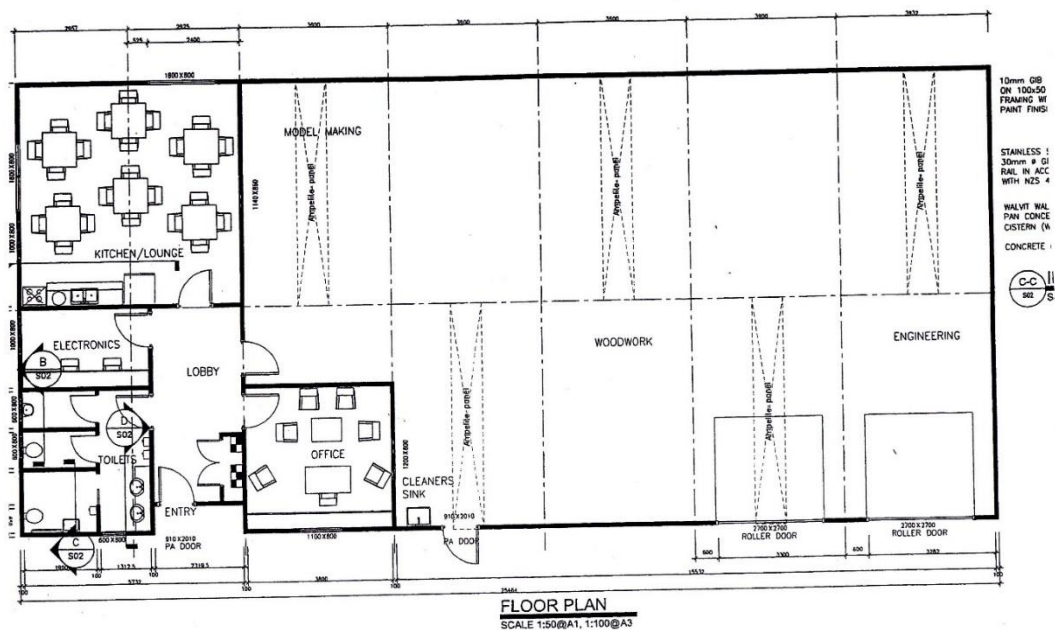


Figure 3. Floor plan diagram of the Shed

The physical layout of the Shed reflects the importance of the workshop and lunchroom areas, and the activities that happen there: a space for particular forms of labour (woodwork and metalwork, in particular), and a space for socialising and relaxing over food and drink. There are also smaller spaces at the Shed for other forms of labour (i.e. the office and electronics room) and ablutions, though these spaces were not foregrounded and discussed by participants (with the exception of John, who jovially referred to electronics as a 'black art'). These spaces were general taken-for-granted micro-elements of the Shed space.

The workshop offers a large space in which clusters of Sheddies work together and build camaraderie through collaboration and conversation. In the lunchroom, general conversation happens with the collective membership of the Shed who break for lunch at the same time.



Participants drew attention to the evolving nature of their relationships and how these manifest differently in particular spaces within the Shed (Hodgetts & Rua, 2010), suggesting that relationships for the participants are very much influenced by the material landscape of the Shed.

I experienced first-hand the impact of the Shed's layout, indeed its very atmosphere, on my navigation of Shed spaces and approaches to social interactions in the Shed. With the exception of lunch time, the workshop space in the Men's Shed North Shore is often a hive of focussed activity. This can culminate in an assault on the senses to someone not used to woodwork or metalwork workshop environments. The noise and hubbub is regularly punctuated with greetings and bursts of conversation, and it is in this maelstrom that Sheddies collaborate, connect, find purpose, and take pride in their work. The following journal entry describes my reaction to the typical Shed environment on a particular day.

*I chose to enter the shed through the doorway [leading into the lunchroom] (as opposed to the roller door) [which leads directly into the workshop] because I wanted to say hi to everyone gradually. If I walk in through the roller door [and straight into the workshop], I get a little overwhelmed by the noise and trying to take in everything at once. It is hard for me to say hi to people and have decent conversations with them when I am still trying to adjust to the often chaotic atmosphere of the Shed. The first men I encountered were working in the lunch room where I deposited my bag. The lunch room was in disarray and there was scaffolding dominating the room. Two of the guys said hi and continued working. After hanging around for a while and watching them work, I wandered off into the Shed proper. Ross saw me from across the Shed and came to say hi, and I told him that I hardly recognised the place with all the walls stuffed with insulation. He seemed to be very pleased and excited at the progress. I continued walking through the Shed, greeting the Sheddies and asking if I could be of help.*

– Journal entry: August 27, 2012

The noisy and productive atmosphere of the Shed is a powerful determinant of Sheddies' interactions with the Shed and with other men that participate there. At the same time, it is also welcoming and able to be navigated in multiple ways. There is often a lot going on at once that renders this an immersive space.

The Shed is also located socially within the community through the labour and gifts it supplies to local organisations. In particular, men's participation in the Shed anchors them in the wider community through opportunities to produce goods that are expected to benefit local community groups. Their participation and engagement with community activities reflects their connection with those communities (Putnam, 1995). The opportunity to connect through giving is a particular incentive for some men who participate in the Shed. As Dave explains:

*"The Shed will keep going if we've got good projects, and not just private [personal] projects, but some good community projects. Cos people are quite altruistic. A lot of guys want to do things for the community"*

- Dave

The Sheddies use the Shed's core objects, machines and tools, to make new objects for community spaces. This is part of how the Shed is woven into the community as a local feature. Objects that are produced and gifted to the community symbolise Sheddies' desire to contribute to the surrounding community and to care for others. Service to the community is an important element of the Shed's philosophy and character. Dave's account points to a shared understanding of joint humanitarian contribution in which the material produce of Sheddies' effort benefits a range of people (Walster, Berscheid, & Walster, 1973). Consumption of, and participation in, joint community-oriented action (re)affirms Sheddies' shared understandings and identity development of community and goodwill. The production and donation of useful objects to community groups, such as local kindergartens, anchors Sheddies to the Shed through a shared sense of altruism and giving, as well as positioning the Shed positively within the community. Figure 4 depicts 'thank you letters' from local kindergartens in response to objects constructed and donated for the children's use.



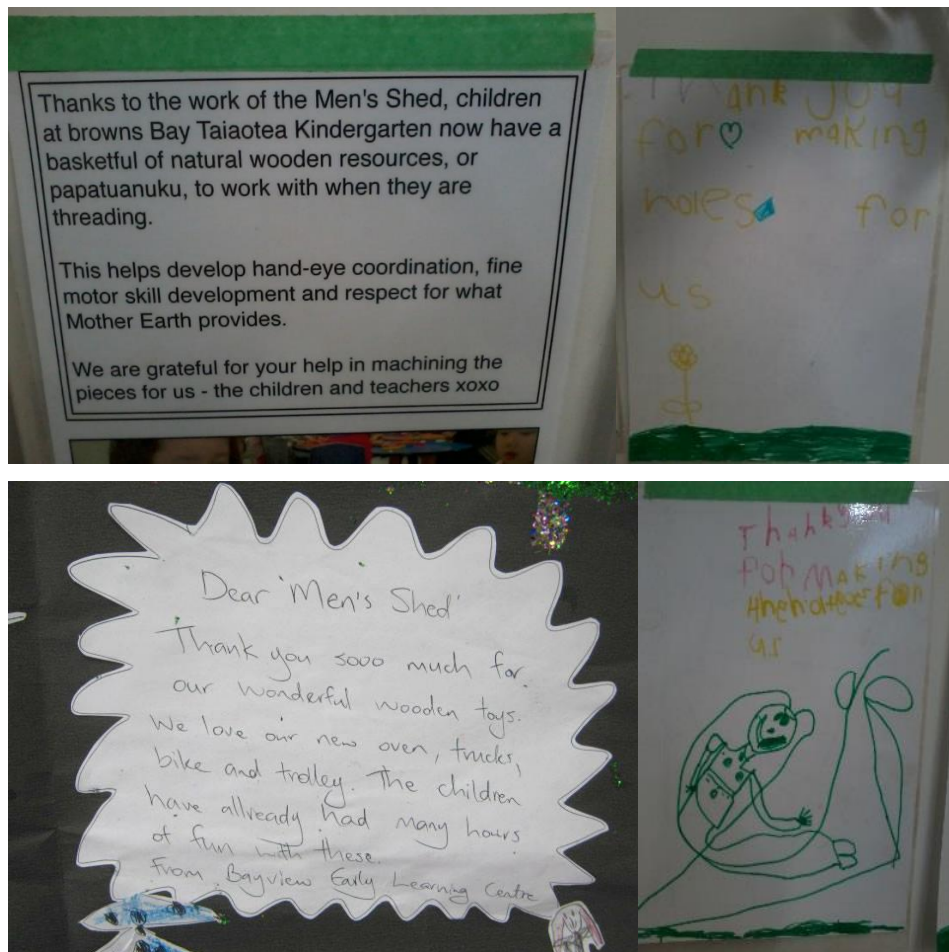


Figure 4. Thank you letters from local kindergarten for the Shed's contribution to learning materials

Donations of hand-crafted objects to kindergartens are a physical expression of the Sheddies' care for local children (Hodgetts & Rua, 2010), and the Sheddies desire to provide for others. The letters above point to the collective agency of the Shed, and also to the recognition of production, contribution, and care the Shed contributes to the community. Such demonstrations offer an alternative to a widespread climate of concern and suspicion regarding men and their interactions with children. It is important that the efforts of these men are acknowledged and celebrated as valid ways men can contribute to the wellbeing of local children and the community.

It can be difficult to advocate for male-specific spaces in urban contexts given certain climates of fear surrounding men. For example, in a conversation with John, a Men's Shed (in another part of New Zealand) had been opposed by neighbours based on their concern about the risk of abuse to local children at the hands of older men. Hodgetts and Rua (2008) have also drawn attention to the regulation of men's interactions with, and even proximity to children in response to public concern.

John stated that he sees Sheddies as guardians of the local residents as well as a helpful part of the community. The Shed is a site through which men literally carve out a caring and productive space within their local community, and offer support through practices of labour, gifting, and guardianship.

#### **4.2 A tour of some important objects located at the Shed**

Objects play an important role in the way the Shed, construction projects, and relationships are (re)produced. In the Shed, objects such as tools and raw materials are much more than physical things employed by the Sheddies to construct specific projects. Rather, objects are agents in Sheddies' social interactions and help shape Sheddies' patterns of relationship-building. The objects that have been brought into and positioned within the Shed have an ongoing influence on the social interaction that takes place there (Gibson, 1979; Wood & Giles-Corti, 2008), which is rendered visible through action (Gaver, 1996). Recognising that people, settings, and relations can be mutually defining (Altman, 1993) is an important step in understanding the Shed. This section introduces a selection of three important objects in the Shed and the consumptive practices that were associated with these objects.

##### *The exemplar of the bandsaw*

The restoration of a damaged bandsaw became pivotal to my sense of contribution and emplacement at the Shed. The bandsaw is depicted in figure 5, and was an object I used to demonstrate my willingness to engage with the material culture of the Shed. My contribution to the restoration of this damaged object set the scene for my ongoing interactions with particular men. The bandsaw is now a fixture of the Shed and is still frequently used by Sheddies in woodworking projects. Here, I want to explore the ways in which this particular object provided me with a fundamental entry point into the social landscape of the Shed. I do so in order to demonstrate the ways in which particular objects, and the people that use them, become entwined within this place.



Figure 5. Photographs that depict the restoration of a damaged bandsaw.

In a pivotal learning moment during the restoration of the bandsaw, I realised that labour, and tangible evidence of it, could act as a medium of exchange (Magdol & Bessel, 2003) which could embed me within the social structure of the Shed. The journal entry below describes how I purposefully approached a Sheddie (who did not take part in an interview or the group discussion) with whom I had not previously managed to build much of a connection. I offered the Sheddie practical labour and received engaged social interaction in response:

*I decided to engage [the Sheddie], firstly because I hadn't had much contact with him, but I also wanted to make an effort in getting to know him. [He] had been one of the men who was particularly disinterested at my introduction as a researcher on the first day of relocating the equipment. Because of this I have been expecting some resistance from him in regards to my project. I didn't have the courage to reintroduce myself as researcher at this stage, so instead asked if I could be of any help to him doing maintenance on the bigger machines. I encountered no resistance at all. Rather, he immediately said that he needed a 'grub-screw' for the machine he was working on (though he didn't explain to me what a grub-screw was) and showed me the hole where the screw was supposed to go. He also led me to a bandsaw that had sparked when he had plugged it in. He explained that it was sparking and that the motor needed to be taken off and the dust blown out.*

– Journal entry: April 23, 2012

The extract demonstrates how, in this research, practical activity or labour functioned as the crucial conduit for building trust, rapport, and connection. It also points to an act of inclusion within the ongoing Shed interactions that enabled the two of us to initiate collaboration and to become entwined within the Shed. I sought to 'fit' my action in a way that I had come to realise was at the heart of the Shed. This methodological insight was based on the accumulation of my interactions with Sheddies. This previously reserved and somewhat distant Sheddie responded immediately to an offer to help that was given in a way that was congruent with the practices of the Shed. By requesting to engage in the materiality of the Shed, he responded in kind and provided a vehicle for me to engage in productive activity. His 'apprenticing' of me represents a tradition of passing down skills across generations in backyard sheds, and reflects the entwined nature of 'doing', learning, and material expression that imbue the Shed. Moving forward from this moment, my ongoing approach to participating in the Shed placed objects as focal points in my interactions with other Sheddies, through which I continued to demonstrate my willingness to engage practically in the Shed, and to not simply observe what was going on.

The bandsaw was a device through which I experienced encouragement, creativity, resourcefulness, independence, observation, discussion, contribution, guidance, and particular approaches to what I consider informal 'apprenticeship'. Engaging practically with the bandsaw provided a crucial opportunity for me to learn about the dynamics of labouring in the Shed first hand, as I explain in my journal:

*On asking if I could lend a hand with anything, [the Sheddie I had approached] suggested that I could build a dust-guard for the bandsaw I had taken the motor off, which he had since replaced. This would involve attaching a 'shelf' above the motor so that sawdust from the cutting machine above would not fall into the motor. I had no idea about how to do this so I asked where to start. He suggested placing two wedges on either side of the motor and placing a shelf on top. I must have misunderstood him the first time because when I repeated what I thought he had suggested, to confirm I had the right idea, he responded that I could do it any way I liked. I am beginning to think that there may be no one 'right' way to do things when it comes to doing things in the Shed. It seems that ingenuity, inventiveness, and freedom of creativity are valued. I explained that I still wasn't quite sure what to do, so he led me to some off-cuts and found a rectangular piece of wood that I could cut into two triangles. I was a little worried that he would lose patience with me, since I have no wood-working knowledge and have to be taught from scratch and explained everything twice. He didn't, though, so I wonder if he may have instructed people before. After explaining what he*

*thought I should do, he went back to what he had been doing (continuing to make children's toys which [Deasy] had started) and left me to work on my own (the machines we were working with were side-by-side, so we were working in the same space). [Another Sheddie] came over and chatted with [the Sheddie I was working initially with], then took an interest in what I was doing. I explained that I had cut the wedges for the shelf but wasn't sure how to fix them to either side of the motor. Here, [the second Sheddie] took on a sort of mentor role and guided me through the rest of the process. He discussed with me where I wanted the screws to go and gave suggestions on how to do so. He then helped me find the appropriate screws, led me to an electric drill machine (I should start recording and learning the proper names of these machines), showed me how to use it, and left me to finish drilling. While attaching the wedges, [the first Sheddie] started a conversation with me, asking what I planned to make for myself in the Shed. When talking to me, I was surprised that he knew my name, given that even though I have talked to him before, I have never introduced myself properly. I said that the toddler's toy [Deasy] intended me to make was of interest. I asked what he intended to make, and he said that he was not going to make anything for himself because he had a workshop of his own at home and could make his own things whenever he wanted.*

– Journal entry: May 28, 2012

The extract demonstrates how Sheddies responded to my early efforts in productive activity. It exemplifies their patience and willingness to guide me, and also their interest in getting to know me once I engaged in the Shed on their terms. People and objects become linked and are bound to each other through their engagements (Allen, 2011; Bourdieu, 1986). The Sheddie in the extract gifts me with a sense of connection with the saw, and so also to himself and to the Shed. Through a form of supervised autonomy, he allows me space to learn for myself on a project of my own. Such actions reflect shared understandings that are housed within, and work to (re)produce, particular social structures (Geertz, 1973). Indeed, the Sheddie in the extract above reproduces the Shed ethos of experiencing the world through doing, and invites me into the Shed in a very taken-for-granted yet significant way via everyday Shed practices. This is a place-based gesture of inclusive goodwill that is conveyed through material practice. This example illustrates how networks of positive and affirmative relations can become anchored in particular objects, places, and related activities. My engagement with the materiality of the Shed via the bandsaw thus opened up opportunities to take part in (re)producing the Shed through specific forms of interaction and the appropriate 'fitting in' of social action. Through such gestures, the caring, supportive, and communal Shed was opened up to

me. Engaging with these men as a Sheddie meant engaging in productive activity, which was fundamental for building rapport, and a vital precursor to the possibility of doing research in the Shed. It shows the importance of participation rather than simply observation in ethnographic orientated research.

Attaching the shelf to the bandsaw also gave me a sense of achievement. This sense contributed to my understanding of how I expect Sheddies to enjoy the Shed in response to their participation in material projects:

*I left the Shed feeling extremely good. Not only had I had a lot of fun working with my hands and learning about power tools, I felt like I contributed meaningfully to the Shed by helping to restore faulty tools for others to use. I also felt more like a Sheddie, being one of them rather than someone outside looking in. I really enjoyed [the two supporting Sheddies'] collaborative approach to learning and problem-solving. While my thoughts had turned to my family as I walked back to the car, I was also very excited about returning to the Shed to complete the task I had started.*

– Journal entry: May 28, 2012

Contributing to the restoration of the bandsaw was a positive experience involving material contribution and relationship building, alongside a sense of placement, belonging, worth, and the anticipation of returning to recreate that experience. Such experiences generated a sense of meaning, relationality, and continuity that collapsed the distance between myself as a younger male pursuing academic studies and the older retired men, many of whom had never engaged in tertiary study. At the same time, the men apprenticing me via the bandsaw were socialising me into a place that is textured primarily by tradesmen and working class men who 'read' me, a university doctoral researcher, as being from a different class or social group. However, they were willing to take the time and care to welcome me and re-socialise me as a contributing Sheddie. People are called into the world in particular ways through their engagement with others (Heidegger, 1953). At the same time as I was called into the world as a Sheddie through my engagement with emplaced actors and practices, they were called into the world as mentors and carers by guiding me.

The journal entry above is an example of place-based 'being', social engagement (Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982), and relationship development with other men (Hodgetts & Rua, 2010) at the Shed. Importantly, it reflects the positive function of Sheds in providing men with opportunities for positive experiences, relational practices, social engagement, community, valuable contribution, and inclusion (Golding, 2011a; Ormsby et al., 2010). This materially expressive form of caring and sharing

is a manifestation of care in a gendered way that is often overlooked—if at all acknowledged—in literature theorising men and masculinities.

Relationship and rapport building are intrinsically related to labour practices in the Shed and are bound up in class and gender. This may go some way in explaining the difficulty I encountered initially in striving to feel like I belonged in the Shed space. My sense of connection and belonging was not automatic due to differences in age and background, and I came with the added persona of being an academic researcher. Connection and rapport do not appear spontaneously in the Shed - they need to be worked at. For some new Sheddies it can take time to feel one fits in, particularly if differences in identities bound to class and education are to be navigated. In the extract below, I demonstrate the difficulty I experienced in forming a connection with another Sheddie in the context of our contrasting educational backgrounds. I was subject to what I now believe were attempts to reduce imagined differentials in intelligence symbolised by academic/labour differences. After continued efforts of joint labour, banter, and sharing company, the Sheddie reciprocated and we ended up developing a positive relationship. My journal entry states:

*[A Sheddie] joined me and we created another 'production line' process; me drilling pilot holes, and he attaching the nogs with screws. It was during this that [the Sheddie] enquired about the word 'researcher' on my name tag; I had forgotten to introduce my reason for being there when I had introduced myself (Why? How had I forgotten this?). When I explained, he replied, "so you're one of those educated people; whereas I am one of those uneducated people". [The Sheddie] said that mine was a good topic because people like myself get to participate in activities we would otherwise not participate in, and 'people like him' get to socialise when their social networks have disappeared having retired from work. Despite this, though, he seemed offended by my being an academic so I tried to lighten the atmosphere with a joke [another Sheddie] had made. I said that [the other Sheddie] had told me that if I didn't get my PhD done, then the Sheddies would at least make a carpenter of me. [The Sheddie] seemed to consider this then laughed and exclaimed "that's probably not what you had in mind!" I thought that I had broken the ice a little, but after attaching the nogs, [the Sheddie] quizzed me on whether I could convert centimetres to millimetres in my head ("What is one metre plus 10 centimetres in millimetres?"). He also made a comment about having to be good at physics when working with large machinery. After this, [the*

*Sheddie] left to help some of the other Sheddies. I think my being an academic, not necessarily my position as researcher, sets up a potential barrier between some of the Sheddies and myself; one that I have to work to get around. I am reminded of the attitudes of the first NZ colonials to the 'new chums', in which I am the new chum<sup>16</sup>. After making an effort to talk to him when I could, or to stand next to him when we were watching the others work, I think he started to loosen up a bit and he told me an amusing story about trying to get heavy machinery up an elevator when they weren't supposed to.*

- Journal entry: September 03, 2012

Experiences and expectations of labour and paid employment are subjectively related to social stratification and help shape people's understandings of class and social structure (P. Willis, 1977). Labour is a predominant form of connection with the world in which class identities are understood and forged (P. Willis, 1977). Indeed, it is evident in the extracts above that some men relate to the world and other people in it through lifelong working-class practices that men have engaged in to support themselves and their families in a capitalist context. However, labour is but one half of developing connection in social landscapes defined by labour, with social participation constituting the other half. The journal entry above particularly illustrates that despite being mutually engaged in labour, it is still necessary to negotiate differences in age and occupation, to build rapport and common ground, and to work to create a social place in which to connect.

