Ageing and the Continuity of Masculine Identity in a Scottish Men's Shed

An Ethnographic Enquiry

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by

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Declaration

I, Jeremy Charles Watt, certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Aberdeen is solely my own work. All quotations have been distinguished by quotation marks and the sources of other works and information specifically acknowledged. The thesis has not been accepted in any previous application for a degree.

Signed

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

Although the social constructionist turn in masculinities studies has broadened and deepened sociological understandings of masculine identities in Western societies, the literature has predominantly focused on younger and middle-aged men. The recent expansion of the Men's Shed 'movement' offers significant opportunities to investigate the intersection of ageing and masculinity, and provide novel insights into what is a rapidly expanding demographic group. Originating in Australia, Men's Sheds are male-exclusive spaces in which mainly older men gather to pursue traditionally masculine practices such as woodworking and engineering. This report presents the findings of an 18-month ethnographic study of the Carstonwood Men's Shed, one of the first examples of the concept in Scotland. Established to address a perceived lack of social opportunities for older men in the town of Carstonwood, the Men's Shed attracted a dedicated core group of participants for whom the organisation played an important role in their lives. Drawing on the work of Robert Atchley and Tony Coles, participants were observed to enact an 'aged masculinity' encompassing aspects of conservation alongside the management of unavoidable change. The attitudinal and behavioural characteristics of this aged masculinity, apparent in participants' views on work, wealth, gender differentiation, health, social change, and technological objects, shaped their understanding of the purpose and functioning of the Men's Shed. In particular, the similarities participants shared stimulated the development of bonding social capital, allowing the organisation to embody, in a necessarily limited and artificial manner, a communal form no longer as apparent in contemporary society. Accordingly, the organisation exhibited a social environment characterised by norms of equality and reciprocity, with an emphasis on assisting, supporting, educating, and learning from fellow participants in matters both personal and technical. While engendering strong intra-group loyalties, this stance also prompted the rejection of individually oriented conduct as threatening to organisational success.

Keywords: Ethnography, Men's Shed, Ageing, Masculinity, Aged Masculinity, Continuity Theory, Social Capital, Community, Nostalgia, Technological Objects

Contents

Introduction

Wednesday, 15th of May 2013:

> *The excitement in the fine spring air, alongside the smell of petrol, is palpable, the throaty chug-chug-chug of a refurbished Lister standalone engine quite deafening. Huddled in a semi-circle around the fire exit of the Carstonwood Men's Shed, a group of older men observe as keenly as I do myself as this beast of a machine, transformed from mere scrap to a gleaming example of the model, is subjected to testing. Painted in deep green, mounted on a customised wooden trolley, and connected, via a thick rubber band, to a refurbished water pump, its vibrations shake the ground as it spins into life, with a hard twisting of the crank, for the first time in decades...a bucket of water is brought out to test the system, but great expectations are dissolved in roars of laughter as a powerful jet squirts around 5m, vertically, from a hole in the top of the water pump, soaking everyone in the vicinity. Having suffered for their art, and regained composure after this unintentionally comedic interlude, it is time for take two. The water pump, now properly capped, greedily sucks up the refilled bucket, shooting rapid jets around 8m, in the intended horizontal direction this time. Within a few seconds, 15l of water is drained...it is a triumph, and the expressions of joy, and indeed relief, say it all; four months of hard work, of collaborative problem solving, of sourcing and machining parts, of researching and rewriting the historical biographies of these objects, encapsulated in this moment.*

As the first major project to be completed at the Carstonwood Men's Shed,[1] a pioneering form of local social endeavour geared towards the needs and desires of older men in the community it serves, this moment can be considered not merely as the culmination of the four months of effort it took to transform these exhausted farming implements into the embodiment of the skills and labours of those involved, but moreover of the two years of effort it took to progress the organisation from an ambitious idea to a thriving reality. Frequenting an unremarkable former library building, the only indication of the transformation occurring within is a small blue sign, stating that this once empty shell now houses the Men's Shed, that this space has been, like the engine and water pump, rescued from neglect and decay to serve a new purpose. This study is an ethnographic enquiry into these processes of transformation, a study of the establishment, development, justification, functioning, and purpose of the

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[1] In the interests of anonymity, 'Carstonwood' is a pseudonym referring to the suburban Scottish town in which the Men's Shed was located.

organisation, as understood by those men who made it, and those men who made it their own.

The Carstonwood Men's Shed is one of the first Scottish instances of the wider Men's Shed 'movement', which began in Australia and has spread rapidly to other Western countries in the last decade. In 2014, there were estimated to be over 900 Men's Sheds operating in Australia, 200 in Ireland, and 50 in England and Wales (Carragher *et al*, 2014; Golding, 2014; Mark & Soulsby, 2014; Misan *et al*, 2008). In the simplest terms, Men's Sheds add a social aspect to the long-established notion of the garden shed as a male retreat, providing a community-based workshop in which men gather to pursue traditionally masculine practices such as woodworking and engineering. The majority of sites are male-exclusive, meaning that only men can become members and use the facilities, and are mainly frequented by older retired men. Men's Sheds can take various forms, including standalone buildings, rooms in larger community buildings, or converted train carriages, garages, and barns, basically anywhere in which a workshop can be established. Larger locations, such as the Carstonwood site, may also have a separate social area for tea breaks and hobby projects. Men's Sheds thus take two long-standing masculine norms, that of male homosociality, and of pursuing technological interests, and combines them in novel spaces. For Golding and colleagues (2008:255), Men's Sheds are "simultaneously…conservative and revolutionary". In terms of what is done (creative woodwork, metalwork, etc.), where it is done (the shed as a symbolically male space), and with whom it is done (other men), Men's Sheds epitomise the 'boys being boys' stereotype (Glover & Misan, 2012). The revolutionary aspect lies in the widespread local-level acceptance of such practices, an acceptance which stems from the observation that allowing time and space for boys to be boys is actually beneficial to both men and women. According to the (mainly Australian) literature, the benefits realised by participants relate to improvements in their social integration, health, and general wellbeing. In carrying these forward into other areas of their lives, their families and communities also share in the new contentment afforded to their male members.

Men's Sheds provide a relatively rare opportunity to study a homosocial environment frequented almost exclusively by older men, a demographic that has

attracted only a fraction of the scholarly attention granted to younger and middle-aged men. The majority of the current masculinities literature provides compelling reports into the diversity of masculinities enacted in schools, workplaces, sports teams, fraternities, and other local-level contexts predominantly frequented by those of student/working age. This 'ethnographic moment' (Connell, 2005) in masculinities studies is underpinned by conceptual and theoretical scholarship geared towards developing a deeper understanding of the social construction of the male gender form, and its social, cultural, political and personal implications. Most apparent in the literature is the investigation of the enactment of the hegemonic form of masculinity, the particular configuration of practice understood to legitimise the patriarchal dominance apparent in Western societies (Connell, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005. See also, Bourdieu, 2001; Coles, 2008, 2009; Kimmel, 2006). In contrast to the extensive focus on those whose bodies and social positions facilitate adherence to hegemonic norms, the gendered aspects of older men's identities, as structured by the transition into retirement and profound alterations in their social networks and physical constitutions, have yet to be fully comprehended (Davidson, 2013). This lack of scholarly understanding is mirrored in cultural conceptions of older men, which remain largely homogenised, with individuals being primarily defined according to their age, rather than their gender. As *older* men, rather than older *men*, they are "constructed as pre-death. They are relatively redundant, even invisible, not just in terms of paid work and family responsibilities, but...life itself" (Hearn, 1995:101). Scholarly attention should be expended on seeing these 'invisible' older men, and not merely as interchangeable biological entities subjectable to regimes of biomedical control. Such homogenisation is neither a practical nor ethical response to this increasingly prevalent and diverse demographic category, the expansion of which will generate significant social and political challenges in the coming decades (National Records of Scotland, 2013). Research informed by theoretical developments in social gerontology and masculinities studies has a vital role to play in rendering apparent this diversity. It is imperative to investigate the needs, desires, behaviours, and perceptions of older men, across the spectrums of socio-economic status, age, ethnicity, and sexuality, in the same in-depth manner afforded to their younger counterparts. This perspective encompasses a research

program extending far beyond the current enquiry, and in this ethnographic study of the Carstonwood Men's Shed I can only claim to present an in-depth investigation of one manifestation of the central issue. Though this empirical focus is specific, it is hoped that the theoretical approach utilised and developed throughout will be of wider applicability among researchers working at the intersection of ageing and masculinity.

Outline

Chapter one reviews the current literature on ageing, masculinity, and selected studies investigating their intersection. I firstly consider the social construction of ageing, outlining the denigration of older people stemming from inaccurate understandings of population ageing, and critically assess micro-level theories of 'successful ageing' (Franklin & Tate, 2009). Though a continuity approach arises as a suitable framework for understanding the ageing process, the common social-gerontological neglect of gender as a fundamental aspect of identity in later life is recognised as a significant limitation (Atchley, 1989, 1999). Accordingly, in the second part of the chapter I discuss the socio-cultural marginalisation of older men's masculinity, and consider the contestation, complicity, and adaptation, with regards to hegemonic norms, that older men engage in. Having investigated older men's health, family life, and leisure activities, the literature suggests that these processes occur in the context of an overall desire for the continuity of masculine identity in later life. However, the literature is by no means comprehensive, and it is possible to identify empirical and theoretical shortcomings. Regarding the former, older men's homosociality (here considered in terms of their interactions with other older men) and their relationships with technological objects, both of which have been widely investigated among younger men, have yet to be considered in sufficient detail. Regarding the latter, the literature demonstrates an aversion to explicitly recognising the contribution of relevant social-gerontological theorising, and, with certain notable exceptions, an unwillingness to develop a general theoretical stance capable of explaining older men's masculinity. Coles and Vassarotti's (2012) conception of a distinctive field of 'aged masculinity' provides a promising though underdeveloped means of thinking about older men's masculinity in this more holistic fashion. In this approach, the field of aged masculinity is considered to be a specific empirical

instance of Coles' (2008, 2009) prior investigation into the various 'fields of masculinity'. This approach draws on the work of Bourdieu in order to theorise the lived experience of, and power dynamics existing between, the multiplicity of masculinities recognised by social constructionists. Treating this multiplicity of masculinities in terms of semi-independent fields, in which competition over capital resources shapes dominant and subordinate positions, invites research into the nuances of particular fields, in this case that of aged masculinity.

Coles and Vassarotti limit their initial investigation into the characteristics of aged masculinity to the study of health and wellbeing in later life. As physical capital declined among their research participants, a compensatory form of cultural capital, built around the wisdom and maturity inhering through advanced age, was emphasised. This is an understandable empirical focus, given the potential risks to health and wellbeing engendered through the ageing process, but these issues by no means exhaust older men's experience. As a social environment centred around workshop-based activities, the Men's Shed provides an opportunity to investigate older men's homosociality and their relationship with technological objects (among other aspects of their lived experience), in a manner that expands upon Coles and Vassarotti's initial enquiry. Regarding homosociality, Coles and Vassarotti's application of Bourdieusian capital theory can be extended to include a consideration of how participants generate and utilise bridging and bonding forms of social capital as a means of maintaining and legitimising personal and collective masculine identities (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Portes, 1998; Putnam, 2000). Regarding technological objects, Nusbaumer (2011) argues that these fulfil representative and restorative functions among older men, providing a tangible means of re-experiencing a valued past in an uncertain present. The concept of nostalgia underpinning Nusbaumer's study, encompassing a desire for external continuity that extends beyond but is necessarily experienced locally, is a useful means of understanding older men's concerns regarding social change (Atchley, 1989; Davis, 1979; Boym, 2001). This emphasis on the relationship between past and present addresses the lack of any significant temporal perspective in Coles and Vassarotti's work. While Men's Sheds appear to be ideal locations to investigate these and other factors relating to older men's masculinity, in the final part of the chapter I contend that the current literature largely adheres to the standard problem-solving approach

apparent in social gerontology, leaving the potential for understanding these novel spaces in sociological terms largely untapped (Hendricks, 2010).

Chapter two outlines the ethnographic methodology utilised in this enquiry. I begin by highlighting my own experience of a common aspect of ethnographic research, namely the alteration of the initial analytical focus due to the realisation that my prior understandings were, if not wholly incorrect, certainly not as applicable as I had expected (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). I therefore had to reformulate my approach, focusing on the description and analysis of what I actually observed in the field, rather than what my initial biases concerning the needs and desires of older men led me to think I would/should be observing. I then discuss the process of building and maintaining relationships with the management team, those men who established and developed the Men's Shed, and ordinary participants, those men who attended the Men's Shed, and over time came to deeply value the role it played in their lives. The nature of the field mandated a relatively intense form of participation, in which I adopted a number of organisational roles. As the fieldwork began when the organisation first opened its doors to participants, I was initially called upon to adopt a supervisory role, overseeing the daily running of the site, and was later asked by the management team to engage in various forms of evaluatory work using my sociological knowledge. In relation to ordinary participants, I adopted a 'socially acceptable incompetent' role, positioning myself as grateful to receive the benefits of their vast technical knowledge (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). Though this degree of participatory involvement may raise concerns regarding the possibility of 'going native' (Gold, 1958), I argue that far from impinging on the research, it actually allowed for the establishment and maintenance of the access crucial to successful ethnographic research. Drawing on the principles of the grounded theory approach, observational and data-recording strategies were quite standard, being married to the analysis process from the outset and allowing for its gradual maturation over the course of the fieldwork (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Suddaby, 2006).

Chapters three and four introduce the Men's Shed, outlining, from the management team's point of view, its initial establishment, the foundations upon which it stood, the justifications utilised in its defence, and its development and

maturation over the course of the fieldwork. Chapter three firstly considers the origins of the organisation and the issues arising in its establishment, before discussing the two foundational elements upon which it was built. These were, firstly, its male-exclusivity, which stemmed from the perceived lack of social activities geared towards older men within the local community, and the continued homosocial desire such men were thought to possess. The Men's Shed was considered to positively address these issues, serving older men's desire to socialise with like-minded others without degenerating into the kind of aggressive sexism and competitiveness identified in other male-exclusive groups (Bird, 1996; Kiesling, 2005; Palmer & Thompson, 2007). The second foundation was the organisation's independence from outside control; if male-exclusivity first attracted participants, independence, and the autonomy this granted, allowed them to assume a desired degree of control considered absent from other organisations serving older people. Chapter four considers the contrast between the desired appearance and the actual reality of the Men's Shed, between what I have termed the 'standard benefits discourse' considered vital in establishing its positive purpose, and hence gaining initial funding, and the majority of participant's resolute rejection of being conceived of as men in need (Davidson, 2013). As the management team became aware of the scope of participant's desires and capabilities, so the nature of the organisation both parties sought to construct became apparent. I chart two main transitions that occurred during the fieldwork, firstly that from a primarily 'fund absorbing' to a primarily 'fund generating' organisation, commonly referred to as a 'social enterprise' (Borzaga & Defourny, 2001; Nyssens, 2006). The second transition involved a shift towards a greater degree of participant ownership of the organisation, expressed through what Joe,[2] the first chairman of the board of trustees, referred to as a 'decentralisation' process, in which important organisational functions were adopted by participants.

Chapters five, six, and seven discuss the men who attended the Men's Shed, considering the interests and concerns that fostered collective understandings of the organisation as something worth contributing their time and effort towards,

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[2] In the interests of anonymity, I typically refer to members of the management team using the term 'board member', while ordinary participants are referred to using the term 'shedder'. Where it is necessary to refer to individual members of the management team and ordinary participants (for reasons of style or specificity), I do so using pseudonyms.

something worthy of being called their own, and hence defended as such. Participants shared comparable masculine self-conceptions, similarities that formed the basis of the strong bonding social capital engendered among members of the core group, those who most strongly 'bought in' to the Men's Shed, and thus came to define its functioning and purpose (Putnam, 2000). Chapter five considers two enduring aspects of participant's aged masculinity, discussing their understandings of work, wealth, and retirement, and the distinction they maintained between men and women. Both were instances of the conservation of character and practice, aspects of hegemonic masculinity maintained despite ageing. Chapter six considers how personal changes in the health and wellbeing of participants were utilised as a means of establishing 'bounded solidarity' between them; this term refers to the sense of comradeship that occurs among groups due to the experience of similar hardships (Portes, 1998; Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993). The personal decline of physical capital, a central aspect of the marginalisation of older men, actually functioned to bring participants together, with the Men's Shed providing a space for discussion and support. In doing so, it catered to the male propensity for homosocial comparison while neutering the capacity for reductions in self-esteem this can engender (Kimmel, 2006). Several recovery narratives are also presented, in which the Men's Shed served the vital function of allowing participants to manage and overcome large-scale changes (episodes of radical discontinuity) in their personal lives. Chapter seven firstly focuses on participants' nostalgia for a particular communal form considered lost to social change, a desire necessarily reflective of their age (Boym, 2001; Davis, 1979). Participants were brought together on this issue through 'norm introjection', a relatively common experience of socialisation that, through comparisons with the present, produced negative understandings of contemporary society (Portes, 1998; Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993). This is particularly apparent in the discussion of technological objects, which served three functions for participants. Firstly, they facilitated 'topic indirectness' through providing an uncontroversial common interest around which relationships were established and structured (Kiesling, 2005). Secondly, they provided a tangible means of reconnecting with a revered past. Thirdly, they allowed them to contrast their own knowledge and appreciation of particular technological forms and skills with the younger

generation of men, thus demonstrating a contextually specific variant of the comparative strategy Coles and Vassarotti (2012) recognise as central to aged masculinity.

Chapters eight and nine discuss the functioning of the Men's Shed, utilising Uphoff's (2001) distinction between the cognitive and structural aspects of social capital apparent in organisations. Chapter eight considers the former, outlining the central norm guiding participants' involvement, that of mutual reciprocity, or as participants termed it, 'give and take'. As the social enterprise approach and the decentralisation process assumed primacy, the continued functioning of the organisation in a manner capable of fulfilling participants' desires required a collective effort on their part, with each individual contributing sufficiently to justify their presence. Accordingly, contributory actions were conducted in the expectation that others would do likewise (Oakerson, 1993, Ostrom, 2001). The majority willingly adhered, because what they gave, and what they took, was largely indistinguishable. Participants wanted to experience again the kind of community they once knew, in a necessarily limited and artificial fashion, a 'Gemeinschaften of mind' rather than of locality (Tönnies, 2002), and they could achieve this only by collectively maintaining the environment in which this occurred. Immersing oneself in the well-functioning 'community *of* practice' (Golding *et al*, 2007, added emphasis), with a helping hand willingly proffered and received, therefore allowed for the establishment, in a wider sense of the term, of a well-functioning community *in* practice. Because mutual reciprocity was both the means and definition of organisational success, those understood as free-riders were negatively assessed through gossiping, the central means of expressing disapproval in an environment lacking any formal authority system (Coleman, 1988a; Dunbar, 2004; Foster, 2004). Chapter nine then considers the structural aspects of the social capital in operation at the Men's Shed, the rules dictating acceptable behaviour, and the roles granting individuals their place within the organisation. The chapter begins with a discussion on social area conduct, in particular the difficulties arising through certain participant's attempts to instigate joking relationships (Kaplan, 2005). I then consider conduct in the workshop, where two main rules, both informal, and labelled 'ask not assume' and 'non-interference', structured participants' behaviour and their perceptions of others. The expectation of the former was that individuals would

take advantage of the knowledge available to them, because asking demonstrated both respect for one's colleagues and engagement with the wider community of practice. In contrast to individualistic conceptions of masculinity, participants valued the opportunities for both teaching and learning presented by absorption in a cooperative network of experienced, capable men, and expected others to engage as they did. The expectation of the latter was that participants should not interfere in areas in which they were unqualified to do so, because this was understood as an assertion of authority unbecoming in an environment structured around role differentiation, based either on expertise or simple contributory commitment. Finally, in the conclusion I summarise the main findings and draw together the various strands of the analysis, outlining how and why the Men's Shed achieved the success it did, and commenting on the development of Coles and Vassarotti's (2012) concept of aged masculinity pursued throughout the study.

1

Ageing, Masculinity, and Men's Sheds

There is by no means a standardised ageing process, as the diversity among older people[1] ensures only very general statements, related to social repositioning and physical changes, can be made with any accuracy. Recent population ageing trends have, however, publicised and politicised this universal experience, with the debate around this demographic change demonstrating the dual nature of ageing as both a biological inevitability and a social construct (Coleman, 2006; Jasmin, 2000; ONS, 2011, 2012).[2] Though Cruikshank (2013) has argued that population ageing is proof-positive of social progression, providing an objective means of affirming the success of long-term improvements in health and social care, the consequences of this success have also generated considerable concern. The so-called 'crisis view' of population ageing has been fuelled by scaremongering discourse referring to 'crises' and 'time-bombs' in relation to future economic growth, pensions, and healthcare provisions. Inherent in this narrative of inevitable decline is both an understanding of the older individual as requiring a disproportionate amount of societies' supposedly 'scarce' resources, and an implicit push towards self-reliance to reduce this threat to succeeding

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[1] The terms 'older people' and 'older men' are here utilised with this diversity in mind, as the participatory group contained men of various ages (50 to 90, the majority being between 60 and 75), occupational statuses (mostly retired, others worked part-time), and health issues, as is observable in Scotland's general population. The term 'older' implies advanced chronological age, a state beyond youth or middle-agedness, thus differentiating members of the group under investigation, but is no more detailed than this. It is also value-neutral, avoiding the demeaning stereotypes associated with terms like 'elderly', 'elder', and 'senior citizen' (Calasanti & Slevin, 2001; Dahmen & Cozma, 2009; Falconer & O'Neill, 2007; Hazan, 1994; Palmore, 1999, 2000).

[2] The 1911 Scottish census found the population of 4760000 contained 105000 men aged 65+ (2.2%). By the 2011 census, the population of 5295000 contained 385000 men aged 65+ (7.3%; National Records of Scotland, 2013). This important demographic shift is commonly explained with reference to two trends. Firstly, total fertility rates (TFR) have, despite small increases in the mid-2000's, substantially declined over the last 50 years. While the current replacement level stands at 2.1, the 2011 Scottish TFR stood at 1.7, the lowest of the UK countries. Secondly, there have been consistent improvements in the health, and hence longevity, of older people in Scotland, measured in terms of life expectancy. Men born around 2010 can expect to live for 76.1 years, seven years longer than men born around 1981 (69.1 years), and furthermore, the mortality gap between men and women has been declining; in 2010, it stood at 4.5 years, down from 6.2 years in 1980 (MacKenzie, 2012).

generations (Cardona, 2008; Estes, 1999; Gee & Gutman, 2000; Gullette, 2003; Katz, 1996; Mullan, 2000; North & Fiske, 2013). The ideal older person therefore "remains youthful as long as possible, contributes to the economy as a smart consumer and as an active participant in productive activities, and stays healthy to avoid accessing healthcare and other public services" (Rozanova, 2010:220). This discursive 'Othering' of older people, prevalent in political, advertising, and media texts, adheres to the wider neo-liberal categorisation of social groups according to their value as self-reliant 'contributors' (Kite & Wagner, 2004; Lister, 2004). This form of differentiation, in appealing to the public's fears regarding personal socio-economic security, provides a fertile breeding ground for multiple forms of ageism (Bytheway, 1995; Nelson, 2004).

Theorising Ageing

The crisis view of population ageing unnecessarily homogenises older people, drawing together this diverse group, varied according to socio-economic status, age, gender, ethnicity, health status, and educational attainment, among other things, under a common banner of burden and dependency. The discipline of social gerontology has long dispensed with understandings that explicitly stress the homogeneity of older people, or focus exclusively on the negative aspects of ageing. Critical scholars have, however, had cause to question the discipline's long-standing 'successful ageing' paradigm, an approach that, in sharing underlying ideological similarities with the crisis view of population ageing, is alleged to afford it a degree of academic justification (Dillaway & Byrnes, 2009). Contemporary approaches to successful ageing, of which there are over 100 variations, are rooted in the principle that there exists an objective, universally applicable ageing strategy against which the conduct of individuals can be judged (Rowe & Khan, 2015). Of these variations, Rowe and Kahn's (1997, 1998) 'new gerontology' has attracted the most scholarly and public recognition. These authors stress that successful ageing is a personal achievement on the part of the individual, a state of being to be continually maintained through diligently monitoring and addressing physical, psychological, and social issues as they arise. Accordingly, their conception of successful ageing has three components, namely "low probability of disease and disease-related disability, high…functional capacity, and active engagement with life" (Rowe & Kahn, 1997:433). Each

component is further sub-divided; 'low probability of disease' involves both the avoidance of disease itself, and the avoidance of disease risks in the individual's immediate environment. 'High functional capacity' has both a physical and a cognitive component, while 'active engagement with life' involves both the establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships and the conduct of productive activity, that which creates 'societal value'. The precision of these standards, and the necessity of their co-existence, inevitably limits the number of people characterised as ageing successfully. Recent quantitative studies suggest that, among over-65's, just 11.9% of U.S citizens and 8.5% of Europeans meet the criteria (Hank, 2011; McLaughlin *et al*, 2010).

Continuity Theory

The normative, exclusively behavioural focus of successful ageing approaches renders them devoid of embodied subjects, of thinking, feeling, older people, whose bodies, thoughts, and feelings reflect the varied lives they have led (Dillaway & Byrnes, 2009; Holstein & Minkler, 2003; Katz & Calasanti, 2015). The evident difficulties of the successful ageing approach stem from this detachment of the later life period, this wiping clean of the slate of accumulated experience upon reaching a pre-defined age. In the majority of cases, later life is a period of significant transition and change, the fruitful study of which should begin with the recognition that older people's present experience is influenced by their past conditions. How the older individual has lived their life, the resources of an economic, social, cultural, and physical kind they have cultivated, the interests and experiences they have nurtured, and the relationships they have established, shapes how they currently live their life. Over time, Atchley (1999:5) informs us:

> "Adults develop considerable investment in their conceptions of themselves and the world around them…[utilising]…patterns of thought created out of a lifetime of experience to describe, analyse, evaluate, decide, act, pursue goals, and interpret input and feedback".

The individual's continual adaptation to, and personal development in, the shifting contexts characteristic of later life underpins continuity theory, an approach applicable in the analysis of instances of 'normal ageing' (Atchley, 1972,

1987, 1989, 1993, 1999).[3] 'Continuity' does not typically manifest as a rigid consistency, but is rather considered to be an adaptive strategy, referring to the retention of a relatively fixed cognition of self, anchored in familiar material contexts. Old age is therefore not a qualitatively different stage of life, but rather a novel context in which manageable changes are incorporated into established living patterns. The desire for this psychologically and materially continuous narrative covers all aspects of life, from mundane everyday activities to those considered individually definitive; as Atchley (1972:36) notes, "predispositions include...brushing one's teeth right-handed, shopping at a particular department store, living in a certain neighborhood [and] having certain friends".