My participation in fairly mundane tasks, which at first seemed unrelated to my research, generated break-through moments for me in gaining access to the Shed as an 'insider'. By offering to help, following through with my offers, and achieving lasting material results, I was able to experience the Shed as I anticipate other Sheddies might also experience it. In particular, I can reflect on my experiences of contribution, achievement, and placement, and how I stamped my presence physically on the Shed. The bandsaw is an object that is imbued with meaning for me (and those who participated in its restoration with me, or who took an interest), and gives me a reflection point to consider my interactions with the Shed and the (re)production of its culture as a Sheddie.

### *The exemplar of scaffolding*

Everyday, taken-for-granted objects that are used for practical purposes draw Sheddies together and open up places for men in the Shed to notice and appreciate each other. In this section, I use the exemplar of scaffolding as an object of care, to reveal the ways in which Sheddies look out for one-

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<sup>16</sup> New chums: the European settler term for aristocrats and new British immigrants



another and take notice of each other's wellbeing. Figure 6 depicts two forms of scaffolding which were used in the fit-out of the Shed. The photograph on the left depicts makeshift or 'trestle' scaffolding, created by resting a wooden board between two trestles, and using clamps to secure the board in place. The photograph on the right depicts more 'professional' and secure scaffolding which was hired from a scaffolding company.



*Figure 6. Various forms of scaffolding used to construct the internal Shed*

Scaffolding is used to provide access to spaces that are normally out of reach due to height. Navigating scaffolding generally requires a degree of flexibility and agility. Sheddies drew on characteristics that set me aside from the group (such as my younger age and assumed agility, and their seniority) and used this to their advantage in completing work via scaffold.

*I ended up running up and down the scaffolding, clamping and drilling the tri-board in place. I think this was left to me due to my age and assumed younger energy as, at one point, when a shorter panel had to be carried up the scaffold and put into place, [a Sheddie] commented that this particular job be left for the 'boy' (me).*

– Journal entry: July 18, 2012

My visually comparative age, with its connotations of energy and agility and a lower position in labour hierarchies, was rendered visible through the use of scaffolding. Such factors played a large role in the functions I fulfilled in relation to other Sheddies, particularly within, but not restricted to,

work teams that formed around scaffolding. Visual attributes are accompanied by opportunities for banter and the performance of particular roles that bring about hierarchies of labour (P. Willis, 2001). My perceived attributes were also drawn on by Sheddies to complement their own skills and abilities:

*[Skip] called out to ask if I was busy—which I wasn't—and asked if I could climb the scaffolding where he was. I helped to hammer some tri-board in place while he held it to stop it from bowing. He commented that I was more agile than he, so could reach around the side of the tri-board which was at an odd angle to the scaffolding.*

– Journal entry: July 23, 2012

Sheddies relate to one-another through labour, by observing others working, collaborating, and asking for help on particular tasks. Skip's comment exemplifies how Sheddie's skills are brought to the fore and observed by others through collaborative labour, but also how Sheddies appreciate one-another through verbal compliments.

Working on scaffolding should be approached with caution, particularly makeshift scaffolding (shown on the left-hand side of figure 6). In response to Sheddies' awareness of the potential for accidents when working on scaffolding, they observed and encouraged others' safety practices. The journal entry below exemplifies a situation in which a group of Sheddies observed the unsafe practices of one particular Sheddie, and intervened before an accident occurred:

*In putting up the packers, we re-arranged the 'trestle' scaffolding over some piles of wood that were in the way. One Sheddie and I climbed up to attach the first packer. The scaffolding was sagging in the middle so this was scary as hell. Once the packer was up, I was glad to get down and not too keen on getting back up again. To attach the other end of the packer, we couldn't get the scaffolding in the right position, so [the Sheddie I was working with] put a ladder on top of the pile of wood and he climbed up to attach the other end of the packer. Onlookers were dubious about the idea but no-one stopped him from doing it. At first, the screw wouldn't bite in to the steel, so [the Sheddie atop the ladder] had to call out for another one. The longer he was up the ladder, the more nervous I think the observing Sheddies got. When [the Sheddie atop the ladder] went to climb higher, on to the uppermost rung of the ladder, all the observing Sheddies called out not to go any higher, so he stayed where he was and tried fixing the screw again from where he was. Once he had finished, many of the observing Sheddies called for him to come down, and it was decided that that was enough for the day.*

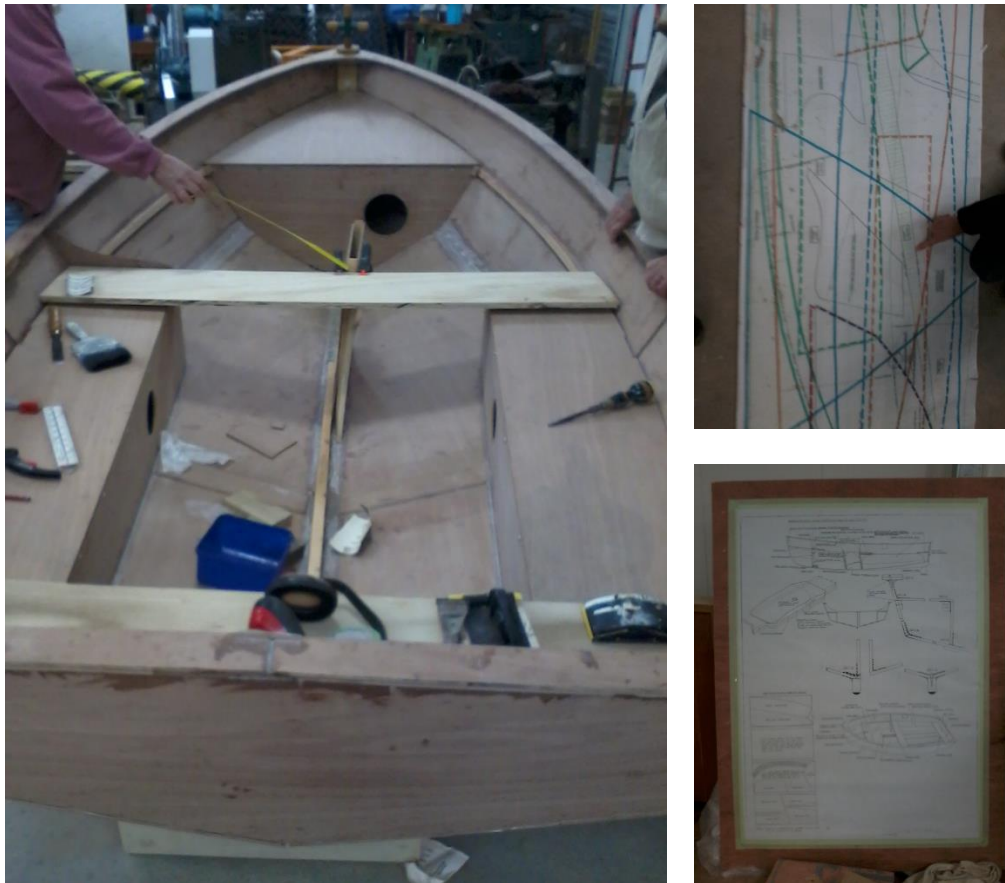
- Journal entry: September 03, 2012

Everyday situations at the Shed can bring Sheddies into danger. In this context, risk is tolerated to a certain extent, though mitigated through the surveillance and intervention of other Sheddies. This contrasts with popular academic literature which positions all men as blatant risk takers and unconcerned about safety (C. Lee & R. G. Owens, 2002; O'Neil, 2008).

In short, objects such as scaffolding are more than just devices to achieve certain material ends, such as reaching high places. These objects are imbued with meanings related to risk and safety, and which prompt practices of care and protection at the Shed. The use of these objects requires some skill to navigate, and draws users' gaze to men most able to do so. Sheddies produce the Shed by drawing on objects and labour practices in order to relate to, and care for one-another.

#### *The exemplar of Deasy's boat*

Deasy's boat (see figure 7) was a common topic of conversation amongst the Sheddies. Frequently discussed objects, such as Deasy's boat, provide a common vocabulary that can be drawn on in exploring broader social constructs (such as camaraderie) present in Sheddies' everyday lives (Hodgetts & Rua, 2008). Such collaborative objects render visible the fruits of social interaction and therefore also the development of social identity (Hurdley, 2006) and self, through an interplay between the material and the social (Allen, 2011; Mills, 1959; Thrift, 2000b). As this section will show, when Sheddies discuss significant objects embedded in the spaces in which they live their lives, they also discuss themselves (Hurdley, 2006), their understandings of social structures, and locate themselves within them. In the process, the Shed becomes a prime place for doing relational meaning-making and the shaping of selves through object-mediated interactions that occur in the Shed space.



*Figure 7. Photograph of Deasy's boat during its construction, and the plans used to construct it*

In describing the boat project, Deasy recounted to me a story in which, through his wife and her knitting group, he had connected with a well-known New Zealand boat builder who supplied Deasy with a 'stitch and tape' dinghy plan. The boat builder was given some firewood in return for the plans, and the boat builder came into the Shed from time-to-time to monitor progress and to advise the Sheddies during the boat's construction. As Deasy recalls:

*"Jim Young was around at our place one day picking up wool or dropping off a blanket, and he saw me in my workshop chopping up some old bits of wood into fire wood lengths and throwing them into a bin. He said, 'oh, what's happening with that wood?' I said, 'well, all my mates now haven't got open fires but I know a fellow over in the city who's got an open fire and I'll probably give it to him', 'oh' he said, 'we've got a little open fire', and I said, 'oh yeah, what's your name?' He said, 'I'm Jim'. I said, 'well, I'm [Deasy] and he said, 'I'm Jim Young' and as soon as he said that, I remembered: Jim Young! I said, "you're not the boat designer are you?", 'Yes, yes, that's me'. And it was him, there he was, a well-known yachting and boat*

*and launch designer... So I immediately, I said to him, 'you might be just the man I want to see. I'm thinking of, in the Men's Shed when we get going, to build a little dinghy for my grandchildren'. And he said, "oh yes, I've got some plans, come round and see me'. So I did. And I dropped him a load of fire wood in one day and he said, "here we are. This is a stitch and tape dinghy". He said, "I designed this off a format of stitch and tape," had been formulated somewhere else in the world before his time, but he modified it and he designed this current dinghy that we're building. He's been down here keeping an eye on us and helping us"*

- Deasy

Deasy's narrative illustrates the social networks, acts of reciprocity, and mutual interests that he draws on to facilitate his activities in the Shed. Such social networks provide an opportunity for Deasy to access a desirable resource (i.e. the dingy plans depicted on the right-hand side of figure 7). Objects such as Deasy's boat thus bridge distinct social groups and can facilitate the flow of resources between them (Putnam, 2000). In drawing on members of the Shed for labour to achieve the construction of the boat, Deasy reveals a highly practical social structure and a rich range of resources (such as help, expertise, and interests) embedded within the Shed (Bourdieu, 1986). Deasy's interest in bringing such resources to the fore is conscious (Coleman, 1988), and he deploys these resources to achieve the mutual goals of the group through joint effort (Putnam, 1995). The communal setting and achievement of goals through the deployment of human and non-human actors defines the Shed and (re)produces it through shared material projects. As Deasy explains:

*"I just consider myself as one of the boys and with a bit of knowledge. But for their help and their expertise and their interests, I wouldn't be making the progress with my little boat that I'm making. So to me, that is the result of the whole promotion of the shed idea"*

- Deasy

A multitude of material projects were completed by various Sheddies during the period of my fieldwork research. However, Deasy's boat stood out due to the size and complexity of the project, and the number of Sheddies who assisted in its creation. The collaborative contribution of resources that went into constructing Deasy's boat, and the use of the boat as a resource in itself, are important in understanding the boat's significance within the context of the shed (Money, 2007). Ross, the Chairperson of the Men's Shed North Shore, explains the significance of larger collaborative projects to the Shed, and how these material projects function to support health and wellbeing for men:

*“That’s probably one of the main things that the [Men’s Shed] project’s designed for, is to get guys out of their homes where they tend to shrink into their own cocoon and invariably depression sets in, mental illness and the like. Whereas, if they can get here, they find that they can make new friends, they can help others. And the boat’s a typical example. You’ve got the owner of it, that’s never built a boat in his life, and you’ve got four or five guys also that’ve never built boats before. But it was like a blimin’ magnet. They all just came together and next minute you’ve got the boat. Amazing.”*

- Ross McE

In responding to men’s loneliness and social isolation, ‘making new friends’ and ‘help[ing] others’ become part of the history of projects such as the boat. The Shed is about social connection, care, and empathy, and is manifest materially in such projects, and help to bring their construction into context. The boat reveals the extent of goodwill and social capital that is present at the Shed. In essence, the boat offers a positive material response to older men’s experiences of social isolation and displacement.

In short, Deasy’s boat played a significant role in the Shed during this particular stage of its development, and was a communal effort. Drawing attention to the boat reveals the intentional demonstration of care, support, and friendship that happens in the Shed. Deasy’s boat is a materially and socially significant project that textured Sheddies’ everyday lives through collaboration and achievement. In chapters five and six, I explore the importance of such objects in the enactment of continued wellbeing in later life, and the development of relational bonds that permeate the Shed.

### **4.3 Chapter summary**

In this chapter, I located the Shed geographically and socially, and presented an ‘insider’s’ account of the lifeworld I experienced there. The Shed is a distinctly noisy and practical place, and did not in the first instance present a typical setting for conducting psychological research. However, this particular group of men feel comfortable and thrive there given emplaced practices and objects that provide relational media, as well as continuity and anchoring of self (James, 1890). I also situated the Sheddies and myself as involved in a process of fitting together our action (Blumer, 1986) within a relational and place-based social structure through the use of specific objects and practices (Cohen

& Taylor, 1976; Hodgetts et al., 2010). This is an important point to make, because the foundation of the Men's Shed North Shore is an intentional intersection between social and material landscapes, and is evident in the practices that emerge within the Shed space (Allen, 2011; Mills, 1959; Thrift, 2000b) and the way participants talk about the Shed. In this place, people and objects intersect and shape each other's interactions. People consume, deploy, and construct material objects to (re)produce their social climate (Geertz, 1973). Such place-based objects and practices comprise observable units that are taken up in larger assemblages of action (Gaver, 1996; Heidegger, 1953; Swidler, 1986), and render Sheddies' supportive and relational practices visible. Objects such as Deasy's boat, scaffolding, and faulty machinery give rise to the production of the Shed, as well as being vehicles through which interest, observation, care, and community materialise in the Shed. Objects are thus laden with meaning and are much more than background furniture in the Shed. They provide opportunities for men to connect with the material essence of the Shed, and to engage meaningfully with other men.

The objects people use in relating to each other provide essential media with which to communally develop a shared sense of self and social identity (Snell & Hodgetts, 2007). During my time in the Shed, I not only observed bonds between Sheddies developing, but also experienced them first-hand as I developed my own relationships and shared identify with other men in the Shed through objects such as the bandsaw, scaffolding, and Deasy's boat. It was important for me as a researcher to approach the men on their terms. Contributing time and physical labour to the Shed's initial construction, and engaging with the (often noisy and sometimes dangerous) material practices of the Shed, helped me to build rapport with Sheddies and cement my membership in the Shed place. The ethnographic basis of this research was essential in bringing me closer to participants and their context (Blumer, 1986; Emerson, 1995; Whitehead, 2004; Zemliansky, 2008a) in order to experience and map out the Shed as I have done throughout this chapter.

This chapter illustrated the mutually defining dynamic that occurs between objects, place, and relationships that take shape in the Shed. By drawing attention to the Shed's material and social landscapes, I revealed the intentional utilisation of objects and practices in the material expression of care and friendship, and of inclusion and contribution that are the focus of the Shed and of the broader Men's Shed movement (Golding, 2011a; Ormsby et al., 2010).

Construction projects pepper the Shed with material reminders of the collaboration and achievement that is made possible by the Shed and men's participation there. Such objects provide markers through which people can anchor a sense of self and continuity (Hurdley, 2006) as 'makers' and 'givers', and ground these men meaningfully within the Glenfield community. Such markers

work to create a sense of solidarity and emplacement, and contribute to reproducing practices (Gibson, 1979; Wood & Giles-Corti, 2008) that drive the communal ethos of the Shed.

Material labour is an essential relational practice that draws human and non-human actors together in the Shed, providing a relational medium as well as tangible evidence of one's willingness to engage with others in the Shed space. Through such place-based action, one connects with other emplaced people (Allen, 2011; Bourdieu, 1986), and is afforded opportunities for positive experiences. The purposeful use of labour and objects at the Shed, such as my part in the restoration of the faulty bandsaw, signals to others in the Shed, one's desire to engage with the Shed and in meaningful ways with the Sheddies located there. Labour is thus more than a means to a material end. It is a device for announcing one's intent and respect for the happenings and culture of the Shed, and for building relationships and rapport in the process. Labour also serves as a medium to experience self-worth and satisfaction, and serves as a point of reflection and reminiscence. In short, labour is a fundamental core of experiencing the Shed.

In the next chapter, I deepen the current exploration of Sheddies' use of the Shed space, objects, and labour practices, particularly in their communal reworking of self in the face of disruption many men experience when leaving paid employment. As I will demonstrate, socio-material practice at the Shed comprises a healthy ageing strategy during a difficult and challenging life stage.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Reworking selves: Maintaining health and dignity in retirement, through socio-material practice**

The Men's Shed North Shore is occupied by men who have spent a large proportion of their lives in paid employment, where they have developed identities, secured resources, found meaning, participated in social networks, and engaged in practices of health and gender (Barnes & Parry, 2004). Discontinuing paid employment in retirement can bring about disruptions to men's roles and identities (Barnes & Parry, 2004), as well as their access to social, health, and material resources (Barnes & Parry, 2004; Nicholson, 2012; Pease, 2002). The Shed offers a space where retired men can actively pursue wellbeing, and respond to disruption and loneliness through community practice. The Shed also houses reflective places where men reflect on themselves, their lives, and on their relationships with other men. These men take part in reflection as a group, during labour or over cups of tea in the lunchroom. Reflection is thus a communal process which results in joint reworking of selves and the Shed.

As I touched on in the preface, men in general are often positioned as being disinterested in health practices, and as purposefully engaged in irresponsible practices that put them in danger (Brooks & Good, 2001; Courtenay, 2000; Hall, 2003; C. Lee & R. G. Owens, 2002). Such unsafe and health-negligent practices are typically understood through conceptualisations of what are theorised to be "traditional male roles" in which men engage in identity formation and meaning-making through everyday risk-taking and the rejection of health regimes (Courtenay, 2000; O'Neil, 2008). However, many men are interested and attentive health actors (Johnson, Huggard, & Goodyear-Smith, 2008; Malcher, 2009), and understand the broader implications of their health and illness on their own and others' lives (Mitchell & Horn, 2006).

I start this chapter by exploring the disruption that some men experience when leaving paid employment, and also the fitting in (Blumer, 1986) and re-placement (Cuba & Hummon, 1993) men engage in when participating in familiar routines of labour in the Shed. In particular, these men respond to leaving paid employment by deploying social interaction and physical activity as apparatus for fostering and anchoring a positive sense of selves in place in the face of disruption. Throughout the chapter, I argue that the reworking of self in the Shed is not done individually, but

relationally (Blumer, 1986; Hermans et al., 1992; Salgado & Hermans, 2005). It involves a group-level reworking of selves in response to common representations and experiences of older age. As I explore Sheddies' practices of identity and self, I bring to light certain participant self-positions which work to identify these men as part of a group (Blumer, 1986; Mead, 1934; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) who engage as active practitioners in particular wellbeing practices. I also draw attention to their awareness and concern for other men's wellbeing through displays of sharing, support, and empathy. Exemplary narratives are woven throughout this chapter and reflect literature that challenges dominant assertions that construct men as uncaring, negligent, and socially and emotionally cloistered.