For those seeking continuity, change is both a necessity and a risk; too little change generates boredom, while rapid and substantial change can be disorientating. Generally, the optimum degree of change, which differs based on individual psychology and prior experiences, creates a manageable contrast between stability and excitement. The experience of continuity is considered to have internal and external components. Internal continuity refers to the "persistence of a psychic structure of ideas, temperament, affect, experiences, preferences, dispositions, and skills" (Atchley, 1989:184), and thus depends on a functioning memory, or knowledge of the accumulated self, and a degree of malleability, in order to incorporate change. In recognising the requirement for reflexivity, the concept of internal continuity aligns with late-modern understandings of self-identity, of the importance of establishing and maintaining an authentic personal narrative in a social environment in which the structural conditions underpinning collective narratives have been significantly eroded (Giddens, 1991). External continuity refers to the retention of a stable social environment, in which familiar activities are conducted alongside familiar

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[3] Continuity theory focuses on normal ageing, the "usual, commonly encountered patterns of human aging" (Atchley, 1989:183). Normally aging individuals are described as:

> "Independent adults with persistent self-concepts and identities. They can successfully meet their needs for income, housing, healthcare, nutrition, clothing, transportation, and recreation. They lead active, satisfying, and purposeful lives that involve adequate networks of long-standing social relationships" (Atchley, 1989:184).

This is contrasted with 'pathological ageing', a term describing those whose ageing is substantially affected by ill-health, disability, or cognitive decline. While this lack of universal applicability is a recognised limitation of the approach (Atchley, 1989), its application to the current enquiry is justified given the largely 'normal' characteristics of the participants.

people in familiar environments, all of which generate habituation over time due to the similarities within 'domains of proficiency' (Atchley, 1989; Bergson, 2004; Olsen, 2010). For example, a painter will take easily to sculpting, as both utilise a general artistic skill set, which represents the stable core of identity, while altering the specific activity allows for the manageable excitement of change. Such alteration within particular domains also extends to roles; the example given is that of a musician who switches to scheduling bookings when the ability to play is lost (Atchley, 1989). These patterns are consistently observed in the study of older people's leisure pursuits, activities that, in the absence of employment, come to play an increasingly significant role in their lives (Agahi *et al*, 2006; Atchley, 1999; Verbrugge *et al*, 1996). In terms of relationships with significant others (family and friends), Atchley (1987) finds their maintenance to be vitally important for older people, as their social networks are typically highly developed, exhibiting great intimacy generated through years of interaction. Due to this high degree of investment, any disruption of these relationships can be devastating.

As continuity theory does not mandate the substance of continuity, there is scope to consider the established preferences of the individual, whatever these may be, thus avoiding the prescriptive nature of successful ageing approaches. This prioritisation of agency is apparent in Atchley's (1999:6, original emphasis) outline of the 'constructionist' underpinnings of continuity theory, whereby choice is afforded primacy. Continuity theory:

> "Assumes that in response to their life experiences, people actively develop individualized personal constructs…concern[ing] ideas about the self, our relationships with others, and our personal lifestyles…[personal constructs] are *influenced* by the social constructions of reality that we learn from those around us and from the mass media but are not *determined* by them. No matter how strong society's efforts to influence personal constructs, individuals ultimately are free to decide for themselves how to construe their personal reality".

Atchley's research is primarily (and successfully) concerned with demonstrating the existence of continuity as an adaptive strategy among normally ageing individuals. Each participant in his 1999 longitudinal study demonstrated 'truly unique' patterns in relation to general indicators of internal continuity (self-confidence, emotional resilience, personal goals) and external continuity (living

arrangements, income adequacy, social and personal activities). The multitude of observed patterns is attributed, without further explanation, to the highly individualistic culture of the USA, where the study occurred. Despite stressing their 'influence' over individual's personal constructs, Atchley does not investigate the effects of 'social constructions of reality' on general patterns of continuity, or specific activities indicative of it, rendering his study devoid of any wider socio-cultural context, as if continuity is pursued in a vacuum. Gender can reasonably be considered an important constituent of the personal constructs noted by Atchley. According to the social constructionist understanding of gender, choices made regarding embodiment, employment, consumption, leisure, and relationships are indicative of individuals 'doing' gender in their everyday lives. The manner in which gender is enacted is shaped by the individual's perceptions of the norms of masculinity and femininity apparent in their society and immediate social groups (Bourdieu, 2001; Connell, 2005; Goffman, 1977, Kimmel, 2006; Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Atchley's neglect of this factor is not an unusual omission within social gerontology, a discipline said to lack "a widespread connection to theoretical advances from gender research" (Krekula, 2007:156). In order to fully comprehend the Men's Shed and those men who frequented it, it is therefore necessary to consider the socio-cultural factors that may influence continuity, specifically the intersection of ageing and masculinity.

Older Men, as Men

Older people typically experience profound changes in their physical constitutions and day-to-day routines, as their bodies undergo biological ageing and they retire from or scale back their involvement in employment. These changes can be particularly challenging for men, as the social devaluation associated with ageing intersects with the marginalisation of their masculine status, in relation to the culturally exalted hegemonic form of masculinity (Connell, 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Though its proponents correctly stress that the hegemonic form of masculinity does not refer to a fixed, trans-historical set of characteristics embodied by certain men, it is currently characterised by configurations of practice that are aesthetically and practically at odds with the reality of many older men's lives. The hegemonic male, it may

generally be said, "is a man *in* power, a man *with* power, and a man *of* power" (Kimmel, 1994:125, original emphasis), though the enactment of this power varies across local contexts, drawing on different strategies and resources. The extensive literature identifies, among many other examples, bullying in the school environment, physical dominance on the sports field, or boasting of one's sexual prowess in the workplace, as typical 'manhood acts' (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009), the conduct of which continually reproduces hegemonic masculinity at the local level (Bird, 1996; Collinson, 1992; Kidd, 2013; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Messerschmidt, 2012). Though varied in substance, local-level instances of hegemonic masculinity are, Kimmel (2006) asserts, primarily 'homosocial enactments', with men typically comparing and defining themselves against other men. Those capable of demonstrating aggression, competitiveness, rationality, strength, sexual prowess, or stoicism in the face of pain (the precise constellation of characteristics is contextually specific), will receive validation of their masculinity from their peers. Such is their lowly status, men typically do not bother to compare themselves with women, instead utilising the cultural construct of femininity as a means of negatively categorising other men, hence the subordination of homosexuality, that considered to most closely align with the feminine Other (Kimmel, 1994).

Note that the majority of local-level contexts outlined above are frequented predominantly by younger and middle-aged men, utilising resources that older men may struggle to possess and mobilise. Yet if they are to avoid marginalisation, Western culture dictates that older men should combat their 'decline' through consumption practices that align their lifestyles with those of their younger counterparts. Older men are encouraged to maintain their bodies, lead active lifestyles, and, in relation to the virulent heterosexuality fundamental to hegemonic masculinity, pursue an active sex life (Calasanti & King, 2005; Katz & Marshall, 2003). For the majority of older men, such discourse promotes a largely unattainable ideal, highlighting that however toned their bodies, however hard they play, however much sex they have, they are merely imitating the youthful ideal (Woodward, 1991). This decline in masculine status is the norm for the majority of older men (Davidson, 2013), though certain scholars posit that their continually developing subjectivity renders this loss of marginal importance:

> "In postindustrial societies like the United States, the third and fourth ages come close to embodying a feminist utopia of gender equality…in this utopian society, power relations and gender differences become minimized, androgyny becomes the norm, and the self can be actualized in contradictory ways" (Silver, 2003:392).

It is contended that gender "as a marker of identification and constitutive of selfhood in old age becomes less salient compared to other features of the self" (Silver, 2003:389; see also, Biggs, 2004; Gutmann, 1987), as the focus shifts from the maintenance of masculinity to a primarily age-based identity. As discussed below, the current literature convincingly refutes this over-simplification, demonstrating that older men do not discard their gender identity, but instead seek to adapt it by factoring in the shifting personal circumstances characteristic of the ageing process. Indeed, in societies exhibiting a pervasive gender differentiation, in which the status of 'man' or 'woman' fundamentally shapes lived experience, it would be intensely strange were consistent de-gendering to occur (Bourdieu, 2001; Connell, 2005; Kimmel, 2006). The retention of a masculine self-conception in later life can, however, prove challenging, given the decline in the typical resources and opportunities utilised by younger men, such as the prized youthful body, a wider variety of local-level opportunities for homosocial enactments (most importantly, the workplace), and legitimate cultural exemplars of masculinity to draw upon. Lacking the kind of "socially dictated parameters for gender expression" (Tannenbaum and Frank, 2011:244) available to younger men, older men must seek to renegotiate their masculinity in the context of personal change and cultural devaluation.

Masculinity in Later Life

A central focus of the masculinities literature concerns the investigation of the ways in which men "modify their manhood acts…when they are unable or unwilling to enact the hegemonic ideal" (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009:284). This is a particularly salient question when studying older men, and has been posed in relation to their bodies and health practices, as well as their familial and leisure activities. Regarding the former, due to the body's centrality to gender identity, the process of biological ageing, in which it undergoes certain irreversible aesthetic and functional changes, has been a consistent focus of study. For older men, skin wrinkles as it loses its elasticity, hair greys and thins, muscle mass

declines, bones become more brittle, the immune system weakens, and sensory sharpness declines. The spectre of cognitive decline, a stigmatised and much feared condition, also increasingly looms (Benbow & Jolley, 2012; Coles & Vassarotti, 2012; Gilleard & Higgs, 2010, 2014). Research has considered how ageing bodies affect masculine self-conceptions, recognising that the disjuncture between the desire to retain an embodied sense of masculinity and the reality of an ageing body presents older men with a dilemma. They may choose to "strongly embrace self-reliance as a last bastion of masculinity and therefore avoid seeking health care...[or] hold tightly to their physical health as a last vestige of masculinity and therefore proactively seek health care" (Springer and Mouzon, 2011:4). The first of these options is predicated on an unflinching adherence to the hegemonic norm of stoicism in the face of adversity, alongside a reluctance to cede control to a professional (Courtenay, 2000). The second option is predicated on the recognition that while a holistic enactment of hegemonic masculinity may no longer be achievable, the preservation of a healthy body allows for successful homosocial enactments in other contexts (Tannenbaum & Frank, 2011). These options therefore represent differing conceptions of continuity and the meaning of personal independence (attitudinal or corporeal) in later life (Atchley, 1989; McVittie & Willock, 2006; Smith *et al*, 2007).

Regarding familial relationships, older men's continued adherence to the symbolic distinction between the masculine public sphere and the feminine private sphere is indicated in conceptions of the home as more fully expressing women's identities than it does men's (Russell, 2007). This is apparent in experiences of 'underfoot syndrome', "the phenomenon of a couple both being at home full-time together, often but not always in retirement" (Golding *et al*, 2008:251). Men's wives may feel 'smothered', even 'resentful', regarding their husband's increased presence in the home, and ensuring the correct degree of 'separateness' and 'togetherness' a mutually beneficial form of external continuity (Atchley, 1989) mirroring the pre-retirement period, therefore becomes critical for many couples. Regarding older men's marriages, two further issues can threaten masculine self-conceptions. Firstly, caring is traditionally conceived as a female occupation, and therefore older men adopting this role seek to redefine it, considering it an honourable practice they are duty-bound to conduct, and furthermore a practice requiring a man's strength and

organisational skills (Calasanti & Bowen, 2006; Ribeiro *et al*, 2007). Secondly, for some older men, the organisation of their social life, and their personal enactment of masculinity, occurs primarily through and in relation to their wife, hence the experience of widowhood can prove challenging. Widowed men are "caught between a rock and a hard place" (Bennett, 2007:349), having to grieve in a caring but non-feminised manner while also managing the incompatibility between masculinity and domestic labour. While re-partnering allows for the reestablishment of a comfortable domestic life for some men, for those remaining single masculinity is reconstructed through the interpretation of their experiences in terms of rationality, control, and responsibility (Bennett, 2007; Calasanti, 2004; Davidson, 2001, 2013; Moore & Stratton, 2003).

Regarding leisure pursuits, research demonstrates that older men broadly seek continuity with regards to their previous activities, though typically at a lower level of intensity given the experience of physical change (Agahi *et al*, 2006; Atchley 1999; Coles & Vassarotti, 2012; Eman, 2013; Genoe & Singleton, 2006; Wiersma & Chesser, 2011). As men's social networks are primarily employment-related, the post-retirement maintenance of existing connections, and the establishment of new ones, is particularly important in negating the potential risks of social isolation and loneliness (Barnes & Parry, 2003; Davidson, 2013; Gibson, 2001; Thompson, 1994; Victor *et al*, 2005). This is a gendered process, with older men rejecting activities specifically designed for older people, which are understood as female-dominated places of passive, non-productive activity that do not adhere to masculine conceptions regarding the structured and productive use of time. While recognising their value for others, Davidson's (2013:172) participants "completely eschewed...Day Centres, Luncheon Clubs and other establishments run by local authorities and charitable associations specifically targeted at old people", as they did not align with their own self-conceptions. One participant summarised this thusly, stating that such services "tend to be a 'pink' thing, not a 'blue' thing" (Davidson, 2013:173), with the latter equating to contributory involvement in both the organisation itself and the wider community. For these men, the desire to remain relevant by conducting productive, communally beneficial activities took precedence in their choice of involvement. The ethos of organisations generally geared towards older people, adhering to the standard narrative of decline that underpins the crisis view of

population ageing, did not align with their continuing self-conceptions as responsible, skilled individuals (Aléx *et al*, 2008; Davidson, 2013; Liechty & Genoe, 2013; Scherger *et al*, 2011).

The majority of the current literature has focused on specific aspects of older men's lives, demonstrating contestation, complicity, and adaptation in relation to the configurations of practice characteristic of hegemonic masculinity. This variation of practice is also apparent in those studies that have attempted to chart and theorise older men's experience in a more holistic fashion. The work of Aléx and colleagues (2008) and Coles and Vassarotti (2012) are illustrative of this approach. Considering the former, these authors identify three general orientations towards hegemonic masculinity adopted by participants in their study. Firstly, older men who remained 'in the male centre' emphasised pride and satisfaction taken regarding continuing involvement in the public sphere, financial independence and the male breadwinner role, and the objectification and devaluation of women. Older men 'in the male centre' retained attitudes and practices aligned with hegemonic masculinity, and could, as wealthy, fit, and active individuals, continue to enact them to some extent. Secondly, those 'striving to maintain the male facade' lamented their loss of power, having failed to positively reinterpret their aged status. These men practiced what Connell (2005) terms a 'complicit masculinity', supporting hegemonic norms but, through physical decline and social exclusion, lacking the resources required for continued enactment, leaving them in a state of denial. Those adhering to the final orientation, 'being related', challenged hegemonic norms by prioritising concern for others, strong familial relationships, and willingly conducting traditionally female roles, such as domestic duties. Aléx and colleagues stress that these masculinities should be considered as general orientations rather than fixed sets of characterological traits, and are therefore not mutually exclusive. The complexity of older men's experiences always mandates a degree of crossover, a personal 'elasticity' (Davidson, 2011) allowing for contextually appropriate responses to the particular experiences encountered during the ageing process.

Drawing on the work of Bourdieu (1986) and Connell (2005), Coles' (2008, 2009) conceptualisation of 'subfields' of masculinity provides a useful framework through which the lived experience of subordinated and marginalised men can

be understood.[4] One such subfield identified and studied is that of 'aged masculinity'. Within this subfield, Coles and Vassarotti describe the dominant form of masculinity as one in which the importance of physical capital, central to the main field of masculinity, declines in value relative to a specific form of cultural capital, acquired only through ageing, which manifests as perceived increases in the intangible personal qualities of "experience, maturity, and wisdom" (Coles & Vassarotti, 2012:36). Their participants enacted a 'mature masculinity', highlighting their intellectual prowess, calm rationality, and capacity for reflection, while downplaying the importance of aggression and physicality, with some withdrawing from competitive sport rather than exposing themselves to youthful bodies stronger than their own. Exhibiting mature cultural capital positioned these men at the apex of the field of aged masculinity, their position perceived as superior to both other older men and younger men exhibiting the brash physicality of hegemonic masculinity. For Schrock & Schwalbe (2009:280), the exertion of control over oneself and one's environment, the capacity to "make things happen and...resist being dominated by others", is the consistent theme that, irrespective of the resources available to the individual, underpins all manhood acts. Through downplaying the importance of physical capital, a resource they had lost complete control over, and stressing their possession of an exclusive and intangible kind of cultural capital that allowed for more considered, controlled actions, Coles and Vassarotti's participants positively differentiated themselves from their more

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[4] In Coles' (2008, 2009) approach, these subfields exist within the overall 'field of masculinity':

> "Bourdieu's concept of fields is easily extended to a field of masculinity in which there are struggles and contestations over definitions of what is, and what is not, considered to be masculine/masculinity resulting in a relationship of orthodoxy and heterodoxy as those with valued capital defend their position against those who seek change. In turn, this notion of a field of masculinity is complementary to the concept of hegemonic masculinity [which can be] used to appropriately describe that form of masculinity which is considered culturally to be most dominant at any given time *within the field of masculinity*" (Coles, 2008:234-235, original emphasis).

In this understanding, the struggle to assume a position of dominance, or hegemony, within the overall field of masculinity is centred on the ability to define and accumulate legitimate forms of economic, social, cultural, and physical capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Shilling, 2012). On the point of subordinated and marginalised masculinities specifically, Coles proposes the existence of subfields of masculinity, which function as relatively independent sites of contestation in which aspects of dominance and subordination can, but do not necessarily, align with those of the main field. This conception of subfields of masculinity facilitates the understanding of those men who, although subordinated or marginalised in relation to hegemonic masculinity, do not comprehend their lived experience in these terms (because they perceive themselves to be in a dominant position in their particular subfield).

instinctual younger counterparts. The authors do, however, hint that the departure from the main field's hegemonic norms is not total. In areas of life in which their participants could successfully continue to enact them, they did so, though this finding is not expanded upon.

Further Research Opportunities

Generally, the current literature suggests that older men seek a manageable balance of conservation and change, looking not to deny, but rather renegotiate their masculine self-conceptions in the light of shifting social and personal circumstances. Although the achievement of hegemonic masculinity is out of the question for the majority of older men, the alternative narrative of age-based decline is denied in favour of more individualised, but nevertheless identifiably masculine configurations of practice. Older men, despite cultural devaluation, and the difficulties they may have in enacting it, continue to conceive of themselves as men. However, two potentially fruitful areas of enquiry have barely been touched upon in the existing research, namely older men's homosociality, and older men's relationships with technological objects. Regarding the former, the investigation of older men's homosociality here refers to the local-level enactment of masculinity occurring within 'blue' spheres of activity, in direct relation to other older men (Davidson, 2013). Research has consistently demonstrated that intra-group interaction between (younger) men establishes appropriate norms of masculine conduct and defines subordinate and marginalised Others; these standards are continually and collectively policed by group members (Kimmel, 2006). Given the implicit consensus regarding the continuity of older men's masculinity in other areas of life, the lack of attention granted to the potential continuity of their homosocial enactments, their actual interactions with other older men, appears an important oversight. While Coles & Vassarotti (2012) highlight the cultural capital valued within the field of aged masculinity, demonstrating how older men utilise this resource to positively differentiate themselves from younger men, their data does not directly address actual interactions, and the relationships these generate, between older men. Their conclusion, that their participants' "everyday lived experience of masculinity was one of dominance in relation to other older men" (Coles & Vassarotti, 2012:38), is therefore not adequately supported. Given their

application of Bourdieusian concepts, it is surprising that Coles and Vassarotti do not investigate older men's utilisation of social capital in the construction and maintenance of their aged masculinity. This extension of Coles and Vassarotti's approach allows for consideration of the means by which older men's social networks, specifically in this enquiry the connections forged with other older men at the Men's Shed, facilitates the continuity of homosocial enactments.

Social Capital

Formal organisations such as schools, clubs, and voluntary civic groups like the Men's Shed are receptive to the generation of social capital:

> "Because they make possible network connections among sets of individuals. The network connections, in turn, foster social capital because they produce goal-oriented interactions of sufficient frequency and depth to produce and maintain productive normative orientations" (Bankston III & Zhou, 2002:287).

In the simplest terms, the concept of social capital asserts the value of goodwill between family, friends, and colleagues, those sharing horizontal (non-hierarchal) associations. Like the concept of masculinity though, social capital has become somewhat of an umbrella term, gathering together various understandings of the formation, functioning, and consequences of inter- and intra-group social relationships. However, it is possible to identify several distinct areas of concern, as Adler and Kwon (2002:23) do in their definition of social capital as the "goodwill available to individuals or groups. Its source lies in the structure and content of the actor's social relations. Its effects flow from the information, influence, and solidarity it makes available to the actor". The 'structure and content' of social relations refers to the debate concerning the openness of social networks and the role played by norms and values therein, which centres on the differentiation between diverse, or bridging, and homogenous, or bonding, social capital networks. The former concerns mutually instrumental linkages established between dissimilar individuals or groups, while the latter concerns intra-group linkages established around similarities between members, with a focus on maintaining pre-existing resources (Coffé & Geys, 2006; Patulny & Svendsen, 2007; Putnam, 2000).

Though Bourdieu (1986) considers social capital as a resource utilised by members of the dominant socio-economic class to secure their position, the main approach within the field tends towards conceiving social capital in a neutral fashion, investigating situated instances of group dynamics utilising the bridging/bonding distinction. This approach, rooted in the Durkheimian distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity, between group functioning based on adherence to a collective consciousness, and that based upon functional interdependence, is of greater applicability in the current enquiry, given the focus on intra-group solidarity and functioning rather than socio-economic differentiation. Considering the details of the bridging/bonding distinction, theorists focusing on the establishment of external linkages in pursuit of beneficial resources stress the bridging form of social capital, which is considered to generate greater social benefits, opportunities for 'getting ahead' rather than merely 'getting by', than its bonding counterpart (Putnam, 2000). Ties are weak in the loose open networks characterising bridging social capital, with relationships occurring across social cleavages, potentially generating generalised trust and cooperation within and between communities that allows for the efficient and equitable exchange of resources (Burt, 1992; Granovetter, 1973; Marshall & Stolle, 2004; Putnam, 2000). In contrast, bonding social capital refers to the creation and maintenance of intra-group solidarity, based on similarities between members and adherence to collective norms and values. In closed communities exhibiting the 'thick' trust characteristic of bonding social capital, the individual can expect returns on their investment of time, energy, and resources, though this may not be the primary goal of involvement. In-group cohesion thus tends to increase over time, provided members conduct the necessary maintenance work. Bonding social capital is not a personal possession of the individual, as its economic, cultural, and physical counterparts are, but rather inheres in intra-group linkages as a collective good, whereby the exchange of resources, and simply of words, the typical to-and-fro of everyday life, continually functions to delimit the group (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Coleman, 1988b; Fukuyama, 1995; Lin, 1999; Putnam, 2000).

The literature tends to understand bridging social capital as being of greater social utility, due to its capacity to link disparate individuals and groups, in contrast to the closed, and hence potentially negatively reinforcing bonding

variety. However, neither form is inherently positive or negative, nor do they necessarily occur in a mutually exclusive fashion (Coffé & Geys, 2006; Patulny & Svendsen, 2007; Portes, 1998; Portes & Landolt, 1996). Social networks typically exhibit both varieties simultaneously, in differing degrees depending on the needs of the group in question, though several studies suggest the presence of bonding social capital is an essential prerequisite for the establishment of bridging connections (Ferguson & Dickens, 1999; Larsen *et al*, 2004; Warren *et al*, 2001). Those seeking information or employment opportunities will likely pursue diverse inter-group connections, while those seeking to promote collective action will likely seek to establish strong intra-group connections, exhibiting particularised trusting relationships capable of functioning as the basis of collective norms. Uphoff (2001) considers such norms, alongside collectively held values, attitudes, and beliefs, to be the 'cognitive' aspects of social capital, as opposed to its 'structural' aspects, the roles, rules, procedures, and precedents that are the objective manifestation of group norms, and which organise the pursuit of collective goals. Few studies have investigated social capital as it relates to masculinity, though Palmer and Thompson's (2007) ethnography of Australian football fans offers an interesting exception. Their participants' dense homogenous network encouraged adherence to the typically tribal and aggressive hyper-masculinity of sporting fans, while also offering them, through an online fan site, valuable social support and emotional bonds stemming from but extending beyond fandom. Palmer and Thompson's study therefore demonstrates the simultaneously exclusionary (bonding) and inclusionary (bridging) functions of social capital, generating what they considered fluid and contradictory gender identities. Like sports, another culturally masculine domain, that of technology, also offers opportunities for men to establish homosocial relationships through pursuing a socially legitimate common interest, though again, studies have been mainly restricted to men of working age.

Masculinity and Technology

As Latour (2005:73) laments, material objects "exist, naturally, but they are never to be given a thought, a social thought. Like humble servants, they live on the margins of the social doing most of the work but never allowed to be represented

as such". The use of objects, alongside language, is definitive of humanity, but while the latter has always attracted scholarly attention, objects have been neglected. This lack of scholarly attention reflects the prioritisation of the rational mind, and language as expressive of it, over the stuff of material experience in Western thought, and in conceiving of society as exclusively the preserve of embodied conscious agents, it produces an incomplete understanding of lived experience (Olsen, 2010). Those who have considered this topic stress that material objects can serve important representative functions by assuming a number of 'identities', the attribution of which is temporally and contextually contingent, for example, the "gift, talisman, art work, heirloom, ancestral legacy, ritual sacra, [or] memento" (Hoskins, 2006:74-75). Of relevance to the current enquiry is this capacity of objects to embody the personalised, though culturally mandated, meanings of their possessors. Here Morin (1969) provides a useful distinction between 'biographical' and 'protocol' objects, describing not the object's substance, but rather the relationships people establish with it. Biographical objects are 'singularised' (Kopytoff, 1986), embodying particular meanings and even personalities (Appadurai, 1986; Florman, 1976; Kleif & Faulkner, 2003; Mellström 1995, 2002, 2004; Nusbaumer, 2011). In contrast, protocol objects embody only the general meanings attributed to objects of their class, and are valued only according to their functionality and exchange value. Objects can, when singularly 'idolised', grant "sensual absorption, spiritual connection, emotional comfort, and aesthetic...pleasure" (Kleif & Faulkner, 2003:297), as well as empowering individuals, for example, a male mechanic working on a car. In the moment of manipulation, surrounded by like-minded others and the tools of the trade, the individual feels in complete control, embodying, and being seen by one's peers to embody, the mastery that underlies locally valued enactments of masculinity. Kleif and Faulkner suggest that these experiences may be particularly empowering to those lacking control in other areas of their lives.

Granting the importance of objects in the construction of identity, and recalling the pervasive nature of gender differentiation, it is unsurprising that research demonstrates gendered patterns of interaction between individuals and, in particular, technological objects. Such objects constitute "people's ways of making and doing things" (Lerman *et al*, 2003:2), a definition encompassing

everything from Stone Age tools to modern high-tech gadgets. Technological objects demonstrate a 'durable equation' with masculinity, with every aspect of their production and use being gendered (Faulkner, 2000, 2001; see also, Hacker, 1989, 1990; Oldenziel 1999; Wajcman, 2004). Computers and tractors are examples of symbolically masculine technologies, allowing men to appropriate them as facets of their masculine identity and causing women to distance themselves from their admiration and use. In contrast, domestic appliances such as washing machines are symbolically feminine (Cockburn, 1997; Cockburn & Ormrod, 1993; Nusbaumer, 2011; Saugeres, 2002; Wajcman, 1991). For men then, working with and on symbolically masculine technological objects can function as a manhood act, a legitimate means of asserting one's masculinity. For example, in their study of robot hobbyists and software engineers, Kleif & Faulkner (2003:204) found that both groups shared "pleasure in creating, in their strong identification with the artefacts they make, and in their desire for their achievements to be acknowledged by their peers". Demonstrating a knowledgeable and competent 'technicist identity' (Faulkner, 2007), through discussion and the co-operative utilisation of embodied skills in hands-on 'nuts and bolts' work, therefore functions as an important means of generating homosocial comradeship (McIlwee and Robinson, 1992; Mellström, 1995, 2002; Nusbaumer, 2011). As Mellström (2002:475) puts it:

> "Many men create truly gendered spaces through their interaction and relationships with machines. These homosocial masculine practices continuously exclude women and perpetuate highly gendered societal spheres, in which men form communities based on love and passion for machines...in such a sociability, machines are understood as a means of a performative and embodied communication enabling homosocial bonding linkages".

The gendered division of labour in technical arenas structures men's and women's perceptions of the authenticity of their involvement, essentialising the compatibility between men and certain technological objects.

There has been little research into the aspects of conservation and change inhering in older men's relationships with technological objects following their withdrawal from the workplace, the main facilitator of such relationships for those employed in technical fields. A notable exception to this is Nusbaumer's (2011) study of antique tractor collectors. In the context of the large-scale

industrialisation of farming, which reduces opportunities for the enactment of a traditional rural masculinity, antique tractors functioned as physical manifestations of this masculinity lost to change (Bell *et al*, 2006). Collectors formed an almost exclusively male community, manifested in regular shows and documented in magazines, based on discussing, admiring, and tinkering with their machines. Nusbaumer particularly focuses on the nostalgia he recognises as underpinning this conduct. Originally conceived as a profound homesickness, nostalgia now refers to "a positively toned evocation of a lived past in the context of some negative feeling toward present or impending circumstance" (Davis, 1979:18), and is considered a near-universal emotion experienced throughout the lifecourse (Boym, 2001; Davis, 1979; Sedikidis *et al*, 2004). Davis (1979:34-35) notes two features common to nostalgic experience:

> "(1) The nostalgic evocation of some past state of affairs always occurs in the context of present fears, discontents, anxieties, or uncertainties, even though they may not be in the forefront of awareness, and (2) it is these emotions and cognitive states that pose the threat of identity discontinuity...that nostalgia seeks, by marshaling our psychological resources for continuity, to abort, or...deflect".

Nostalgia encourages continuity through the promotion of a unified self experiencing a holistic lifecourse; its effects on wellbeing have been documented accordingly (Routledge *et al*, 2008; Sedikidis *et al*, 2008; Wildschut *et al*, 2006). Furthermore, nostalgia can also engender collective identities, particularly among members of the same generation. Nusbaumer's antique tractor collectors practiced a collective 'restorative nostalgia' (Boym, 2001), not merely remembering their purer rural past, but actively recreating it through cooperatively working alongside like-minded others on machines surviving from that era. This (re)enactment of a particular form of masculine identity adhered to certain standard hegemonic norms (the exclusion of women in a technological realm) while simultaneously prioritising the value of age-based experience and knowledge. Nusbaumer's participants knew their machines intimately, appreciating them both functionally and biographically, as both engaging technical exercises and tangible symbols of times past. As male-exclusive spaces in which like-minded men pursue technological interests, it is surprising that neither homosociality (here considered using the concept of social capital) nor the relationship between masculinity and technology has been adequately

addressed in the study of Men's Sheds. Instead, research into these organisations has exhibited a largely atheoretical approach, characteristic of empirical social gerontology, focused on elucidating the benefits to participant's health and wellbeing (Hendricks, 2010).

Men's Sheds

The literature on Men's Sheds has considered the practicalities of developing and managing these organisations, and, most apparently, the beneficial effects of participation. Regarding the former, Morgan and colleagues (2007:50) stress that all Men's Shed organisers must consider the "origins, operations, activities, funding and resources, and linkages" of their organisations. Men's Sheds have been established through various channels, with some run by national older people's charities, some developing out of previously existing men's groups, and others being created privately. Each site must be located in safe and secure premises, and supported by enthusiastic volunteers possessing a clear and realistic strategy regarding its development. A central aspect of this strategy concerns the particular purpose organisers want the site to fulfil. Beyond the universal emphasis on the provision of an inclusive environment in which men conduct workshop-based activities, research has identified differentiation regarding the stated objectives of Men's Sheds. Each site may, to differing extents, emphasise and be considered as "health, leisure, social support, community development, cultural or recreation organisations" (Golding *et al*, 2008:239). Hayes & Williamson (2007) offer a similar typology, noting that Men's Shed may fulfil 'clinical', 'recreational', 'occupational', 'educational', or 'communal' functions. There are also myriad decisions regarding day-to-day management (opening hours, advertising, staffing, health and safety, activities on offer, dispute resolution, etc.) and the sourcing of funding, with some sites relying on charitable donations and grants, while others function as 'social enterprises', generating income through selling goods and services. 'Linkages', which can be conceived as examples of bridging and linking social capital (establishing connections with those in positions of power; Woolcock, 1998), refers to a Men's Shed's establishment of local, national, and international contacts with other Men's Sheds, national organising bodies, charities, community organisations, and service providers (Cavanagh *et al*, 2013; Misan *et al*, 2008; Morgan *et al*, 2007).

Though Men's Sheds are differentiated in terms of practicalities, Australian qualitative research consistently demonstrates their provision of a structured, supportive, and non-hierarchal form of homosocial engagement for men used to the social networks provided by employment. Involvement is argued to foster valuable new friendships, an enhanced sense of purpose, community membership, and opportunities to discuss health issues in an unthreatening environment. Through the work of Golding and colleagues (outlined in Golding [2011a]), the educational capacities of Men's Sheds have also been highlighted. They have been observed to provide opportunities to engage in informal, practically focused, mutually supportive learning through immersion in what is termed a 'community of practice' (Golding *et al*, 2007). Learning here arises as an emergent function of the environment rather than being the explicit purpose of the organisation. Given these wide-ranging benefits, participants have consistently reported subjective improvements in their health and wellbeing (Ballinger *et al*, 2009; Fildes *et al*, 2010; Golding *et al*, 2007; Graves, 2001; Misan & Sergeant, 2009; Ormsby *et al*, 2010). In the assessment of the current literature, Golding's (2011b:114) conclusion is therefore typical:

> "Active involvement in practical hands-on activity in the form of voluntary and cooperative work was found to enhance men's productive ageing. It provided older men with the opportunities and incentives to remain fit and healthy enough to actively participate at any age; to reconnect with their past life and share hands-on skills with other men; to combat the likelihood, for some of them, of depression associated with withdrawal from the family and community; and to cope with changed abilities due to ageing".

Generally, the current literature paints a positive picture of Men's Sheds as engaging a hard-to-reach demographic through facilitating enjoyable social interactions from which learning opportunities and general wellbeing arise.[5]

While the literature acknowledges the importance of gender-exclusivity to these outcomes, in-depth analysis of masculinity within Men's Sheds has been lacking. It has, however, been contended that Men's Sheds are exemplars of a positive,

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[5] Despite these apparently positive findings, Wilson and Cordier's (2013) review is critical of the vague and unconvincing methodologies of the current Men's Shed research (single interviews, focus groups, or basic surveys, frequently reported with inadequate discussion of analytical procedures). These authors recommend a systematic longitudinal approach tailored towards demonstrating the health and social benefits of Men's Sheds, an approach they argue will be more appealing to long-term funding providers.

non-hegemonic form of masculinity, being frequented by 'inclusives' (Karoski, 2007) who recognise that improving the situation of men in society will be universally beneficial:

> "While essentially and mostly for working class men who are not in paid work, [Men's Sheds] are not tinged with some of the negative and hegemonic connotations…associated with men who have traditionally…socialised in hotels and…sporting venues in Australia" (Golding *et al*, 2008:254).

This argument rejects the notion of universal male privilege, as the majority of Australian participants (middle-aged and older working-class men) lack the resources to enact hegemonic norms, leaving them frustrated and prone to mental ill health and negative behaviours that, through the desire to 'maintain the male facade', they may choose not to seek help for (Aléx *et al*, 2008; Courtenay, 2000, Golding, 2014). Men's Sheds are said to facilitate positive expressions of masculinity detached from the aggression, competitiveness, and sexism of the hegemonic form, providing an "environment where men can let down their (hegemonic) guard [and] feel safe to expose some of their fragility/vulnerabilities without feeling judged as a…'lesser' male" (Foley, 2014:74). Although gender-exclusive, these organisations are considered to promote equitable gender relations by granting men a space to consider themselves "as men in society, as fathers, as husbands, as lovers, identifying and addressing [their] emotional needs, and learning to relate in a non-domineering and exploitative way" (Karoski, 2007:286-287; see also, May, 1998).

Conclusion

The literature suggests a continuity approach can provide a general framework for examining older men's experiences, although in Atchley's (1989) outline, the de-gendered nature of what older people seek to conserve, both internally (a core sense of self) and externally (environment, relationships, and activities), leads to the question, ultimately, of 'continuity of what'? Theory and empirical research suggest that masculinity is one of the primary factors structuring perceptions of what is worthy of conservation, and how experiences of change are managed. Older men remain men, despite losing the primary resources (the youthful body and employment) that hegemonic masculinity defines as central to manhood.

Both Aléx and colleagues (2008) and Coles and Vassarotti (2012) consider this issue in general terms, though the latter's utilisation of a broader Bourdieusian framework offers greater potential going forward, allowing for an analysis of how the decline of certain resources utilised in the construction of a masculine self-conception is negotiated through the prioritisation of aspects of selfhood arising only through age. Though marginalised in our youth oriented culture, older men can, Coles and Vassarotti suggest, retain a locally dominant position by acting within the subfield of aged masculinity, in which a different constellation of resources, norms, attitudes, and values is prioritised. However, given that masculinities are constructed and legitimated through homosocial interaction (Kimmel, 2006), and Coles and Vassarotti's neglect of this factor, the question remains regarding how older men utilise another Bourdieusian resource, social capital, in the pursuit of a personally satisfactory identity.

As Men's Shed's bring older men together in a homosocial environment with the explicit purpose of working on and with traditionally masculine technologies, these organisations appear as obvious sites for establishing a fuller understanding of older men's masculinity. The Australian literature demonstrates that Men's Sheds are 'more than a place to do woodwork' (Ballinger *et al*, 2009), but conceives of this 'more' in largely atheoretical terms, while also neglecting the importance of said woodwork (or, generally, workshop-based activities) as an important aspect of masculine identity. Men's Shed have mainly been considered as 'interventions' or 'services', with research focused on measuring self-reported, personally beneficial outcomes, and while these findings are of interest to funding providers and others concerned with the evidence-based efficacy of these organisations, they are of little sociological relevance. Where masculinity is addressed, the current literature suggests that Men's Sheds, and those men who frequent them, are characterised by an atypical non-hegemonic form, exhibiting openness, cooperation, and personal reflection. Given that male-dominated environments have so frequently been observed to engender problematic behaviours, this is a surprising and sociologically interesting finding, which merits further research. If this research is to provide novel insights into how and why Men's Sheds facilitate particular forms of masculinity, and the characteristics thereof, it is imperative to realise two opportunities. Firstly, as the current chapter has demonstrated, the wealth of

untapped theoretical resources from the fields of social gerontology and masculinities studies can be utilised to inform a more nuanced analysis of Men's Sheds and those men who frequent them. Secondly, the scope and methods of enquiry can be broadened, investigating locations outside of Australia, and utilising in-depth, relatively long-term ethnographic techniques, my own experience of which is recounted in the following chapter.

2

An Ethnographic Enquiry

In this ethnographic study, I sought to immerse myself in the life of the Men's Shed as a known investigator, in order to observe both those who established and ran the organisation (the 'management team', or 'board') and the ordinary men who became involved in it (termed 'participants' or, following the organisation's own documentation, 'shedders'). Rachel (1996:114) describes ethnographic practice in the following terms:

> "In order to find out how a particular community operates, one must invest an extensive period of time (traditionally measured in years, rather than in hours, days or weeks) living with them; being physically, verbally and emotionally present, moving among their interactions, joining in their discourses, using their objects and technologies and becoming part of the economy of things, values, morals and money. This is the character of ethnographic work".

Immersing oneself wholly in what may be a strange environment, foregoing detachment and objectivity while opening oneself to the judgement of participants, is justified by the richness of the data collected, data on behaviour, meaning, cause, and consequence:

> "The aim of the ethnographer is to listen deeply to and/or to observe as closely as possible the beliefs, the values, the material conditions and structural forces that underwrite the socially patterned behaviours of all human beings and the meanings people attach to these conditions and forces" (Forsey, 2010:567).

As these brief descriptions clarify, the ethnographic process is characterised by the long-term, intensively involved presence of the researcher in the field, and proceeds from the formation of human relationships to the understanding of the nuances of human lives in particular cultural contexts (Adler & Adler, 2012; Dietz *et al*, 1994). This process is inevitably fraught with difficulties, the most apparent of which is recognising, addressing, and assessing the effects of the researcher's presence in the field, and the ways in which this influences the construction, collection, and reporting of data. Honest and critical 'self-reflexivity' (Burr, 1995)

is therefore an imperative aspect of ethnographic research, as it allows for a fully informed assessment of fieldwork conduct (Chiseri-Strater, 1996; LeCompte, 1987; Preissle & Grant, 2004).

In the following discussion, I consider two particularly problematic issues that could have jeopardised the successful conduct of the fieldwork. Firstly, the pre-fieldwork expectations held by the researcher can guide both the particulars of the data being sought and how participant's actions are interpreted, hence multiple forms of 'truth' can potentially be constructed from field settings (Crotty, 1999). Secondly, participants can respond to the researcher's socio-economic status, age, gender, ethnicity, and other characteristics in ways that may promote or preclude access to data. Self-reflexivity therefore involves rejecting the 'view from nowhere' (McCarthy, 1994) previously considered essential to producing sociological representations of reality, and the turning back of the analytical and critical focus onto the researcher themselves, in order to reveal the complexities inherent in the production and dissemination of knowledge (Altheide & Johnson, 1998; Davies, 1999; Pillow, 2003). However, realising the importance of the researcher's expectations and characteristics can itself be problematic. If these are conceived as objects of enquiry on a par with the culture under investigation, research risk collapsing into a sociologically insignificant "black hole of introspection" (Van Maanen, 2011:92). Gans' (1999:542) riposte towards autobiographically focused ethnography is worth recalling here:

> "Instead of studying society, some of ethnography's work is devoted to inventing new moral discourses and establishing new research ethics, as well as reporting personal injustice and personal aspects of social injustice and obtaining catharsis and therapy for both researcher and readers...this kind of ethnography has nothing to do with analyzing what people do with and to each other in their groups and networks, or how institutions and communities function and malfunction".

As Gans informs us, ethnography should seek to illuminate the reader not about the researcher's character or concerns, but rather about the individuals, groups, and organisations under investigation. Therefore, the following discussion does not contain much in the way of substantial data, instead merely providing an account of decisions made in the service of constructing, collecting, and reporting

it, from which an informed assessment of my practice may commence.[1] I begin by discussing how I, a young, male, white, middle-class graduate student, perceived the object of enquiry prior to the research, gained access to the Men's Shed, and established relationships with members of the management team and participants, who were mainly older, white, middle-class retired men. While my participatory conduct was uniquely shaped by the context and characters I encountered, my observational and analytical practices, discussed in the later part of the chapter, more closely adhered to long-established standards.
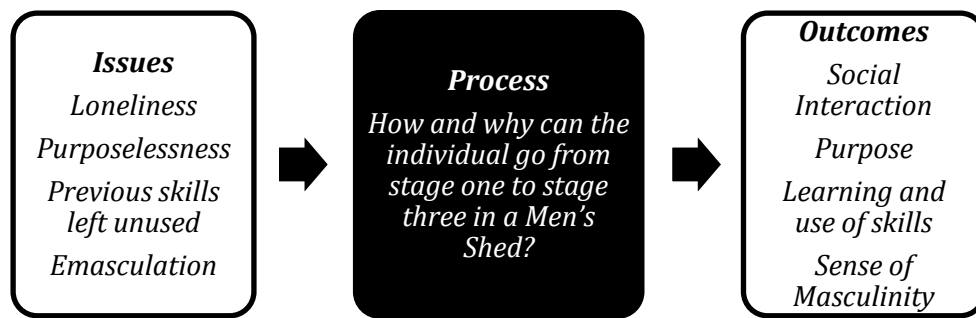
Pre-Entry

While not entirely formalised, the ethnographic approach adheres to several basic principles, the most important of which relates to the adaptability required of the researcher. Research questions are not strictly defined at the outset, acting only as initial prompts for exploring the field, with unforeseen areas of enquiry arising through the analysis of collected data and subsequent experiences in the field (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Such openness to adaptation was certainly apparent in the initial stages of the current enquiry. Though Knoblauch (2005:Online) asserts that "ethnographers…have vast implicit and explicit background knowledge of any field they are studying", I really did not, having experienced neither sustained contact with older men, nor engagement in the workshop-based activities characteristic of Men's Sheds. Accordingly, I allowed the current literature on Men's Sheds, primarily concerned with the health and wellbeing benefits available to participants, to shape my expectations, both of participants themselves and of the particular focus of the research. This initial focus is apparent in the following extract from the research proposal I produced to introduce myself and the study to the management team:[2]

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[1] Certain researchers (Blee, 1998; Down *et al*, 2006; Lerum, 2001) claim that "what the field…'does' to you emotionally, generates information about the field when you eventually look beyond the personal experience" (Brandt, 2010:5), and that reflexivity therefore serves methodological functions. As discussed below, reflecting on my own emotional responses did suggest further avenues of enquiry, but only generally, in pushing me to consider participants in a fully human sense, as both subject and object of the social construction of ageing and masculinity, rather than as one-dimensional exemplars of specific identities.

[2] My entry was negotiated with two 'gatekeepers' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007), namely Joe, who acted as the inaugural chairman of the Men's Shed's board of trustees, and Graham, who acted as the vice-chairman.

"I think of Men's Sheds in terms of three stages, as in the following diagram:

Issues Loneliness Purposelessness Previous skills left unused Emasculation	→	**Process** How and why can the individual go from stage one to stage three in a Men's Shed?	→	**Outcomes** Social Interaction Purpose Learning and use of skills Sense of Masculinity

The current research into older men's issues has adequately addressed the first box; it has been identified that older men can suffer from these issues following the transition into retirement. Likewise, the research into Men's Sheds in Australia has demonstrated that the outcomes in the third box can be achieved by participation in a Men's Shed. My research seeks to address the 'black box' in the middle, the actual processes operating in a Men's Shed, to understand how and why they serve their valuable purpose".

I initially sought to assess how participation at the Men's Shed could address loneliness and purposelessness among older men, and why it was important for them to continue utilising their workshop-based skills, with masculinity being merely one issue among others.

The influence of ageist narratives of decline is apparent in the research proposal I presented to Joe and Graham, as I positioned potential participants as inevitably suffering from the issues identified in the current literature. Subjective bias of the kind that can, left unchecked, negatively guide the conduct of research, derives from both personal experience and professional training, though a third source, ignorance, may be added in my case (LeCompte, 1987). Impressed by the reported capacity of Men's Sheds to literally 'save lives' (Misan *et al*, 2008), I initially expected to report on the gradual flourishing of what I supposed was a group of downtrodden men, charting simple processes of personal improvement. Upon entering the field and discovering participant's backgrounds, characters, and understandings of the Men's Shed, I had cause to alter my approach, as the initial data strongly suggested that they did not consider their involvement through this limited frame of reference. Indeed, several participants took offence at the implication that their involvement was in any way linked to problems in their lives, instead emphasising that the Men's Shed served as an enjoyable addition to their currently satisfactory arrangements. Furthermore, as is

discussed in chapters four and eight, one of the most consistent themes in the data was that of contributory involvement, whereby participants' stewardship of the organisation was emphasised over and above any personal benefits gained from involvement. This is not to say that the recognised functions of Men's Sheds are not present in the data. The management team recognised the practical efficiency of presenting the organisation in these terms, and for a minority of participants, their involvement can reasonably be said to have significantly improved, or even 'saved', their lives. However, as is made apparent in chapter six, it is overly simplistic to set these men apart from their fellow shedders, or to suppose that the bare fact of improvements to their lives is a valuable sociological insight in itself. These men encountered issues of social isolation, loneliness, and ill health in an organisational culture they helped to define, and the improvements they experienced must be considered in this context. In summary then, my initial experiences in the field strongly suggested that I pursue a different course, to investigate the reality I encountered, in all its complexity, rather than that which my initial biases had led me to expect. This reality prompted particularly demanding forms of participation from the outset of the fieldwork, an intensity of engagement that was willingly pursued in the service of collecting informative data.

Access

Access, write Glensne and Peshkin (1999:33):

> "Is a process [referring] to your acquisition of consent to go where you want, observe what you want, talk to whomever you want, obtain and read whatever documents you require, and do all of this for whatever period of time you need to satisfy your research requirements".

The difficulties inherent in gaining and maintaining access are well documented in the methodological literature, although these treatments tend to generate general 'checklists' of best practice that only partially align with experience (Bruni, 2006; Lofland & Lofland, 1995; Neyland, 2008; Ybema *et al*, 2009). In reality, each access process is unique, being shaped by the internal dynamics of the site, the characteristics and needs of participants, the attributes of the researcher, and the changeable relationship between these factors. I based my access pitch on two elements, firstly, the organisational need for individuals

willing to supervise day-to-day operations, and secondly, the evaluatory role I could play using my sociological education and writing skills. Regarding the former, as the 'threats' section of the Men's Shed's Business Plan stated, "we will need enough competent men to act as the manager of the shed during opening hours. Too few and we won't be able to open for many hours or cover for sickness". The supervisory role, advertised on the Men's Shed's website, entailed opening and closing the building, briefing new participants on health and safety guidelines and ensuring they filled in the corresponding paperwork, checking that the workshop was safe (noting trip hazards, checking fire exits, ensuring hazardous materials were stored safely, etc.), answering the telephone, and other everyday duties. Realising this role could provide a rationale for physical access (Gummesson, 2000), I positioned myself as suitable for it in my initial email to Graham:

> *"I could take up this role, the good thing being that I would be able to be present whenever is required. The principal idea underlying my research is that the best way to understand Men's Sheds is to actually be there over an extended period of time, getting to know the members and the routine of the place, and actually taking part and being useful rather than observing from the side-lines".*

As is typical in the initial contact, I attempted to maintain a "professional, yet friendly, persona with a clear 'other' orientation" (Pitts & Miller-Day, 2007:188), focusing on what the gatekeepers had stated they required, and how I could fulfil this. Adopting the supervisory role was therefore my initial contribution to the 'reciprocal' relationship I sought to establish with the gatekeepers (Jorgensen, 1989; Lofland & Lofland, 1995).

In my initial contact, I also provided a personal biography designed to demonstrate some degree of commonality between myself and the gatekeepers (Harrington, 2003). As Shaffir and Stebbin (1991:26) note, "access will be shaped by the cultural and ascriptive differences between the...researcher and the researched. Where these differences are minimal, access and even acceptance are likely to be enhanced". Accordingly, I reflected upon what I thought the gatekeepers would consider important, and decided to highlight those aspects of my identity that I felt would best align with their own. My name made it immediately obvious that I was a man, which I felt would be advantageous in a male-exclusive environment. Though female researchers have studied Men's

Sheds utilising interview-based methodologies (e.g. Ormsby *et al*, 2010), based on data concerning the management team and participants' views on the importance of male-exclusivity (see chapters three and five), a female researcher would likely have experienced considerable difficulty in gaining long-term ethnographic access. I also noted my long-term residence in Carstonwood, to demonstrate that I broadly shared the middle-class background I suspected the gatekeepers had (quickly confirmed, based on various indicators, after entering the field), Finally, I highlighted my academic record, as a means of demonstrating that I was serious, professional, and capable in my work (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). Graham's response was encouraging, stating that he would welcome the proposed research, and help with developing the Men's Shed during the difficult opening period.[3] He suggested a meeting to see "how [I] would fit in to the culture we are trying for", indicating a concern with how I, as a person as much as a researcher, would fit into the organisation, as well as a recognition that this 'culture' was a work-in-progress (Bruni, 2006). During the meeting, I hoped to establish an 'explicit research bargain' by presenting and discussing my research proposal (as discussed above), thus clarifying my aims and methods, as well as demonstrating my professionalism (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Lofland & Lofland, 1995). However, Joe and Graham expressed greater concern about their own immediate supervisory requirements, and how I could help to address them. I was granted entry, and the gatekeeper's endorsement of the research, based on my willingness to adopt this contributory role.