### **5.1 Responding to disruption through re-placement**

Separation from specific places in which men have developed relationships and formed their identities can produce substantial disruption in their lives (N. Hopkins & Dixon, 2006). Social identities such as being a productive and socially connected being are entwined with meaningful places such as workplaces, occupational categories, or industry sectors, and the practices performed therein. Indeed, some men can struggle with finding meaningful activities and creating places to participate in once they have left paid employment, as is indicated by Fred in this chapter. With the disconnection from meaningful places comes a loss of belonging and disrupted sense of self. In this section, I explore the sense of disruption some men experience when leaving paid employment through a model suggested by participants, Rat and Tuatara. I move forward by discussing Sheddies' re-placement in the Shed through the relocation of Sheddies' locus of wellbeing, self-worth, and belonging to the Men's Shed North Shore. Such re-placement takes shape through the (re)creation of labour routines in the company of other men. Such a context creates a sense of being 'at home' for some Sheddies.

The overwhelming sense of disruption and loss felt by some men in retirement was summed up nicely by Rat and Tuatara, who asked specifically to explain retirement to me through the English literature metaphor of the Monomyth (outlined below). Joseph Campbell, an academic mythologist interested in cultural myths and stories, argued that there exists a universal pattern that is common to heroic tales in every culture, which he called the Monomyth (Joseph Campbell Foundation, 2015). Campbell also argued that a story-hero's progression through the Monomyth is a metaphor for an individual's progression through life (Joseph Campbell Foundation, 2015). Indeed, Rat and Tuatara

referred to Campbell, and overtly used his theory of the Monomyth to describe retirement to me. In doing so, they sought to convey the disruption retirement causes to working men's identities, as well as the negotiation and rebirth of selves that happens in the Shed. Figure 8 shows a diagram Tuatara had drawn to illustrate the Monomyth, and which he and Rat used as a guide to explain their conceptualisation of retirement to me. Rat and Tuatara's use of theory and symbols in meaning-making reflects processes used by social scientists in interpreting everyday phenomenon through literature.

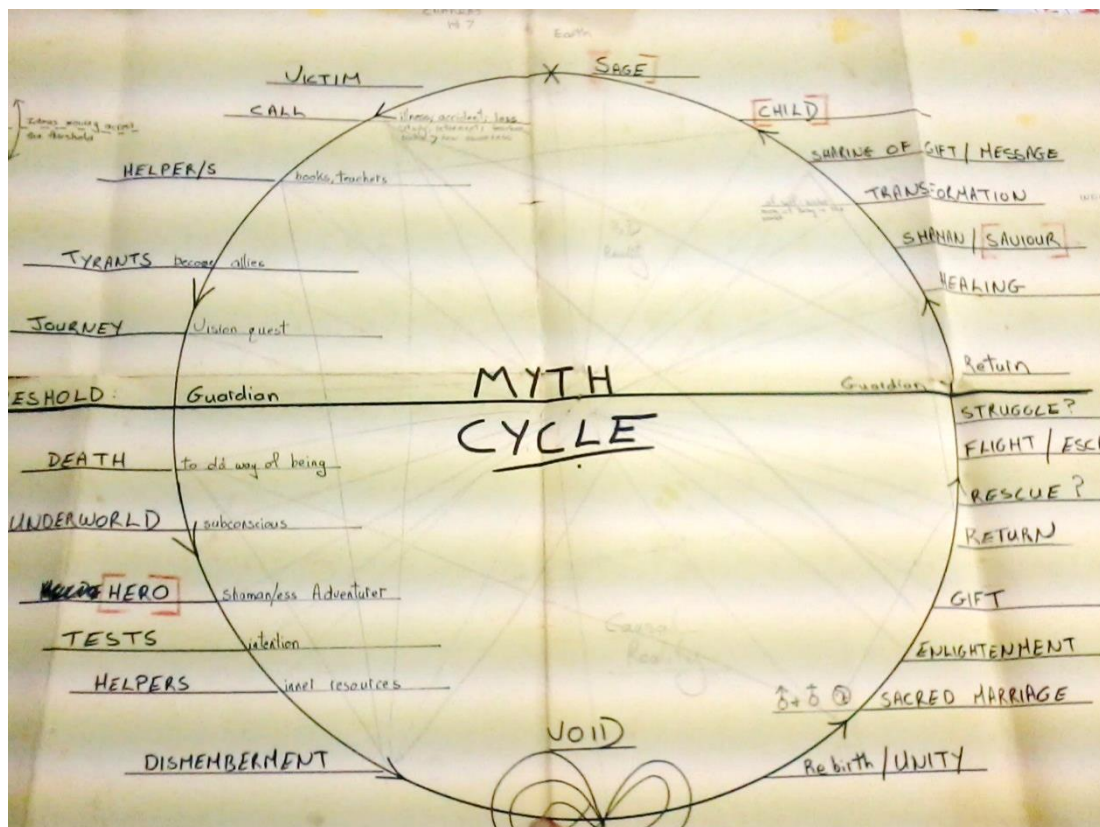


Figure 8. Photograph of Tuatara's diagram of Joseph Campbell's Monomyth. The diagram is designed to run in an anti-clockwise direction, starting at the top, centre (marked with a small x).

Rat and Tuatara drew particular attention to a section of the Monomyth that describes a state of non-being (represented in the bottom-left quadrant of the circle) which they conceptualise as describing men's experiences when they retire. This area represents one's transition from the 'known' (top half of the circle, marked by the horizontal line which bisects the circle) to the 'unknown' (bottom half of the circle), a dark and scary place in myths and legends. This segment of the Monomyth is characterised in stories by a hero's death and sentence to an underworld where

the hero must pass a series of tests before returning to the land of the living. During this stage in the story, a hero passes through the 'void', a state of loss and 'non-being' or nothingness (situated at the very bottom of the circle, marked by a lemniscate). On exiting the void, the hero is 'reborn' and experiences a sense of unity. The hero then goes on to return to the 'known' world enlightened and ready to help others.

The extract that follows illustrates Rat and Tuatara's application of the Monomyth to a man they had seen visit the Shed. In the extract, Rat and Tuatara try to understand the man's predicament through their conceptualisation of the 'void' to explain the man's situation while also contrasting the man's experience with his (female) partner's experience. In particular, the man's wife has continued to engage in labour, and, the narrative suggests, is better able to engage in social participation and enjoyment in later life.

Rat: *"There was this older guy—I think I convinced him to join us—he saying to me, "fuck, I don't know what I'm doing", he says. "I've run businesses all my life, along with my wife", and his own words were, straight out, "she's got it sussed, but I haven't. She's got another job. She doesn't need a job, we've got plenty of money". But she works out [by] the airport apparently. She's got her friends. "She goes partying", he was telling me. "She drinks wine with them. She does this, but what the fuck am I doing? I'm sitting here bloody dying". That was his fucking words! That was his words, mate. He says, "I don't know and I'm lost and I don't know what to do"*

Tuatara: *"77, you feel a vibe"*

Rat: *"You put your finger on it. It's all finished for him, mate"*

Tuatara: *"Yeah. He feels he's come to the end of his journey"*

Rat: *"He feels he's come, but he hasn't. He's only just started. So I says, "well, for Christ's sake, mate. Join us. We'll convince you that, hey, all that was bullshit. There's still you. The old, all the crap..." Yeah, so he's there [in the void] somewhere"*

Tuatara: *"Yeah, he's lost in this [void]" [indicates void at base of diagram]*

To Rat and Tuatara, the 'void' represents a transition from a comfortable and familiar space of paid employment, to a terrifying and unfamiliar place textured by a sense of ruptured self and loss of purpose. While in the 'unknown', one may be tested, and must navigate the void in order to re-emerge into the 'known'. In the same way, retirement tests men's selves which have previously been shaped through paid employment, and which can be reworked in the Shed in ways which

support men in coming to (re)understand and (re)know themselves. Rat and Tuatara expect that in transitioning through the void, the man described in the extract above may find renewed meaning in retirement and forge a reworked sense of self, and that the Shed opens up opportunities for such men to undertake this process successfully. Renewed meaning can thus be found in retirement through one's own experiences, and by reframing retirement (Janoff-Bulman & Frantz, 1997) in terms of a quest for forging new identities. Through the Shed, men can achieve meaning and better adapt to retirement by finding alternative meaning and value in its wake. Rat and Tuatara deliberately drew on the metaphor of the Monomyth to make sense of retirement and reframe their experience as a journey.

To Rat, contemporary Pākehā society does not adequately recognise the disruption retirement brings to men's lives. As he explains, the absence of attention drawn to recognising such a phenomenon works to obscure the struggle some men face in the disruption and (re)construction of self:

*"Yeah, so going through the 'not me' [a sense of self lost], especially when you've got a society which doesn't even talk about [identity disruption in retirement], let alone saying, 'hey, there is a 'not me'". Coz it's the polar opposite. All hell will break loose"*

- Rat

By referring to a 'polar opposite' Rat creates a continuum of wellbeing and sanity on which identity disruption in retirement is juxtaposed quite extremely to wellbeing that can be achieved through paid employment. Paid employment, then, provides a cornerstone landscape for the intersection of people and meaning-making (Allen, 2011; Thrift, 2000b) in which wellbeing is achieved. As people interact with each other in particular places such as workplaces, they develop identities and conceptualisations of self and placement in the process (Blumer, 1986). Paid employment provides a context in which people and practices are linked and bound together (Allen, 2011), and these can break down when leaving paid employment. Men thus experience a range of disruptions when they retire.

In short, everyday practices of identity and self-worth are wrapped up in paid employment and meaning-making through labour for some men. Identities are located in everyday social practices as well as in the individuals that perform them (M. Crawford, 1995). For some men, leaving paid employment disrupts practices that contribute to men's relationships, identities, and sense of

belonging. When leaving paid employment, some men can become displaced and experience uncertainty about where they fit in.

In this context, the Shed offers men a familiar and restorative place (Korpela et al., 2008) in which men can 're-place' themselves through familiar ways of being in the world with others. When participating in the Shed, Sheddies reconnect with shared practices that help to forge new place-based enactments of selves with other men (Golding et al., 2007). Such re-placement is possible because our sense of belonging and placement is made, malleable, maintained, and can shift from one space to another (Gorman-Murray, 2011). Indeed, participants illustrate a sense of familiarity, placement, and belonging by weaving themes of 'home' and 'family' throughout their narratives. To Rat, for example, the company of similarly aged men engaged in similar interests make the Shed feel like 'home' to him: *"It's just the feeling, to me, I'm home. To me this is a home"* (Rat). This is Rat's response to many years working in the company of other men: *"Being around other guys. I suppose, you know, after fifty years of working in a male-oriented world"*.

Fred and Jerry similarly made reference to the development of familial-like relationships in the Shed, drawing particular attention to positive and supportive relationships through: *"caring and sharing... with strangers becoming, well, family"* (Jerry). Participants' understandings of home, then, are not limited to domestic spaces, but consider places which cultivate a sense of belongingness, valued memories, and self (Altman, 1975; Charleston, 2009). 'Homes' are also places in which practices of consumption point to broader social and economic structures, and are evident in the objects and practices that are located there (Jackson & Moores, 1995). Men do not just 'do things' at the Shed. They are homed and dwell there through labour practices and associated material artefacts. Through these a sense of belonging and relational selfhood are (re)formed, and Sheddies are anchored (Mallett, 2004). Ultimately, sharing interests with other people and being able to engage with them through labour is a strong determinant of placement and anchoring in the Shed. Feeling like one is 'at home' and surrounded by family illustrates men's sense of placement and belonging in the Shed, and bolsters their efforts in responding to disruption.

The Shed acts as a familiar and restorative place in which attachments are formed through positive experiences, shared purpose, and relational practices that are embedded in the Shed space (Korpela et al., 2009; Pretty et al., 2003). The promise of daily activity and a regular routine in the Shed are important in providing anticipation about the Sheddies' everyday: *"It is something to look forward*

to” (Mike), reproducing daily structure: *“It provides structure in your life when you’re retired”* (Mike), and opens up opportunities to connect with others within familiar routines. Texturing the Shed in this way renders visible the anchoring of men to place through familiar routines, the promise of purposeful activity, and the valuing and use of their skills and experience. As Fred explains:

*“Being able to come here really makes an awful difference. And I think it... probably the greatest thing is our mental attitude. You at least wake up and think, ‘oh, I got something to do’, you know? And you’ve got projects, people, and a place to go. Very important”*

- Fred

Participation and social inclusion are ways of belonging (Lave & Wenger, 1991), are linked with positive wellbeing (Berkman, 1995; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Matud et al., 2003; Wilkinson & Marmot, 2003), and are made available to Sheddies through familiar and jointly understood practices. Emplacement in the Shed provides men with opportunities to ‘do wellbeing’ in later life, particularly through participating in a context in which they feel engaged and stimulated, and contribute to an atmosphere of communal purpose.

By reconnecting with familiar daily structure through routinized practices, Sheddies not only place and recognise themselves in the Shed, but also within broader social and economic structures. By continuing long-standing everyday routines, Sheddies create a sense of continuity, ground themselves to the Shed through shared practices, and anchor themselves to other Sheddies through a common understanding of how the day should unfold for working-class men. As I state in my journal:

*Today, I asked [Rat] about a question I had had in the back of my mind. I asked him why all the Sheddies are so keen and relieved to break for lunch (one Sheddie had even asked for the lunch xylophone to be played). I asked why lunch was such a special occasion, given that they could take a break at any time. He laughed and exclaimed, “you ‘liberal’ bastards! Always asking why”. He said he was brought up with the motto: ‘ours is not to question why; ours is to do and die’. [Rat] then went on to tell me that this was a time of day that had been ingrained in them through years of schooling and work. It occurs to me that maintaining this practice might give the Sheddies some sense of structure and continuity with their former lives. I will have to look more into this. He also said it was a special time for socialisation*

– Journal entry: May 15, 2013

The lunch break is an opportunity for Sheddies to ground themselves in familiar and comforting routines that complement production and labour practices. It is also a symbol of the way labour routines have been entrenched in these men's lives, and the way their bodies have been wrought as productive tools through pervasive capitalist demands. As 'living tools', these men have been expected to be engaged in production throughout certain periods of the day. The lunch break is thus a cherished time in the Sheddies' day where Sheddies can be human beings (as opposed to human tools) and relate to one another in ways not associated with labour, such as through socialisation and shared relaxation. Even though this group of retired men is no longer bound by labour obligations tied to paid employment, the practiced consumption of their bodies for production is such that the need to remain productive, and to take breaks only at controlled intervals, lasts long after leaving paid employment.

Overall, many men develop identities and attachments during long lives in paid employment. These men experience significant disruption in response to leaving workplaces or industries in which identity and belonging were formed. In particular, these men have faced breakdowns in identity as worthwhile, productive, and socially connected beings. When participating in the Shed, Sheddies use familiar routines and meaningful engagement with people and objects to render themselves and each other 'in place' to re-place themselves in the world through the Shed. This re-placement represents a practical response to the structural changes that retirement brings to men's lives, and happens through engaging with the environment in ways that espouse a shared sense of 'being' and 'doing' (Dixon & Durrheim, 2004). Through familiar gestures, people are able to establish a sense of belonging, particularly within a certain space (Dixon & Durrheim, 2004). However, Sheddies' achieve much more than merely belonging to a space. They draw together subject, place, space, routine, and identity to establish the Shed as a community of caring men who purposefully create continuity and familiarity in 'doing' wellbeing.

## **5.2 The shared reworking of selves, and resistance to popular representations of retired life, through continued engagements**

These men come to the Shed and jointly make sense of retirement, drawing renewed meaning together, particularly in regards to popular conceptualisations of retirement. When participants discuss ageing and retirement, they also discuss losing a sense of self-worth which is wrapped up in their ability to be active and productive beings. Participants also point to popular representations of



idleness and social withdrawal that they anticipate are associated with retirement. Indeed, the word 'retirement' conjures up images of complacent idleness, relaxation, and freedom from the obligations of paid employment. However, men's enactments of these representations are observed by participants to be irresponsible and even potentially fatal, highlighting particular notions of morality and responsibility that are wrapped up in healthy ageing practices for men who participate in the Shed. Participants foregrounded and juxtaposed their experiences of paid employment and retirement, particularly in terms of opportunities for engaging with others socially and materially. Specifically, paid employment was understood to offer opportunities to be active (socially, physically, and mentally) and to develop social identities as communal and productive beings. For many men, such identities are developed through routines of socialisation and labour which are enmeshed within employed lifestyles, then disrupted when leaving such spaces.

As a communal construction, the Shed opens up opportunities for men to jointly 're-place' themselves and carve out a place of belonging through socio-material practice. In the process, these men rework identities of self and gender through shared labour practices at the Shed, and benefit from shared experiences of healthy and 'graceful' ageing. Participants draw on shared understandings of individualised health responsibility to create morally-laden narratives in which one's own social engagement and material production is positioned as vital for their continued grace and wellbeing in later life. However, my research highlights the importance of *collective* action that encourages sustained social and material engagement with other people. This collective action acts as a medium for one to engage in gendered health practices and a group-level reworking of selves at the Shed.

Participants did not usually talk about their participation at the Shed as a way to stave off ill-health per se. They did, however, position themselves as performing practices they feel are associated with wellbeing and prolonged life, such as engaging with material projects and with other men in the Shed. Instead of talking about health in terms of disease and illness (McKinlay, Kljakovic, & McBain, 2009), participants draw attention to the potency of shared construction projects in (re)establishing essential and life-giving routines of mental, social, and physical action. Hodgetts and Rua (2010) have also noted the way their (male) participants engaged in shared enterprise over a common interest, and happened to benefit from the social capital that emerged from their participation in collaborative projects. By taking part in construction projects, Sheddies purposefully engage in practices that support their continued wellbeing, reflecting literature on men as interested in their health, as opposed to purposefully negligent of it (Johnson et al., 2008; Malcher, 2009). Participants identified that keeping an active and exercised mind, remaining independent, learning new skills,

utilising old skills, problem-solving, and social engagement are all important elements of wellbeing in later life.

In this section, I explore participants' consideration of what they observe to be popular representations of retirement and of retired men. I use this discussion as a platform on which to explore participants' conceptualisations of wellbeing in later life, and how Sheddies respond pragmatically by engaging with retirement on their own terms through socio-material practice in the company of other men. In particular, I explore participants' understandings and performances of health practices, and how these are linked with the cultured and moral expectations anticipated of older people as part of the broader social structures in which these men are located (Herzlich, 1973).

This group of men anticipate that the world sees retired men as redundant and obsolete in a wider culture of paid work, while at the same time being expected to be satisfied in idleness. On the contrary, these men fear inaction and expect it to bring them closer to the end of their lives. As Deasy explains, a sense of crisis can follow the sometimes abrupt cessation of routine social and physical activity that some men face when they leave paid employment:

*"But people, they get into set... man gets into a set channel and of course a lot of fellows have known that when they retire, they've been very, very busy driving a desk or running an organisation with quite a number of people around them and that sort of thing, and business going on and so on. All of a sudden that stops. Now what the hell do they do?"*

– Deasy

In leaving paid employment, some men experience disconnection from the industries and workplaces they are used to participating in, and from particular practices they are used to performing. Productive activity and social engagement are important tools for this group of men to forge their conceptualisations of self as worthwhile, functional beings who feel purpose and connection. Some participants felt the weight of popular expectations of retirees to discontinue such activities and to *"wind down"* (Dave). Such popular understandings of retirement serve to distance men from lived landscapes that are based on paid employment. As Rat explains:

*"But, see, even use the word 'retirement'. It's the wrong word. Retiring from what? So that gives you... and you used the word, the mental picture of when you sit back, you'll sit back and do nothing*

- Rat

Rat problematizes the word 'retirement', and challenges its connotations of withdrawing from life more generally. Such participants also draw attention to perceived links between retirement, older age, withdrawal, and incompetence which are anticipated to undermine older people's capacity to learn and participate socially. Not only are retired people cloistered from having a productive and active life, they are also considered to be without full command of their faculties. As Jerry explains:

*"You see, the world, once you turn thirty-five, don't wanna know you. But there is so much knowledge in older people, you could always learn and you could make good friendships. You know, we're not senile. We're getting old, sure. But we're not senile... The more people know about this, the more they'll realise that this is an organisation that's been set up to help men get older more gracefully and with more interest"*

- Jerry

Jerry's quote, particularly his use of the word 'senile', evokes connotations of dementia, weakness, frailty, and ineptitude, while also revealing the notion of a superior social standing of younger people. However, Jerry contests the idea that Sheddies are any less able to contribute positively and socially to society. He is confident in the capacity of older men to learn, to develop social networks, and to contribute their knowledge as capable and (still) intelligent social beings. Sheddies' continued pursuit of activity and valuable contribution to their communities provides an alternative to portrayals of elderly people as incapable and obsolete. Jerry responds to derogatory representations of older men by pointing to the dignity men find in the Shed through healthy ageing, and remaining hopeful that others will become as aware of this as Sheddies are. Sheddies' pragmatic and optimistic response to retirement, then, reflects a social movement which represents a more humanistic view of older people.