Participation

The primary means of data collection utilised in this enquiry was overt participant observation, a method in which the researcher becomes enmeshed in the culture under investigation, to a greater or lesser extent, and yields data in the form of descriptive, analytical, and reflexive fieldnotes (Bernard, 2006; Lofland & Lofland, 1995; Sanjek, 1990). The apparent simplicity of participant observation as an extension of natural social capacities masks various issues that can affect the validity of the findings, ultimately stemming from the paradox

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[3] I began attending the Men's Shed on the 6th of February 2013, the second opening session, and attended every five to six-hour session (three sessions per week), aside from holidays, until Friday 5th of September 2014.

between the necessities of participatory involvement and observational detachment. The method involves both:

> "Immersing yourself in a culture and learning to remove yourself every day from that immersion so you can intellectualize what you've seen and heard, put it into perspective, and write about it convincingly. When it's done right, participant observation turns fieldworkers into instruments of data collection and data analysis" (Bernard, 2006:344).

Despite the plethora of roles that may be adopted in the field, it is vital to maintain one's identity as a researcher, both to avoid the temptations of 'going native' (Gold, 1958) and to ensure participants remain aware of the purpose of the researcher's presence. The need to 'belong' while also maintaining the 'distance' required for analysis places the researcher in an ambiguous position, though this balance will differ according to the nature of the field and the character of the researcher, substantially affecting data collection and analysis (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011; Hume & Mulcock, 2004; Wolcott, 2008). Gold (1958) initially classified participant-observational research into four types, namely complete participation, participant-as-observer, observer-as-participant, and complete observation. Further classifications have elaborated on these distinctions, outlining the continuum between pure participation and pure observation (Bernard, 2006; Spradley, 1980). Of relevance here, Adler and Adler (1987) consider membership, the degree to which typical roles within the field are adopted, and note non-membership, as well as peripheral, active, and full membership, the latter of which is the most accurate classification of my involvement in the field. Here I outline the evolution of my participatory practice as a 'contributor' and a 'practical shedder', and reflect upon how my actions facilitated the development of the kind of friendly and trusting relationships required to establish and maintain a position from which informative data could be sought. Generally, while my initial involvement as a contributor helped me to gain and maintain the respect of the management team and participants, a further role, comprising engagement in the workshop, was required to fully ingratiate myself with the latter group.

As a Contributor

Wolcott (2008:52) recommends becoming "only as involved as is necessary to obtain the information desired", though this was problematic, given my rapid

realisation that the 'information desired' was not as clear-cut as I had anticipated. Furthermore, the pressures generated through entering the field as it came into being, and being a novice ethnographer, over-eager to please for fear of being judged an 'exploitative interloper' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007), also guided my involvement. Such fear was legitimate, given the ethos of contributory involvement established within the Men's Shed, and I could not expect to maintain prolonged access through adopting a detached stance, hence I engaged in various organisational roles, within my limitations (de Laine, 2000). In relation to the needs of the management team, I initially acted in a supervisory capacity, and later adopted the role of author, advisor, and representative throughout the fieldwork. As an author and advisor, I held regular discussions with the management team regarding important issues, helped to write funding applications, local bulletin and media articles, and acted as minute secretary during board meetings. I was not, however, directly involved in making management-level decisions, and I did not join the board of trustees. I also conducted internal surveys and other simple research projects, designed to provide a body of evidence demonstrative of the value of the Men's Shed, which could then be utilised in future funding applications.[4] In my representative

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[4] Though I have strived to adopt a neutral tone in the current enquiry, I was occasionally asked to present the Men's Shed in a positive light, in the manner of the current literature, thus contributing towards the development of positive external perceptions of the organisation. For example, consider the following extract, where I discussed an evaluation of a funding grant with Joe:

> Joe: "What they want is some short case-studies…just a basic biography, what they're getting out of the Men's Shed, just a few quotes. We thought you could write these".
> Jeremy: "When do you want them"?
> Joe: "About a month should be fine…try and keep them confidential, you can use false names or something".
> Jeremy: "You can keep it very general, use very general language, y'know, this man was an engineer…".
> Joe: "And this ties into your own work, your own notes, what you have written there, they're for your eyes only, but we don't want you to write anything negative about the Shed, not in things you write for us, y'know. There's more scope for being critical in your academic work, if that's what you've found". (Fieldnotes, 5th June 2013)

Joe established a difference between the scope of my research and the limitations to maintain when presenting the Men's Shed to particular readers, a directive I willingly followed in light of the need to maintain ongoing access. Contrasting such presentations with that given here demonstrates the multiplicity of 'truths' that can be constructed or obscured in ethnographic writing (Crotty, 1999). Indeed, it is impossible to give a 'complete' account of any organisation, as any account will always skew towards highlighting the particular concerns of the author. My concern, as is apparent throughout this enquiry, is sociological, being primarily concerned with the development and refinement of theory, and hence the observations reported and analysed are geared towards this, though naturally there will be a degree of crossover between the discourse established here and that which currently exists around Men's Sheds.

capacity, I went on fact-finding trips to the Southampton headquarters of a tool-refurbishing charity, in order to assess the viability of pursuing this kind of project at the Men's Shed, and to the Irish Men's Shed Association's national conference, in order to give a speech regarding the Scottish Men's Shed movement. I also gave a speech at the first Scottish Men's Shed national conference, and held discussions with local older people's groups concerning the Men's Shed. This type of contributory work was largely unseen by participants, though I did receive grateful recognition, for example, one shedder stated that I was "instrumental in getting the place up and running", another considered my presence 'a real bonus', while a third simply stated 'we need you'.

This initial acceptance, borne of my willingness to contribute towards the development and functioning of the Men's Shed, is apparent in Joe's summary of the benefits of my presence at the first AGM I attended, held on the 6th of March 2013, after a month of fieldwork. This event provided a means for Joe to express gratitude to those involved in the successful opening period. As he generously put it:

> Joe: "Jeremy, our researcher from the University of Aberdeen. We actually wanted to contact the universities to see if they'd be interested in the Shed, and he fell from heaven [Joe raises his hands], and is now embedded, like a soldier in Afghanistan. But seriously, he's proved himself to be a reliable supervisor, always here to open up".
>
> Ed: "Here, here"!
>
> Joe: "He's helped me a lot with my own thinking about the Shed, and we're very lucky to have him". (Fieldnotes, 6th March 2013)

With the management team and the early core group of participants present, Joe, chairman of the board of trustees and chief gatekeeper, made an explicit statement of my value to the organisation, positioning me in a "meaningful, familiar and valued role within the group" (Harrington, 2003:608), though he also made clear reference to my research activities (Pitts & Miller-Day, 2007). Joe, who after a report I wrote assessing the first six months of opening, considered me "the leading expert on Men's Sheds in Scotland", made similar statements to groups of participants and visitors to the Men's Shed. Introducing me to the councillors, politicians, and various charitable service providers that visited over the course of the fieldwork, he would always stress how 'privileged' the

organisation was to have my expertise. In consistently stressing the value of my presence, Joe transitioned from a gatekeeper to a 'sponsor' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007), a man with whom I established a strong interpersonal connection (Pitts & Miller-Day, 2007). Sharing with me a desire to comprehend the Men's Shed in an academic fashion, Joe acted as a consistent, reassuring presence who understood what I was trying to achieve, and I valued immensely the support he gave me, privately and publicly, throughout the fieldwork. No doubt there was an element of self-interest in this, because my supervisory role, and the academic understanding of the organisation I provided, proved to be practically efficient, but I do not think that this exhausted our relationship. Joe was genuinely interested in helping me succeed, and as long as I dutifully fulfilled my obligations, I had a solid foundation from which to conduct the research.

After the first three months of fieldwork, as new members and new machinery began to arrive, an expansion requiring the formalisation of safety procedures, aspects of my supervisory role were superseded by a group of experienced participants who adopted more specialised supervisory responsibilities, including the training of newcomers and the safety-checking of machinery, both functions I could not safely conduct. While initially concerned about this transition, I realise on reflection that it did not adversely affect my status, and in fact provided an opportunity for observing the changing nature of participant's roles in the field. I remained a supervisor in name, but this entailed only the general capacities of the role, such as opening and closing the building, answering the telephone, greeting visitors, and ensuring that participants were adhering to formal workshop rules. Freed to an extent, I began to focus on establishing relationships not based around the somewhat restrictive supervisory role, which was initially problematic. Though my participatory efforts enamoured me to the management team, and gained the respect of participants, this did not easily translate into rapport with the latter group, with whom I initially felt I had little in common. The majority of participants were, as one put it, 'practical shedders', attracted to the Men's Shed by the chance it provided to engage in traditionally masculine technical practices, such as woodworking and engineering, alongside like-minded others. Previously having little interest in technical theory and practice, I initially found interactions based on these topics largely impenetrable. I admit to a degree of boredom early on, sitting through detailed discussions on,

for example, double-glazing or torque, laughing when others laughed, nodding in agreement when others did, and having only the barest grasp of the conversations (Fine & Shulman, 2009). Furthermore, I felt uncomfortable in the workshop, possessing neither the knowledge nor confidence to pursue technical practice on my own, especially among a group that possessed hundreds of years of cumulative experience. Although I got on well enough with initial participants, and they respected me for my willingness to contribute, I was concerned that if interactions and activities were to be primarily technical in character, if a general ease in the workshop functioned as the arbiter of full acceptance, then the sharing of pleasantries would encompass the entirety of our relationships (Whyte, 1997).

As a Practical Shedder

With hindsight, I realise that my initial experiences somewhat mirrored those of participants. Group formation was an inter-subjective process being simultaneously conducted by all concerned, with technical topics functioning as a means of safely expressing homosocial desire and demonstrating participant's 'qualifications' for membership (Kiesling, 2005). It was naive to think that I could pierce through this process of group formation to reveal an underlying reality where useful data would pour forth if only participants dropped the jargon and presented 'themselves' (or rather, who I expected them to be). In actuality, charting the process of group formation in this new social context was itself an important source of data, with the analysis of participants' reverent attitude towards technological objects providing insight into important aspects of their masculine identity. In order to access and understand the process of group formation, I had to pay heed to Harrington's (2003:609) maxim, stating that "ethnographers gain access to information to the extent that they are categorized as sharing a valued social identity with participants". If this technical orientation represented a salient aspect of participant's identities, and was the primary means through which group formation occurred, I had to undergo 're-socialisation' (Emerson *et al*, 2011), and demonstrate a willingness to engage with participants as they engaged with each other. Put simply, I had to "stop sitting about all day", as a few shedders had criticised me for, "and do some work". Knowing that Men's Sheds had been demonstrated to be conducive to informal learning (Golding, 2011a), and recognising that the most effective means of

understanding experience was to share in it, I adopted a 'socially acceptable incompetent' role. Lofland and Lofland (1995:56, original emphasis) state that this stance "of watcher and asker of questions is the quintessential *student* role...such persons *have* to be told and will not take offense at being instructed about 'obvious' things or...being 'lectured to'". While my youth and lack of experience naturally suggested this approach, Lofland and Lofland implore cautious deployment, by younger researchers, of the incompetent role in technically oriented or male-dominated fields. Youth, these authors stress, can potentially indicate and compound perceptions of ignorance and frivolity. Fortunately, this did not occur at the Men's Shed, as the socially acceptable incompetent role actually tapped into a substantive theme in the data, namely participant's desires to engage in the intergenerational transfer of knowledge, as the following extract demonstrates.

My first project was selected for me by Peter, a highly knowledgeable shedder who kindly facilitated my transition into the workshop. As a suitably easy introduction to technical practice, he encouraged me to undertake the refurbishment of an old coffee table, purchased from a charity shop for £5 to sit in front of the sofa in the seating area. Having completed sanding it down (or so I thought), I began to varnish it:

> *The tabletop is covered in burns and markings, but will look good when varnished. As I begin, Peter checks on my progress, exasperatedly stating "woh, woh, what are ye doin'"? He has noticed residues of the previous polyurethane covering missed by my untrained eye. I don't know if my incompetence angered him, but if it did, he certainly didn't show it. Peter's teaching manner is excellent, speaking in a soft, even tone, highlighting that sanding and varnishing, though basic processes, are not to be taken lightly. One needs the correct equipment, preferably a camel's hair brush, and we discussed the advantages and disadvantages of different varnishes. I proceed to remove the varnish I had applied, and begin further sanding...Peter comes in following his lunch break and proceeds with further teaching, this time considering sanding. He has brought in the necessary tools, the right type of sandpaper, wire wool, and a rag coated in white spirits, and demonstrates the process to me. With smooth, circular motions, he caresses the wood, there's no need to rub it hard, as I was doing, this just damages it. What about the markings on the table, I ask, should they be removed? Peter replies that they are there to stay, they are representative of its history, its biography, and therefore its character. He was detailed and patient once again, and once he had put me right, says 'right, lesson over'. I continue sanding, telling Barry, who was hovering about throughout, that I understood this interaction as a teaching and*

learning session, and he states that this is the purpose of the Men's Shed…having completed the sanding, I rub it with my bare hands, feeling for any tiny bits of stubborn polyurethane; it is clear, and it is beautiful.
(Fieldnotes, 22nd April 2013)

This coffee table became somewhat of a running joke over the months it took me to complete. Participants would continually approach me, questioning my methods and offering advice (hand or electric sanding, the correct varnish to use, and its application, the quality of finish needed), and not knowing any better, I accepted their suggestions, meaning I reworked the constituent parts a number of times. In doing so, I experienced conflicting emotions, feeling, in the manifestation of my pre-fieldwork opinion, that it was just a cheap old table, hardly better than firewood, why the need for such rigour, and then correcting myself, recalling the importance participants granted to diligent workshop conduct; as Peter put it, reflecting the general stance of the group, "do it right or don't do it at all". Working through this table, organising donated tools, and helping out with participant's own projects gradually altered my feelings regarding this aspect of participation, from the slog of emotional work reluctantly pursued to the enjoyment of personally fulfilling labour, conducted under the guidance of men like Peter, who were thankfully willing to share their considerable experience (Down *et al*, 2006; Lofland & Lofland, 1995).

As the fieldwork progressed, I began taking on larger projects, such as the refurbishment of a wooden climbing frame for a local children's group, went shopping for supplies at hardware stores, and found myself looking forward to the opportunity to rummage through new donations of tools, hoping to find, as would participants, some rare and interesting treasure; in short, I began to enjoy being a practical shedder. There were, however, a few occasions in which I incorrectly judged my level of involvement in the workshop, risking being perceived as an 'unacceptable incompetent' (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). These situations occurred when I overestimated my skills and attempted to use particular tools or intervene in technical issues I was unqualified for. In a space in which technical competence was so highly valued, both as an expression of masculine identity and for simple safety reasons, I was concerned that such incidents could damage my relationships with those who had witnessed and, invariably, gossiped about my misdemeanours. Initially reflecting on these incidents, I considered the fact of my unavoidable imitation, rather than full

realisation, of the practical shedder role. This role comprised innumerable aspects of discursive and embodied knowledge, gained, in most cases, through a systematic education in the craft. Though I had learnt the basics, I came to realise that ample scope remained for embarrassing mishaps. Following these incidents, I consciously renewed my resolution to think, to recall my limitations, before I acted in an environment where one wrong move could result in serious injury. However, singular mistakes in the field are rarely terminal (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011), and these incidents were thankfully no exception. Indeed, for a newcomer to technical practice, mistakes could actually be beneficial, for as several shedders told me, making mistakes is an unavoidable part of the learning process.

Further reflecting on these incidents, I recognised another developing bias in my perception of participants. In refocusing the research project to consider workshop practice in depth, addressing what my initial observations suggested was of greatest concern to participants, I risked replacing one set of one-dimensional categorisations (lonely, needy, older men) with another (exclusively technically oriented older men). Perhaps for reasons of space or topic specificity, readers of research reports are rarely granted the opportunity to comprehend participants in fully rounded terms, and this is reflected in my concerns regarding being frozen out of the group for making mistakes in the workshop. In reality, the assessment of individuals was based upon the accumulation of similar mistakes (suggesting the culprit had not learned from their experience), and linked to perceived characterological flaws (see chapters eight and nine). This suggested, in what with the benefit of hindsight is an obvious statement, that participant's understandings of others, including myself, incorporated multifaceted criteria of judgement reflective of masculine identities broader in scope than the immediately apparent 'technicist' identity (Faulkner, 2007) I expressed such concern about imitating. Accordingly, as the fieldwork progressed, the initial comfort participants established through their collective enjoyment of technical pursuits evolved into deeper friendships (and occasionally, antagonisms) reflective of the fullness of their identities. As men of similar age, background, and socio-economic status, they shared many attitudes and concerns regarding social class, gender, health, and the state of contemporary society, topics that provide a deeper and more holistic insight into their aged masculinity, and which are considered in chapters five, six, and seven (Coles & Vassarotti, 2012). So too did

they begin to express an interest in me as a man, questioning me about my background, family, career plans, personal relationships, and interests outside the Men's Shed. I was happy to discuss these topics, given the potential such interactions had to illuminate participant's concerns and remind them of the ultimate purpose of my presence in the field (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011).

Given the intensity of my participatory involvement, it is reasonable to question its possible influence on the content and validity of the data, though I would argue that such intense engagement was a necessity given the nature of the field (Fine, 1993). My adherence to the expectation of contributory involvement served to neutralise possible perceptions of me as an entirely foreign element, allowing me to ingratiate myself with the management team and participants to the extent that my presence was not perceived as a negative. However, to really become a part of the group and come to know participants, I had to adopt a more 'hands on' approach by engaging in the workshop. This engagement facilitated the gradual development of friendships between me and participants, which mimicked, to an extent, those which were being established between participants themselves. In effect, this allowed participants to engage with me, and engage with others in my presence, in a fashion generative of the naturalistic data required for effective ethnographic reportage. Gold (1958) though, is correct in warning that such an intensely involved participant-as-observer approach increases the risk of 'going native'. This term implies the dissolution of an observational stance, and the prioritisation of a participatory stance, with the necessary attitudinal shift from enquiring to belonging, though I feel that my subjectivity, my self-perception as a researcher, was never compromised. It is correct to state that I conducted the various tasks assigned to me, and those I chose to engage in, to the best of my ability, and that generally, I enjoyed my time as a shedder. However, I always retained a conception of my involvement as, in the most basic sense, a means to an end, namely securing the ongoing access required for gathering informative data. Furthermore, I also ensured that participants themselves remained cognisant of my status as a researcher, which was not difficult given their interest and continual questioning regarding my progress and future plans. Put simply, I acted as participants expected a dedicated shedder to act, and moreover as a young, technically inexperienced man was expected to act, and as a consequence

of this, participants acted as I, the researcher, 'required' them to act (as 'naturally' as possible) in my presence.

Observation

'Effective observation', note DeWalt and DeWalt (2011:95) "means "seeing" as much as possible in any situation", through considering the physical layout of the space, the location of participants and the researcher within that space, and the typical and unusual activities conducted, including both verbal and non-verbal communication. Acts of observations acquire value as data only after undergoing 'inscription', the transformation into fieldnotes. I was concerned to generate as 'thick' a description as possible (Geertz, 1973; Kleinman, 1995; Wolcott, 2008), though adopting a constructionist stance, I recognised the impossibility of direct correspondence between any underlying 'reality' of the field and my reported observations (Crotty, 1999). As Emerson and colleagues (2011:240) stress, "just as the ethnographer-as-observer participates with members in constructing a social reality, so, too, the ethnographer-as-writer creates the world through language". My reporting is but one possible interpretation of the actions and interactions I observed, though I feel, considering the consistency of previous research findings into homosocial enactments, and the utilisation of well-developed analytical strategies, that it is a valid interpretation. Fieldnotes were taken in pencil (pens frequently clogged in the dust-filled environment) on folded pieces of A4 paper, which combined with small writing can hold substantial amounts of information. I initially took fieldnotes in private, though I quickly realised that this was unnecessary. While ethnographers cannot help but be deceptive to some extent, I felt I could minimise this through unobtrusive openness, and began to take fieldnotes while at the front desk or computer area, where writing would not look out of place (Fine, 1993; Van Maanen, 2011). I could therefore bypass 'headnotes' in the social area, though while observing workshop practice, which involved active participation, I had to periodically leave the area to record notes. When I took my laptop computer into the field to update the attendance sheets, I typed fieldnotes, and for occasions when I knew a particular event was going to occur, I used the video-recording facility on a tablet computer, later transcribing what occurred.

While observing, I primarily took 'jot notes', words or short phrases that trigger memory, which, once I had established typical observational practices, tended to follow a standard format (Emerson *et al*, 2011; Van Maanen 2011). As I usually arrived first for sessions, I noted changes in the physical environment, including the organisation of particular objects, new additions, and notes posted on the notice boards and whiteboards. While the spatial organisation of the Men's Shed provided much useful data (Silverman, 1993), day-to-day changes were typically small-scale, hence I did not require a new writing-up of the space on a daily basis. Instead, I periodically re-described it, incorporating month-to-month changes, to capture its gradual evolution. Likewise, I did not require a daily description of participant's clothing, as this tended to go unchanged for the most part. For example, Joe wore one of the company-branded warehouse overalls that another participant had donated, others wore boiler suits, and Peter wore a crusty, stained apron, its pockets filled with measuring tapes, pocketknives, small screwdrivers, and other bits and bobs. In order to capture typical patterns of action and interaction, I reserved space for following up interesting avenues from previous data through further observation and targeted discussions, while also continuing to observe day-to-day occurrences, which quickly settled into a pattern. In a typical session, two or three half-hour tea breaks were interspersed with workshop activities for the majority of participants, and a quiet seat or game of pool for the small minority of non-practical participants. I also made sure to record certain periodically occurring special events in sufficient detail, for example, visits from nascent Men's Shed groups from across Scotland, or weekend sales of donated tools at the local shopping centre.

Regarding the substantial data, I mainly recorded instances of action and speech, with a view to firstly gauging participant's typical behavioural patterns, as well as their reactions to particular situations, and then focusing on the meanings they held and expressed in relation to these (Emerson *et al*, 2011). The first of these stages was rendered problematic by the nature of the field. With new participants and situations continually arising, particularly during the first half of the fieldwork, continual reassessment was required in order to establish, with a degree of consistency, the behavioural and attitudinal norms valued by participants. My own participation, as outlined above, was then vital in facilitating access to data on meanings. Though seeing and hearing constituted

the primary means of experiencing the field, the nature of the Men's Shed also mandated consideration of other sensual experiences (Adler & Adler, 1994; Forsey, 2010; Wolcott, 2008). I thus noted sounds, smells, and other impressionistic aspects of the environment, seeking to counteract the ethnographic tendency towards accounts outlining "oddly empty spaces, with little or no attention paid to the physical surroundings. [These] ethnographic worlds are...flat and monochrome, in that aesthetic qualities, such as colour, are ignored" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007:261), reflecting methodologically the wider neglect of objects and physical spaces in the social sciences (Olsen, 2010). Participants took great pleasure in the use and admiration of technological objects, and this was naturally a sensual experience. There were thousands of these objects in the field, and in the workshop, sawdust stuck in the throat and irritated the eyes, the smell of oil, white spirit, or creosote filled the nose, and conversations were periodically interrupted by roaring engines or buzzing saws piercing the air and sending vibrations travelling through the floor. While the principles of the analytical approach utilised in this enquiry mandate progressing beyond raw description to a higher conceptual level, the need to write 'lushly' (Goffman, 1989) was important to accurately render the environment and highlight the sensual aspects of masculine identity. Regarding the presentation of data, the current enquiry can thus be classified as a 'fieldnote-centred text' (Van Maanen, 2011), skirting between 'plain' and 'enhanced' ethnographic writing (Humphreys & Watson, 2009). I seek to give the reader a 'feel' for the substance of my observations, both to 'ground' the analysis and generate a degree of immersion, hopefully prompting a deeper understanding of how I arrived at my conclusions (Suddaby, 2006).

The Men's Shed's opening hours (Monday, 10:00am - 4:00pm, Wednesday, 3:00pm - 8:00pm, Friday, 10:00am - 4:00pm) allowed for the conversion of jotted notes into full fieldnotes (written on a personal laptop computer) almost immediately (this also applied to other interactions, including tool sales, board meetings, and social evenings), which is vital for recall and accuracy (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011; Van Maanen, 2011). Making sure to retain the necessary degree of separation, I utilised Bernard's (2006) distinction between descriptive, analytical, and reflexive fieldnotes. The former were recorded chronologically, though I allowed more leeway for analytical and reflexive notes, through which I

attempted to chart, respectively, the evolution of my understanding, and the reasons underlying shifts in my perception. Analytical notes thus served as 'theoretical memos' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) that aided in the generation of concepts through highlighting similarities, differences, and connections between particular occurrences, while reflexive notes charted the gradual re-socialisation I underwent in becoming a contributor, practical shedder, and friend to participants. Daily notes were concluded with a brief summary, providing a guide to the next fieldwork session. I also utilised extensive documentary data in the analysis (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007), being granted full access to these paper and Word documents. Official documents, such as the Men's Shed's Business Plan and Constitution, funding applications, policy documents, email exchanges with funding providers and other Men's Sheds, as well as photographs and promotional videos, informed me of how the management team understood their creation, and in particular their careful crafting of its public perception.

Analysis

The data collection and analysis procedures utilised in the current enquiry were informed by the general principles of the grounded theory approach. Though not strictly formulaic, this approach typically follows a 'funnel' structure, involving a progressive abstraction from descriptive data to conceptual and theoretical constructs, with a consistent focus on demonstrating the link between data and theory (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). The approach is inductive in character, as "the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis…emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection" (Patton, 1980:306). This does not, however, mandate ignorance of the current literature addressing the area of enquiry, but rather the utilisation of pre-existing findings, or 'sensitising concepts', as 'interpretive devices' (Bowen, 2006) to provide initial impetus to data collection, and guidance to its analysis. It is correct to state that the use of sensitising concepts risks converting open-ended ethnography into merely hypothesis testing, as I had originally intended to do by pursuing the concerns of the current Men's Shed literature (Suddaby, 2006). However, I quickly realised that restricting myself to such a narrow view of the Men's Shed would not have done justice to the complexity of participant's experiences. In the early broadening and refocusing of the study, I adopted a new set of sensitising

concepts in order to try and make sense of the data apparent in the field. In doing so, I adhered to Suddaby's (2006) recommendation to select these from more than one substantive area by drawing from the disciplines of masculinities studies (utilising concepts such as 'hegemonic masculinity', 'aged masculinity', and 'homosociality') and social gerontology (utilising concepts such as 'successful ageing' and 'continuity'). As the fieldwork progressed, these concepts were exemplified, refined (or discarded), and subject to analysis regarding their relationship with initially unforeseen themes arising in the data, including participants' nostalgia, community-mindedness, and reverent treatment of technological objects, as well as the operation of cognitive and structural social capital in the field (Uphoff, 2001). Accordingly, the novelty of the current enquiry lies partially in the exemplification of existing concepts in a novel context, though the point of refinement in relation to the principle themes apparent in the data is of greater sociological relevance (Charmaz, 2006).

Formally stated, the grounded theory approach mandates that repeated instances of a phenomena, as captured in raw data, are meaningless in themselves, acquiring value only when converted into 'concepts', the basic unit of analysis. Each potential instance of a concept that arises in the data undergoes constant comparison with others, assessing whether it fulfils the concept's criteria, or whether it forms the basis of another concept. Concepts that express an underlying similarity are then grouped to form 'categories' amendable to analysis. Such analysis considers the conditions under which elements of the category arise, when, where, why, and how participants conduct actions related to the category, and how the categories relate to each other and to the sensitising concepts. Fieldwork and analysis ends when no new evidence is arising ('categorical saturation') and the main categories are apparent (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Practically, grounded theory mandates a two-stage coding process. Firstly, 'open' (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), or 'initial' (Charmaz, 2006) coding, conducted following a close-reading familiarisation stage, is concerned with breaking down, line-by-line, raw data into discrete units from which initial concepts arise. This entails the production of increasingly wide-ranging theoretical memos, which problematize the developing concepts and suggest directions for forthcoming fieldwork, a process referred to as 'theoretical sampling' (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Due to my research inexperience and the variety of data being generated,

my initial coding was eclectic (Saldaña, 2013). I coded across as many dimensions as possible, confident that these broad considerations would establish points of consistency indicating participants' main concerns.

For example, consider the following account of the organisation of donated tools that I engaged in with Peter:

> *In the back room, Peter is enthusiastically looking over some donated tools (various boxes, bags, and little cupboard units, from a widow). They are small, subtle, woodcarving tools, different from the usual spanners and saws. I carry out the routine of picking up various tools, and without asking, he happily informs me as to what they do, and also why they need to be kept. Several times he mentions that Joe should stay away from these tools: "don't let Joe see these, they'll be out the door, he just disnae think, he cannae be trusted with them". However, Peter also notes that "Dean's gonna love these, he's the guy, he's got to look at these, he's got to make the final decisions", thus recognising his knowledge in this area…Peter takes me over to the other shelf, on which there is a small wooden set of drawers containing more woodcarving tools. He takes each out in turn, small files, gougers, and suchlike, precision tools used to carve intricate designs into wood: "look at that, that's a little scraper, see how the edge on this one is jus' slightly different". He turns these little tools over in his hands, pressing down on the metal tops such that a little bump is made in his dirty fingers, and compares them to each other, and generally to newer tools: "see, they just dinnae mak' them like this anymore, nobody takes the time". He then crouches alongside me, with some difficulty, to look at an old wooden cabinet, lovingly tracing the intricate carved patterns with his fingers and demonstrating the use of the woodcarving tools, while expressing great respect for the man who originally made the chest: "look wit he's done here, he's just come roond, ever so softly, little bit, little bit". Peter tells me he will be working on this cabinet soon, when he has finished refurbishing his antique chairs: "all it needs is a wee bit o' care and attention, somebody'll want it after that, forty, fifty pound, you cannae buy stuff like that these days, they're just no' makin' it anymore"…Peter then goes back to sorting, selecting a few of the donated tools and putting them into what he calls 'Grant's box', a container holding items that Grant (a collector of rare and unusual tools) might be interested in adding to his collection, saying that "he'll know wit he's doing with these, but me, I'm just an enthusiastic amateur".* (Fieldnotes, 24th May 2013)

In coding this extract, I firstly considered Peter's understanding of the tools, nothing his 'admiration' and 'protectiveness' towards them, the 'functionality' he considered important, and the difference in 'quality' he observed with the older tools and the cabinet. In terms of relationships, I noted the tension between Peter and Joe, with the latter deemed 'unknowledgeable' and 'untrustworthy', in contrast to Grant, a collector of rare and unusual tools, and Dean, the chief

woodworker, whose experience and similar mind-set to Peter rendered them 'knowledgeable', 'trustworthy', and 'professional'. In terms of 'versus coding' (Saldaña, 2013), this tension highlights two different understandings of donated tools, and the perceived capacities of participants to take action in relation to them. Peter's understanding represented 'universality', implying that each tool should be assessed on its merits by an expert, and this could be contrasted with 'selectivity', Joe's view (not fully outlined in the extract) questioning the viability of Peter's approach, due primarily to concerns over space management. I also noted Peter's self-perception as an 'enthusiastic amateur' (an example of 'in-vivo coding'; Saldaña, 2013), respectful of the tools and other's expertise, thus positioning himself below the knowledgeable experts (though from my own point of view, the knowledge Peter possessed regarding the functioning of even the most obscure tools was extraordinary). In terms of theoretical sampling, this extract suggested two lines of enquiry. Firstly, participants' understandings of tools and objects, specifically the point regarding the difference between older and newer tools, and secondly, given Joe's chairmanship, the functioning of the structural social capital (Uphoff, 2001) existing within the Men's Shed, specifically the impact of formal organisational and informal skills-based roles in the assessment of tools and objects.

As the focused coding stage was pursued, in which specific themes and linkages arising from the initial coding are considered in greater detail, this extract came to represent a typical example of the kind of reverential relationship participants engaged in with certain technological objects (tools and projects) they encountered at the Men's Shed. I therefore established a category labelled 'object reverence' (from the Latin *reverentia*, meaning 'to stand in awe of'). Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) note Scott (1968), who, in his study of horse racing, posed the apparently simple question 'what is a horse'? Based on the meaningful relationships participants established with tools, I had recourse to a similar question; what is a tool (in the context of the Men's Shed)? This category captured the meanings granted to tools and other objects, and provided a means of organising explanations for actions related to them (see chapter seven). Peter's gossiping in the extract also aided in the development of assessments concerning the structural social capital existing at the Men's Shed, in particular the process of 'role assignment'. Regarding the management of donated tools, what Peter

perceived to be Joe's uninformed interference rendered his actions deviant, and it was felt he should restrict himself to the administrative aspects of his chairmanship, which he was demonstrably good at, rather than assuming a role more efficiently conducted by an expert. Such respect for the expertise of others was considered vital to the successful functioning of the Men's Shed (see chapter nine). These are specific examples of the analysis presented in this enquiry, which, considered holistically, seeks to chart the social construction of reality engaged in by the management team and participants at the Men's Shed. I question how this particular reality came into being, and, with reference to continuity and masculinity as broader structuring elements in older men's lives, why it did so in its particular manner. I consider the development of an institutional context, discussing processes of integration (group formation, concerns, and dynamics), differentiation (Othering, forms of deviance, and role assignments), and organisational maturation (the development of rules and an institutional ethos). It was in this environment that participants enacted what I have conceptualised as their aged masculinity, which I consider in relation to personal and structural factors (including work, wealth, gender, health, and the state of contemporary society) that extend beyond Coles and Vassarotti's (2012) initial outline.

Conclusion

'By definition', claims Wolcott (2008:218), "ethnography asks too much of the researcher who attempts it - mission impossible". Ethnography asks that a culture, established, developed, enacted, and granted meaning by a group of people, be captured in its complex and contested fullness. My failure to immediately realise this can be explained by naivety, over-excitement, and an initial reliance on the current Men's Shed literature, which may cause some readers to condemn this project. Others though, may recognise from personal experience the classical trope of 'learning on the job', of confronting and overcoming the fear and apprehension experienced when the complexity of social reality overwhelms one's initial expectations, and this is unsurprisingly the position I have defended. The fieldwork was initially facilitated through my demonstration of sufficient dedication to the Men's Shed, and developed as I made the crucial progression into the workshop. Demonstrating a willingness to

be taught about objects and activities valued by participants eased my ingratiation into a group that, as relationships gradually solidified, ultimately made possible in-depth expressions of selfhood, and my recording and analysis thereof. As this process occurred, so my general stance towards participants altered, from understanding them, in a limited sense, as *older* men, to understanding them in the fullness of their identity, as older *men*. Successful fieldwork ultimately depends upon such flexibility, upon the willingness to step outside one's comfort zone and fully engage in the social life of those very different to oneself. As the group developed, I managed to adapt my approach, and in doing so realised the requirement to expand the horizons of my analysis, thus facilitating the fullest comprehension of both those men whose efforts initially established the Men's Shed, and those dedicated shedders who aided in its successful development. The following chapters present this analysis, informed by instances of the data in which it is grounded.

3

The Carstonwood Men's Shed

The Carstonwood Men's Shed is located in a former library building in the centre of Carstonwood, a medium-sized, predominantly middle-class suburban town in Scotland. Following two years of development, the organisation opened in February 2013, and averaged 18 visitors per session throughout the fieldwork, mainly drawn from a pool of around 40 regular participants, just under half of whom comprised the core group of participants (see note one below). Although participants were drawn from throughout the surrounding countryside and nearby urban areas, the majority resided in Carstonwood, a town established in the early 1970's to serve local business interests. Several participants recalled when the town comprised only a few stone cottages, though these are now incongruent against the mass of largely standardised, typically suburban dwellings. With a population, in 2011, of 11220, Carstonwood is served by a secondary school and three primaries, a shopping centre and two supermarkets, a bowling green, a golf course, tennis courts, two churches, and various other amenities. Demonstrating year-on-year housing and business growth (mainly occurring in the large industrial estate to the south of the town), local council statistics indicate that in 2012, average (median) per annum earnings were £42877, the average house price was £273424, and the unemployment rate was 0.4%, all favourable in comparison to Scottish averages. Exhibiting a rich civic tradition, Carstonwood presents ample opportunities for those wishing to engage with their fellow residents. For example, the notice board at the shopping centre offers invitations to the local MP's surgery, to Zumba classes, litter-picks, lunch clubs, and coffee mornings, among many other activities designed to bring residents together. In the quarterly Carstonwood Bulletin, delivered to each household in the town and surrounding area, one may read concerned councillor's thoughts on vandalism, littering, or the modernisation of the shopping centre, catch up on the activities of the local Scouts, Brownies, Lions, Rotary, or Round Table groups, check local sports results, or learn of the progress

of the Men's Shed. 'People', one board member said, 'identify with Carstonwood', willingly dedicating their time and effort to the organisations and activities that have come to define the meaning of the term 'community' in the town.

Initial Establishment

The idea of establishing a Men's Shed in Carstonwood was first proposed by a local council officer in 2009. Having been informed of local concerns regarding older men's lack of social activity, and impressed by a visit to an English Men's Shed, this individual acted as a 'ginger man', pitching the idea through the Carstonwood Bulletin and attracting interested locals to advance it. A steering group was formed, and meeting in homes and cafés initially, began developing the Men's Shed, with sub-committees being formed to create a charitable organisation, secure start-up funding, procure a location, and generate publicity. Following expert consultation, the Men's Shed was registered as a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation, and was therefore legally obliged to outline its management structure in a Constitution. The board of trustees averaged eight members over the course of the fieldwork, and was initially chaired by self-described 'Mr Men's Shed' Joe, for whom the organisation became practically a full-time job. Considered a 'control freak' by other members of the management team (though it was agreed that this was not necessarily a bad thing when establishing a Men's Shed), it was he who largely set and verbalised the agenda throughout his chairmanship. As a fellow board member put it, when establishing a Men's Shed, "you need a Joe to take things by the scruff of the neck, and just run with it and not stop", and it was under his skilled, professional direction that the Men's Shed achieved its initial success (Misan *et al*, 2008); he resigned the chairmanship as I left the field. Joe was deputised by vice-chairman Graham, who was responsible for workshop matters. He assumed the chairmanship following Joe's resignation, though he assured, in the spirit of decentralisation (see chapter four), and an unwillingness to assume Joe's workload, that he would not be as 'hands-on'. Joe and Graham took on the bulk of managerial duties during the fieldwork, while the rest of the board took on specific functions. It included treasurer James, a local politician who provided vital links to government (Woolcock, 1998), Vern, a retired healthcare professional who organised health talks, and chief publicist Dennis, a council

employee who later took on a charity-funded full-time Men's Shed promoter role and established a national Men's Shed Association, an organisation dedicated to the establishment of Men's Sheds throughout Scotland. As participants assumed greater responsibility over the Men's Shed, members of the core group[1] who were considered to have, as one board member put it, "demonstrated the necessary commitment", were welcomed onto the board when positions arose. The board met bi-monthly and held an annual AGM, where the chairman reviewed the previous year and charted a course for the forthcoming year.

The management team negotiated a 'Community Asset Transfer' (DTAS, 2010) with the local council, securing a five-year lease on the disused library building (paying only a peppercorn rent), which stood at the corner of the Carstonwood Academy playing fields, a short walk from the central shopping centre. This location, one board member hoped, would bring older men out of their houses and "right into the heart of the community", into a central space where they would be highly visible. It was hoped that this would prompt the mixing of generations, the acquiescing of suspicion and misunderstanding between young and old through increased exposure of each to the other. The management team and early participants transformed the building, installing a partition wall that divided the social area from the workshop, fixing the electronics, and kitting out the space with workbenches, tools, and furniture. To give a better idea of the physical layout of the site, the following extract details my initial impressions during my first visit, when I met with Joe and Graham to discuss the feasibility of my research:

> *I see through the thin, high, horizontal back windows, covered with grating, that the lights are on. I stop, about twenty metres away, gathering my thoughts. This was never a pretty building, all stout, square, weathered bricks, and chunky black handrails, rusting at their feet, running up the side of the entrance ramp. The four front windows have heavy metal*

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[1] The Men's Shed played a significant role in the lives of members of the core group of participants, and it is from these men that the majority of the data in this study was gathered. They attended most of the sessions during the fieldwork, dedicating significant amounts of time and effort towards the organisation, and it was to their standards that men looking to become involved at the Men's Shed were held to. Members of the core group shared many similarities, facilitating the observation of the dominant form of aged masculinity existing among these men, but they did not agree on everything, nor did each member precisely adhere to the dominant form of aged masculinity (Coles & Vassarotti, 2012). As is apparent throughout the study, each exhibited particular concerns and characterological quirks, and they occasionally clashed over the correct course of conduct. Despite these differences though, the point that set them apart was their unwavering commitment to the Men's Shed, or as they understood it, *their* Men's Shed.

shutters, while the main double doors are fronted with metal panelling, the building's main defences as it stood empty for the last year. Walking in, the relative bareness of the large space (approximately 10m x 8m) that I think will become the 'social area', lit by standard strip lighting, is apparent. In the expanse of brown tiled carpet, stretching to beige walls on three sides, and wood panelling behind the front desk, three odd tables are surrounded by a hotchpotch of chairs, and the front desk, where books used to be checked out, is littered with stationery and paper. In the magazine racks lining this desk, there are leaflets with advice on various aspects of the ageing process (health, retirement, pensions), a series of Haynes Health Manuals (men, women, the brain, and retirement) that mimic the famous Haynes manuals on car mechanics, and copies of old woodworking and tractor magazines, incongruous next to the large stickers of Winnie the Pooh and Piglet, relics of this spaces' former use. On the permanent desks lining two of the walls, where the library computers once sat, a model tall ship, its rigging messily tangled, and a half-finished wooden model of a windmill, await repair. On the walls, there are two corkboards filled with notices, a heater covered with grating, and a fire extinguisher. In two corners, six-foot high freestanding banners read 'Carstonwood MEN'S SHED; Open to ALL for FREE; Socialising and having a laugh! Craft making, learning, and sharing skills shoulder to shoulder. All men welcome!'...Graham then gives me a tour of the rest of the building. The back room (approximately 5m x 5m), entered through a sliding door behind the front desk, is empty aside from two tables, a cupboard containing a safe, and a small kitchen, containing a fridge, kettle, and sink. There are also three toilets; men's, women's, and disabled. On the door on the way through to the workshop, which is separated from the social area by a newly installed partition wall, to keep the noise and dirt away from the social area, there is a yellow sign that reads 'Work Area: Men at Play', below a large exclamation mark in a triangle; it also says 'be mindful, be safe'. The workshop itself stretches the length of the building, about 15m, though it is narrow, about 5m across. It has a light green special wooden workshop floor, and like the front area is somewhat bare. There are five workbenches, made in-house, in various states of completion, and modelled on the 'Swedish bench/model/blonde' that Graham says was bought in. There are also some shelving units, and a smattering of mostly second-hand hand tools on each bench. (Fieldnotes, February 8th 2013)

While retaining its original layout (social area, workshop, and back room), the site evolved considerably over the course of the fieldwork, as new machine tools arrived and members of the public donated considerable amounts of tools, furniture, and all manner of other equipment. The back room in particular changed significantly; originally intended as an extension of the workshop, over time it became a packed storage room, overwhelmed with donations of tools and resources, which led to significant aggravation (see chapter nine).

Early publicity involved distributing leaflets throughout Carstonwood, the creation of a website and promotional videos, and holding meetings with other

local organisations. Later on, the Men's Shed attracted media attention from local television, and local and national newspapers, as well as various charity award nominations and victories, all of which were considered useful for publicity purposes. The Men's Shed's running costs were around £7000 per year, and this was raised through various means. Early fundraising occurred mainly through the sourcing of charitable grants, which was incredibly successful, largely due to the work of Joe, who was often referred to as 'the funding master', a man who could "teach a course in writing grant applications". An excess totalling thousands of pounds over the initial start-up costs was quickly established, and this was maintained throughout the fieldwork, even increasing month-on-month following the transition to a social enterprise approach, whereby participants completed paid projects commissioned by local groups and individuals (see chapter four).[2] These efforts were bolstered through donations from participants (ostensibly to pay for tea, coffee, and biscuits) and 'community fundraising', involving bag-packing and can collections at local shops, as well as regular raffles, all spearheaded by the highly dedicated community fundraiser Barry. Quarterly tool sales, in which excess stocks of donated tools were sold at the local shopping centre, added a further £3000 per year. Overall, the establishment of the Men's Shed was incredibly successful, attracting a dedicated team of skilled individuals capable of raising the funds required to pursue the project, and crucially secure a location. This was not an easy task, as Dennis, in his role as a Men's Shed promoter, informed me; he was consistently thwarted by the local council planning department, which, despite allowing the use of the old library building, was reluctant to release more commercially viable properties to other nascent groups.

The Men's Shed also successfully integrated into the local community, becoming a respected newcomer to the collection of organisations and individuals comprising it. Such integration was undoubtedly bolstered by the board of trustee's pre-existing networks, with each member conducting various voluntary works, whether acting as treasurer of the local day centre, driving the community bus, serving on the Community Council or with the Lions or the Rotary, judging gardening competitions, raising money for the local First Responders, or taking

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[2] Excess funds were kept in a building account, which saved towards the purchase or building of a new site in the event that the council did not renew the initial lease agreement.

disabled children on sailing trips. This consistent and varied bridging and linking social capital ensured that the Men's Shed received favourable treatment from influential community stalwarts, and an audience with local government and smaller grant-providing organisations (Putnam, 2000; Woolcock, 1998). Over the course of the fieldwork, the Community Council, Lions, Rotary, and Round Table consistently supported the Men's Shed with small grants and the commissioning of projects. All three primary schools and the academy commissioned multiple projects, as did the church and a wide variety of other groups, while individuals and small businesses generously donated tools, furniture, and resources (for example, the local chip shop gave a sack of potatoes for a Burns supper). Whether referring to the donation of tools, the tables and seating furnishing the empty shell, or an individual or group commissioning a project, I heard, on innumerable occasions, the phrase 'I thought of the Men's Shed'. Though it explicitly barred half of Carstonwood's residents from participation, the organisation was nevertheless welcomed into the town, which was particularly important following the transition to a social enterprise model, whereby the majority of funding was generated through attracting the 'business' of local groups and individuals. These then, were the key ingredients required to establish the Men's Shed; a receptive and supportive community, a local government willing to release property, and a management team, working alongside enthusiastic participants, with the knowledge, skills, links, and dedication required to turn concept into concrete, and interest into action (Misan *et al*, 2008).

Foundations

As Hayes and Williamson's (2007) typology claims to demonstrate, Men's Sheds may fulfil various specific functions, according to the needs and desires of participants. At the Carstonwood site, the 'communal', 'occupational', and 'educational' categories are most applicable, while the 'clinical' category, due to the rejection of the organisation as a 'service', is inapplicable. The 'recreational' category is applicable if participants' establishment of normative rules of conduct (Uphoff, 2001) is considered, although the openness and equality implied in the frequently utilised negative definition of the organisation, as 'not a club', problematizes this. As discussed in chapter four, the difference between the desired appearance and developed reality of the organisation demonstrates the

difficulties in attempting to categorise the Men's Shed, with Hayes and Williamson's scheme implying a functional uniformity only partially validated by observations. Allowing participants to experience the benefits identified in the Australian literature was the 'official' purpose of the organisation, as presented to funding providers and supporters. However, the motivations underlying participant's intense and dedicated involvement transcended this discourse, ranging from the life-saving capacities of the organisation, or the contextually-specific re-creation of a valued past, to the more mundane, if no less personally meaningful desire for puzzles, interactions, solidarity, and hilarity. It was, however, possible to comprehend two underlying conditions established by the management team rendering it possible for participants to bestow personal meanings upon their involvement, namely the organisation's male-exclusivity, and its independence from external control.

Male Exclusivity

In practice, the Men's Shed's male-exclusivity meant that only men could be present without any particular reason for being so, and in particular, only men could use the workshop. Generally speaking, as one board member stressed "women in Sheds is bad news", as they were felt to disrupt normal social intercourse, in particular that related to men's health issues (see chapter five). All men over 18 were eligible to participate at the Men's Shed, regardless of their interests or prior experience, as another board member stressed:

> "We don't advertise ourselves as a club, we know the insecurities of men, so we don't wanna present the Men's Shed as exclusive, it's open to everyone, so we try to get across the idea that it's a friendship group, a Shed...we're entirely free of charge, and I wanted this because it removes one of the excuses guys can use to get out of attending the Shed, they might say they don't wanna pay a pound or whatever...this kind of trepidation is natural among guys, so we try to be as open as we can, we accept everybody, we're not like the Lions or the Rotary, there's no judgement, no fear of being rejected".

It was frequently emphasised that the Men's Shed was 'not a club', as it dispensed with any formal membership criteria in an attempt to attract the kind of 'ordinary' men who may be intimidated by such measures:

> "It's not a club or a fraternal organisation, fixed membership, and joining up etcetera, it's open to anyone, anybody can walk in off the street, you're

in, okay…we want the guys who don't join clubs, y'know, there's that embarrassment of not being chosen, you wonder, 'are these guys gonna like me'? You walk in here, take a look about and you're welcomed".

Despite these assertions, the management team knew that men customarily compare themselves to other men, particularly in a novel environment in which they are unaware of the expectations of existing participants (Kimmel, 2006). For newcomers, entering the Men's Shed, though it was advertised as welcoming and friendly, could therefore be fraught with difficulties. Accordingly, the Business Plan stated that:

"Although the concept of a shed in the garden is a very familiar one…the purpose of a communal shed may seem strange at first. We need to turn early hesitancy into curiosity and make sure the initial experience is an enjoyable one".

Little could be done to quell these fears prior to attendance, as budgetary and logistical restrictions limited the amount and scope of advertising to general, entirely favourable statements, which could not get across the intricacies of the social environment. The management team attempted to get out into the Carstonwood and talk to men whenever possible, through can collections or tool sales at the local shopping centre, but this too was limited by the numbers present at these events, and the capacity of those involved to describe, to interested men, the nature of the Men's Shed.

This lack of prior knowledge meant that newcomers ultimately had to step into the unknown and experience the Men's Shed first-hand to judge its suitability. One regular shedder humorously compared this to another near-universal experience men undergo:

"It's like your first kiss, really. I remember mine, it was after a dance, and we snuck out to the barn round the back, the girl threw down a rug on these bales of hay. Of course, I didn't know what I was doing, and she said, 'stop licking my ear, just stand there and open your mouth, I'll do the work'! So I let her lead me, but what I mean is, you don't really know what it's going to be like until you do it, but when you do, you quickly find, oh yes, this is quite enjoyable"!

Like this shedder's first kiss, taking the first step into the Men's Shed unavoidably involved a potential loss of face. However, the potential 'reward', whether one's first foray into physical intimacy with a woman, or one's initial involvement in the Men's Shed, was, he thought, worth the risk, potentially opening up fulfilling

new avenues of masculine practice. Consider the following statement from a newcomer who had suffered medical problems that had depleted his confidence and physical capacities. He told me:

> ""I wasn't sure if I could come in here and talk about my [medical problems], I thought I'd be the only one, I'm glad I'm not...I want my confidence back, I've lost it, you should have seen me this morning...I was terrible, I was really worried about coming in, coming into this place with all these strange men, see I thought you'd all be cleverer than me, I just didn't think I'd fit in, but I'm alright now".

This newcomer willingly expressed his current fragility and his initial fears about attending the Men's Shed, specifically that his health difficulties would differentiate him, and that his technical knowledge would not stack up in relation to others. Another newcomer expressed similar concerns:

> "I really like the concept of the Men's Shed, and I've got a few projects I want to be getting on with as well. I'll tell you though, at first I was a wee bit reluctant to ask some of these guys for help...no, I didn't want to appear stupid by asking about really obvious things".

Both of these newcomers correctly recognised the value of knowledge at the Men's Shed, but their concern that the perceived differences between themselves and other participants would see them viewed negatively was misplaced, reflecting an unawareness of the informal rules governing workshop conduct (Uphoff, 2001). Asking for help actually reflected well on the individual, demonstrating not stupidity, but rather a willingness to engage with the community of practice and learn from the expertise of others (see chapter nine).

Though male-exclusivity caused certain participants to experience unnecessary apprehension regarding their technical abilities, the arrangement was considered fundamental to the experience and purpose of the Men's Shed. Initially, the management team did not consider male-exclusivity a significant point of contention, justifying it in the Business Plan only by stating the propensity for women to frequent existing social spaces:

> "A brief walk around the centre of Carstonwood during the day will see the half dozen cafés and restaurants busy with women meeting and chatting to their friends. For cultural reasons men find it harder to get out and interact".