The men in this research had spent up to 50-60 years in busy and demanding workplaces, which meant that they were accustomed to a regimented time structure to their everyday lives. For such men, the anticipated sedateness offered by retirement presents an unfamiliar and disconcerting life situation. Participants respond by 'keeping busy', sometimes contemplating, or actively returning to, the workforce to do so. As Skip illustrates, he keeps busy through various forms of labour, despite being of retirement age at which he could be expected to stop working:

*"I ended up [looking after the maintenance of] three Kindergartens, four afternoons a week. So the afternoons were taken care of. And now the Men's Shed's taken care of two mornings a week. I'm busy"*

- Skip

Participants' desire to 'keep busy', particularly through socio-material practice, suggests a blurred boundary between leisure and labour (Lefebvre, 1991) in which participants pursue activities which replicate their working lives in a life-stage that carries popular expectations of sedate leisure. Dualisms of labour and leisure, then, break down in the transition from paid employment to retirement for some men. Labour is a medium through which individuals connect with the world and develop identities (P. Willis, 1977). For Sheddies, it is a way to draw on long-term patterns of productive activity to reconnect with the world and other people in it during retirement. Such activities provide pleasurable distractions from worry (Lefebvre, 1991), and draw together companionship and work, whether enjoyable or laborious.

Sharing the company of other men interested in productive activity is an important element of social participation and sense of connectedness and satisfaction for this particular group of men. As Ross explains:

*"I don't mind putting the time into something that I can see, and boy can I see it here. Guys all round with smiles on their face. Even out here today, they're digging the clay and what a cow of a job that is. But they're all out there laughing and joking. What a great way it is to be retired, doing something you get satisfaction out of. Yeah"*

- Ross McE

Demanding and gruelling labour can provide Sheddies' with shared enjoyment, visible outcomes, and banter. In 'doing' positive retirement, material practices do not always have to be pleasant to be enjoyable, but should provide joint satisfaction and social interaction. As Deasy explains:

*"We were here sorting out nuts and bolts and washers and screws with people, which was a boring, boring job, but it was made interesting by the conversation and the relationships that developed through that"*

- Deasy

Joint activity can provide Sheddies with a sense of connection and 'being together' with the other men that take part. Enjoyment and satisfaction in the Shed, then, are not just about labour, but are also about people. This experience is juxtaposed to Sheddies' experiences of working alone in domestic sheds, where men may face loneliness and isolation. Participants describe working on projects at home as solitary, and note their preference for participating in labour in a shared work environment. As Deasy explains:

*“Most of the time my wife was sort of around, and she’d be calling out for something to be done, or I’d say, “I’ll do that”. It was a lonely existence and I missed the fellowship of my peers, you know, chaps my own age, probably interested in the same thing... Just talking to these people, the cross-section of people we’ve got here in membership and their other interests, their outside interests that you swap notes on, that sort of thing, is what, to me, is important. I don’t get that at home in my own garage or workshop. I can turn the radio on, I can talk to my wife and have a cup of coffee, but I haven’t got that connection with like-minded people”*

- Deasy

Participants emphasise the importance of the company of other men of a similar age and who also share an interest in socio-material practice. Some draw particular attention to the fact that they feel isolated at home despite their wives’ presence, emphasising the importance of gendered company in feeling socially connected. One suggested that he feels he could not talk to his wife about the same subjects that other men—men his own age and who share the same interests—might find interesting. Social connectedness for these men involves somewhat overlapping, but still largely distinct social circles which exist in differing social contexts, and which are each important to their overall sense of wellbeing (Chipuer, 2001).

Many participants positioned their desire to be active, engaged, useful, and valued as something that differentiates them from men they perceived to be socially withdrawn and sedentary, and who embody popular and negative representations of retirees. In this instance, keeping active was largely positioned as an imperative which helps to avoid what participants consider untimely deaths of disengaged men, who they understand to be at increased risk of ill-health. As Rat explains, men are expected to die soon after retirement if they cease to be engaged socially and physically:

*“You look, dig up the statistics. They’re there and they mention our thing. Suicide rates go up and older health rates of—especially heart disease of blood clots and strokes and that—it all goes up. And you cannot sit back and do nothing”*

– Rat

Rat frames continued activity as necessary for older men’s sustained wellbeing. He also speaks of a moral imperative for people to take responsibility for their individual health and to provide evidence of their efforts by living longer (R. Crawford, 1980; Radley, 1994). Men’s decision to continue active

lifestyles is a response to the placement of wellbeing responsibility on individuals, and to moral enactments of wellbeing. Ross illustrates the obligation of retired men to take responsibility for their continued activity to achieve healthy living:

*“How many times do you hear people say, ‘there’s nothing really for retirees to do’? Rubbish. There’s tons of things if they want to get off their backsides and get out”*

- Ross McE

Participants draw on stories that demonstrate healthy living and illustrate dichotomies in a health-action narrative. In their narratives, positive regard is given to men who actively participate in physical activity at the Shed. These men are seen to actively take responsibility for their wellbeing. As Deasy illustrates, Fred’s eagerness for action in the Shed is exemplary:

*“[Fred] comes down here, and he loves it. It’s marvellous. And he’s had experience with building boats and with sailing, that sort of thing. And he’ll do anything. He was out raking the concrete there this morning while he was waiting to work on the boat. So, that’s the sort of thing. If the Shed wasn’t here, yeah, what would he be doing? He’d be sitting at home probably reading the paper or watching television or reading a book, which many of the other guys’d probably be doing. I mean, you think of it... see, this is what gets you into the occupational therapy side of this Shed concept, is where... it’s a good question. What would folks be doing?”*

- Deasy

Deasy draws particular attention to the fact that Fred would “do anything”, highlighting the appreciation of Fred’s enthusiasm and use of initiative in engaging in maintaining the Shed. Participants draw attention to the agency Sheddies deploy in demonstrating active, healthy, and moral selves in later life, particularly in response to narratives of withdrawal, uselessness, and idleness associated with retirement. Such narratives present retired men as outmoded and redundant. Deasy points to the Shed as an essential object for retired men in achieving agency.

Participants actively position their desire to be active, as distinguishing them from people whom they imagine stay at home and spend their time sitting, watching television, reading, or ‘vegetating’. As Dave explains:

*“I can sit and read for a while, but I can’t do that all the time. I couldn’t vegetate as I think people might do”*

- Dave

Inactive men are positioned as unhealthy given an anticipated association between inactivity and the degeneration of health, which could eventually be fatal. Participants see such men as choosing to remain inactive, and render them morally responsible for their ill-health (Radley, 1994). The Shed, then, provides crucial apparatus in reworking the self(s) and maintaining favourable self-image(s) regarding wellbeing. Participants who are proactive in pursuing health are positioned in contrast to men who might enact popular practices of sedate and withdrawn retirement. Participants' narratives demonstrate their production of wellbeing practices through social and material action, and by differentiating themselves from men who they see as exemplifying ill-health due to their perceived social isolation and lack of activity. Hodgetts and Rua (2010) similarly found that their participants worked to distinguish themselves from other men by emphasising moral roles of domestic care. The current findings reflect moral enactments of health through action-health narratives positioning participants as active and therefore responsible, moral, and healthy.

When considering the relationship between wellbeing and the Shed, participants draw particular links between meaningful and relational engagement and healthy ageing. The men who I encountered during my time in the Shed did not view health strictly as a biomedical concern, or as a matter simply of ailments and treatments. Participants framed health holistically, drawing together biological, psychological, and social elements of health (Engel, 1977). As Dave explains, such elements coalesce at Men's Sheds, and are expected to increase members' life expectancy as well as their quality of life:

*"And maybe they will live longer because of the fact that they've got something to get up for every Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday morning, if not on other days of the week. I really think... I hadn't thought of the Men's Shed being a mental health initiative because you think mental health immediately you're talking about people who're nuts, to put it crudely. But of course it's all about keeping your mental wellbeing in a good state and what better than coming and sharing and conversation and sharing pasts and still having goals. Not too many guys of 80 have been building themselves a boat would they? That's gotta be pretty inspiring. I think, I hope I never get too old that I can't be inspired by that sort of thing"*

- Dave

For Dave, wellbeing can be achieved through a mix of social engagement and physical activity. Such an achievement is set against a backdrop of the loss of fundamental human faculties in later life,

particularly the capacity to be inspired. In this instance, Deasy (aged 82) affords an exemplar, whose case illustrates the achievement of men in their later years, given inspiring and empowering contexts. Inspiration and mental wellbeing are thus rendered visible through engagement in, and realisation of, material projects. Participation (social and material) and healthy ageing give rise to one-another in this context, so as Sheddies participate, they share the ageing process and develop a communal buffer against the effects of degeneration. Their prolonged health permits their continued participation, and by extension, the supportive environment of the Shed also. Healthy ageing in the Shed, and indeed the supportive environment of the Shed itself, thus reflects a communal and intertwined process. The combination of the space of the Shed and the practices that take place there give rise to longer, healthier living for men.

Participants conceptualise their minds and bodies as objects that are vehicles for action. Participants also point to men's minds as figuratively tangible extensions of their physical bodies. Participants' ways of being in the world thus involves an action-oriented and holistic stance to the interconnection of mind and body (R. Crawford, 1980). Participants place particular emphasis on the importance of mental health in later life, describing their minds in terms of a physical body part that needs to be exercised regularly lest it degenerates: *"Your little mind shrivels up like a prune"* (Fred). As Ross explains, mental health may become prioritised over physical health as men age and face declining bodily ability:

*"As you get into your more post-retirement years, or into your retirement years, is that you sort of think about, you know, the body gets a bit, doesn't perhaps work as well or gets more tired or whatever. You can occasionally have debates with yourself which you sort of, would you rather have a good body and your mind not so good or the other way around, sort of thing. And I'm a great believer is that part of your wellbeing is to have an active mind. Body might get a bit tired from time to time. But that's probably, it's the mind, really [that is important]"*

– Ross M

In the process of ageing, some people enter into dialogue with themselves (Hermans et al., 1992), and consider constructive means of nurturing the whole self alongside the acceptance of the eventual degeneration associated with ageing. The Shed provides opportunities to remain mentally active through material activity which can involve learning, problem-solving, and the fitting in of action with others. In the Shed, 'being in the world' centres on sustained activity and action, where



Sheddies: *"want to be doing"* (Dave). The importance of 'doing' is a core value of this social group, which has implications for Sheddies' ability to continue to participate socially and mentally in later stages of older age in the face of declining physical health.

As can be expected, older people anticipate that ill-health will disrupt their everyday lives (Pound, Gompertz, & Ebrahim, 1998). Participants expect that ill-health would, in time, prevent them from engaging socially and materially at the Shed, and so disrupt their enactment of engaged and moral selves. As Skip explains, ill-health may likely prevent his attendance in the Shed:

Researcher: *"Do you see yourself still participating in the next 10, 20 years?"*

Skip: *"I don't know about 20 years [laughs]. Well, within 10, I would say I'd like to still be here in 10? That'd make me 77, so I don't know about that"*

Researcher: *"So what would stop you?"*

Skip: *"Oh, health. I've got arthritis in my hands now, having trouble gripping stuff, so... But, yeah. But other than that, fairly fit. Most of the blokes are fairly fit"*

Given their age and stage of life, ill-health is anticipated by the men in the Shed. Indeed, some participants disclosed health issues that were affecting their ability to fully engage in material activity in the Shed. These men attended the Shed as often as they could, regardless. Such issues had not yet progressed to stages serious enough to interfere with participants' ability to be physically present. As Dave illustrates:

*"I've got prostate cancer, so... but I don't think that's gonna slow me down for a while. That's in early stages"*

- Dave

Dave's continued participation, despite his diagnosis, exemplifies patterns of stoicism, independence, and self-reliance that work to demonstrate attempts to retain control over an ailing body (Anstiss & Lyons, 2014; Courtenay, 2000). Dave also commented that he felt a familial obligation to support family members by remaining alive and in good health for as long as he could, suggesting a functional adoption of stoicism:

*"You gotta look more to the future. In my own case, with [my grandson], that's even more important because you almost feel you've still got to be around for a fairly long time yet. I'm 74 in about 3 or 4 weeks' time, maybe 2 months' time, and I need to be around longer so he*

*can at least have at least some male influence in his life. He's got his mum and his nanny and there's his aunty, and I'm the only male who's in regular contact with him"*

- Dave

For Dave, continued participation in the Shed, in the face of health issues, is not just a way for him to continue to be active and healthy in later life for himself. It demonstrates his understanding of the wider implications of his health on younger family members for whom he provides a positive and gendered influence. Dave's case exemplifies how the Shed is an important vehicle for some men in fulfilling and affirming supportive familial roles by retaining wellbeing in order to continue gendered health and care practices outside the Shed. The positive effects of 'doing' wellbeing in the Shed thus spill over into domestic spaces (Walster et al., 1973). The Shed, then, is an initiative that not only benefits the men who attend, but also their friends and families.

Death is not often explicitly spoken about in the Shed, yet is a very present reality for the men who participate there. Before the Shed's physical materialisation, two trustees had passed away, and during and closely after my participation in the Shed, Sheddies familiar to me passed away, including one that my son (then two years old) and I had developed ongoing rapport with outside the Shed. However, Ross explains that even with the reality of death lingering over older people, it is still important for them to consider a future in which they are engaged and active:

*"I've got to the stage in life, where, 'don't worry about the problems, think ahead. Don't worry about what happened before, keep looking forward because you don't know how much longer you've got'. And nobody's telling you any of that, which I think's unfair. So you can't really plan too much ahead, but you've still got to keep looking ahead because you might be here tomorrow"*

- Ross McE

The cases of Dave and Ross provide insights into the way some men respond to uncertain futures that surround increasingly apparent mortality. They highlight how some Sheddies anticipate and respond pragmatically to the expectation of ill-health and death by continuing to plan for futures in which they can make a difference to their own or others' lives.

The pervasive sense of negative constructions of retirement is felt by these older men. Together, they take on the task of reconstructing selves. This is no small task for people whose lives have been predominantly given over to paid employment. In particular, participants reframe retirement in ways in which they can resume their legitimate links to other actors and practices that retain their

place in the world as active, intelligent, and healthy beings. Specifically, participants illustrate their choices to continue socio-material practice through the Men's Shed North Shore. In this way, disruption is approached with the intention to remain physically and socially active and engaged. Given the association of retirement with withdrawal from a productive and public life, reframing retirement in more meaningful ways can help people to resist negative connotations that blanket older people. Such reframing can also help to cultivate rewarding lifestyles (Barnes & Parry, 2004). People negotiate experiences of everyday life through continued meaning-making by engaging with people, with the world, and with meaningful activities (G. King, 2004). Participants forge renewed meaning in retirement by contesting popular conceptualisations of retirement which are centred on idleness and senility, and by resuming enduring patterns of social connection and activity.

In short, healthy ageing for these men is about continued action that extends beyond one's own activity, and considers the importance of social, mental, and physical action in embodied ageing processes. Participants' ways of being in the world are relational and practiced in the company of others with whom their (inter)action fits. When participants consider (inter)action, they consider not only the material construction of projects, but also social engagement, including encouragement and inspiration. Sheddies also consider the holistic nature of health and of 'being' in general, and how they might respond to degeneration in later life.

### **5.3 Reworking gendered identities**

When discussing gender identities tied to paid employment, participants explicitly describe performances that are reflected in theories of hegemonic masculinities. In particular, there is agreement that participants had felt the weight of expectations of aggressive and competitive workplace practices. This section starts by exploring men's reflection on aggressive and competitive workplace practices through older eyes. I discuss how paid employment offers opportunities to enact selflessness, provide for families, and contribution within capitalist regimes. This discussion highlights the extent to which productive activity is ingrained in how some men have lived their lives in response to the use of their time and bodies to obtain goods and services within capitalist structures. Particular identity-enactments such as gender are linked with particular places in which people participate (Connell, 1995), and the 'doing' of such emplaced identities can be disrupted when leaving paid employment. I discuss how identities of gender and manhood are reworked in the caring, understanding, and collective context of the Shed. More specifically, these men respond to disruption by banding together and reworking selves through enactments of manhood that contest

aggressive and competitive selves that were brought to the fore in paid employment. The Shed is a site within which various gendered patterns of being are (re)produced, contested, and reworked.

Recent attention has been drawn to aggressive and competitive performances in the conceptualisation of Western masculine gender roles through the lens of hegemony (Rudman & Glick, 2008; Stanistreet, Bamba, & Scott-Samuel, 2005). Participants contest the relevance of such masculinities to later life, and suggest that the Shed opens up spaces to rework conceptualisations of manhood, describing the Shed as *“a space for men to be”* (Rat), and *“[a place for] men to be men”* (Mike). While people may experience loss and disruption on leaving paid employment, retirement also opens up opportunities to acquire new social roles (Reitzes, Mutran, & Fernandez, 1998). Despite challenges in later life, Sheddies demonstrate agency in finding meaning in retirement, drawing on labour practices at the same time as they also contest gender norms of competition and aggression that may have accompanied labour in paid employment.

Some participants draw on notions of hegemonic masculinities to understand competitive and aggressive enactments in the workplace. Jerry, for example, links competitive and aggressive workplace practices to young men establishing themselves within workplace hierarchies: *“We’re not young bucks tryna make a name for ourselves”* (Jerry). Others frame competitive and aggressive enactments within understandings of capitalist notions of productivity and consumerism. Capitalist-centred workplaces are positioned by participants as creating competitive and aggressive workplace masculinities in which men are pitted against other men. Rat, in particular, talked about hostility as a response to the commodification of men as productive beings, and the feelings of isolation men might experience as a consequence.

Participants see the commodification of men as disrupting community and solidarity among men who would otherwise provide mutual support and companionship:

*“No men are bloody-well being men out there. I don’t agree that they are. I think we’re now becoming men. The older we get, the more men we become. In the past, all we’ve been in the past is this bloody stupid mob, all that society put on us. Cut each other’s throat. Cut-throat is the word. It’s even used, isn’t it? There’s competition, this mad stupid bloody rush to Christ knows to get where. Whereas now you can, as you say, sit down, share our ideas, bloody “hey, it’s okay just to be you”. You don’t have to have an inquiring mind. You don’t have to be skilful at anything”*

- Rat

Individuals do not act independently of society, but rather act in concert with others also operating within social spheres through anticipation of others' expectations (Cooley, 1902). Rat links aggression and competitiveness with broader societal expectations of paid employment, and contrasts these to the relaxation, sharing, and openness he anticipates from the Shed. The Shed is thus a site within which more relational and connected social selves are considered, reworked, and fitted through social interaction (Blumer, 1986) with other Sheddies. I revisit and discuss the Shed as a site of relational being in detail in chapter six.

The Shed offers men a place in which a comfortable intersection between labour and social connection can happen. As Rat explains, men who enjoy particular types of labour associated with previous roles in paid employment, may continue to carry out such work but without a hostile work environment:

*"To guys, now, who've got to the stage of either retired or whatever, of taking the initiative to carry on what they were doing, if you like, or, and I think we've mentioned it in the group, just the camaraderie of being together as [Fred] says. But not feel so alone, coz the workplace is a cut-throat place, there's no two ways about that. Well, there's even a saying isn't it? In business, you don't touch. The touchy feely, feelings if you like, the emotional level, very cold and very thing, which is your old fairy tales, you know, the ice princess or the ice maiden, you know, they're trying to say, 'unfreeze'. We've even got this—it's in our language—"I'll freeze you out". Yeah, no emotion, no... You're here to make a buck, and maximisation of profits"*

- Rat

The extract is an example of Rat's desire to establish connections with people, but also reveals social and economic structures that can constrain some men being in the world in ways that cultivate community and connections in particular settings. Rat suggests that some men may not develop camaraderie with other men in the workplace despite participating in shared labour. This is due to social expectations, capitalist pressures, and an expectation that emotional expressivity is inappropriate within landscapes shaped by paid employment. In contrast, the Shed opens up opportunities or possibilities for men to engage and interact in alternative ways. Men respond by closing emotional and social distances between one-another to develop camaraderie in a space that encourages sharing, caring, and a collective sense of self. Such practices illustrate that enactments of manhood are socially constructed in an ongoing process, and can vary across contexts (Hodgetts & Rua, 2010).

Gendered enactments of manhood are reworked through reflection of workplace experiences and past patterns of behaviour through older eyes. Participants value the appreciation of other's ideas which they see as coming with ageing: *"we're at the age where we appreciate other people's input"* (Jerry). These men prize the unique skillsets of others, which creates a sense of worth between them, and is linked to the collaborative effort which is deliberately fostered in achieving mutual goals in the Shed. As Fred explains:

*"I'm not trying to prove that I'm a better welder than you. I'm quite happy that you do the welding, in fact. And I think this is what is good. That nastiness of trying, because men, I think, out there, in business are always trying to be better, do faster, more than their colleagues or opposition or whatever and it becomes very competitive. Whereas here it isn't... Everybody helps"*

– Fred

Sheddies illustrate their appreciation for one-another in the Shed, and recognise skill sets that make each man unique. Fred suggests that such humanitarianism may be obscured in paid employment, and he illustrates his point by conjuring up images of men locked in competition with each other, in an endless pursuit of outdoing other men. Meaningful social connections and partnership with other men open up exploration and opportunities to redefine manhood and what this might look like for older men. At the Shed, then, conceptualisations of retirement and gender are reworked conjointly. As Rat explains, these processes are place-based and link men together through a sense of homogeneity and collective changes:

*"To me, this is the whole [concept of the Men's Shed]. What's changing, as [Fred] said, we're, as men, learning to be men, I feel. Or maybe even learning what women have always known of how to be homogenous I suppose is the word. You know what I mean? They're all linked together"*

- Rat

Men learn harmony in the Shed, and come to understand their interconnectedness with other men. These men jointly respond to retirement and 'learn to be men' by functioning as interconnected beings.

Paid employment offers opportunities to enact gendered enactments of altruism through acts of selflessness and contribution that are tied up in processes of commodification entrenched in capitalist economies. Gendered roles in which men participate in paid employment to gain monetary remuneration also turn men's time and bodies into commodities which are used to acquire resources for their families. However, leaving paid employment can imply to some men that they are *"being thrown on the scrap heap"* (Rat), given expectations of traditional genders roles which position men's roles as intimately linked to earning a wage through paid employment. In the Shed, particular selves can be brought to the fore in response to the casting aside of men after lifetimes of commodification and servitude. Such selves work to counter men's 'workplace selves', by focussing on a sense of value, contribution, and community that can replace a sense of worth as linked to paid employment and monetary remuneration:

*"We were brought up very, as I say, very shut into a mould of what it means to be a man, and a woman for that matter, of what society says is expected and how life actually is. And to have a group of people that had decided, as you say, we're not just talking New Zealand, obviously in Australia and I'd imagine in America, guys that'd reached that age and basically being thrown out on the scrap heap, have got together and formed a nucleus and got this thing moving, of this thing of saying, "hey, no we're not, we're going to become involved in a community of using our skills, of just keeping things going, of being in a community of like-minded people who're interested." And it's like [Fred] said, just that community feeling as against coming from a workforce most of us spent in trades of very cut-throat, not intentionally cut-throat, but in a very cold, there's no emotional thing about being in business. You were there to earn a living whether you liked it or not. You went along to support a wife and kids and even though you might not be able to stand the job"*

- Rat

In explaining the supportive context of the Shed, Rat highlights undesirable aspects of paid employment (e.g. 'cold' and 'cut-throat') that directly contrast to those of the Shed (e.g. 'community', 'involved', and 'nucleus'). During the acquisition of resources for family survival, some men engage in undesirable patterns of aggression and competition in the process of identifying with the mores of particular work environments (Vigil, 1988), or fitting in their action with other employees (Blumer, 1986). Such identification and 'fitting in' practices may be necessary for managing particular contexts (Vigil, 1988), where profit-orientated and competitive labour market

expectations can override more humanistic ways of being and interacting (Hennigan & Spanovic, 2012). The intensive commodification and identification through labour that some men experience can result in the questioning of men's productive self-worth when leaving paid employment, and are sought out when participating in the Shed, but in more relational and collaborative ways.

Social expectations of men's sacrifice are woven throughout participants' narratives when talking about engaging in paid employment for the sake of providing for their families. However, altruistic practices also exist in everyday life in efforts to support others through hardship (Mattis et al., 2009), as is illustrated by Fred:

*"I came to this country... I left behind a double garage with all my tools, etc. I couldn't bring anything because I have a wife who paints. Now, I knew I could survive, not happy, but without my toys, but she couldn't survive without her paints. So we came here and she now paints, uses the garage, which we have, as a studio. So I really had nowhere to do anything and it's not an easy thing to find yourself out there with no place to do it"*

– Fred

Fred draws on links between space, productive activity, and wellbeing, and the effect displacement can have. He also illustrates how being separated from spaces in which identities are developed and situated can also bring about opportunities to resituate identity as Fred does as a giving and altruistic being. Helping others can be a way for people to demonstrate morality and to identify with particular social norms (Post, Underwood, Schloss, & Hurlbut, 2002) such as those which are (re)produced in the Shed.

The altruistic nature of Fred's voluntary displacement also reflects literature in which people interpret and respond to the needs of others without the expectation of personal returns (Batson, 1991). By doing so, Fred's narrative exemplifies patterns of servitude and sacrifice (Gilmore, 1990) that have emerged alongside his displacement, and demonstrates Fred's identification as an altruistic being. In this way, Fred responds to disruption via altruistic action through which elements of self come to the fore. Fred's account of altruism fits well with the accounts of other participants. Spaces such as the Shed offer crucial apparatus for developing and situating selves (Cuba & Hummon, 1993) that encourage a joint focus on altruism and giving. Indeed, these men's sense of belonging is intrinsically linked to place and the narratives that take shape there; where belonging draws together subject, space, and identity (Gorman-Murray, 2011). Shared narratives of altruism thus ground men to the Shed and to other men who participate there. While the altruism of these



men is commendable, it is also important to acknowledge the impact everyday acts of altruism and sacrifice can have on givers such as Fred, who experience displacement as a result.

Overall, Sheddies' practices of manhood are reworked within the Shed. Such practices differ from popular and theoretical conceptualisations of masculine enactments that may tend to take shape through particular forms of paid employment. Shifts from performances of aggression and competition to collaboration and connection are evident in participant narratives. Social identity (re)formation is apparent in this shift, such as changes in expectations about how men should act, based on (re)produced contextual values that differ from space to space. While aggressive and competitive identities may be expected of men in particular arenas such as paid employment, collaboration and co-operation are anticipated and performed in the Shed. Ultimately, shared projects in the Shed do not just take the form of material objects such as boats, but include the lived identities and relationships of Sheddies. These men are recasting themselves through shared practices, which emphasise their unity and solidarity.

#### **5.4 Chapter summary**

This chapter explored how a particular group of men have responded to challenges encountered in later life, such as retirement and health declines associated with older age. In particular, participants gave accounts of life-long patterns of everyday living which are textured by the demands of paid employment, gender expectations, and broader capitalist structures. Considering the use of men's time and bodies as vehicles for resource-acquisition through production-oriented landscapes reveals the commodification of men's very 'being' in the world. The extent of this commodification is apparent in the observation that leaving paid employment threatens men's continued wellbeing, due to the disruptions in entrenched practices and routines which pattern paid labour. Amid such disruptions, men must also negotiate illness and face uncertainties associated with death and care of family members. The pressures of paid work and family life mean that men seldom have the time to reflect on such deeper life questions until they are faced with retirement.

The Shed exemplifies the pragmatic adaptation of a group of men in responding to retirement. These men actively pursue and perform wellbeing through active engagement in conjoint social and physical practices. In the Shed, a landscape of labour is produced in which human and non-human actors intersect and are bound, giving legitimacy and purpose to men's shared company and engagement. In doing so, these men purposefully carve out a niche and culture in which they reflect

on past experiences and respond through humanitarian philosophies of sharing, caring, connection, and collaboration. Such elements anchor these men to the Shed, its culture of humanitarianism, and to the other men who participate there. The Shed embodies a physical exemplar of the interwoven nature of wellbeing and meaningful space.

The daily activities of the Shed reflect an ongoing enactment of wellbeing, enabled and demonstrated through social interaction and productive activity. These men draw on performances of activity (and inactivity) to define healthy (and unhealthy) selves and others within broader social representations of health (Herzlich, 1973, 1995). The continued performance of health through production practices facilitates a positive transition from paid employment to retirement. The Men's Shed North Shore is a site which accommodates this transition and provides a landscape for the reworking of identities that may once have been tied to elements of paid employment. In the Shed, men can 'be' in, and relate to, the world through a health-laden synthesis of labour and social connection. Herein enactments of health, leisure, and labour are entwined in this space.

In the Shed, men respond to disruption in their lives through a space textured by physical and social participation. Through such practices, men place themselves in the world, connect with it, and anchor themselves to a particular space and way of being in it through labour. Everyday material objects play essential roles in this process, where social interaction and objects exist dependently, and are deliberately co-created or taken up, and is explored further in chapter six. Their intersection works to solidify relationships through a sense of engagement and belonging. Shared practices help manufacture markers of commonality and belonging (Fortier, 1999).

Sheddies' views of wellbeing are complex and holistic, and focus on healthy ageing. This challenges the typical positioning of men as negligent of their wellbeing, and generally irresponsible (Brooks & Good, 2001; Courtenay, 2000; Hall, 2003; C. Lee & R. G. Owens, 2002). The Shed is an intentional place in which men weave together and 'do' routine, placement, gender, identity, community, caring, purpose, and communication that centre on healthy and positive experiences of shared ageing.

In response to the demands of survival of working class families within capitalist structures, these men may find themselves negotiating detestable contexts rife with hegemonic enactments of masculinity. In the Shed, men rework conceptualisations of manhood, and actively distance themselves from competitive, 'cut-throat' enactments, and choose to 'be' men in more humanitarian ways. The Shed offers an example in which gendered spaces are essential for the

‘doing’, understanding, and reworking of gendered practices, through the joint reflection of life experiences.

Ultimately, the Shed is about maintaining dignity during a challenging life stage that in many contemporary societies is popularly associated with incontinence, senility, and the absence of human worth. Ironically, this life stage is also associated with satisfied idleness in which older people are free from the obligations of paid employment. Participants identify such representations of retirement as typical, but as potentially lethal within action-health narratives. The Shed is a site where men can contest both negative and idealistic representations of retirement. Sheddies adopt an active stance to life in retirement, often positioning themselves in opposition to socially and physically inactive men whom they perceive as socially isolated and unhealthy. The way Sheddies consume representations of retirement thus differs significantly from more widely understood representations. This reflects the agency Sheddies have in resisting and challenging the limiting images and representations of retirement and retirees in Western society. For Sheddies, identities are produced and reproduced, and placed within wider structures of paid employment and retirement (P. Willis, 1990). Labour provides a means for Sheddies to affirm their sense of power and of self, as well as providing a means to communally create change in the world (P. Willis, 1990).

Finally, this chapter touched on healthy ageing in the Shed as a communal process in which Sheddies ‘do’ wellbeing. In the next chapter, I focus on the manifestation of such activity through joint construction projects. I do this by taking up participants’ recurring use of the term ‘camaraderie’ and unpacking its meaning within the materially-laden context of the Shed.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Shed Camaraderie: Relational being through socio-material practice

When discussing positive and supportive relationships in the Shed, participants drew frequently on a shared understanding of ‘camaraderie’, which is defined by the Cambridge Online Dictionary (2015) as “a feeling of friendliness towards people that you work or share an experience with”. While notions of friendliness and shared experience are certainly evident in participants’ accounts, their conceptualisation encompasses a broad range of themes, including companionship, social diversity, connection, team effort, social involvement, participation, support, cooperation, shared focus, and material co-creation. The Sheddies’ conceptualisation of camaraderie is instilled with an emphasis on social connection and relating to other people as fellow human beings within the Shed. Such themes exist in stark contrast to Sheddies’ accounts of their experiences of paid employment. At the heart of the Shed, then, are the people who participate there and their sense of unity and connection, rather than merely feeling a sense of friendliness. As Rat explains:

*“I think it gets back to what I said before, what that Māori chief said, “You ask me what’s important. It is people, it is people, it is people”<sup>17</sup>. I’ve always been people oriented. And you are as well.”*

– Rat

The benefits of company, the communal use of resources, and mutually directed effort have been well noted by scholars (Bourdieu, 1986; Whitlock, Wyman, & Moore, 2014; Wood & Giles-Corti, 2008), and is reflected in the intentional development of camaraderie in the Shed for its healing and restorative qualities.

This chapter explores relational living as a focal point of the Shed, and examines the processes that (re)create the Shed as Sheddies intentionally engage with and relate to one-another. I start the chapter by examining the material focus of the Shed, which attracts a group of men with similar interests to this space, anchors social interaction and productive activity, and brings to the fore those shared interests, joint practices, achievement, and conversation through which camaraderie is brought to life. The way material objects are drawn up in such relational practices is an inextricable

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<sup>17</sup> Rat refers to the following Māori proverb: He aha te mea nui o te ao? He tangata! He tangata! He tangata! Translated: What is the most important thing in the world? It is people! It is people! It is people!

part of the Shed's core. Such processes take shape differently in adjacent areas of the Shed, in accordance with divergent human-object interactions afforded within such spaces. Throughout the chapter, I draw particular attention to the active and purposeful development of camaraderie in the Shed, how this is woven into the everyday activities there, and how camaraderie is defined and produced through the materiality of the Shed.

### **6.1 Relational being through social identification and shared practice**

Participants agreed that the Shed constitutes a cohesive community of like-minded men who are similar in many ways. It makes sense that men who share similar backgrounds and interests, and who perceive themselves as similar, would come together and develop friendships (Eastwick, Finkel, Mochon, & Ariely, 2007). These men participate in the Shed for a variety of shared reasons, including interests in material projects, social interaction, and reproducing essences of meaning and connection that were previously derived from paid employment.

In this section, I explore the ways in which a common interest draws together a range of men, and unites them in a context in which a shared interest in material production brings particular and jointly-worked selves to the fore. I also explore the ways Sheddies draw on shared interests and selves in relating to other men in the Shed. Shared interests are important markers for Sheddies in anticipating solidarity, constructing shared identities, and producing the Shed environment. I demonstrate the importance of engaging with material objects through labour practices in identity development and unification. As I touched on in chapter four, the material demonstration of one's intent to labour provides a physical marker which symbolises one's affiliation with the Shed's practices, and anchors one's self to others who also participate there. These are essential elements of camaraderie, solidarity, and oneness in the Shed.

The group discussion was particularly helpful in elucidating how shared interests might draw a 'typical Sheddie' to the Men's Shed North Shore. The participants explored common elements that might draw such men together and which create common ground through which to connect. I asked explicitly, "*If there was such a thing as a typical member of the Shed, how would you describe him?*" Initially, participants discussed attributes and interests they thought were shared by men who participate in the Shed. Participants anchored themselves to other men in the Shed through inferred similarities between themselves and other members of the group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Through this process, Shed membership was delineated and reified, drawing on a sense of community through shared practice and symbols (Ethier & Deaux, 1994). Specifically, participants consider how

an archetypal Sheddie might demonstrate an interest in productive activity (as well as an interest in associated objects such as tools), and so through active participation in the Shed by making objects, and self-identification as a Sheddie. Participants also suggested that particular immaterial markers might also identify a Sheddie, including an enquiring mind, liking to use their hands and tools, needing a place to create, the attainment of satisfaction from fixing and repairing objects, the need for companionship and social interaction, and the desire to be physically and mentally active in later life. The Shed thus functions as a site for a community of symbols and practice, in which objects are taken up by people as they create opportunities for embedding themselves in the world. In the context of coping with identity and embodied disruption, such consumptive practices help men to escape adversity, imaginatively and concretely (Cohen & Taylor, 1976; Hodgetts et al., 2010). In the Shed, men draw on objects, and on shared symbols and practices, in creating a social niche to which like-minded men are attracted and are able to engage in forging a renewing and restorative place.

The gathering of men with shared interests creates inclusionary social processes in which men who share interests are drawn closer. Over the next few pages, I unpack some of the discussion around the notion of a typical Sheddie, paying particular attention to social inclusion which happens via shared interests and perceived similarities of the men who participate. I then link such processes back to the development of camaraderie.

During the group discussion, participants suggested that relationships are best developed through conversation about things that signal a shared identity which is brought to the fore by mutual interests such as tools and construction projects. As Ross explains, some Sheddies connect and build rapport without prior knowledge of each other, and within a short time of being in the Shed, given their common identification as ‘do-it-yourself guys’:

*“Every new person that comes in here, on any day that we’re open, within ten minutes, they’re chatting with the other guys. It’s like mates even though they’ve met for the first time. It’s strange. And there’re quiet guys out there, and there’re quite, some very, I guess, I don’t know whether flamboyant is the word to use for them, but others that communicate very, very well. I’ve watched over the last couple of years and it really is strange. It happens darn near every day; you’ll get somebody walk in, ten minutes later they’re laughing and chatting and communicating with the guys and I find that quite good... I think it’s sort of, possibly we’re all built with the same genes or something, cos we’re all do-it-yourself guys in the main, most of them”*

– Ross McE

Sheddies respond well to one-another in a context of shared interest in, and affiliation with, material projects. The extract provides an exemplar of the ways a shared interest can facilitate conversation and rapport-building through common identification. Such relational practices work to create a sense of camaraderie, but also ‘oneness’ and commonality such as feeling linked genetically. Participants expect that their shared interests and engagement in productive activity crystallises their solidarity.

As the group discussion unfolded, some Sheddies contested some of what was being said. This particular piece of the group discussion ended with the agreement that it was a difficult question, that there was no typical Sheddie and that the Sheddies were all different. Identities and notions of self which are linked to being a Sheddie, and to being a unique individual, then, are not fixed, nor are they mutually exclusive. Indeed, people experience themselves as disparate individuals, while also sharing identities with others (Arnow, 1994). Consequently, Sheddies identify with the Shed and experience their ‘being in the world’ through it, observing and evaluating their ‘being’ in multiple ways. People understand and produce social structures by drawing on attributes they see as commonly identifying people similar to them (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), while also drawing on things that make them distinctly unique within a wider group of similar individuals (James, 1890). This point in the conversation opened up a place for participants to discuss the diversity of members that participate in the Shed.

Participants suggested that shared interests bring an otherwise diverse range of men together. The positive influence of such diversity was implied through talk about constraints some participants anticipate from too-like company:

*“If you’re just stuck in your own age group and people that just think similarly to you, it’s okay, but can be quite limiting. You’re not getting any other input or any other viewpoints into it. I’ve always liked that [diversity]”*

– Tuatara

Sheddies appreciate meeting a range of people as one might in a workplace, and desire encounters with others that may broaden their own views and ways of thinking. In the Shed, the expansion of one’s own mental practices comes about through engaging with other men, particularly those that are dissimilar to them in some way. While the quote illustrates Tuatara’s own preference to meet

people with different views, it also reflects broader issues for retired people around the risk of shrinking social circles, social disconnection, and sense of isolation in older age (Cornwell & Waite, 2009; Wiles et al., 2009). Older people experience the loss of social connection through the death of friends and family (Wiles et al., 2009). It also reflects the limited opportunities for older people to interact with others, given disconnection from paid employment, and the routine relocation of older people to specific 'older people's spaces' such as retirement homes, villages, and residential care (Lee, Woo, & Mackenzie, 2002).

Participants talk about spending time with men from walks of life that they may have been unlikely to meet outside of the Shed. Tuatara in particular sought to find a "tribe" of people with similar interests, while also seeking the company of men with different life experiences: *"I thought, 'this will be a range of people, ages, and socio-economic backgrounds'"* (Tuatara). The Shed brings together a disparate range of men, where shared interests and the common identification of Sheddies bridges differences in identity (Putnam, 2000), and brings shared selves to the fore (Hermans et al., 1992). Social cohesion arises as these individual men are bound together (Putnam, 2000) through construction projects, and their solidarity crystallised through camaraderie.

One's identity as a Sheddie bridges divides between personal identities that may be drawn on outside the Shed, such as age, socio-economic status, and working background. Sheddies draw on selves that relate to shared interest which bind them to other Sheddies through a shared identity (Hermans, 2001). The Shed is a space in which particular selves take priority and are produced in the 'doing' of community and camaraderie in the Shed.

In short, the Shed houses a community of practice (Duguid, 2005; Holmes, 1999; Lave & Wenger, 1991) in which men experience social inclusion as productive men, and are rendered 'in place' in the Shed. Sheddies are placed through being and engaging in a place where men are similar to them and share interests. Men's placement is crystallised through engaging in practices that demonstrate their shared interest in material-production practices. Physically doing things with mutually interested men is an important element in developing camaraderie in the Shed. While the men are 'doing', they are engaged in the co-creation of shared experiences while also talking together and (re)working shared selves they can connect through. The conversation that arises solidifies their unity. Such shared practices reaffirm shared identities which are embedded in place, highlighting the interwoven nature of objects, place, and practices (Snell & Hodgetts, 2007). In the men's



(re)production of the Shed, commonly understood practices such as labour, and objects that demonstrate labour, help to shape and reproduce shared social identities.

## **6.2 The development of camaraderie across space**

Finding the 'right' people to build camaraderie with is a process that takes shape in numerous ways and in multiple spaces in the Shed. As I touched on in chapter five, the workshop and lunchroom are especially influential spaces which shape Sheddies' interactions, and afford Sheddies with alternate modes of relationship-building. Sheddies actively appropriate spaces to engage in varying degrees of relationship-building and intimacy. Different elements of everyday Shed life take shape in different spaces to the extent that the identity of these spaces are associated with the practices that occur there (Hodgetts et al., 2010).

In this section, I had intended to focus on the workshop and lunchroom as discrete units, drawing readers' gaze to these spaces separately and exclusively. However, in attempting to pull apart the interaction that occurs in adjacent Shed spaces, it became apparent that such complementary happenings do not occur in orderly and linear ways as I would have liked to portray them in a printed thesis. Rather, Shed practices are worked on and carried over from one micro-space in the Shed to the next. Sheddies walk through doorways from one room to another while simultaneously building on their relationships as they do so. While particular forms of relationship-building are largely space-specific at the Shed, such as labour practices that take place in the workshop, Sheddies build on relationships incrementally and traverse different spaces together each day that they attend the Shed. In the process, they subsume the landscape to their needs as people, rather than complying with pre-defined behavioural underpinnings. What materialises in the Shed is a deep and personal understanding of others, which happens as an accumulation of interaction and shared personal experience. Sheddies connect over a variety of commonalities, including shared backgrounds and shared experiences of ill-health. It sometimes surprised me just how much Sheddies knew of each other when I asked after particular Sheddies they had come to know. These men build up a working knowledge of each other and become experts in the lives of their fellow Sheddies. This knowledge is developed and polished through working together to achieve shared objectives, and is the sum of practices which take place across multiple points in space and time. Such personal familiarity and intimate understanding is an inevitable part of the Shed, and can help Sheddies foster a sense of care and wellbeing.