Men do not, as one board member put it, "make friends as easily as women...they don't join groups so well", a situation potentially devastating in the context of retirement. Aside from considering the legality of male-exclusivity,[3] it was not mentioned elsewhere in the original documentation. However, as the Men's Shed grew and attracted greater attention, the management team found it necessary to defend male-exclusivity in a more in-depth manner. They sought to establish a clear and consistent explanation of male-exclusivity that could be used to address any concerns and be shared with nascent Men's Shed groups throughout Scotland. Though Carstonwood had a thriving community sector, the management team emphasised gender imbalances in involvement, with one board member stressing that women "are naturally more adept" at establishing social networks in later life, and hence formed "the backbone of most community activities and initiatives". In contrast, opportunities for 'ordinary' older men (those not attracted to formal clubs such as the Lions or Rotary) to engage in healthy and productive interactions with others of similar age were felt to be severely lacking. The consequences of this were thought to be potentially problematic for men, as one board member highlighted in a promotional video designed to be shown to groups interested in establishing a Men's Shed:

> *"GP's have identified that there are some concerns, like the men having too much time on their hands, and the effect of having too much time on your hands can lead to depression and other types of things. We find that in community centres, there are very few men that go to community centres, the majority are women that are going and doing the courses and networking, chatting, and having a great time, and the guys are sitting at home, not getting out...we aren't giving men an option other than the bookies and the pub, where men will sit in a row at the bar, talking along the line, looking at each other in the mirror. We're looking for a new cultural norm".*

Men's potential for productive, personally beneficial citizenry was felt to be blunted by existing 'cultural norms' mandating a narrow sphere of potentially harmful activities (Leishman & Dalziel, 2003). As women network, chat, and enjoy themselves organising and taking part in community activities, so perceptions of spaces such as the community centre as primarily serving the

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[3] The Equality Act 2010 (HM Government, 2010:121) states the acceptability of gender-exclusivity if it is "a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim", which at the Men's Shed meant addressing the potential issues (social isolation, loneliness, and physical health issues) men face as they undergo the ageing process.

needs of women crystallise, to the point where men with time on their hands would not even consider attending. Lacking "socially dictated parameters for gender expression" (Tannenbaum & Frank, 2011:244), some older men ended up in the bookmakers or the pub, while others simply reside in their home which, if they are married, can be problematic in itself (due to 'underfoot syndrome'; see Golding and colleagues [2008], and below). None of these activities were considered to generate the kind of meaningful and beneficial social interaction freely engaged in by women (McGivney, 1999).

Another board member also noted the influence of men's wives in their leisure choices:

> "For some of these guys, they'll say, I'm with women all week, whether it's the carer or the wife, and with Carstonwood, there's a strong community, there's lots of things for women, ballroom dancing, lunch clubs, and they're something like 75% women, and the guys there are being dragged along by their wives, but the Men's Shed's the only place that really attracts men in significant numbers".

In Carstonwood, a town that prided itself on its strong sense of community, the management team recognised that the majority of groups, activities, and projects were organised, led by, and primarily appealed to women. Though not physically harmful, the issue in a gender-divided society is that ballroom dancing, like the majority of local leisure activities, is commonly understood as a 'pink thing', falling outside of men's desires and self-conceptions (Davidson, 2013). Lunch clubs are also noted in the above extract, and though these are attended by both genders, the difficulty they present for men relates to their passivity, and the association they have with the later stages of the ageing process. The male-exclusivity of the Men's Shed was considered a reasonable and much needed response to this local-level reality, as a third board member put it:

> "The key to Men's Sheds is that they are a rare example of a social situation that men are attracted to. We believe this is because it is not a service, the men are in charge of their own attendance and what they get involved in, from full on in the workshop to men who come to talk...men get a feeling of self-worth from assisting in [workshop-based] projects for the community".

The Men's Shed hit the elusive sweet spot, being neither too 'pink', nor too passive, for men looking for an active and rewarding social engagement in their retirement. Indeed, the Men's Shed can be considered an archetypal 'blue thing',

a space in which men use traditionally masculine skills to make tangible contributions towards their community (Davidson, 2013).

The argument put forward by the management team asserted that men's lack of involvement left them on the margins of their community, and prone to social isolation or potentially self-destructive behaviours. In order to establish social opportunities that did appeal to men, it was imperative to understand and provide the kind of social arrangements and activities they valued. Inspiration for such a project could be found in the largely segregated workplaces that many retired men experienced throughout their lives. As one board member put it:

> *"Guys like to be with other guys, it might be an age thing, they grew up with other men…some Australian Sheds have Sheila days, and we've talked about it, but the thing is, there's a lot of guys, sixty or seventy, they grew up when the police were men, they were all firemen or whatever, it was all men in their environment, they're comfortable like that…there's a lot of men, and the wives are saying he's at home with me, the daughter's at home, the carer's a women, he hasn't had any male company all week, if he doesn't go to the pub, if it's certain guys, of a certain age, and there's very few male carers".*

This board member recognised the importance of the continuity of homosocial engagements in the lives of men for whom they have been a lifelong norm (Atchley, 1989). Another board member echoed this point, and also reflected, in a promotional video, on how his retirement had impacted upon his wife:

> *"I've been used my whole working life, to working in a large group of men, and I find that when I'm at home…being retired, doing the things that I do, is very lonely, I'm used to the interaction with other people…[the Men's Shed] really is useful to me, to get me out of the way, out of the house. When I first became retired, my wife was driven round the bend, cus she was used to having the house all on her own, and suddenly I was there, doing things, gettin' in her way, trying to help, but being awkward doing it, and she found that very difficult".*

This board member stressed the danger of discontinuity by outlining his own post-retirement transition, from mainly spending his time working competently alongside other men to spending more time at home, a space traditionally understood to express women's identities to a greater extent that men's (Barnes & Parry, 2003; Russell, 2007). His attempts to contribute were 'awkward', and lacking knowledge regarding his wife's day-to-day routine in the home, the space was experienced as an alien environment. Retirement removed him from his

comfort zone, and prior to his developmental role at the Men's Shed (he moved to England, where he also sought to establish a Men's Shed, prior to its opening), he had not re-established a comfortable balance. His incompetence in the home environment blunted his desire to remain productive, and this negatively affected his marital relationship, a standard statement of underfoot syndrome; this situation is further discussed in chapter five.

In mimicking the workplace experience of many participants, male-exclusivity addressed their desire to spend time with other men, crucially in an environment where the most dangerous vice lay in the biscuit tin. The technical activities on offer at the Men's Shed further facilitated external continuity (Atchley, 1989), as one board member explained: "a lot of the guys here miss work, well, not miss it, but miss the challenge of work, miss the opportunity to use their skills". In an internal report, this point was elaborated, in relation to the first project worked on by the engineering group (the testing of which is described in the introduction):

> "The first project was to restore a stationary engine and water pump (built about 1950). A core team soon developed and a lot of man-hours have been spent on a regular basis. It seems to have been so well attended because there are a lot of engineers in the area who did not just do it as a way to earn money but because of an enjoyment in the subject and this is a way to keep practicing their craft. Talking to them it is also important that they are not doing it alone but have that interaction with others".

This report was correct in asserting that those participants who pursued careers in technical occupations enjoyed their work, and that the Men's Shed allowed them to continue 'practicing their craft', as many already did in their own workshops, in the company of like-minded men. Continuity is an adaptive strategy, a means of reacting to changing life circumstances in a manner that promotes personal satisfaction (Atchley, 1999). One of the most profound of these changing circumstances is retirement, a process that can be particularly problematic for men whose identity is rooted in their employment. In offering a recreation of the workplace, in terms of the company present, the activities engaged in, and the general workshop environment and routine, the Men's Shed offered ample opportunities for participants to continue expressing themselves as men, in a manner they were accustomed to.

Though male-exclusivity was considered fundamental to the experience and purpose of the Men's Shed, the management team were cognisant of its potential pitfalls. Joe in particular expressed concern regarding the perception of the Men's Shed by outsiders, and was extremely sensitive to anything that could potentially generate negative understandings. In the following extracts, he sought to distance the organisation from potential accusations of two standard characteristics of the current form of hegemonic masculinity, namely homophobia and the objectification of women (Connell, 2005). The first concerns an apparently offensive situation described in an evaluative report I wrote:

> *Joe: "So I had a look at your report, it's very good, but I just wanted to flag up this".*

> *Joe has underlined a section in which I reported on participants discussing modern mechanics, in the context of the desire for continuity of practice. I stated that a participant had put on a squeaky voice and exaggeratedly waved his hands around in order to emphasise his criticism of modern mechanic's reliance on computer-based diagnostics:*

> *Joe: "I'd like you to remove that".*

> *Jeremy: "Why? I'm just describing what happened".*

> *Joe: "It gives off the wrong idea".*

> *Jeremy: "In what sense"?*

> *Joe: "It, it sounds, er, homophobic, y'know, the squeaky voice, waving their hands in the air, people could take that out of context".*

> *Jeremy: "I didn't even think of that".*

> *Joe: "I know you didn't mean that, I know he's not like that, but there's that stereotype, it could be seen in that way".* (Fieldnotes, 22nd November 2013)

Though I doubted that the reported actions could be considered homophobic, Joe insisted that I alter the report, feeling there were certain people among those who may read it who were highly sensitive regarding possible instances of discrimination. For example, it could have been problematic should a council official or funding provider have read it in these terms, hence I altered it, removing any reference to what could be understood as stereotypically homosexual behaviour.

In this extract, Joe took umbrage at a potentially offensive representation of women:

> *Fred took in examples of his fretsaw art that he had been working on in his home workshop. They are intricate designs cut out of thin blocks of wood, each about the size of a paperback, which he wanted to swap for a donated corner clamp. These could be sold at £5 each, which Fred felt represented excellent value for the Men's Shed. The designs are varied, including horses, tigers, Elvis Presley, and Michael Jackson, while one is of a naked woman, hands behind her head, breasts thrust forward in an erotic pose...I take it over to the board table to show Neil, who has a little giggle once he realises what it is, then Joe, sat opposite him counting the petty cash, peers over the top of the cash box and spots it:*
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> *Joe: "I thought that was going out".*
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> *Jeremy: "Why"?*
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> *Joe: "It's gotta go".*
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> *Jeremy: "How come? It's no different from a female nude in an art gallery".*
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> *Joe: "I know that, you know that, but it's about our image, there are some people out there looking for something like that, y'know, nudie pictures, they expect to find that kind of thing here, so we don't wanna give them it...it's just, a naked woman, if some people see that, it confirms what they think about the Shed, we don't want to give them any ammo".*
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> *Jeremy: "So it's about context"?*
>
> *Joe: "Look, we've got to get rid of it, it's gotta go, okay"?* (Fieldnotes, 28th May 2014)

It was atypical of Joe to openly express anger, though here my counter-argument, directed towards allowing him to elaborate, was met with a forthright statement of finality. Joe believed certain people could use this wood cutting as evidence of the undesirability of male-exclusivity, that treating women as objects of erotic desire, as this wood cutting could be argued to do, was the norm at the Men's Shed, as has been identified in other male-exclusive groups (Bird, 1996; Kiesling, 2005; Palmer & Thompson, 2007). In a similar vein, an attempt by Ed, a particularly mischievous shedder, to display the famous 'Tennis Girl' poster (showing a young female tennis player revealing her buttocks) was granted equally short shrift, disappearing from the walls of the Men's Shed within days of being put up.

Though gatherings of men have frequently been identified as breeding grounds of sexism and the objectification of women, the management team were adamant in insisting that such regressive attitudes were not apparent at the Men's Shed. Indeed, part of the standard script, relayed to visiting parties, concerned differentiating participant's conduct from hegemonic stereotypes. In the words of one board member:

> *"With the atmosphere here, there's no sexism, there's none of that macho stuff or anything like that, I think it's very positive, it's not all talking about football, there's no girly pictures on the wall or anything like that, it's very positive, I think it's very positive".*

Another board member likewise emphasised the lack of hegemonic machismo, with reference to interpersonal relationships and the effects of ageing:

> *"A guy comes in here, there's none of that macho bullshit, there's no 'I've got a big car' or anything like that, no judging. If they did try to do that, they'd tell them 'get in the corner, go and make a cup of tea'. There's none of that stuff, guys don't care about that stuff anymore".*

The Men's Shed, it was felt, promoted equality among men, with participants collectively policing boasting about outside success. The 'big cars' were left in the car park, and stripped of their inconsequential worldly goods, men were judged solely on characteristics relevant to the advancement of the organisation. This assessment was largely correct; though similarities aided in the formation of bonding social capital among participants, they also diminished the utilisation of these characteristics as a means of elevating one's status in comparison to the group (Putnam, 2000). The dominant form of aged masculinity at the Men's Shed took account not of participant's possessions, but rather their attitudes and actions. A willingness to utilise and share one's experience and knowledge sat alongside contributory involvement in the constellation of traits defining a good shedder (see chapters eight and nine).

The shoulder-to-shoulder working format utilised in Men's Sheds was thought to encourage this kind of cooperation, easing tensions deriving from men's natural proclivity for conflict (Golding, 2011b), as one board member put it:

> *"The idea here is shoulder-to-shoulder, they're working and they're chatting, cus if you get guys looking at each other in the eyes, its trouble, the testosterone levels go right up, they're checking each other out, they're*

judging each other, and it's dangerous. We've always been like that, ever since we were hunters, killers".

In this understanding, inherent differences between women and men, the former passive and sociable, the latter active and competitive, are considered to span the lifecourse. Contemporary communities, it was felt, do not adequately cater to these natural differences, with men lacking opportunities to fulfil their homosocial desires, and confront particular issues they may be experiencing, in environments minimising the risk of both the latent 'hunter' and the 'macho bullshit' arising. Men are here positioned as being doubly disadvantaged, as slaves to both their animalistic nature and a culture of hegemonic masculinity encouraging submission to this nature. Older men, though recognising the illusions of macho culture, still require an interactional format that minimises the inherent, socially undesirable elements of maleness. As Golding and colleagues (2008) suggest, Men's Sheds address this lack of opportunity, generating a positive form of homosociality and demonstrating that in the correct context, meetings of men need not degenerate into the kind of toxic masculinity identified among many male-exclusive groups. The management team sought to establish perceptions of the Men's Shed that aligned with these research findings, stressing that the necessity of male-exclusivity need not inevitably lead to the difficulties so often associated with it.

Independence

Working alongside the charitable and governmental sectors was vital in establishing the Men's Shed, as these bodies had access to the money, contacts, and knowledge required to establish a charity, secure a building, and successfully work through any legal issues (Hayes & Williamson, 2007; Misan *et al*, 2008). However, following the initial establishment of the organisation, the management team expressed a concern to 'break away' from these outside influences and centralise developmental control exclusively within the board of trustees, those best equipped to comprehend and respond to participant's needs and desires. This occurred largely without issue, with the main council contact remaining a non-voting board member until the opening, before stepping down entirely (the council later received a prestigious local authorities award recognising its role in the establishment of the Men's Shed). The importance of independence is

apparent in an email one board member sent to a prospective Men's Shed in England:

> *"My main advice is to try to maintain your Shed's independence. Accept help from NHS, Social Work, and larger charities but keep control of the Shed in the hands of the men. This is what makes Sheds different and this is what men want. They don't want to be "service users", they want to be "problem solvers"".*

Speaking with a board member who had moved to England and attempted to establish a Men's Shed in his new location, he informed me of the problems he was experiencing, complaining that the financial aid he sought from a prominent charitable funding provider was conditional on ceding almost complete control to the provider, restricting the potential for organic growth. Furthermore, the provider insisted that a full-time supervisor was employed, vastly increasing costs while barely improving participant's experiences, and implying that they were incapable of looking after themselves. Such external control was anathema to Carstonwood participants, and therefore the management team understood the maintenance of independence as a central operating principle, with organisational development completely determined by the needs and desires of participants, rather than outside sources pushing any particular agenda. The views of the management team on the issue of external influences on Men's Sheds were therefore very clear (Golding, 2014; Mark & Soulsby, 2014). Financial aid from charitable and governmental sources was sought after and willingly accepted, on the proviso that it did not equate, in any way, to ceding control to these bodies.[4] In keeping with previous research into older men's leisure

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[4] Later on in the fieldwork, Dennis established a national Men's Shed Association covering Scotland, basing it on the hugely successful Irish version, which had been instrumental in developing approximately 200 locations, in both the North and the Republic, in five years (Carragher *et al*, 2014). To a greater degree than his managerial colleagues, Dennis had set his stall on the Scottish Men's Shed movement, and hoped to establish a second career out of it, envisaging the development of a national community of Men's Sheds, "one in every village in twenty years". He felt that his association, dedicated exclusively to Men's Sheds, could correctly administer funding grants directed towards their development, as opposed to general older people's charities, which would utilise a portion of funds for their operational costs, and may wish to exercise control in the management of sites. The association would also remain dedicated to Men's Sheds in the long-term, following the initial rush of enthusiasm that accompanies new concepts in the charitable sector. Dennis recognised that the current interest in Men's Sheds may not last, and while national older people's charities and the various kind-hearted people within the sector had their own agenda, his association would remain exclusively focused on the advancement and sustainability of the Men's Shed movement. As evidenced in Australia and Ireland, the formation of national associations appears a typical step in developing national movements. However, since the Carstonwood site was developed without such oversight, there was a reluctance from Dennis's managerial colleagues to become overly involved; as one said, "my

activities, one of the main desires of the core group of participants was pursuing the opportunity to contribute towards the development and continued success of the Men's Shed through engagement in the managerial process (Davidson, 2013). To achieve this, the management team required the freedom to implement a gradual transition of responsibility, first manifested through democratic decision-making processes, and later a decentralisation of responsibility engendering role differentiation (these processes are discussed further in chapters four and nine).

Independence also entailed maintaining a distinction between the Men's Shed and other older men's services. Shortly after opening, a 'no politics' rule was implemented, which had two main elements. Firstly, regarding managing external perceptions of the organisation, it was agreed that an apolitical stance would be adopted, thus lessening the potential alienation that newcomers may experience should they hold different political views. Secondly, the rule functioned as a statement of independence from governmental influence. Throughout the fieldwork, the Men's Shed consistently attracted prominent local and national political figures, which one board member, in an internal email communication, welcomed due to the potential publicity for the wider Scottish Men's Shed movement (Woolcock, 1998):

> *"Let's be clear. We don't get any funding directly from the Scottish government and don't expect to receive any. We are doing this for the sake of the Shed movement in Scotland. The idea of a Shed as a useful step in improving lives for men is one we have aimed to promote from our inception. Now the news has reached Edinburgh and they are interested.*

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ambition was to set up and run one Shed, not set up a national organisation and take over the world". While Carstonwood was successfully established without the oversight of a national association, Dennis did highlight that the status and expertise of the management team, all successful individuals with knowledge of the charitable sector and linkages to decision makers, was atypical. He therefore felt that the support of a national association could prove vital in establishing Men's Sheds in areas lacking these advantages. Though other members of the management team did not wish to become overly involved in Dennis' endeavours, they did support the development of other Scottish Men's Sheds, providing advice to over 30 groups during the fieldwork, either through visits to the Men's Shed or through email, and through hosting a national conference, in conjunction with a Scottish older people's charity, which was attended by 70 delegates. The management team also produced a Men's Shed Development Guide emphasising the 'Carstonwood model', prioritising sustainability through independence and the engendering of participant ownership, while taking into account specific local circumstances. On this point, as one board member put it, "we're an independent Shed, that's the model we're pushing, but you have to work out your own definition of the Shed. It's better to make wrong decisions and agree on them than to make right decisions and disagree, and risk splitting up". While most of the typical developmental issues could, it was felt, be overcome, the establishment of a group capable of doing this relied upon maintaining intra-group unity.

This could potentially be a big boost for groups wishing to set up Sheds around Scotland".

It was agreed that the Men's Shed would cooperate with all interested governmental bodies and representatives, demonstrating what was described as "a model for tackling the serious situation regarding men's health and ageing in Scotland". As it turned out, the main concern on the part of these bodies and representatives was 'co-production', whereby charitable organisations work alongside government service providers in the provision of social care. However, the management team strongly asserted that the Men's Shed would not stand in for government social care services. Likewise, participants, as volunteers pursuing their own desires, made it clear that they lacked both the will and training to do so, as discussed in chapter four with reference to disabled visitors to the Men's Shed.

Independence allowed for the transition towards participant ownership, a vital shift that aligned the Men's Shed with participants' desires and helped to secured future sustainability through the implementation of a social enterprise fundraising model. Through this transition, *the* Men's Shed became *their* Men's Shed, an organisation whose continued flourishing depended upon the contribution of participants. As one board member said, the risk in not pursuing this transition is the sapping of the uniqueness of the Men's Shed:

> *"We are a model for Scottish men. Scottish men don't like to be told what to do. I've volunteered at a local day centre, so I know what it's like, men are sat there, waiting to be served. Guys want to do things themselves, they belong to it, it belongs to us, everyone has a say, we've opened our board meetings for everyone, we try to listen to the men...there's this 'Shed' in England, and it came to be that men were being bussed in in the morning, and bussed out at the end of the day, their wives were calling up asking when they could be booked in, and they realised, it was turning into a day centre, where the men would come in and spend five hours a day being looked after. The Men's Shed's not like that at all, it's all about the men deciding what they want to do with their time. This is the key philosophy for us, we're not a service provider".*

Having volunteered at a local day centre, this board member was aware of the benefits of such organisations for men experiencing the more pronounced difficulties that ageing can present, but felt this model was inapplicable for the Men's Shed. Day centres are characterised by passivity, promoting neither a sense of belonging nor ownership. Men are helped, rather than helping, a situation

clashing with both participant's self-conceptions and the practicalities of long-term sustainability. This was an unbalanced equation that was inapplicable to the Men's Shed, as it over-emphasised the difficulties of ageing while neglecting the importance of the continuity of masculine identity. One regularly utilised slogan put this well, stating that "Men's Sheds are not places where men are looked after, they are places looked after by men".

Conclusion

Given that the current literature identifies Men's Sheds as being mainly frequented by working-class men (Golding *et al*, 2008), Carstonwood, given its relative affluence, could be considered a surprising location for one of the first such organisations in Scotland. However, in two further senses, its establishment in this location makes sense. Firstly, given the recognised difficulties in privately establishing a Men's Shed, Carstonwood, a well-developed community home to experienced, professional men, offered the variety of skills and linkages necessary to successfully pursue the idea (Hayes & Williamson, 2007; Misan *et al*, 2008). As one shedder, who had been involved at the Men's Shed from the outset, put it:

> *"See what we have here, we have a variety of different men, doing different jobs. There's Barry with the fundraising, Joe writes the grants, we had engineers, woodworkers, and what is good is, a lot of these main guys were in management positions, so they have that experience, they knew how to organise things, or they were teachers...that's really helped".*

Secondly, the supposed difficulties experienced by older Scottish men were considered socio-cultural, rather than economic, rendering even the financially successful vulnerable, and this concern was reflected in the foundations upon which the Men's Shed was built. The organisation's male-exclusivity was considered to address the female-centric focus of existing community organisations, the local enactment of wider cultural norms serving to limit older men's involvements to activities potentially harmful to their health and wellbeing. The management team also recognised that this divisive scheme of cultural norms structured the kinds of involvements, in terms of activities enjoyed and the company with which they are pursued, that men are willing to engage in. This lack of opportunities spurred the management team to create a

space in which men would willingly participate, drawing on a model well established in other countries to do so. However, as Thompson (2006) reminds us, the 'blueprint' regarding older men's masculinity is vague, and the management team were initially unaware of who would become involved, and what their particular interests would be, which was why organisational independence, allowing participants the freedom to construct the Men's Shed as they wished, was vital. The characteristics of the core group of participants, as successful, knowledgeable, relatively healthy and wealthy older men, provided the impetus for the organisation to develop as it did, in the direction of self-sustainability and contributory involvement, topics investigated further in the following chapter.

4

Appearance and Reality

During the fieldwork, the management team were concerned with establishing the financial and managerial security of the Men's Shed, which entailed pursuing two main processes of transition. The first involved a shift from grant-based funding towards a self-sustaining 'social enterprise' approach, characterised by raising money primarily through the conduct of commissioned projects for various local charities and community groups. The second involved a shift from a primarily management-led organisation towards a high degree of participant contribution and control. Such transitions stemmed from the foundation of independence, which ensured a considerable degree of autonomy, firstly from outside control, and latterly, regarding participants' actions. This stance served to recognise participants' capabilities, drawing upon their desire to meaningfully contribute towards the collective through the enactment of traditionally masculine conduct, while also taking into account their mainly retired status. Participant ownership widened the base of individuals who had a stake in the Men's Shed, and the contributory ethos quickly evolved into an expectation, becoming the dominant discourse shaping participant's relationships with the organisation. Apparent throughout these transitions was the utilisation of negative definitions; as one board member said, given its novelty, it was often easier to state "what the Men's Shed isn't, than what it is". As noted in the previous chapter, the openness and equality considered central to the organisation precluded its definition as a 'club', while the pragmatic approach adopted towards ageing and masculinity also rendered the terms 'service' and 'business' inadequate in capturing the uniqueness of the Men's Shed.

Grant Funding/Not a Service

Initial fundraising occurred primarily through the pursuit of grants from governmental and charitable organisations, and in this competitive marketplace,

the Men's Shed required an 'official' purpose that appealed to providers. This involved establishing a conception of the needs of participants and outlining how these could be addressed within the organisation. While the management team had basic statistics concerning the number of local older men, and assumed that participants would be mainly drawn from farming and engineering occupations, the actual audience for the Men's Shed, and the specific issues they may be experiencing, was initially unknown. This uncertainty manifested in a generality to the early documentation, which closely adhered to the standard benefits discourse promoted in the Australian literature. The organisation was considered capable of addressing three prominent older men's issues, namely a lack of social interaction, physical health difficulties, and the provision of opportunities for continuing education, as is apparent in this early funding application:

> *"The Men's Shed...empowers older people and promotes learning and skill sharing. It encourages senior citizens to help each other and stay active in the community. It helps build a network of support that promotes a healthier life style and a feeling of wellbeing...the benefit to the men will be improved self-esteem, a chance to learn new skills and practice old ones, overcome isolation, improved social interaction and [the chance to] enjoy an active, healthy retirement...with the Men's Shed the people of Carstonwood...are pioneering a new approach to...these issues".*

These issues, recognised as particularly problematic in the Scottish context (Leishman & Dalziel, 2003; ONS, 2011), can be divided into those the Men's Shed could directly affect (social interaction and education) and those in which the Men's Shed could promote beneficial behaviour (participant's health). However, as the fieldwork progressed I observed a disjuncture between the standard benefits discourse and the reality of participant's lives. While it was financially necessary to present a clear problem/solution narrative, in internal communications this was downplayed, as it quickly became apparent that the conception of participants this entailed did not typically align with their experiences.