In moving forward, I give a simplified overview of the interactions that happen in the different micro-spaces of the Shed, synthesising them as I go, into a deeper understanding of camaraderie development in the Shed. In short, the workshop, which houses the labour activities I have explored in this thesis, opens up opportunities for Sheddies to relate to one-another through labour, and to test others' responses to discussion on intimate topics such as health. In comparison, the lunchroom deepens and nurtures relationships that small groups of Sheddies have initiated in the workshop. The lunchroom is also a communal space where larger groups of Sheddies can congregate, and more 'public' forums of conversation can be opened. As Skip explains:

*"[Relationship-building happens] probably in the workshop more than the lunchroom. [In] the lunchroom, somebody starts on a topic and everybody joins in. Whereas personal contact's more out there [in the workshop] than in the lunchroom. Although, fair bit of contact in the lunchroom, obviously. But normal, general topics, isn't it. The politics of the day or whatever, the weather, all sorts of stuff"*

– Skip

Spaces such as the Shed serve both public and private functions (Rechavi, 2009). 'Public' participation (or rather, communal participation, as the Shed is actually a private space which is accessed via paid membership) in construction projects affords the creation of private (or rather, personal) spaces in which more intimate relationship-building can take shape. Sheddies, then, deliberately use the various micro-spaces and objects of the Shed to moderate their proximity to others sharing the Shed space, thereby influencing the degree to which intimacy occurs (Rechavi, 2009).

The spatial positioning of material objects plays a role in the creation of 'public' and 'private' micro-spaces of the Shed. In particular, the positioning of chairs around a large table in the lunchroom (see figure 9, left) creates an open forum in which the voices of interlocutors can be easily broadcast to others also in the room. In the workshop, construction projects (see figure 9, right) create smaller clusters of men who gather closely and tend to face the project when working on it, thus closing conversation off from others occupying other areas of the workshop. As a consequence of working closely together, project contributors become comfortable and familiar as they gauge responsive discussion. These clusters allow more personal topics to evolve than might take place in the lunchroom. Objects that divide and carve up the overall space of the Shed, such as walls, doors, and even projects such as Deasy's boat, create small pockets of space in which localised social interaction and camaraderie development take place.



*Figure 9. Photographs showing the open plan of the lunchroom, and the small ‘pockets’ of men that form around construction projects*

Engaging in both the workshop and the lunchroom are seen as complementary forms of physical and social participation, reaffirming the holistic way this group of men conceptualise not only wellbeing, but relational being. Sheddies who tend to engage in only one space, such as one who might forego lunch and continue to work through the lunchbreak, are noticed and encouraged to join the larger group in relaxing and socialising, as was the case with Rat. Indeed, camaraderie is initiated in the workshop, and is expected to be strengthened in the lunchroom. As Ross explains:

*“This is what’s happening with [Deasy]. Those four or five guys that’ve been helping him, they’re... I bet you any money you like, you’ll see them sitting in the lunchroom because they’ve made that connection. They’re working together for a goal, at the end of the day”*

- Ross McE

The development of camaraderie traverses workshop/lunchroom boundaries through complementary practices. The camaraderie that may be initiated in the workshop is cultivated when men come together and are sharing discussion in the lunchroom. Shed spaces, then, house intentional practices that draw together shared enterprise and camaraderie. Sheddies deliberately make use of multiple and varied affordances which are provided by adjacent spaces which house particular objects and practices.

In short, and as touched on in chapter two, place and space are crucial elements in the development of camaraderie in the Shed. Men respond to spaces which feel ‘public’ by producing general

conversation that a wide range of Sheddies can partake in, such as happens in the lunchroom. Men respond to spaces in which private and personal places are carved out with the help of construction projects, by gauging other project participants and considering the deepening of relationships with them. Such spaces are complementary in which camaraderie practices cross from one space to another. Camaraderie also happens in other spaces that are not located physically within the Shed, but are located socially adjacent to the Shed, such as in automobiles. These complementary micro-spaces espouse camaraderie development predominantly through conversation. The groundwork for camaraderie development in such spaces is typically conducted within the Shed prior to such journeys. Labour and socialisation practices are thus important elements of camaraderie practices that take shape inside and outside of the physical Shed.

### **6.3 Project-mediated camaraderie**

In the Shed, construction projects are about more than creating material objects. They are visible markers of Sheddies' production of the Shed, and focal points and vehicles through which Sheddies establish rapport with others. By attending to the material projects taking shape around them, Sheddies show their interest in others' works, the skillsets used in the construction and use of objects, and interest in the creators of the projects themselves. Projects bring objects into the social arena of the Shed, which are taken up and used by Sheddies in connecting with each other. As Ross explains, when collaborating on material projects, Sheddies use such objects as media to form connections with others:

*"[Relationships] evolve because you're doing things with people. And this is probably particularly true when we were doing the fit-out and things. You'd been working doing the lining or something, you'd be working with somebody on that, and of course you'd not only talk about that but you'd talk a bit about, "What did you used to do?" And you find you came from the same town or you both find you know somebody or something or whatever. So there tends to be a bit of an attraction in there or whatever. Or feel they're, I don't know, similar intellect as you or whatever. Yeah, so, I think it's really the fact that you are doing, getting alongside somebody.*

– Ross M

The coming together of Sheddies over material projects is results-focussed and involves their mutual orientation toward a particular problem. The role of material projects is an essential one in the Shed, in drawing men together and giving them a common goal on which to focus. The men establish

connections over the shared consideration of this outcome. People and settings (physical and social), are mutually defining (Altman, 1993). Objects and landscapes afford specific ways of action and interaction between human and non-human actors (Gibson, 1979; Wood & Giles-Corti, 2008), but can also be altered by people. The alterations afford new social practices and interaction, and so on. Such affordances are thus rendered visible through action (Gaver, 1996). The Shed exemplifies a context in which objects shape interactions and relationships, which reciprocally produce the Shed.

Everyday material objects, particularly those that are produced communally, can act as media for, and shapers of, human interaction and shared practice (N. Morgan & Pritchard, 2005), and the doing of affiliation and identity formation. Objects taken up in material construction enable Sheddies' shared contribution, and are important in the production of fun and meaningful activities over which team-building and camaraderie happen. The practical use of material objects renders such social practices both visible and tangible. That is, objects such as Deasy's boat, Snoopy's aeroplane (a float made for a local Christmas event), safety guards for machinery, and the physical Shed itself (shown in figure 10 below), while serving practical uses for the Shed and for the local community, are co-created by Sheddies. Such objects are imbued with meaning, are physical markers of Sheddies' material and social efforts, and demonstrate positive relationships.



*Figure 10. Photographs of co-created and meaningful objects.*

Material projects exemplify the shared goals of the Shed and solidify shared identity, cohesion, and participation. Social outcomes such as camaraderie and togetherness are made possible by the construction of objects through material projects. As Deasy explains:

*"It's a total get-together, camaraderie, togetherness, have a bit of fun, and achieve something. Whether we're doing something for a personal thing or for the community, the same applies"*

- Deasy

Camaraderie and cohesion in the Shed are influenced by the group's ability to satisfy particular material goals (Festinger, Back, & Schachter, 1950). The extent to which members observe group efficacy plays a role in their identification with, and participation in, the group (van Zomeren, Leach, & Spears, 2010). Material projects thus constitute vehicles associated with group cohesion and signal the intent of members to achieve particular material and immaterial outcomes. This occurs at the same time as projects reproduce the Shed as a site for cooperation and relationality.

Deasy's boat is a particularly good exemplar of a material project that took shape at the hands of Sheddies, while also mediating human interaction. Shared projects are not solely about constructing material objects such as a boat, but also reproduce the Shed and the relationships that are emplaced there. From its inception, Deasy's boat was envisioned as a collective project. Deasy saw the construction of the boat as an effective instrument for drawing men together and binding them using shared productive activity. Here, Deasy intentionally draws on the emotive and social properties (McCracken, 1988) he expects will arise from the project's construction. As Deasy explains:

*"I thought, 'well, I won't do this on my own. It's a team effort. It's gonna be a shared project and anyone who wants to join in can, if and when they want to, to give them something to do'. I'm quite happy about that because it's been marvellous"*

- Deasy

Deasy's use of objects to create connections between the men is evident and reflects the deliberate appropriation of commodities in people's everyday social consumptive practices (de Certeau, 1984). Through the thoughtful use of objects, Deasy is able to draw together agents who are located within this particular landscape, and uses taken-for-granted, everyday events to open up opportunities to solidify relationships and a sense of belonging (Hodgetts & Rua, 2010).

The construction of the boat provides a focal point at which the personal, social, and material come together in weaving the men's being into the Shed. The project was shared by Sheddies who physically wanted to take part simply for the enjoyment of boat-building, but who were also interested, and who wanted to contribute to a communal effort. Although Deasy initiated the project, those who shared the construction drew on their own agency to contribute materially and socially. As Deasy explains:

*"I've got [Fred], there, who's probably my right-hand man on the boat. Now, he brought in all sorts of things. He brought in some filler powder we were mixing up with glue. He brought in a whole lot of rubber gloves he'd brought at the Two Dollar Shop. He's brought in all sorts of things. When we were having trouble with the plan, because our plan was getting open and closed so many times, we had little tear marks in it, so he brings in some see-through tape to put over it. I mean, things like that"*

– Deasy

The appropriation and contribution of everyday items can represent, promote, and maintain social relationships and bonds (Money, 2007), where the gifting of items could be considered as giving of a part of the giver(s) (Mauss, 1954). By donating to the project, and contributing their time and material objects, Sheddies like Fred are doing more than being helpful and practical, but imbue the boat and the Shed with a piece of themselves, binding themselves to each other and to the boat, which will all eventually be given over to Deasy's grandchildren. By paying attention to the everyday practice of gifting (such as material objects, time, concern, and care) we can see the relational nature of this group of men, as well as the purposeful production and strengthening of bonds between them (Hodgetts et al., 2013).

Traditionally, psychological literature has focused on the expectation of exchange assumed to drive the giving and sharing of resources (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Emerson, 1976; Mathur, 1996). However, the current findings suggest that everyday gifting occurs in spontaneous and altruistic ways in the Shed, without the expectation of return or reward. Such gifting helps to produce a culture of bonding in the Shed, and reaffirms altruistic and caring identities. As Jerry explains:

*"For example, take [Fred]. I understand [Fred] used to be a [previous occupation] and he's building the boat, and I'm helping [Fred]. And although we're tied to the plan of Jim's, Jim Young [the boat builder who supplied the plans], he and I will discuss things. And on Monday, for example, I always bring a large pot of soup or noodles, and he didn't have any lunch and I said, "Come on, let's go and have some lunch. I'll give you a cup of soup". So he appreciated*

*it and it bond... you know, it forms a stronger bond and... yeah, so... it's a case of sharing and giving and being open to input from others"*

- Jerry

Gifting and the consumption of commodities not only play roles in the everyday practices of the Shed, but also render visible the complex ways these men relate, and (re)produce a shared identity as Sheddies (Hodgetts et al., 2013). Gifting is a way men anchor themselves to other men occupying the Shed space by offering jointly recognised tokens that demonstrate their relational ties to each other. Such ties transcend and outlast the initial projects that bound them together. Deasy responds positively to such offerings, and believes that Sheddies should feel valued and appreciated:

*"They want to be part of it and if they've got some little gadget or bits or pieces they can contribute, well I hope they do and they feel good about it, that's great. It's appreciated and I make sure that I acknowledge what they're doing. That's a big thing. It's just a matter of team effort and giving the guys, acknowledging what they're doing as well. Make them feel part of it"*

- Deasy

Gifting constitutes part of the positive experience Sheddies experience when participating in, or contributing to, material construction projects in the Shed. This is true for gifters as well as the recipients of gifts. Such demonstrations and positive affirmations provide concrete occurrences in which belonging and placement take shape, and work to crystallise and reproduce the Shed. Such occurrences also become vehicles for men to show their interest in one-another, and to 'do' community. Connection and relational bonds, then, materialise and are rendered visible via gifting:

*"That is really an aspect of the camaraderie and the interest these people have. Otherwise they wouldn't bother, would they? This is what happens. This is the sort of thing that happens, isn't it? When you're running a team effort"*

- Deasy

Sheddies would not 'bother' to contribute to the project if they had not developed a sense of camaraderie. Sheddies' gifting symbolises their interest in projects and in each other, and works to strengthen bonds between participating Sheddies, and to communicate and affirm shared identities. The intersection of the social and material is entangled in the material culture of the Shed, where material markers of camaraderie are not only visible, but are practical, and take shape through the very day-to-day activities of the Shed.



Sometimes, objects open up opportunities for men to do more than converse, but to reminisce and let themselves be drawn up into collective remembering in which pasts can be imaginatively relived and cherished, if only for a short time. Skip, for example, discovered an Agfa-branded 35mm photographic film canister among the goods donated to the Shed. The find inspired excitement and conversation between himself and Rat. My journal entry of the event describes their recognition and shared connection over the object, as well as the emotion they expressed at the object's discovery:

*[Skip] found an interesting artefact and brought it to me to guess what it was. It was a small metal (aluminium?) tube, and [Skip] was covering the ends to hide the brand-name. I must have looked quite blank because he gave me the brand-name as a clue: 'Agfa'. This brand had no meaning to me and I told him that I still didn't know what it was, though [Rat], who was wandering by at that moment, gave a verbal exclamation. The object turned out to be an old film-camera film canister, used before the use of plastic containers [and use of digital cameras]. Although I couldn't see the significance in the object or brand name (I didn't say this of course, but smiled and nodded and said something along the lines of "Oh, right. I see"), [Skip] and [Rat] seemed quite excited. The Agfa container was placed into a box of 'collectables' that the Sheddies have started. The Sheddies appear to be very excited about items that have long since disappeared from use, and this collectables box has grown considerably since its establishment*

- Journal entry: April 23, 2012

The Sheddies actively accumulate items that represent their links with other people and places (Money, 2007). Memory-elicitation promotes occasions in which joint reminiscing can take place and bonding can happen over the memories imbued within objects. Such items preserve memories that might otherwise be forgotten (Riggins, 1994). By collecting and reminiscing over objects that have fallen from use, Sheddies appropriate once mass-produced objects in the production of personal and shared narratives which link Sheddies' past and present lives together. The Shed is thus a place of 're-membering' as a material rather than purely cognitive process (Fortier, 1999), where, through collective recollection, men draw on memories of common pasts to establish a sense of unity and belonging. (Re)producing such enacted shared narratives reaffirms Sheddies' identities (Hurdley, 2006). Senses of past and present that are imbued in the objects are drawn together in such narratives (Hurdley, 2006). Through re-membering, Sheddies' pasts and presents are drawn together in the Shed place to cultivate a culture of membership through shared reminiscence. It could be

expected that reminiscence 'networks' could appear and disappear on recurring presentations/viewings of the same canister with different groups of Sheddies at different points in time. The Shed and the objects within it can thus be returned to by Sheddies, to (re)engage in remembering (Fortier, 1999). In this way, material objects, such as the Agfa film canister, become drawn up into social interaction as actors themselves.

In summary, construction projects are about more than the use of tools and raw materials to craft material goods. Projects are about creating opportunities to build rapport and connect with others also interested in construction projects. The display of projects and the tools used in their crafting, are important markers of Shed activity and work to produce the Shed. They symbolise to newcomers the activity and expectations or practice that take place in the Shed. Projects are used by Sheddies to understand themselves and their relationship to other men in the Shed, and provide reflection points through which this can happen. While these men engage with projects and objects, they are exploring each other and working socially to find avenues through which to bond.

#### **6.4 Camaraderie as an important element of building supportive and sharing networks**

In this section, I explore how the Shed functions as a caring and supportive social landscape in which Sheddies can understand and engage with health and illness through discussing their own and others' experiences. Attending to health concerns as a community can help to strengthen ties between participants (Gallagher, Easterling, & Lodwick, 2003). Engaging in shared narratives provides a means of communicating experiences of illness, and can help to transform such experiences from private into communal understandings (Hyden, 1997). However, even though Sheddies build rapport quickly through shared interest and common identification, continuing and deepening this rapport to the level of sharing health concerns requires an active and ongoing process in the Shed. Physically being around other men is part of this process, but also necessitates doing things with them, being aware of their activities, exploring and connecting with their experiences, and making them feel that they are valuable contributors.

The important role of shared activity was highlighted in interviews, when I asked participants if there was anyone in particular in the Shed with whom they had developed friendships. All interview participants responded with stories of Sheddies they had worked alongside or had shared some experience with. Below, John describes feeling welcome and (mostly) useful in concert with the

other Trustees running the Shed. In particular, he recounts how the Trustees make him feel wanted, and that he feels he has a place and a purpose among them:

*"I like to think that I get along with all of them [the Sheddies], but I've always gotten along with all the Trustees. I think the Trustees are a good bunch... They made it very clear from day one—there were about four Trustees when I joined—that they were keen to recruit me, so they made me very welcome and they made me feel wanted, which I guess we all want to be to some degree. And they made me feel as though I'm doing a useful job, even though I don't always agree with that"*

– John

For John, camaraderie not only involves getting along with *"a good bunch"*, but feeling like he belongs, is welcome, contributes to the group, and fulfils a human need to *"feel wanted"*. In the extract, John draws on his response to the Trustees' efforts to include him in the joint operation of the Shed. Camaraderie in the Shed, then, is not just about people feeling friendly and sharing a good time, but is a relational process which involves being physically and socially active with others, as well as intentional experiences that leave people feeling that they are welcome, have engaged meaningfully with others, have been made to feel that they belong, and have made a difference.

Opportunities to connect and to build rapport are commonplace in the Shed, and are built into the very fabric of the Sheddies' everyday experiences there. Everyday instances in which Sheddies take an interest in others and observe their practices, highlight the intentional way Sheddies take efforts to connect to each other. The extract below provides an exemplar of an occasion where Tuatara felt drawn to engaging with another Sheddie who stood out to him in the context of material competency in the Shed:

*"And there's another guy there, the American guy, I think he is. I was watching him in November, December, and he didn't know one end of a hammer from another. He didn't know one piece of wood from another. So I thought, 'I've gotta ask him what his field is'. So I sat next to him at lunch and I said, "Blah, blah, blah" and I said, "What's your field?", and he said, "Oh, I'm a botanist". "Oh, okay". And then for some reason I was raving away and was talking about immigrating and I'd said I'd come out on the Angelina Lauro. And he'd been on the same ship and he started talking about the ship, so we connected with this"*

- Tuatara

The extract demonstrates how Sheddies such as Tuatara actively seek out and engage with other Sheddies whose actions might stand out. Tuatara purposefully accompanies another Sheddie to lunch and asks questions to understand this man's background. As social practitioners in the Shed space, Sheddies draw on their understandings of actions which 'fit in' or 'belong' in the Shed, and may be curious about men whose action signals that they may be 'out of place'. Such investigative 'micro-practices' help build a structure of solidarity that textures the Shed as a communal space for inclusion. Constructs such as the lunch break and the lunch room are taken up in such investigations, and are used as media with which to create a friendly atmosphere (e.g. sitting around a table while jointly engaged in the consumption of food) to build on their observations and engaging in open dialogue, and drawing on commonalities as they connect.

The Shed's Trustees work purposefully to create occasions where Sheddies might band together to build rapport and share experiences using shared interests as a channel:

*"We've got these special activities started, which is a, something just slightly different but associated with the Shed. Once a month members are going to be invited to go somewhere together and have a... like the other day, they went to the Naval Museum. Going to have one 'away trip' and one 'something in the Shed' on the next month then an 'away trip'. And we're looking at visiting [the] wood-turners' guild"*

– Ross McE

Special events that are organised by the Shed's Board of Trustees extend beyond material production, to creating joint discovery and learning events, but still incorporate an appreciation of materiality in some way, such as museum displays or the workshops found in adjoining 'maker spaces'. These events are about invoking the men's shared interests, but also about creating shared experiences and histories through which to connect and reminisce on. In keeping with Shed practice, the spaces that are visited are defined by particular practices in which material products take shape, and provide focal points these men can communally observe, identify with, critique, and experience together. During such events, the Shed and their communing becomes mobile and flows out into the adjacent places when these trips occur. The Shed is not an isolated space but is part of the city in which they live.

Merely taking unfamiliar men on a tour of the Men's Shed North Shore can open up spaces to incite conversation to build rapport by drawing attention to material activity. This helps to create a sense of interest and curiosity in the Shed. For men interested in construction projects, such observations are intended to fuel a desire to join the community of the Shed. As John explains:

*"I spend a lot of time showing people around the Shed, which is a pleasure. I've done that from day one, when we were doing work on the inside. I was undergoing treatment, medical treatment, and I was unable to contribute to the physical activities. So I was nominated to show anybody around who wanted to see what we were up to. And we wanted to encourage people to come and see us, to get new members. So I've done a lot of that. Even today I've shown a group of people round. In fact, in the last week, I must have shown a dozen people around"*

- John

At the same time that John is taking potential members on a tour of the Shed, he is also engaging with them, describing objects, pointing out construction projects in progress, and introducing them to Sheddies. I was often an attraction on such tours, perhaps given my novel position as researcher. The point of such practice is to actively promote observation and conversation; to pique men's interest, and to inspire meaningful dialogue with interested men. Such mundane and taken-for-granted gestures are powerful and are used to encourage men's participation in the Shed through welcomes and friendly engagement. These gestures are evidently meaningful for men exploring the Shed and for those already participating there. At the same time as Trustees welcome and engage with new or potential members, they (re)produce and demonstrate a culture of warmth and welcome, and include others in this communal process. Even Sheddies who are unable to participate in construction, as John was, can still derive pleasure from materially-focussed social interaction.