Social Interaction

Regarding social interaction, the Business Plan, referring to the discussions between local council representatives and community groups from which the Men's Shed was first proposed, stated:

> *"It became apparent that various interest groups shared a common concern over the lack of activities for older men and the resulting deterioration in their health and wellbeing. Men were becoming withdrawn from their community, some were not getting out of their houses, had little social contact and in turn were becoming hard to reach and hard to motivate".*

Allaying the deleterious effects of social isolation and loneliness was pitched as a direct effect of the Men's Shed, and for certain individuals, this proved vitally important. However, such cases were in the minority, and even those that did draw these benefits sought to highlight that their difficulties did not preclude the same kind of contributory involvement as other participants (see chapter six). The majority of participants responded dismissively when it was suggested, even indirectly, that they were personally affected by issues such as social isolation and loneliness. Certain media reports were criticised for over-emphasising this point, and the issue came to a head when a funding provider sought to conduct an evaluative survey, utilising a version of the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (Stewart-Brown & Janmohamed, 2008). This instrument asked participants to recall their mental state prior to and after attending the Men's Shed, for example, 'do you now feel lonely/independent/cheerful'? Responses to this proposal were wholly negative:

> *"I don't want the shed to be seen as the place where lonely men come to die. That phrase is meant to be shocking which is how strongly I feel we need to make it a place to come and have fun and do things for the individual. Adding university mental health scales - aaaaaaaaaaaagggh"!*
> (Graham, email communication)

> *Joe: "I think the tone is demeaning, it seems to imply that men have come here cus they need help, it implies that you're lonely so you come to the Shed, it's not suitable for the Men's Shed".*

> *Peter: "They've missed the point, it's making assumptions, it looks at men as if they have a problem. We're not actually fit to deal with guys with these issues, it's not like that at all".*

> *Dennis: "Men don't really reason about why they are coming into the Men's Shed, they just come along cus they want to, it's impossible to ask whether men think they have a problem".*

In seeking to assess the Men's Shed in the same manner as other charities it supported, the funding provider failed to account for the uniqueness of the organisation, and the self-conceptions of its participants. Both the management team and participants felt the use of this instrument contradicted the non-service

environment of the organisation, as it implied that participants attended the Men's Shed in order to address personal problems they were experiencing. The majority simply did not understand their involvement in these terms, for example, one shedder said:

> *"I've got my own workshop at my house, but I'd go down there in the morning, I'd be working away, and I'd be thinking, who have I spoken to today? I saw the Men's Shed, I wasn't lonely, but I thought I'd come down and give it a go, and just the sociability, its good".*

This shedder neither experienced loneliness nor lacked the means to continue practicing his craft, and hence it would be inaccurate to state that his participation was addressing a personal deficiency. Instead, it was adding an enjoyable 'sociability' to his already satisfactory arrangement. Dennis' view of this issue was slightly different, but still rejected the problem/solution narrative. He felt that men were not fully cognisant of why they participated at the Men's Shed, being drawn by impulses they could not verbalise, and hence to pigeonhole their reasoning would inevitably provide inaccurate results.

Health

Regarding participant's health, the management team understood the Men's Shed as a preventative, rather than a curative, measure. It was felt that the workshop-based activities on offer, which required a sharpness of movement and mind, could potentially ward off both physical and cognitive decline:

> *Dennis: "How much does it cost to look after someone with dementia for ten years? It must be fifty grand a year, surely it's cheaper to deal with this kind of thing through a Shed".*
>
> *Ben: "Well, we don't actually deal with dementia here".*
>
> *Dennis: "No, but the Shed can prevent it from happening in the first place. If you keep a man's mind sharp, they're not gonna need all that expensive treatment and care down the line".* (Fieldnotes, 21st May 2014)

As a Men's Shed promoter, Dennis was particularly concerned with establishing the financial value of Men's Sheds. Only by demonstrating the potential savings (to local councils, the NHS, and other interested parties) could he secure the funding and buildings he required to advance the movement in Scotland: 'who', he asked, "is gonna fund a bunch of older men in a workshop"? A particular

perception of the benefits of the organisation had to be established, and in relation to older men's health, this could be partially achieved by adhering to the currently fashionable preventative discourse (Christie Commission, 2011). The difficulty with this approach lay in evidencing the maintenance or improvement of health. As Wilson and Cordier (2013) note, without systematic longitudinal evaluation of physical/physiological/psychological functioning, it was impossible to convincingly state that the Men's Shed was exerting the proposed effects. Therefore, of greater importance was demonstrating that the organisation could raise health awareness and forge links between older men and service providers, a stance apparent in this letter the management team sent to the local medical centre:

> *"[The Men's Shed is] a place where information and material relevant to men's health and wellbeing can be made available. We hope it will provide an additional link between the primary health network and the many men who have no regular contact with that network...we would like to establish an active link with the local surgery to become a focal point in the community for promoting men's health issues and actions to resolve those issues".*

The 'relevant information and material' amounted to various posters, leaflets, and books available at the Men's Shed, though participants expressed very little interest in these, preferring to discuss, rather than read about, health issues they were experiencing. As the management team understood it, men will not be immediately receptive to health information, and if newcomers even heard the word 'health', or worse, 'mental health', in the early stages, their perception of the organisation would be tarnished, thus discouraging their attendance. Of greater efficacy was encouraging the development of a tight-knit group, a comfortable context that would allow men to gradually reveal themselves, and any health concerns they may be experiencing. One board member felt that this had been achieved at the Men's Shed:

> *"What surprised me from the very early days was how commonly the chat turned to personal health issues, varying from drinking too much coffee to PSA tests. This happened spontaneously from the ground up. In talking about it most guys realised that their knowledge was of the sort 'my brother-in-law told me'".*

The observation of these discussions was a source of both pride and considerable surprise, demonstrating the resilience of the long-established, but inaccurate,

understanding that men will not share their health concerns (Foley, 2014; Morgan *et al*, 2007). Indeed, once they had established trusting friendships, participants engaged in informal and supportive conversations, mainly related to their physical (as opposed to mental) health, on a daily basis, covering a wide variety of issues.

Actual health 'promotion' occurred through a series of Wednesday evening 'health talks' given by experts, in a lecture and discussion format, on typical older men's issues. These talks focused on preventative strategies and possible treatments, and allowed participants to have their concerns addressed by experts, with many taking the opportunity to do so. The first talk, titled 'Prostate Cancer and You', was billed as "a frank and honest talk for men about the most common cancer among men in Scotland". It was organised by a participant who had experienced the condition, while further talks were organised by Vern, and focused on cardiac issues, strokes, and Alzheimer's disease. These talks were advertised throughout Carstonwood, via posters at the local surgery, the shopping centre, and other community buildings, and were open to men and women; as one board member said, this was "just another of the good things the Men's Shed does for the community". Prominent advertising was considered essential, for as one shedder put it, "there's a lot of guys who think, 'oh there's nothing wrong with me, I'm not going to the doctor', but if their wives see it, they'll tell their husbands 'shut up, you're going'"! This shedder felt that men's wives could puncture their typical stoicism in the face of health difficulties, facilitating their engagement with a health talk that could prove beneficial to them. This did not turn out to be the case, as only a small number of participants (typically around 20), and on occasion their wives, actually attended the talks, though they did report that they found them enjoyable and informative. "Contrary to some stereotypes", the Men's Shed Development Guide could therefore note, "the Shed and the men who use it are interested in health issues".

However, there were concerns regarding the suitability of certain health talk topics, and how they could affect perceptions of the Men's Shed, as is apparent in the following discussion:

> Joe: "I'd like to have more health talks, for example, on the heart, bypasses...".

Ed: "We could have a talk on death"!

Anthony: "That would be a bit morbid, guys will be getting depressed, guys will be slitting their wrists with some of the things being discussed".

Ed: "It would be good to get people with insight to speak, like my [relative], he had cancer, and now he's an invalid. People don't go and see their doctor, I mean my [relative], he took Imodium, he had diarrhoea, but he wouldn't go and see the doctor".

Anthony: "I don't think that would happen here, we're all educated, all reasonably knowledgeable".

Ed: "I disagree, the big thing is fear, fear of sticking a finger up there and checking your prostate".

Dennis: "This is exactly the kind of thing I want to see. Men talking about these things can take away the fear".

Joe: "Yeh, but it's a delicate line. We don't want the Shed to be seen as too doom and gloom". (Fieldnotes, 18th September 2013)

A talk on suicide was held in October 2013, but during the day, and exclusively in the discussion format, meaning that men were not 'bound' to the talk as they were with the lecture format. Leaflets discussing the issue were laid out following the talk, though these were later removed them, as they were considered to be overly morbid, and gave of the wrong image. Too great an emphasis on such morbid issues, or even on health issues generally, was considered counter-productive, potentially conflicting with newcomer's and participant's actual reasons for attending the Men's Shed.

Such caution is characteristic of the 'health by stealth' approach prevalent in Australian Men's Sheds (Misan *et al*, 2008). In an email communication, one board member considered this point in the following terms:

"I agree about the crucial importance of not having the Shed identified as a "health centre" or headlining (to the public) its role in improving men's health. Men like to see the Shed as just an enjoyable place to go and meet some mates and maybe do something constructive. Most people get the idea that this is a good thing to do".

Or as another said, "the Shed has all these benefits, that's the health stuff, but guys don't come here for that, they come to enjoy themselves". There was a need for balance; on the one hand, the management team felt that over-emphasising the health-related aspects of the Men's Shed to the public would risk giving the wrong

impression, and that overloading participants with formal health-related activities would risk alienating them. They sought to differentiate what was termed the 'serious side of the Shed' from the 'enjoyable' side, highlighting that the organisation was 'not a service', but rather a space in which men could simply enjoy themselves by pursuing their interests in the company of like-minded others. On the other hand, there was a need to demonstrate that the Men's Shed was fulfilling its health promotion role, and to allow participants to feel comfortable sharing their health concerns should they want to. Health issues therefore came to the forefront on the rare occasion of talks, and more frequently (and organically) during participants' informal discussions, the quantity and scope of which actually surprised the management team. Generally, while participants recognised the harmful stoicism that can afflict men, they denied the assertion that manhood entailed a carefree attitude towards health (Courtenay, 2000). On the contrary, as Anthony recognised in the above extract, participants were 'educated' and 'knowledgeable' regarding their bodies, and were willing to open up about their health, and provide support to their fellow shedders, in the suitably informal format on offer at the Men's Shed. As discussed in chapter six, these discussions also served to highlight a further point of similarity between participants, allowing their comparable health circumstances to contribute to the maintenance of the bonding social capital they shared (Putnam, 2000).

Education

In the early documentation, the Men's Shed was also considered to have the capacity to engender 'lifelong learning'. The Business Plan stated that:

> *"Capacity-building on an individual level requires the development of conditions that allow individual participants...to build and enhance existing knowledge and skills. It also calls for the establishment of conditions that...allow individuals to engage in the process of learning and adapting to change (increased free-time and ageing)".*

Such 'capacity-building' is well documented in the current literature (Golding, 2011a), but again, a desire to distinguish what was termed the 'current government jargon' from the reality of the Men's Shed was apparent. As one board member put it:

> *"With the learning, it's peer-to-peer learning, but we don't think of it like that, it's have you tried this, why don't you try that, it's like that...in the workshop, for the guys in the workshop, to ask them for help is the highest compliment you can give them, to know that somebody values their skills, but they don't want to show off...it's learning, its education, but we don't look at it like that".*

Participants recognised and openly acknowledged that teaching and learning occurred at the Men's Shed on a daily basis, though in the above extract, there is an attempt to differentiate the official discourse, utilised to appeal to funding providers, from what was occurring within the organisation. Rather than focusing on individual gains, the relational aspects of the educational process were highlighted; each instance functioned as a demonstration of respect from the learner, and as confirmatory for the teacher, whose knowledge was accorded new value. This hints at an important aspect of the dominant form of aged masculinity existing at the Men's Shed that deviated from the hegemonic norm of competitive individualism. To ask for a man's help in the workshop was a sign of great respect, and likewise to teach, without pretension or judgement, a sign of respect towards a man wishing to better himself. As with participants' discussions regarding their health issues then, teaching and learning began with the recognition and admission of personal deficiencies. Since participants were not judged on their possession of technical skills, there were practically no limitations on which men could become involved in the workshop (aside from those whose disabilities meant they could not ensure their own safety), a point that I took advantage of when conducting this enquiry. The only limit was attitudinal, related to the individual's willingness to immerse themselves in the economy of knowledge and skills, the community of practice, instituted at the Men's Shed.

Learning Limits

Despite the necessity of adhering to the standard benefits discourse when applying for grant funding, it became apparent that both the management team and participants resisted conceiving the Men's Shed in these terms. It was felt that if men were to engage in the organisation, they must not have the 'benefits' thrust in their faces, as such directness could either unnerve them and discourage attendance if they were experiencing issues, or engender an incorrect and off-putting perception if they were not. The testing scenario was to create an

environment that catered to those with obvious needs while also highlighting, for the majority who understood the Men's Shed in terms of 'fun' and 'enjoyment', and as a site in which they could assume ownership through contributory involvement, that the organisation was 'not a service'. As one board member put it:

> *"The Men's Shed...well it's not a day centre, I'm a volunteer at the local day centre, so I'm familiar with day centres, regular attendance, assessment. Anyone can come into our Shed, you don't have to be assessed, or anything like that, it's open. It's not a resource centre staffed by professionals, to address particular problems, we're all amateurs, we're all volunteers, nobody there knows anything more about what they're doin' than the rest of us, so, we just manage to get along".*

In an email communication, this board member further reflected on the necessity of engendering a non-service environment, stressing that:

> *"The [Men's Shed] has no "service users". We treat everyone who enters the Shed as a contributor. Many men would flee if they thought it was some type of "Day Centre". This has more to do with the male ego and their natural desire to be helpful rather than dependent".*

Another board member recognised the practicalities of this stance, noting that "all are welcome, but we emphasise that we are not trained medics or social workers and are not providing a service".

While the Men's Shed comfortably managed to accommodate most men, issues arose on the rare occasions when more severely disabled men visited, highlighting the difficulties inherent in balancing openness and equality with the maintenance of a non-service environment. This is apparent in responses to the following incident:

> *I am at the middle table playing bridge in the otherwise quiet social area. As we are playing, two women, wearing white nurse-style uniforms, come in with a man, who I don't recognise, in a motorised wheelchair. I give a nod of recognition, but am somewhat surprised when he is wheeled to the board table and left sitting there alone, with an assurance from the women [later confirmed as occupational therapists] that they will be back later to pick him up. It does not look like anyone is going to welcome him, so I apologise to the other players and go across to say hello, before going through to the back room to try and get somebody to come and talk to this rather bewildered looking man. Joe and Barry are counting the petty cash box, while Peter is elbow-deep in a box of donated tools. I apologise for the interruption, and ask if someone can go through and speak to this man, maybe sit with him or give him a tour, as I am otherwise occupied.*

Following a brief discussion, Joe, who knows the man, says he will do it…I return to the bridge table, and we continue playing". (Fieldnotes, Friday 4th October 2013)

Admittedly, my actions may appear patronising in this instance, imputing upon this newcomer a need for company without evidence to back this. However, given his nervous demeanour, the fact that I had not seen him at the Men's Shed before, and the oft-stated assertion that newcomers should be warmly welcomed, I felt that I could not simply leave him by himself, and thankfully Joe intervened.

After the newcomer had left, there was a discussion regarding the incident, in which my actions were criticised. I was told that I should not have come through to the back room looking for help, as men do not attend the Men's Shed in order to 'look after' other men, and should not be asked to do so. It was felt that nobody should have to cease their activities to attend to somebody who could not look after himself, a situation one shedder considered akin to 'emotional blackmail'. It was also felt that this kind of situation should be avoided whenever possible, in order that the Men's Shed did not acquire a reputation whereby men could be 'dumped' by their relatives or carers for a few hours, to be looked after by shedders. When a man with particular needs arrived, they would not typically be ignored, as basic courtesy dictated at least a friendly greeting, but the crucial point was that participants were not obliged to further interact with those whose personal characteristics prevented them from fully and easily engaging in the community of practice (just as they were not obliged to engage with any other shedder should they not wish to). Such engagement, involving general cooperative working, and specific instances of teaching and learning, assumed a basic level of physical and communicative capacity from both parties, and if this was lacking, difficulties could ensue. Participants were active and competent men, who created an organisational environment reflective of this. Passively conversing with those who could not engage in the community of practice contravened the first of these characteristics, while the potential dangers of the workshop precluded the involvement of those lacking the second, those who lacked the judgement to comprehend the risks.

Further opinions on this issue were expressed during later discussions:

Joe: "We had this attitude at the outset, y'know, all men are welcome at the Shed, though we've seen with recent events it's not that easy...it was idealism, there are some practical problems in reality. We've had a few men come in who have physical problems, there's a wide range, and we've found we can't cater to everyone, guys have been left without their carer, and we can't cope with their physical needs, if they soil themselves, if they need to go to the toilet...the dirtier side of things".

Dean: "Guys don't come here to be carers. Friends, yes, but we can't be lumbered with them, we can't be responsible for these guys. We come in to work on our own projects, so if a man usually needs a carer, they should come into the Shed with them".

Graham: "Carers are welcome to come in, if they're male or female, but they can't leave men alone".

Peter: "Well, it's alright if they're sat in the corner by themselves, but if they're going in the workshop, the carer should go with them...we can't afford to take any chances". (Fieldnotes, Wednesday 23rd October 2013)

As one board member put it, these discussions were "about learning our limits" regarding what was a difficult topic. While those with minor physical disabilities were willingly accommodated, several men with learning difficulties and more pronounced physical disabilities, those who may be described as ageing 'pathologically' (Atchley, 1989), also expressed an interest in attending, and this was problematic. Participants were not trained to deal with these cases, nor were they interested in being trained, because they did not understand themselves as service providers, but rather as volunteers enjoying themselves and advancing the Men's Shed in the process.

Following these discussions, it was agreed that a policy document formally governing the issue would be created in consultation with experts. This document, which I contributed to drafting, stated that if a man normally required a carer, they should always be present during their time at the Men's Shed:

"A central principle of the Carstonwood Men's Shed is the extension of the numerous benefits of participation to as many men as possible...we have strived to create a welcoming and open environment for men of all ages and abilities. However, throughout our first year of operations, we have come to realise that the wide variety of needs and issues presented by participants can render this principle difficult to implement in practice...our supervisors are not trained in handling or assisting individuals with personal needs, nor are they part of the Protection of Vulnerable Groups scheme. Therefore, the presence of the carer throughout their companions/clients visit is required".

This document also stressed the potential limits regarding participant's interactions with the carer's client: "while participants are generally welcoming to newcomers, carers should note that they may be too busy with their own projects to engage in extended interactions with their companions/clients". In the debate around this issue, the potential impact of the presence of carers, the majority of whom would likely be female, was considered, with concern being expressed that this could 'alter the ethos', potentially stifling conversation and putting men off attending. Experience demonstrated that this was not the case, and it was agreed that female carers, since they tended to stay with their client, were, as one board member noted, 'generally quite transparent'. Their presence was effectively de-gendered, and considered acceptable if it allowed a man to participate. It was also agreed that an informal 'buddy system' would be trialled, whereby those who would otherwise struggle to integrate would work alongside a 'buddy'. This would not, it was stressed, constitute a 'job' (a 'service' granted by participants), rather just an extra helping hand for those requiring it.

Though a few shedders did take it upon themselves to work alongside those with more severe physical and mental disabilities, there was a general scepticism regarding the buddy system, with one shedder stating that participants were all 'buddies' anyway, and that to him, the term implied friendships built on equality rather than oversight. It was stressed that the Men's Shed, though officially designated a charity, was not an organisation in which this kind of close, personal aid to others was routinely practiced. On this topic, it can be said that the idealistic desire for openness and inclusivity clashed with the practicalities of running a Men's Shed in which the expectation of active and contributory involvement had assumed priority. While the principle of openness remained, it was understood that participants did not attend the Men's Shed specifically to help other (disadvantaged) men, nor were they qualified to do so. The Men's Shed was therefore not entirely suited for every man, but rather for 'everyman' (Kimmel, 2006), though of course it should be stressed that this is no different from many other community organisations. It catered primarily to those undergoing 'normal ageing' rather than its 'pathological' counterpart, and who therefore possessed the desire and capability to actively contribute towards the development and maintenance of the organisation.

Social Enterprise/Not a Business

Though contribution entailed a variety of activities, of primary concern to the management team was ensuring the financial sustainability of the Men's Shed. The early success of the organisation led to a decline in grant-based funding, which mandated a transition towards a social enterprise model. A social enterprise is defined as "a business with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or the community, rather than...maximis[ing] profit for shareholders and owners" (BIS, 2011:2). Though the Men's Shed legally remained a charity (there is no legal definition of a social enterprise; Floyd, 2012), and the social enterprise model was not intellectualised, amounting merely to the recognition of self-reliance, the organisation did adhere to several definitional elements identified in the literature. The Men's Shed had grassroots origins and democratic decision-making processes, it lacked paid employees, utilised all 'profits' in the service of users, and pursued communally-beneficial goals (Borzaga & Defourny, 2001; Nyssens, 2006). Specifically, the social enterprise approach involved working on projects commissioned by local charities and community groups, as well as the refurbishment and sale of donated items. It was vital at this stage to take advantage of existing community linkages, while also forging new connections, in order to both generate ongoing funding and provide valuable aid to worthwhile community causes (Hayes & Williamson, 2007; Putnam, 2000). As demand increased for the services being offered, a process of formalisation also occurred, including the implementation of standardised paperwork, working practices, and payment procedures.

Treasurer James felt that grant funding had become more difficult to gain for three reasons. Firstly, in relation to money received from the local council, the effects of drastic budget cuts following the 2008 economic crisis were beginning to bite, affecting voluntary organisations throughout Carstonwood. Secondly, the financial success of the Men's Shed, achieved mainly due to Joe's ability to produce successful funding applications, lessened the appeal for providers concerned with addressing often severe needs in the most economical fashion. The Men's Shed simply had too much money in its accounts to reasonably ask for more from general providers. Thirdly, in relation to funding opportunities

specifically related to Men's Sheds, the establishment of other sites had pushed Carstonwood down the list of priorities, in favour of new start-ups possessing little capital and lacking a property. These factors mandated a shift towards an approach ensuring greater sustainability, in comparison to the time-consuming, hit-and-miss grant-based model. As one board member explained:

> *"I have to say…it happened sort of without us looking for it, so we're raising a lot of money, and quite a few people in here are actually responsible for a lot of income just through projects they do for various groups, and people buying things, and people cleaning up tools and machinery and stuff and then we're reselling them…it's what we call commissioned income. We get things in, we clean them up a bit, we resell them, we check them for safety, one thing and another, we perform a service on them, we sell them out, that's the kinda thing we should continue".*

This was a radical shift, as prior to opening, and the realisation of the capabilities of participants and the demand for their skills, self-generated funding was considered largely insignificant, as is apparent in the Business Plan:

> *"Some Sheds have group projects making bird feeders, rocking horses, etc., which they sell at local markets to raise funds. We are interested in this possibility, but we anticipate the income generated would only amount to a few hundred pounds which would be put back into replacing materials".*

While barely considered in the initial documentation, in the second year of operation, it was hoped that half of all income would come from social enterprise sources, and in the third year, two-thirds, demonstrating the scope of this transition. Though grants were still occasionally sought, and Barry's community fundraising continued unabated (see below), there was a discernible shift in emphasis based on changing financial circumstances in the charitable sector, and on the developing conception of the capacities of participants, who were understood as possessing the desire and capability to sustain the Men's Shed.

Regarding sales, donated tools were tidied or repaired, and alongside small items, such as wooden lathe ornaments, or Fred's fretsaw art, were sold, at the Men's Shed itself (participants themselves often made purchases), at quarterly sales at the local shopping centre, or through classifieds websites. Commissioned projects, which garnered the majority of social enterprise money, entailed local charities and community groups, or occasionally an individual, approaching the Men's Shed with a particular repair or build. The typical kinds of projects engaged in are apparent in these board meeting minutes I wrote:

"Joe reported that the workshop remains busy with commissioned projects, including recent work for a local disabled children's charity, raised planters for a local cancer charity, library shelves for the Carstonwood Primary School, shelving and cupboards for a local Day Centre, and the refurbishment of a children's climbing frame for the Carstonwood Playgroup. The engineers also continue to work on various repair jobs, while Peter is building a bookcase for a friend of the Shed".

Participants wishing to become involved in commissioned projects could consult the sheet on the workshop notice board, where the 'client', project leader, instructions, and cost were recorded. Two payment systems were utilised for larger projects, those taking more than a few hours and requiring the sourcing of materials. The initial system entailed the client paying the cost of the materials, plus an extra 20%, plus a donation of their choice. As the demand for commissioned projects increased, it was realised that clients would willingly pay more, hence the system shifted to the client paying the cost of the materials plus £10 per hour worked on the project (based on an estimation, prior to beginning the project, of how long it would take), though this was partially adjustable based on the identity of the client and their ability to pay. As the Men's Shed was 'not a business' (see below), payment was considered as 'income' rather than 'profit', and did not cover the costs of labour, which was freely granted, instead being said to cover 'overheads'. This was thought to allay any offence participants may feel through the claim that their work was worth only the relatively small amounts charged.

Projects were selected firstly according to the individual or group seeking the work, and secondly, on their particular requirements concerning its conduct. Regarding the former, charitable groups, particularly those helping disadvantaged individuals, were welcomed, as it was understood that they may not be particularly wealthy, and could have trouble finding anyone to carry out work in their price range. Community organisations such as schools, churches, and the local art project, were similarly welcomed, in many cases building upon pre-established relationships between the management team and members of these organisations. The Men's Shed conducted many valuable works for these groups, and could, through word of mouth and advertising, be seen to be doing so, crucial for generating favourable perceptions throughout the community, as well as future work. Commissioned projects from individuals considered 'friends of the Shed' were also accepted, for example, a local woman who provided the

Men's Shed with regular deliveries of home bakes had several small projects conducted for her; in her case, the biscuits and cakes she brought were considered more than adequate payment. In both these situations, the goal of building and maintaining communal bonds was central. The organisation required financial support, and needed to be perceived positively, and it could achieve this through utilising participant's expertise to both provide aid to deserving causes and reinforce mutually beneficial links with friends of the Shed (Putnam, 2000). Commissioned projects were typically not conducted for non-disadvantaged individuals who could be expected to have work done by local tradesmen, though smaller repair jobs were allowed, provided they were conducted within the Men's Shed.[1] For example, an individual may bring in a set of garden shears for sharpening, and a job like this would be conducted quickly and easily, usually for a generous donation (£10 to £20 could be made with five minutes' work on the grinding wheel). The engineers also conducted work for individuals, mainly repairing gardening machinery, which allowed them to contribute towards fundraising as the woodworkers did, and kept them 'ticking over' in between their main passion, machinery restoration projects, which were not conducted primarily to raise money (though completed projects were sold). A further justification for these jobs was the difficulty in finding anyone who would repair lawnmowers and suchlike; exhibiting a 'make do and mend' mind-set, participants hated seeing good machinery scrapped when a day's tinkering could fix it (see chapter seven).