At the same time as camaraderie is being produced in the Shed, it is equally being appropriated by men in alleviating the effects of social isolation, banality, and ill-health. Merely being a member of the Shed, then, does not guarantee access to the full range of social resources, such as camaraderie, available there. Members must be physically present, with increasing degrees of participation and reciprocation accompanying support. Camaraderie, then, can be both given and received in active processes of relationship building. In short, building strong social ties, not merely membership to the organisation (Putnam, 2000), opens up access to resources (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988). As Tuatara explains, intimate conversation about private concerns such as health issues, is available in the Shed, but hinges on interlocutor familiarity:

*"It's a great resource in that way cos you don't have to talk to anybody if you don't want to. You don't have to participate, but if you do want to have a conversation, then you'll always find someone there to talk with... As you get to know them better, you can talk about, obviously it'll go down to deeper levels of health or things like that"*

- Tuatara

One's comfort and thus likelihood of discussing personal matters such as health, is associated with increased intimacy and familiarity. Socially safe and appropriate places to raise potentially sensitive matters, then, develop through active social interaction and connection in the Shed. Such familiarity, and expression of personal issues, is seen as inevitable in the Shed. This is not surprising as the Shed is founded on understandings of support and sharing in response to a particularly difficult stage of life. However, some uncertainty around others' reactions to disclosure can be felt at lunchtime. The lunchroom is an open forum, where general conversation takes place, and involves multiple Sheddies who have come to the same space to share food, company, and discussion. Some Sheddies may need to feel secure in this place, particularly in their understandings of others, so as to anticipate positive responses before contributing openly in this large arena. As Tuatara explains:

*"I think it's just sort of feeling comfortable like [Fred] said. Once you know familiar faces and things, you just feel like you can say, and once you know that no one's going to jump down your throat for saying something"*

- Tuatara

Contributing to conversation at the lunch table is more than just speaking. Lunchtime conversation arises from a sense of familiarity and belonging to the group, listening attentively to others, and knowing that one can contribute to discussion in meaningful and uncontested ways. For those ready to participate in conversation in the lunchroom, engaging in such open discussion helps to alleviate the effects of loneliness these men experience when at home alone. As Tuatara explains:

*"I remember there was one lunchtime when there was twelve of us and it was really good cos the one time everyone was talking and then it would split off into two, two, two, and three. Then it would all come back together, everyone talking, then it would drop off again into groups. It was really good to see how the dynamics worked. Everyone felt comfortable. Everyone chipped in at some point, said something or rather. People came and went, it was really good. It was really nice. Especially when you've been stuck at home on your own all day. You're looking out the window for the postman, that's the highlight of the bloody day"*

- Tuatara

Inclusion in lunchroom conversation ebbs and flows, from wider inclusion to smaller inclusion, then back again. The lunchroom is an example of the value of the Shed for these men, to whom retirement can mean isolation from wider society. The group is an affable and familiar one, which

influences the ease and vigour of conversation. The Shed is a place where men can escape isolation from empty domestic spaces, develop a sense of comfort and connection, and become absorbed in conversation with other men.

Spending time together, finding common ground, and reciprocal interests, then, provide foundations on which to establish connection and rapport in the Shed, and also to create supportive places. Sheddies actively seek out opportunities to deepen their relationships in such ways, and develop a repertoire of rapport-building techniques:

*“[Relationships are formed] by spending more time with them and by being prepared to listen to what they’ve got to say rather than trying to tell a story on top of their story... and by asking questions about things that they know about, ‘cos I’m genuinely interested to know and they seem genuinely interested to spend time with me and to talk with me and have conversations... I’ve spent time with [another Sheddie] but I haven’t really had much conversation with him. I guess it needs to be something that you find that you’ve got in common that you, then leads it on”*

- Tuatara

In the extract, Tuatara emphasises the importance of actively listening to others. Rogers (1959) describes ‘active listening’ as an act of paying attention which involves with empathetic understanding and conveyance of unconditional positive regard. Active listening is associated with rapport, positive impression formation, affirmative and rewarding personal relationships, and the positive appraisal of people’s social experiences (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Duan & Hill, 1996; Gladstein, 1977; Kawamichi et al., 2015; C Rogers, 1957; C. Rogers, 1959). In the Shed, men actively listen to each other to bridge their experiences and understandings, and to create a shared reality in which they are understood and included.

Active listening, finding common ground, building rapport, and demonstrating empathy are essential in finding the ‘right person’ to build relationships in which particular issues are discussed openly and safely:

*“If you get to know people first and know how they respond. I mean, [one Sheddie’s] got prostate cancer problems so he obviously knows about prostate cancer and its treatment and [another Sheddie] has got diabetes so he knows about diabetes. He’s had diabetes all his life, I think, so he knows about diabetes treatment and symptoms, that sort of thing, so I guess you’d have to find the right person. I mean, there’s no point in asking me about diabetes cos I don’t... I’d say, ‘oh, you’d have to ask so and so’. But it would have to be the right person. I*

*guess some of them would be reticent or taciturn or not interested or... and there'd be, cos you'd already see that some of them are more sensitive types than others. There's some really rugged ones in there. There's some really hard bitten ones and there's some guys that're, are much softer"*

- Tuatara

Discussion around personal matters or issues of health happens after Sheddies actively and deliberately familiarise themselves with other interlocutors and use this knowledge to gauge their chances of receiving favourable reactions. People are selective in who they disclose sensitive information to, such as diagnoses of ill-health (Kalichman, DiMarco, Austin, Like, & DiFonzo, 2003). These men are no exception, and draw on their expectations of others and inferences about how such others might respond to particular conversation (Block & Funder, 1986; Jones & Nisbett, 1972). Understandably, disclosure is influenced by the response or support the men might anticipate from potential audiences (Kalichman et al., 2003). In cases where a particular Sheddie might not be the able to speak knowledgeably about an issue, such men might act as markers or pointers, and direct concerned parties to others who might be more able to help them. Such signposting contributes to a community of care in which men look after one-another and ensure that their comrades have their needs met, even if this means pointing them in a more appropriate direction.

The open and willing manner in which men in the Shed either talk about health issues or support others in receiving care, contrasts to dominant discourses in psychology which position all men as resistant to engaging in health practices or acknowledging weakness, particularly around bodily vulnerability (C. Lee & R. G. Owens, 2002; O'Neil, 2008). In the Shed, Sheddies contribute to, and are interested in, the dissemination of helpful health information:

*"It came up cos [a Sheddie] has got diabetes and I think there's two or three of them've got prostate cancer or have had it. So, you know, people are interested to learn from others' experiences with these things cos they're issues that we all face. So it's a resource in that way. It's a resource of experience"*

- Tuatara

The acceptance and sharing of personal issues normalises certain types of strife, and (re)produces an open and reciprocal community of shared care. Making salient the struggles these men face may make it easier for men to talk openly about such issues in the Shed, particularly if they have built rapport with others who share similar issues. In doing so, these men carve out a space in which



sharing and mutual concern become critical elements of collective wellbeing, and contribute to a shared sense of connection and joint care.

Overall, participants illustrate the active and purposeful creation and appropriation of camaraderie, and how these not only take place within the men's everyday engagement in the Shed, but are essential in (re)producing a climate of shared care and support. The extent to which intentional and active relationship building is wrought into the everyday practices of the Shed is apparent. Such practices reproduce the Shed and affirm its culture of deliberate companionship.

## **6.5 Chapter summary**

Sheddies understand camaraderie in ways that extend beyond just friendliness, drawing also on companionship, sharing, caring, experience, and worth in solidifying unity and shared 'being' in the Shed. This chapter illustrates how Sheddies participate in the Shed as social practitioners who engage in the consumption of material objects to relate to one-another. Exemplars of the proficient deployment of camaraderie practices include the creation of spaces for the material and social production of the Shed's vision, the procuring and gifting of items for practical and social use, and the intentional development of material projects foreseen to generate camaraderie practice. Consumption within camaraderie practice in the Shed is not about economic exchange, but about the symbolic significance and use of items in context (Warde, 2005). Mundane performances make up the everyday practice of camaraderie, and are performed in various ways by Sheddies, such as providing physical labour and time, procuring material items, and taking an interest in each other.

Sheddies intentionally, actively, and jointly construct camaraderie, and engage in their everyday material world to do so. People experience the world and are placed in it through their bodies (Olsen, 2003). This placement is understood through the practices and objects that are open to bodies, and which are engaged with by people (Olsen, 2003). Purposeful social engagement through physical labour creates a specific embodied and place-based community of practice in the Shed, and renders men who share practical and material interests 'in place' there. Material symbols of practice demonstrate Sheddies' desire to draw like-men together. These men partake in social participation which is grounded in physical labour. The men produce practices that place them within the Shed and grant them access to the social capital of the Shed and of adjacent social networks.

The uptake of objects and spaces through labour is an important element in the development of camaraderie. While labour takes place, Sheddies converse verbally and explore each other's wishes, experiences, and pasts to find common ground through which to connect. They are also engaged in the creation of new positive experiences that contribute to their wellbeing. Construction projects are about more than the creation of material things, since they also offer the creation of opportunities to respond to retirement through particular and practical forms of social engagement. Sheddies who engage in physical labour are better able to navigate the social places of the Shed, and to benefit from the social support and relationships that happen there. At the same time, the uptake of objects through meal breaks is also an important element in the development of camaraderie in the Shed. Sheddies deploy objects such as chairs, tables, and shared food in anchoring themselves to other men in the lunchroom. The Shed is thus produced through the accumulation of object-use and place-based practices.

Camaraderie plays an important role in experiencing connection to, and support from, other human beings. Camaraderie binds men together in the Shed, and informs and reinforces their actions within its social structure. The development of everyday camaraderie conduct is thus located in the collective place of the Shed, rather than in the motivations of individuals (Warde, 2005).

The intentional development of camaraderie and unity exists in stark contrast with men's experiences of "cut-throat" workplaces in which these men have experienced competitive and aggressive relationships with other employees. Camaraderie in the Shed, then, is more than about bonding, but is about creating a supportive reality in which these men are 're-humanised' by working harmoniously as relational and caring human beings.

In the next chapter, I consider this research as a whole. Throughout the thesis, I have explored how Sheddies (re)construct a sense of self in tandem with each other through social interactions (Blumer, 1986; Goffman, 1959; Hermans, 2001; Hermans et al., 1992). Non-human actors are drawn up in the process of self-(re)formation, not only in facilitating Sheddies' socio-material interactions (Allen, 2011; Mills, 1959; Thrift, 2000b), but in comprising the very elements of their selves (James, 1890). Importantly, social interactions and identity work are emplaced social phenomena (Dixon & Durrheim, 2004) in the Shed that are carried out through embodied practices (Hargreaves, 2011; Reckwitz, 2002), so that 'being' and 'doing' are intertwined in this space. A shared sense of 'being' and 'doing' is particularly important for these men in establishing a sense of familiarity and connection in spaces associated with expression through material labour (Hodgetts & Rua, 2010),

and also in enactments of continued wellbeing in the face of uncertainty relating to health (Radley, 1994). I end the thesis by highlighting how the findings of this research contribute to current scholarly understandings of men, and by illustrating the important role such research plays in the support and continuation of the Men's Shed movement in New Zealand.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Considering this research as a whole

In this final chapter, I draw together the material covered in this thesis. Chapters four through six explored the reworking of self, emplacement, and socio-material practice in the Men's Shed North Shore. Retired people are often portrayed as redundant and obsolete in a wider society of paid work. Furthermore, men are portrayed as disinterested in, and negligent of, their health (Hall, 2003; C. Lee & R. G. Owens, 2002). However, my analysis chapters have shown that older, retired men who participate in the Shed intentionally and communally engage in health practices in agentive ways that draw on elements of the material and social lifeworlds of the Shed. The chapters have demonstrated the effort these men put into the reworking of self, the maintenance of their health and dignity in a disruptive life stage, their pragmatic approach to retirement, and their (re)production of place and space in which men can develop a sense of camaraderie and unity. The understanding of men in this way opens up an opportunity to (re)consider men as beings who are not only proactive in their wellbeing, but who also support each other in coping with adversity in relational ways.

The approach developed for this research reveals how older, retired men communally reflect on their estrangement from places of paid employment and their subsequent re-placement in the Men's Shed North Shore through practices grounded in physical labour. In the process, these men consider their emplacement in wider society, and jointly rework selves in negotiating the disruption retirement brings to emplacement and their sense of self. In the Shed space, the men who participate there, the Sheddies, (re)ground themselves through agentive and emplaced socio-material practices. Subsequent donative practices also anchor the Shed to the Glenfield community as a caring and supportive entity, and create opportunities to reforge how men, particularly older men, are viewed and situated in a community place and in wider society. In short, the Shed's emplaced socio-material practices are linked with older men's communal reworking of selves and their socio-political standing in the world, as well as being a vehicle for their extended wellbeing in older age.

In starting this research, I sought to find out about positive and supportive relationships that happen within a group of men specifically set up for the purpose of care, support, and community building. I drew attention to an organised group of men whose lives are textured by retirement, social isolation, ruptured self-worth, degeneration, and a disrupted sense of self, but who manage to navigate such challenges successfully (Ballinger et al., 2009; Golding, 2008, 2011a; Ormsby et al., 2010). I have argued for a (re)conceptualisation of the Men's Shed North Shore through a lens of social interaction and meaning-making in this particular place. As this research demonstrates, the Shed contributes to a renewed and joint sense of purpose and placement in later life for the men who participate there. In particular, I situated the self as relational (James, 1890; Yang, 2006) and malleable (Hermans et al., 1992; James, 1890), and as being intrinsically linked to, and triggered by, interaction with the space, objects, and social relationships that are brought into being and foregrounded in the Shed (Blumer, 1986; Mead, 1934). As social beings, Sheddies 'fit' their social interactions and practices with the actions of others, which plays an essential role in the construction and enactment of selves in the Shed (Blumer, 1986; Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934). I also argued that the particular ways the Sheddies 'fit' their social action reflects broader structures which pattern their lives (Cooley, 1902; Giddens, 1986). In doing so, I positioned material objects, such as tools and construction projects, as essential actors which facilitate the 'fitting in' of action within the Shed and local Glenfield community (Hodgetts et al., 2013; Reckwitz, 2002). Such objects are taken up and used by Sheddies in a mutual process of experiencing the world, understanding it, and relating to it through their (re)development of selves (Hurdley, 2006; Snell & Hodgetts, 2007).

Through an ethnographic (Emerson, 1995; Whitehead, 2005; P. Willis & Trondman, 2000; Zemliansky, 2008a) case study approach (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012; Radley & Chamberlain, 2012) involving intensive participation and participant-observation, I was able to produce an account of the familiar and supportive practices which take place in the Men's Shed North Shore. My account is anchored in the experiences of those who inhabit the Shed, including me. An ethnographic approach was essential in getting close to the lifeworlds of Sheddies, but also in overcoming differences associated with class and educational backgrounds. In recording, interpreting, and sharing my experiences, I brought readers of this research closer to Sheddies' lived experiences (Blumer, 1986).

In chapter four, the first of three analytic chapters, I highlighted the importance of researcher-participation. My prolonged engagement in the Shed gave me a sense of its history, and

consequently I was able to take the reader on a tour of the Shed during its inception, pointing to significant meaning-laden objects, and presenting the restorative elements of the Shed. My participation in the Shed allowed me to situate the men who engage there as experienced social practitioners and mentors in the process. The necessity, in this research, of active material participation in accessing the Shed's social structure is not surprising given the value this group of men place on material engagement and expression. As such, a key finding of the chapter was the importance of material practice in drawing together human and non-human actors in an agentive intersection of material and social spheres (Allen, 2011; Blumer, 1986; Heidegger, 1953). Material practice is an essential relational practice in the Shed (Allen, 2011; Bourdieu, 1986). The products of this practice provide monuments (Cassim et al., 2015) and markers (Cuba & Hummon, 1993) for members of the Shed to engage in continued remembrance (Hurdley, 2006) and identity work of who they are (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and how they are 'called into' and emplaced in the world through such practice (Heidegger, 1953).

In chapter five, I explored the Shed as a response to retirement and health declines that are associated with older age (Golding, 2011a; Ormsby et al., 2010). A key finding of this chapter relates to the way men in the Shed have grown used to the commodification of their very 'being' in the world through paid employment, and the extent to which their commodified 'being' is disrupted by retirement. The lives of these older men have been heavily patterned by the need for resource-acquisition to fulfil a 'bread-winner' role through capitalist production-oriented landscapes. The men who participated in this research shared with me their own and others' experiences of depersonalising workplaces, the disruption of retirement, and the challenges associated with ageing in later life. More specifically, some of these men participated in competitive and aggressive workplaces, even though they may not have agreed with the workplace culture they had participated in, or the 'cut-throat' enactments that were (re)produced in workplaces. Yet, the men who participated in the research also recounted how paid employment opened up opportunities to share experiences with other men and to engage with them materially and socially. The narratives of these men spoke of the ways men come to know the world and their place in it through labour (P. Willis, 1977). Such labour-based practices of 'being' come to be wrapped up in their continued wellbeing, their identities, and sense of belonging and placement.

For the men encountered over the course of this research, the Shed offers a reflective space to consider the past, and the shaping of their 'being' through the demands of life and subsequent paid employment. In this regard, the Shed represents a pragmatic adaptation to retirement where these

men re-place their sense of self, while also selectively reproducing the socio-material practices they associate with wellbeing and contribution. While the Shed offers men an opportunity to transplant health-laden practices of engaging materially, mentally, and socially, they are also challenging aggressive and competitive practices they feel have obstructed their existence as caring and sharing beings. These elements coalesce in the Shed through a synthesis of labour and social connections, where health, leisure, and labour are entwined in the Shed space (Lefebvre, 1991). In the process, Sheddies engage in jointly (re)constructing themselves rhetorically as healthy men by challenging popular representations of retired people. In particular, they adopt an active stance to life in retirement, often positioning themselves in opposition to socially and physically inactive men whom they perceive as socially isolated and unhealthy.

In chapter six, I explored the active pursuit and construction of camaraderie as a core element of the Shed. The purposeful (re)production of companionship, sharing, caring, experience, solidarity, and worth underlies the climate of camaraderie that infuses the Shed. The chapter built on themes of material practice and object-use that emerged in chapter four. However, chapter six further explored associated practices of taken-for-granted gifting and symbolic significance that accompanies material practice, as well as their contribution to strengthening social ties. Throughout the chapter, I highlighted the emplacement of men who share similar interests, who are 'placed' in the world through their bodies and embodied practices (Olsen, 2003). A key finding of chapter six was the way Sheddies use the rapport and trust which is built up over construction projects as an appropriate platform to discuss intimate topics such as health issues. Material practice and use of the Shed's micro-spaces thus play an important role in developing camaraderie, which subsequently shapes their connection to, and support from, other men in the Shed.

In the current chapter, I consider how the theoretical and empirical material that has emerged from this research illustrates the entwined nature of self, social interaction, place, and object-use in the Shed. I also draw attention to the purposeful ethos of caring and sharing that is absent from much theoretical conceptualisations of men, yet lies at the heart of Shed culture. I contend that research into Men's Sheds plays an important role in the support and continuation of the Men's Shed movement in New Zealand.

## 7.1 Consolidating the research findings

Overall, the proposition that one's self is worked and reworked across social interactions (Blumer, 1986; James, 1890; Mead, 1934) is central to this research. I have illustrated that practice, place, and other actors (human and non-human) are essential media for the reworking of self from one context to another. In particular, my findings indicate that men's selves are not as fixed and oriented toward hegemonic masculinities as dominant conceptualisations of men currently suggest. Rather, men respond agentively to place and to other's selves that are in play there (Altman, 1993; Hodgetts et al., 2010; James, 1890). When this group of Sheddies come together and reflect on their desire to share their experiences of material practice in the Shed space, they create a place where they can communally fit their action together in ways that espouse shared ageing, collaboration, and support which they feel they were not able to adopt in settings defined by paid employment. In the process, these men redefine what it is to be men in this space. The Shed climate and the activities that occur in the Shed are mutually shaping and (re)produce the Shed place (O'Donnell et al., 1993).

The shifting of men's selves documented in this research offers a significant contribution to current theorising around men. Often, men are positioned as inherently oriented towards narrowly prescribed hegemonic masculinities (Courtenay, 2000; C. Lee & R. G. Owens, 2002) and male gender roles (O'Neil, 2008) that focus on domination and superiority. In such literature, men are defined through striving for superiority over others in harmful and detrimental ways, regardless of context or life-stage. My findings suggest that supposed hegemonic 'traits' were expected by my participants to be located in particular contexts and subsequently (re)performed by the people who inhabit these locales, but not in others. The men in this research were prepared to act in particular ways they thought were expected from them in paid employment, and were thankful to leave and to engage in acts of kindness and support in the Shed.

'Re-placement' is a core element of the (re)construction of self in the Shed. When leaving paid employment, many men are 'displaced' from places and practices through which they have anchored themselves meaningfully in the world (Barnes & Parry, 2004; Dixon & Durrheim, 2004; Nicholson, 2012; Pease, 2002). At the same time, these men feel distanced from identities of worth and usefulness that have been forged through lifetimes of trading labour for income. In this way, men find their lives disrupted and, like immigrating people, find themselves separated from places in which their sense of self has previously been constructed and affirmed (Deaux, 2000). Sheddies



demonstrate their agency, creativity, and active engagement in redefining retirement, and engage conjointly in the world on their own terms. Such practices 're-place' men in the Shed, where they form a sense of belonging and once again become anchored (Cuba & Hummon, 1993; Deaux, 2000). The re-placement that happens in the Shed reflects literature theorising the experiences of immigrating people who work to establish a sense of belonging through familiarity and a shared sense of 'being' and 'doing' (Dixon & Durrheim, 2004). This research illustrates how the notion of belonging and feeling 'at home' is a process that is enacted in particular spaces. Home spaces can thus be shared public spaces such as Men's Sheds, where processes of home-making are enacted. Men do not just 'do things' in the Shed. They are homed and dwell there through labour practices and associated material artefacts. Through these processes, a sense of belonging and relational selfhood are (re)formed, and Sheddies are anchored (Mallett, 2004). Ultimately, sharing interests with other people and being able to engage with them through labour is a strong determinant of placement and anchoring in the Shed. It is not surprising to find these men navigating the challenges of older age in the recreation of labour practices, when such practices have been so deeply entrenched in their lives through paid employment.

It is important to note that these men seek to recreate the very labour practices that many are relieved to give up. Considering the use of men's time and bodies through both paid and unpaid labour reveals the commodification of men's very 'being' in the world, and the blurring of labour and leisure that happens for these men (Lefebvre, 1991). Labour provides these men with a sense of continuity and of enacting healthy lifestyles. These findings reflect research illustrating the importance of labour on wellbeing (Wilkinson & Marmot, 2003). Moreover, feeling like one is 'at home' and surrounded by kindred spirits grounds men's sense of placement and belonging in the Shed, and bolsters their efforts in responding to disruption. The Shed represents a site at which men can reconstruct and resituate themselves in new and unfamiliar domains (Deaux, 2000).

The positive orientation taken in this thesis contrasts with more traditional approaches to psychological research. Such approaches have conceptualised men through deficit-based frameworks (Courtenay, 2000; Hall, 2003; C. Lee & R. G. Owens, 2002). There is an overwhelming research-base of theorising about men finding themselves through unhealthy and risky practices. Such a focus can provide useful insights into the lives of some men. However, a deficit orientation has limited our knowledge about men's prosocial and positive practices. In stark contrast to literature which positions men as negligent of their wellbeing, and generally irresponsible (Courtenay, 2000; Hall, 2003; C. Lee & R. G. Owens, 2002), Sheddies' views of wellbeing are complex

and holistic, and focus on healthy and deeply considered ageing. The emphasis on wellbeing in the current findings reflects literature linking Sheddies' participation to self-rated health outcomes (Golding, 2008, 2011a; Golding et al., 2007; Ormsby et al., 2010; Skladzien & O'Dwyer, 2010). The findings also support existing literature on Men's Sheds which suggest that Sheddies come to both produce and consume health care without feeling like service-dependent health users (Golding, 2011a).

The Shed is a site which fosters core aspects of being human such as caring, productive labour, creativity, companionship, and giving. Rarely is the scholarly gaze turned towards men in a way that reveals such fundamental characteristics of humanity. Sheddies reflect on their experiences of paid employment and intentionally rework their very understandings of self in relational and supportive ways. The Shed is a space where new members are sought and drawn in, in warm and welcoming ways, and are supported through ongoing and intentional social interactions and material practices. In particular, Sheddies participate in construction projects as joint enterprises over which they communally (re)produce the labour practices which ground these men in the world. They become embroiled with other men who participate in the Shed and jointly make sense of a challenging life stage by reworking selves and by contributing to a climate of collaboration and care. Through social interactions, including productive endeavours, and object-use at Men's Sheds, Sheddies recreate a sense of themselves as worthy, intelligent, capable, and healthy human beings.

This research demonstrates that, when resources and circumstances allow, men can renew definitions of manhood and later life in the Shed. Relational resources, such as a sense of belonging, feeling supported, and helping others, play an important role in the wellbeing of these men (Cohen, Underwood, & Gottlieb, 2000). Indeed, sharing and volunteering for the good of 'the community' is an important element in these men's participation in the Shed (Batson, 1991, 1994). Such altruism helps these men to cope with adversity (Mattis et al., 2009) and to feel good in being supportive (Dolnicar & Randle, 2007; Mastain, 2007; Rehberg, 2005), while at the same time supporting their sense of worth, creativity, and contribution (Monroe, 1996; Post et al., 2002; Stukus, Daly, & Clary, 2006). Such giving is connected to the shared understandings and practices that permeate the Shed (Post et al., 2002). Giving is embedded in the social fabric of the Shed, and thus also its social action (Cooley, 1902; Giddens, 1986).

Men's Sheds constitute communities of resilience (J. Pooley, Cohen, & O'Connor, 2006), which provide opportunities for group members to experience stability, security, belongingness and psychological connectedness (Sonn & Fisher, 1998) in adapting to adversity (Reed-Victor & Stronge, 2002). The Shed provides older men with opportunities and interpersonal supports with which to cope with disruptive life events (A. Pooley, Breen, Pike, Cohen, & Drew, 2007). As community-initiated health interventions, Sheds target social determinants of health such as inclusion and productive activity through labour. The Shed encourages an agentic and relational approach to retirement and disruption through civic participation (Campbell & Jovchelovitch, 2000). These men jointly consider and navigate disruptive life circumstances to achieve positive outcomes in the shape of healthy ageing (Gottlieb & Wagner, 1991; Jahoda, Lazarsfield, & Zeisel, 1933/1972). The embracing of relational being in particular provides these men with greater resilience resources (Step toe, O'Donnell, Marmot, & Wardle, 2008). In the process, these men draw on health restoration practices located in the Shed, such as social engagement, support, and the sharing of coping strategies, which buffers men against the disruptive influences of retirement (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Step toe et al., 2008).

Despite the positive potential offered by the Shed, this community place of resilience cannot completely lighten the disruption these men experience (Cattell, 2001). Rather, the Shed provides a mechanism through which Sheddies can come together and support one-another through such disruption. These men make use of the Shed space and the social relationships that exist there to cope positively in response to challenging life events. The physical environment of the Shed plays an important role in promoting the wellbeing of this group of older men (O'Dwyer, Baum, Kavanagh, & MacDougall, 2007; Putland, 2008), especially in enabling social interaction that facilitates positive and affirming experiences (Wood & Giles-Corti, 2008), and a sense of collective ownership over the Shed space (Nowell, Berkowitz, Deacon, & Foster-Fishman, 2006). In particular, the Shed is set up in a way that encourages material cooperation over projects and social interaction. This highlights the importance of orienting space to facilitate community building and shared participation when considering healthy and restorative places for ageing men.

The Men's Shed movement is an historically-grounded response to some of life's challenges. The movement evolved from, and still reflects, histories of the settler societies in New Zealand and Australia. Labourers were encouraged to migrate to New Zealand. As a group, these men developed

skills and tools to become largely self-reliant in terms of material survival, but they relied on one-another for support and social survival<sup>18</sup> (Bassett, 1990b; M. King, 2003; Phillips, 1996). In much the same way, Sheddies draw on each other for support in coping with difficult circumstances. Fashioning and maintaining material goods still plays a central role in drawing men together. Engagement and labour in the Shed creates a social climate focussed on pride of work and material achievement (J. Hopkins & Riley, 1998, 2002). The group of men in this research intentionally carve out a supportive and considerate place where they can communally cope with a particularly challenging life stage. Their response to disruption is pragmatic; and draws together space, self, and objects in a milieu of purposeful relational being in which they can jointly reflect and respond through humanitarian philosophies of caring and unity. In the process, Sheddies inject a piece of themselves into the fabric of the material culture of the Shed and into the collaborative projects that take shape there (Mauss, 1954). As such, this research contributes to the growing understanding of men as both prosocial and materially expressive, where labouring and caregiving happen simultaneously (Hodgetts & Rua, 2010). Such practices have taken shape in domestic backyard sheds, and continue today in contemporary Men's Sheds (Ballinger et al., 2009; Golding et al., 2007). Working collaboratively in such spaces contributes to men's sense of connection to place, to other participating men, and to the wider community (Ballinger et al., 2009; Golding et al., 2007).

## **7.2 Final reflections and moving forward**

The findings of this research focussed on material practice and object-use as media for social interaction, emplacement, and the (re)construction of self. This focus should not be surprising as research findings invariably reflect research methods (Radley & Chamberlain, 2012), which in this case, were based on researcher-participation in a materially-laden locale. In this way, the methods used were not only appropriate for the Shed place, but also reflect the Shed ethos. The (auto)ethnographic research orientation and use of participative methods also allowed the agentive practices and representations of Sheddies as experienced social and material practitioners to come to the fore in the research findings (Radley & Chamberlain, 2012). The participatory approach to this research reflects the labour-oriented and materially-grounded relational being of Sheddies. Through

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<sup>18</sup> The material and social resilience demonstrated by colonial men aided their survival and helped to establish European settler society in New Zealand. However, it is important to acknowledge that European settlers often depended on local Maori for resources and knowledge, and that settlers were often working on land or with resources that were confiscated from Maori.

labour, the men in the Shed relate to the world and to each other (P. Willis, 1977). Through my own labour, I came to relate to these men and to their lifeworlds in the Shed. Indeed, Sheddies encouraged my efforts to reflect their 'being' by participating in the emplaced and embodied practices of the Shed. In this way, the findings of this research are joint products of both the researcher and participants.

Given the importance of material participation for this group of men, I do not believe that the findings of this research would have been possible through more distanced or non-participatory approaches. Taking part in the Sheddies' own settings provided me significant insight into socio-political and cultural processes that flow over into the Shed (Whitehead, 2004), and enhanced my empathy for Sheddies' experiences (Emerson, 1995). By taking part in participants' daily life in the Shed, I was able to witness Sheddies' responses to the disruption retirement had caused them (Emerson, 1995), and to consider what the consequences might be for me when I too retire. Through such an approach, I have attempted to increase the transportability of the experiences of Sheddies to others, and to create a place for readers of this research to also consider the Shed in ways that may not be otherwise available to them as 'outsiders'.

Throughout this research, I sought to explore the meaning-making of Sheddies, rather than to merely describe the Shed. A participatory approach enabled me to extend beyond description by offering a viewpoint of the Shed as an 'insider'. As a participant and social actor in the Shed, I was able to immerse myself in the Shed for an extended period of time (Khan, 2011) and more fully appreciate what the Shed entails, interpreting the Shed as Sheddies might (Whitehead, 2004). My methodological approach to exploring the Shed took priority over testing any predetermined hypotheses, and was an inductive process, seeking to generate theoretical insights rather than deductively confirming or refuting existing theory, as in more positivist approaches (Emerson, 1995). My approach utilised a wide range of research methods depending on their practicality and appropriateness. This open-ended approach invoked opportunities to encounter continuous learning experiences, raise new questions about the Shed, and develop sequential means of approaching Sheddies (Whitehead, 2004). In the process, as a bricoleur, I drew on an array of data sources to explore this context, including interviews, a focus group, newsletters, literary and video media suggested by participants, and newspaper articles. However, the most potent of resources were the informal conversations and material practices that I engaged in within the Shed. These experiences

and accounts comprised the material of my fieldwork journal of participating in the Shed. Indeed, the Men's Shed North Shore was chosen because I saw it as having the potential to exemplify a context in which I could build and explore supportive relationships with participants, based on what I had found in existing Men's Shed literature.

The philosophies of case studies and ethnography demonstrated a particularly good fit with my intentions in conducting this research. I was particularly interested in developing closer researcher-participant relationships by spending more time with individual men and learning about their own life experiences. In this regard, I agree with Hodgetts and Stolte (2012) that collaboration with participants in engaged case-based research represents a less exploitive methodological approach than those involving tests done on subjects. In adopting participatory methods, I also sought to recognise the expertise both of the Sheddies and of myself as researcher. Trust and rapport were foundational in establishing close collaborative relationships in this research: to gain access to the lifeworld of the Shed; to assist dialogue between myself and the Sheddies to create an account of meaning and practical use to them (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012); and lastly to stimulate theoretically informed social change or benefit (P. Willis & Trondman, 2000). Indeed, throughout the course of conducting this research, I have become increasingly critical of more dis-engaged methods of research which overlook meaningful benefits for participants.

Through this research, I have been less concerned with developing a representational model of male behaviour, and more with exemplifying a particular instance of positive and supportive relationship-building in this particular Shed. This research provides what I hope are useful and richly detailed insights into life in the Men's Shed North Shore, and into the broader structures that shape Sheddies experiences (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012). As such, findings from this research are not meant to be used to make generalisations about all men or all Men's Sheds (Radley & Chamberlain, 2012). However, the findings may still be used to inform our understandings of processes in similar instances (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012; Radley & Chamberlain, 2012) such as how some men might pragmatically, materially, and communally adjust to retirement, or continue wellbeing in later life through socio-material practice. By making inferences about the Shed, we can consider whether its social, emplaced, and materially-mediated elements could apply to others, given alike circumstances (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012). We can also challenge dominant approaches to research that theorise all men through deficit-based theoretical lenses. This research offers an alternative to most mainstream

research on men by investigating a supposedly 'outlying' social instance (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012) in which men intentionally form positive, expressive relationships and engage in wellbeing practices.

This research offers an account of the Men's Shed North Shore and its emplaced socio-material practices. However, Men's Sheds materialise in accordance with the needs of the local men who bring their particular Sheds into being (Glover & Misan, 2012). As a result, the social structures of particular Sheds will likely develop differently based on the practices that take place there (Giddens, 1986). This research warrants further exploration into the practices of other Men's Sheds in New Zealand which emerge in response to particular issues that are prevalent in their local communities. Such research plays an important role in the support that emerges for these Sheds. I hope that the closeness to participants that I have illustrated here may encourage future researchers in this area to also consider the benefits of engaged participation-observation approaches to Shed research, and to research more generally. The depth of insight that emerged from this research resulted from extensive engagement with the Shed and the everyday socio-material practice that are a core element of the Men's Shed North Shore. By engaging more with the lived experiences of participants, we position ourselves in producing research that is of greater benefit to improving participants' lives. In the process, researchers can aid participants by developing theoretical insights which may validate Men's Sheds as a legitimate community-based health intervention. Research efforts to document and communicate participants' experiences to those with the power, can help to advocate for resources for such community initiatives. In this way, in-depth and engaged research practices constitute a research strategy toward addressing socio-political issues. Social scientists have recently promoted the use of engaged, case-based research as an effective way to gain deep insights, and assist action in regards to social issues (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012). Indeed, praxis is becoming increasingly important, given growing economic and socio-cultural stratification. As an engaged researcher, I have sustained a praxis orientation by working with and alongside participants, and by focussing on the practical application of my research in ways that could benefit the Shed and its members.

Throughout my participation, men also participating in this project made it clear that they anticipated good things to come from my research, mostly in the form of a detailed case-study that could demonstrate the supportive and restorative elements of their Men's Shed to stakeholders such as funders and the general public. As a community project that relies on giving by local charitable trusts and support from local residents, this research contributes to wider understandings of the benefits of such restorative community places, and to broaden understandings of older men

beyond a deficit approach, to instead focus on the positive contributions men can make to their communities. The findings of this thesis, and future research in the area, can be used to strengthen the content of funding applications and justification for Men's Sheds, and to inform articles that promote the benefits of Sheds. Given that there is currently no state funding or policy initiatives which support Men's Sheds in New Zealand, this thesis and further research into Men's Sheds can contribute to a growing recognition of the benefits of such positive and restorative spaces for older men. Through my engagements with the Shed, I have initiated action, and continue to do so through a collaborative reworking of this thesis into more manageable and consumable forms. While this research constitutes an excellent starting point in drawing positive attention to the Shed, alternative vehicles, such as press releases, news articles, testimonies, funding 'sound bites', and video media, provide accessible material through which the Men's Shed North Shore and the broader Men's Shed movement can be promoted and supported.



## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Host information sheet

## Men's social capital: the function of men's groups

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### Host information sheet

#### What is this study about?

The aim of this study is to develop a better understanding of the ways in which men in Aotearoa/New Zealand develop and make use of positive and supportive relationships. This research explores how men make material and non-material resources available to other men within groups (e.g. borrowing money, borrowing tools, transport, camaraderie, social support, and advice), how men recognise these as being available to them and how men utilise these resources.

#### Who is conducting the study?

David Anstiss, a Ph.D. student with The University of Waikato.

#### What will I be asked to do?

I would like your permission to participate in your group as both a member and researcher, and to keep a journal of my experiences and of my observations of other group members. I would like your permission to approach other group members to ask about, and record, their experiences and to clarify questions I may have about my observations. I would also like your permission to take photos of group members, projects and the site. Photos of members would not be taken, or published in the final research, without their permission.

#### How will my information be used?

The information from members will provide useful insights about men's supportive relationships within men's groups in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Should you or the group members be interested, I would like to present the results of this study back to the group at the end of my Ph.D. If, at any time up until the completion of the research, members should want their contributions retrieved and withdrawn from the research, I will be happy to do so.

#### How will my information be kept anonymous and confidential?

Group members' names or other personal information will not be used and pseudonyms will be used in any writing or published materials. I would like to assure you that I will respect confidentiality, and that all group members will remain anonymous in anything I write from this research.

If you have any further questions or concerns regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact:

Principal researcher:

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Supervisor:

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## Men's social capital: the function of men's groups

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### Participant information sheet

#### What is this study about?

The aim of this study is to develop a better understanding of the ways in which men in Aotearoa/New Zealand develop and make use of positive and supportive relationships. This research explores how men make material and non-material resources available to other men within groups (e.g. borrowing money, borrowing tools, transport, camaraderie, social support and advice), how men recognise these as being available to them and how men utilise these resources.

#### Who is conducting the study?

David Anstiss, a Ph.D. student with The University of Waikato.

#### What will I be asked to do?

I would like to invite you to talk about your experiences, and to clarify questions I have about my observations of the group. I would like your permission to record our discussion with a tape recorder. I would also like your permission to take a photo of you and your project. Neither your contribution nor photo will be published in the final research without your permission. You are free to accept or decline this invitation. You are also free to ask for the tape recorder to be turned off at any time.

#### How will my information be used?

The information you contribute will provide useful insights about men's supportive relationships within men's groups in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Should you be interested, I would like to present the results of this study back to the group at the end of my Ph.D. If, at any time up until the completion of the research, you should want your contributions retrieved and withdrawn from the research, I will be happy to do so.

#### How will my information be kept anonymous and confidential?

Your name or other personal information will not be used. Instead, you will be assigned a pseudonym in any writing or published materials. I would like to assure you that I will respect confidentiality, and that you will remain anonymous in anything I write from this research.

If you have any further questions or concerns regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact:

Principal researcher:  
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## **Appendix 3: Group facilitator reference**

### **A case study of the Men's Shed North Shore**

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#### **Group discussion - facilitator reference**

##### **Introduction**

My name is David Anstiss. I am a Ph.D. student with the University of Waikato. I am doing a case study of the Men's Shed North Shore.

##### **Purpose**

The purpose of holding these discussions is to get an understanding of the Men's Shed North Shore, and to be able to describe to outsiders what the shed is and what it means to its members.

##### **Audio recording and consent**

I'll be recording this conversation. The only people who will have access to the recording will be myself and my supervisors. You may ask for it to be turned off at any time.

If at any point you feel you need to leave, that's not a problem.

##### **Questions**

Did anyone have any questions for me about my research or why I'm here?

##### **Topics and questions/prompts:**

###### *The shed*

If you were to summarise the shed, what would you say?

What are the most important aspects of the shed for members?

How is it that the men who come here, come to know each other?

###### *Sheddies*

If there was such a thing as a typical member of the shed, how would you describe him?

How do you feel others, who are not members, see the shed?

###### *Place*

What are the most important places in the shed?

What happens in there and what makes them so important?

## ENDING THE DISCUSSION

### **Summarise**

Would that be an accurate synopsis of what was covered today?

### **Unfinished business**

Is there anything you would like to bring up or thought should be discussed?

### **Thank you's**

## Appendix 4: Interview guide

### A case study of the Men's Shed North Shore

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#### Interviewer *guide*

##### TOPIC: The Shed

- Can you tell me about why you became involved in the shed?
- Tell me about your first experience of the shed
- What keeps you coming back to the shed?
- Is there anything that would stop you coming to the shed?
- Could you describe a typical day at the shed for you?
- If you were to summarise the shed and your place in it, what would you say?

##### TOPIC: The Sheddies

- Is there anyone in particular at the shed you get along with?
- Tell me about how you get on with them
- How have your relationship evolved since first meeting them?
- Do you have any contact with these men outside the shed?

##### TOPIC: Participation

- Where in the shed do you tend to spend most of your time?
- What happens in there?
- Any other places?

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