The second consideration concerned the client's requirements regarding how the project was to be conducted. Specifically, projects would be rejected if an unreasonable deadline was mandated, as noted in the Men's Shed Development Guide:

> *"What Our Shed is NOT - Commercial. We do not want deadlines and targets or pressure. The majority of us are retired and have had plenty of that to last a lifetime. The men who are still working come along for*

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[1] Participants were prohibited from soliciting outside work under the auspices of the Men's Shed, for two reasons. Firstly, the possible financial implications should participants inadvertently damage someone's property, and secondly, the desire not to take business away from local tradesmen. Inevitably though, a few small 'homers' were conducted, but only on the proviso that the individual was acting in a personal capacity, with their conduct being wholly unrelated to the Men's Shed.

> *relaxation. We do projects for charitable groups and the community, but we do them at our own pace".*

Or as one board member said in an internal email, responding to a build-up of projects, "remember our success is measured in smiles not pounds", and similarly that "our real reward is laughter and friendship". Deadlines contradicted the third negative definition used to describe the Men's Shed, that it was 'not a business'. Participants were not employees, instead considering themselves volunteers who freely dedicated themselves to the Men's Shed because they enjoyed using their skills to the benefit of the organisation and those they conducted projects for. The Men's Shed was concerned to enhance rather than restrict participant's lives, which for the majority meant their retirement, and it was felt that, given their obvious commitment, deadlines would see them, as one board member put it, "worrying in their bed at night", and coming in early to get projects finished on time. On their part, having worked for decades, participants felt they had earned their retirement, and expected this to be considered as a condition of their involvement. It was therefore stressed, in an internal report, that "we must not change the reason for the Shed being there. It must remain a place that men go to because they enjoy the company and engagement…we are mostly retired men and don't do stress or deadlines"; in a sound bite, "we have a motto; we are retired, we don't do pressure". As skilled, capable men, the majority of participants could still work if they chose to (two had retired but returned to work due to boredom; see chapter five), and felt as though they may as well do so if deadlines were mandated; as one shedder put it, "some people want it next Wednesday, and it just does not work like that here. You may as well be doing nine-to-five, you may as well be back at work if you're doing that". Projects were, however, conducted diligently, with participants often spending hours on fiddly little jobs that may not be particularly enjoyable. The difference, in principal if not always in reality, was the lack of pressure (the Men's Shed was 'fully booked' for two months as I left the field, and such popularity inevitably meant that certain participants felt pressured to finish projects as soon as possible). In effect, the Men's Shed's non-business status counterbalanced the assertion that it was 'not a service'. That participants were mainly retired older men did not entail a wholesale shift in their masculine self-conceptions, pushing them into the realm of service-users, with all the emasculating connotations this entailed (Davidson,

2013). Equally though, in ceasing employment, there was a desired shift away from the demands inherent to it.

Participant Ownership

Discussing the character of participants, one board member felt that "men, including myself, wanna be contributors. We wanna do something, we wanna give something. They don't wanna sit back and say 'help me', they're not like that". Another similarly stressed that "men need to feel they are doing something valuable", and commissioned projects allowed for this, granting participants a means of exercising their skills to financially contribute towards the Men's Shed, though this did not exhaust their contributory desires. As the fieldwork progressed, the perceived lack of communication between the management team and participants, and the lack of organisation around certain events and processes, such as the management of donated tools (see chapter nine), generated significant tensions, the resolution of which relied upon the diffusion of managerial responsibilities (Cavanagh *et al*, 2013). Given that they were responsible for the financial sustainability of the Men's Shed, participants also sought a greater degree of managerial control. The management team, keen to ensure both long-term sustainability and a harmonious social environment, actively promoted and willingly granted this demand, as is apparent in one board member's statement at the second AGM (18th April 2014):

> *"The thing that's very attractive about the Shed is that it's run by the men, it's not the council or anything else, they're not responsible. We all decide what we wanna do, how we wanna spend money...we have a board that makes a lot of those decisions, but we want as many people as possible to share in that responsibility, and to share in the input...we'd like more people to participate in the board and give your contributions, give your suggestions, and y'know, in a sense take responsibility for your Shed...so, there's no boss in the Shed, that's one thing, I think, I'm not that successful at, cus I don't like it so much when people come up to me and say 'can we do this, can we do that, there's a phone call'. I think it should be more distributed, and we have to work on ways of doing that, distributing decision-making so it's like everything doesn't have to be referred to me. Certain people, supervisors, can make decisions on buying things and stuff like that, but we want everybody to feel like it's partly their thing, and not feel like it's the Shed decides this, the Shed decides that, it must be we decide this, we decide that, y'know, get rid of those oligarchs in charge...it takes a lot of hands to get it to work, and so we'd appreciate it if more people said 'okay, I'll give you a hand there, I'll give you a hand here'. So,*

lots of people contributed in lots of different ways, and that's the way it should be, but we gotta continue that, and say don't take it for granted, it just doesn't happen".

By the time this statement was made, significant progress had already been made in the direction of participant ownership. Participants acted as supervisors, were consulted on policy and project decisions, and could join the board, which in this conception is merely the formal mechanism of power. The reality was a conversion from an 'oligarchical' to a democratic/technocratic form of governance, with decision-making conducted via open discussions in certain instances, and by expert role-holders in others, before being verified by the collective. The latter entailed what Joe termed a 'decentralisation' process, a restructuring of the structural social capital (Uphoff, 2001) in operation within the Men's Shed. This involved participants adopting specific roles, for example, Ed became the 'supplies manager', responsible for sourcing and purchasing supplies, and Arnold became the 'store man', responsible for managing donated tools. The formalisation of roles allowed participants to contribute in a consistent fashion, with full awareness of their responsibilities. Furthermore, as the organisation grew to the point where the sourcing of often obscure supplies and the donation of tools (each of which had to be recorded, labelled, appraised, and assigned for use, repair, sale, or scrapping) was a weekly occurrence, assigning oversight to individuals proved practically efficient.

Reflecting a concern with the needs of the organisation over those of the individual, the expectation of contribution from all capable men is readily apparent in the above extract, a sharp contrast with earlier conceptions which stressed that participants may reasonably do as they wished at the Men's Shed, without any reference to reciprocation. To give a small but revealing example of these shifting expectations (in an area demanding a contribution from all practical shedders), as the fieldwork progressed signs on the workshop walls promoting tidiness went from cordially suggestive:

'How about this: Every man stops work 15 mins before they have to leave and cleans up anything they have done and then does a bit more for general tidiness...your cooperation is appreciated, we are all in this together'.

To highlighting the group's respect for contributors:

'All the men really appreciate those guys who are not shy of doing their bit'.

To guilt-inducing questioning:

'Others cannot be expected to keep the workshop tidy...are you one of the few guys not pulling their weight in this area'?

The first two signs were made by the management team, the third by Ed, a participant who policed this area alongside his role as supplies manager. As the competence demanded in the workshop precluded the involvement of men with certain needs, so the contributory ethos, if not entirely precluding the involvement of casual attendees, certainly made it clear that full integration into the group entailed not merely presence, but active involvement.

Participants largely heeded the contributory call, with certain notable exceptions. In Barry's view, one such exception was participants' lack of interest in community fundraising, which hugely frustrated him. Expressing no interest in the workshop, Barry instead focused his efforts entirely on community fundraising. As an experienced fundraiser, he had provided his services to several community groups prior to his involvement at the Men's Shed, and was happy to organise raffles (designing and printing tickets, and sourcing prizes through letter writing and visiting local businesses) and can collections (contacting supermarkets) despite, for a large portion of the fieldwork, suffering from a serious physical injury which kept him off work. Barry's unwavering dedication to community fundraising earned the Men's Shed around £2000 per year, money which was particularly useful in the early stages of the fieldwork (as the main source of funding at this time, grants from external bodies, often had to be spent on particular items). However, while the chief woodworker or the chief engineer had no trouble attracting participants to work under their guidance on commissioned projects, Barry dismayed at participants' lack of willingness to engage in community fundraising. He could not understand why others did not share his enthusiasm, having to be persuaded to sell raffle tickets or give an hour for a can collection, with particular criticism reserved for members of the bridge club (which met weekly in the social area), in his view, and that of other shedders, the most egregious offenders (see chapter eight). Considering this issue, one

board member reasoned that participants' fears regarding their local social status may preclude them from participating in community fundraising:

> *"I'm with the Lions and we go round begging a lot, shaking cans and things like that, so I'm used to begging for money, it doesn't bother me, my pride isn't injured, but for a lot of guys it's a bit 'ooh, what's my neighbour gonna think if he sees me out here looking for money' or one thing or another, a lot of guys aren't comfortable with that".*

While men such as Barry, who had extensive 'begging' experience, could accept rejection without injury to his pride, it was felt that other participants disliked not only asking others for money, but also being seen doing so. On this issue, it is apparent that although participants clearly wanted to contribute, they sought to do so only in a manner that aligned with their self-conceptions.

Further evidence of the personal limits to contribution was apparent in the lack of interest participants took in cleaning the kitchen and the toilets. The former was thoroughly cleaned only once during the fieldwork, when one participant's wife, seeing the state of it during a social event, came in specifically to do it, while the latter were only cleaned prior to social events (parties held during the evenings, when participants brought their wives to the Men's Shed for a summer barbeque, a Burns supper, or a Christmas dinner), usually by me. Graham worried that even this basic level of cleaning would decline when I left the field, presenting a health hazard. While he considered the notion that men do not clean to be a negative stereotype, he recognised that certain participants willingly adhered to it:

> *Graham: "I don't want a woman to come in and clean, it looks like a, erm...".*
>
> *Jeremy: "Stereotype"?*
>
> *Graham: "That's the word...I know there's those men who'll say they've never cleaned anything in their lives and they don't intend to start now...I think with some guys, they never actually do anything, I think some of them are proud of never doing any cleaning".* (Fieldnotes, 26th May 2014)

As with Barry's fundraising, Graham stated a willingness to take on the responsibility, provided that others did likewise. Failing that, he proposed hiring a cleaner and charging participants, though this was rejected because participants already contributed financially through commissioned projects and regular small donations. By the conclusion of the fieldwork, this issue remained

unresolved, as participants, though recognising the need to 'muck in' in this area, neither took on the responsibility nor policed it as they did other, more overtly masculine, aspects of contribution.

Conclusion

Prior research into Men's Sheds has mainly focused on reporting the benefits of participation, focusing on social isolation, health, and continuing education, and in the early stages of the fieldwork, the need to generate start-up funding prompted strict adherence to this discourse. As the recovery narratives in chapter six demonstrate, I do not suggest that the Men's Shed did not address these issues, as several participants willingly acknowledged that the organisation provided the social interaction and sense of purpose they desperately needed, and all highly valued the opportunity to teach and learn from their peers. However, for the majority of participants, the disadvantage implied by the standard benefits discourse did not align with their experience, and hence self-perception, as independent, active, and competent men. Participant's enthusiastic involvement demonstrated that there was a desire for the Men's Shed, but this cannot be adequately understood using the three-pronged standard of health promotion, lifelong learning, and tackling social isolation. These areas, aspects of life to be improved, suggest a disjuncture between present and future, a personal shift from one multiply disadvantaged state to another, happier state. While such narratives existed among certain participants, they were exceptions to a norm based upon the maintenance of a comfortable balance, an aged masculinity encompassing aspects of conservation and change, in participant's lives (Atchley, 1989; Coles & Vassarotti, 2012). As the management team recognised, the desire to contribute is a natural aspect of the male ego, which participants evidently sought to conserve. A good participant was therefore simply a man adhering to his nature, and the Men's Shed was simply a space allowing this to occur. However, that an untidy workbench was considered different from a dirty sink, the former constituting a notable offence, the latter going largely unnoticed, and that generating money through the utilisation of one's skills was considered more agreeable than 'begging', indicates participant's perceptions of the limits of acceptable contribution. If nature generated a desire to contribute, it was recognised that participant's status within a gender-divided

culture limited their involvement to areas unthreatening to this status. For the most part though, the management team and participants responded to each other's needs, prompting two transitions at once desired and necessary for long-term sustainability. The shifting grant funding climate mandated the pursuit of a secure form of fundraising that utilised the very skills participants attended the Men's Shed to exercise, and this occurred alongside the decentralisation process and an intensification of expectations regarding participant's contributory conduct. The core group of participants most willingly engaged in these transitions, seeking through them to create an organisation they were proud to call their own.

5

Work and Gender

The success of the Men's Shed relied upon the establishment of bridging and bonding social capital (Putnam, 2000). It was vital to establish both links with external agencies, those willing to engage in the donation or exchange of required resources, and internal cohesion, expressed as shared goals, norms, values, rules, and roles, which governed participants' conduct and affections and generated a collective identity (Uphoff, 2001). Discussed in this and the following two chapters are the sources of the bonding social capital existing at the Men's Shed, those aspects of common socialisation and experience that fostered friendships exhibiting mutual trust and purpose (Portes, 1998; Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993). Commonalities of gender and age were the bases of friendships, but were not sufficient in themselves, as participants' rejection of certain individual's presence at the Men's Shed evidences (see chapter eight). The additional ingredient was the commonality of experience, interests, and attitudes; as one shedder put it, "I want to spend time with other men, they're the same age as me, they've got the same interests". "There are guys here", noted another shedder, "and they've all had similar lives, well, quite similar, and that's the basis of good conversation". One board member, in a promotional video, likewise stated:

> *"When I drop into the Men's Shed, for a cup of coffee, to have a chat with people, read the newspapers, discuss what's going on in the world, express my worries about things, about the world, I can get the interaction with other people about how they feel about it, and I realise I'm not alone, there's a lot of people like me, who agree with what I'm thinking".*

The contentment participants experienced through sharing the Men's Shed with 'people like them' facilitated enactments of the dominant form of aged masculinity existing among the group (Coles & Vassarotti, 2012). I observed a proud yet pragmatic masculinity, in turn imitating and denying hegemonic norms, that was informed above all by the pursuit of continuity. It is wise to recall here that continuity does not refer to the precise maintenance of previous

attitudes and behaviours; retirement, reflection, and the process of physical ageing preclude such uniformity. Continuity instead encompasses the maintenance of a comfortable balance between the conservation of enduring aspects of selfhood on the one hand, and the management of unavoidable change on the other (Atchley, 1989). In this chapter, the pursuit of this balance, and the aged masculinity it underpins, is discussed in relation to participants' understandings of work, wealth, and gender differentiation. Chapter six then considers health and wellbeing, as well as the recovery narratives engaged in by certain participants, while chapter seven considers the topics of community and nostalgia, as well as participants' relationships with technological objects. Where they arise, I also note more individualistic aspects of identity enacted by certain participants. Though these diverge from the concerns of the majority, they nevertheless lend support to the model of aged masculinity outlined here, as they exhibit the characteristic pursuit of continuity.

Wealth and Self-Reliance

When questioning me about my research, some participants were concerned with my progress, and to these men I explained the purpose of a literature review, a methodology, or coding procedures. Others focused on my financial and career situation, wanting to know the details of my stipend, how I envisaged my career going forward, and providing me with advice based on their own experience. Such concern is apparent in the following conversation with Dan, which is quite typical of the discussions I held with participants regarding my work and future plans:

> Dan: "So how's your thesis coming along"?
>
> Jeremy: "I'm just writing the literature review at the moment...".
>
> Dan: "And what about money, are you working at the moment"?
>
> Jeremy: "Well, I'm really lucky, I got this grant, it's something called the ESRC, so I get about thirteen thousand pounds a year, I get to do what I love, and get paid for it".
>
> Dan: "Hmm, it's not a bad amount".

Jeremy: "I have my flat as well, I rent it out, so that pays the mortgage. I see my friends, they might earn more than me, but they don't have mortgages".

Dan: "Yeh, that's so difficult these days...and what do you want to do when you're finished here"?

Jeremy: "Well, I want to be a teacher, or a lecturer".

Dan: "I wanted to be a teacher myself, but I wouldn't fancy working with the teenagers these days. At least with the lecturing, you're teaching people who want to be there. Like there was this one young guy at my company, now he's on good wages, about twenty-two grand a year, but he's a bit cheeky, cocky like, when he's talking about the company, he refers to it as 'they', but y'know, 'they' is 'us' [Dan directs both hands towards his chest]. He has to understand he's a part of the company if he wants to progress his career".

Jeremy: "I think it's much the same with this place, you have to buy into it, and it's the same with my supervisor as well, I've worked with him for four years now, so there's that kind of relationship".

Dan: "Yeh, you need that". (Fieldnotes, 26th March 2014)

Dan achieved the necessary qualifications before working his way up through the technical side of his company, eventually reaching management level before retiring in his late 50's. Exhibiting a gradual development of power and responsibility, occurring through a shift from hands-on engineering work to the management of people and resources, Dan's career can be seen to closely adhere to the dominant 'hegemonic masculinity script' prevalent in Western culture (Spector-Mersel, 2006).

Like Dan, the majority of participants had adhered to this dominant hegemonic masculinity script. Some proudly recalled military service during the Second World War and after, while for others, the transition from apprentice to skilled technical worker occurred in the fields of joinery, engineering, and IT. These varied occupations provided opportunities for worldwide travel, progression into teaching and management, and therefore plentiful storytelling material for the Men's Shed. However, while the assertion of a technical background fostered specific commonalities between subgroups of participants and allowed some to assume expert roles, the Men's Shed also welcomed participants from fields as diverse as insurance and cheffing. These men could, through their willingness to learn, or the expression of an interest acquired non-professionally, assume a

position within the group (see chapter nine). In relation to the topic of interest here, attitudes towards employment, these men shared a general conception of the importance of hard work as the precursor to material rewards. Having worked diligently throughout their lives, participants considered their comfortable financial status, that of being 'all quite rich', as one shedder put it, or 'quite well-heeled', in the words of another, to be entirely legitimate.[1] They had earned their retirements and pensions, hence the ideal of 'no pressure', that which distanced the Men's Shed from any employment connotations, was enshrined as a central organisational principle. This was despite the fact that many participants actually considered themselves to be busier in retirement than they were in employment, remaining 'in the male centre' through involvements with family, friends, the Men's Shed, and other charitable and community organisations (Aléx *et al*, 2008). Vitally though, the pressures of employment, the stress and the deadlines, had ceased, and participants now found themselves with relatively large amounts of disposable wealth, which they felt entitled to spend as they wished. As one shedder put it:

> *"There's no point in hoarding all of your money, I want to spend it while I still can. I've got the kids complaining about their inheritance, but they'll be getting my house when me and [my wife] die, and that's not a bad inheritance by any means…that's the wisest thing to do, invest in property".*

And another:

> *"I'm earning more on my pension than I was ever paid in wages when I was working, so we're quite comfortable…I don't think, it shouldn't be hoarded to hand down to your children, my daughter has told me she doesn't expect that to happen".*

Likewise, when one shedder spent £13000 installing solar panels on his house, he dismissed the concerns of relatives who felt he was frittering away their inheritance; he had earned it, saved it, and spent it as he liked, even if, as he admitted, he was unlikely to recoup the initial outlay in his lifetime. Like his fellow shedders, he felt that his house, and any money left over, would be a suitable inheritance to grant his relatives.

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[1] Accordingly, while participants welcomed health talks as being potentially relevant to their experience of ageing, the suggestion that a representative of a credit union visit the Men's Shed to present their service was rejected, as it in no way aligned with their experience.

Participants thus exerted control over their money (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009), and financial matters were a frequent topic of conversation, for example, one shedder told me his secret to financial success:

> *"I retired early, basically on my savings and investments, not on my workplace pension. When I was forty-five, I had more in savings than I'd earned in my entire life, it was just good investments. You have to be frugal, but you must realise that you haven't made any money until you've sold your investments. It's not your money until it's sitting in your pocket".*

Participants had acquired comfortable amounts of economic capital, with several earning more through pensions than employment, allowing for rewarding, guilt-free lifestyles largely free from financial restrictions. Some invested in the stock market, earning 'shed loads' due to canny dealing, and would share tips around the tea table, some pursued home improvements or maintained holiday homes, while others went on several foreign holidays per year. Those participants that did return to work following retirement cited boredom, rather than economic necessity. One shedder who took this route stated that "when I retired, I soon went back to working part-time, I was getting a little bored with the long days having nothing much to do". As a skilled employee, he returned to employment on his own terms, as did a second shedder, who told me "I might look for some part-time work, I'm getting a little bored with retirement. I still feel like I can contribute in some way, and I want to do something productive with my day". This shedder initially applied for a job at a local deli, indicative of his desire to return to a work environment, but turned it down when offered a temporary return to his previous employer, again on his own terms. As well as providing him with the structure he felt lacking following retirement, this granted him the opportunity to work alongside and pass on his knowledge to younger people. He gained great satisfaction through taking younger workers under his wing, helping them to develop both the skills and mindset required for occupational success.

Participants were generally not boastful regarding their wealth, with discussions merely reflecting their lifestyles. It quickly became apparent that this aspect of selfhood, an obvious 'marker of manhood' (Kimmel, 1994), was basically universal among participants, rendering ostentatious displays of wealth moot. One shedder, Bradley, was an interesting exception though, a man who chose to elaborate at length upon his business and financial success to fellow participants.

Having been a 'millionaire' at certain points in his life, he informed me that he had "more money than I know what to do with". His photography business was outstandingly successful, as he made apparent in the following discussion:

> Bradley: "I was only in the business for ten years, and then I retired. How many men do you know who have done that? Honestly, I was getting four-and-a-half grand per job, it was a grand here, seven hundred and fifty there, I would get four hundred for twenty-five minutes' work, and I was sitting at the top table with the people I was photographing".

> Jeremy: "How did you get started"?

> Bradley: "I was doing small things, like weddings and portraits, and I just decided to turn it into a business".

> Jeremy: "How did you get work"?

> Bradley: "It's all word of mouth, I never advertised, not once. See, that's what I was good at, turning business contacts into friends, that's how you run a business. And they always paid me on time, you turn them into friends, they'll always pay you on time". (Fieldnotes, 14th April 2014)

Photographing footballers and celebrities, on one assignment at a luxury hotel Bradley lamented getting "tired of eating steak and lobster". He was open and generous with his money, and within weeks of his first attendance, had given the Men's Shed, through purchasing donated tools (several of which merely sat in his car afterwards), over £150, proffering blank cheques at the tea table when more private deals could have been made. While participants regularly purchased donated tools, only Bradley chose to inform others of his purchases in this fashion. As discussed in this and the following chapters, Bradley was somewhat anomalous within the Men's Shed. He both expressed a greater need for the bonding social capital the organisation made available to him, having suffered significant health and relational difficulties, while also stressing his adherence to the norms of hegemonic masculinity in a manner far more exaggerated than other participants. However, in overtly stressing his business and financial success, as well as his success with women (see below), Bradley emphasised aspects of selfhood that were of minimal importance in the context of the Men's Shed, and therefore this did not provide him the status that may typically be expected of such a successful man.

Participant's financial success stemmed from a solid work ethic, which translated into the contributory ethos that came to define the Men's Shed.[2] This was contrasted with those failing to exhibit self-reliance, a construction of a feckless Other that simultaneously asserted the righteousness of their own outlook (Coote & Lyall, 2013; Valentine & Harris, 2014). As Cliff put it:

> *Cliff: "My kids know if you want to get anywhere in life you have to look out for yourself. They've both worked hard, now they've got a nice house, nice car...I mean, we're comfortable, because we worked for it, I was registered disabled at fifty-two, and I never took a penny in benefits, not a penny".*
>
> *Jeremy: "Really"?*
>
> *Cliff: "Absolutely, yes. It makes me mad, you see these people and they've never worked, you go in their front room and it's nicer than mine"!* (Fieldnotes, 6th January 2014)

Despite experiencing long-term health difficulties, Cliff maintained a positive self-conception by never accepting financial aid from the state. He distinguished himself, and his children, from those who do not work, noting an injustice when considering the supposed ease with which these hypothetical individuals live. Neil expressed similar sentiments:

> *Neil: "I've never claimed any benefits in my life, I went straight from school to work. I'd not even seen a P45 before I retired, I was with the same company for fifty years, 1949 to December 1998...no, I've never claimed a thing in my life, I can say that at least".*
>
> *Jeremy: "That's pretty impressive".*

---

[2] As encapsulated in a story one shedder told me, which brought to mind the Soviet *Stakhanovite* industrial worker noted by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) to exemplify hegemonic masculinity:

> *"I was awake at five this morning, in my workshop by quarter to six, then I was out at the house [he was refurbishing a house for rent] putting up a greenhouse, then at the Shed just now, so a fourteen-hour day. I'm glad I don't have to do these so often anymore...I'll tell you though, I once did a thirty-two-hour shift, I had just taken over a new team, and all these new machines arrived, and we had to get them up and running. I had one ten-minute break in that time, but we got them working. I went home, I was going to sleep for twelve hours, I ended up sleeping for sixteen, and my wife didn't wake me. Then I went back into work, and my boss gave me a rollicking for working too long. He said 'is the machine working', I said yes. Well, there you go then. Job done".*

"You don't count the hours, you just do it"; so this shedder said after spending several hours in his home workshop polishing part of a lawnmower he was refurbishing, in a typical example of participant's dedication to the Men's Shed.

> *Neil: "You see these families, and they've had two or three generations living on benefits, on thirty thousand pounds a year, they teach their children how to do it, how to fill in all the forms, it's like a job in itself. I don't know how they can afford these big cars you seen them driving".*
>
> *Jeremy: "Yeh".*
>
> *Neil: "Even if I do ever take something, I'll always have put in far more, so there's that".* (Fieldnotes, 24th July 2013)

Neil had experienced the difficulties of claim forms following health difficulties he suffered during the fieldwork (his family had urged him to claim Attendance Allowance, which he did not receive), and reasoned that if claimants put as much work into finding a job as they did applying for benefits, they would easily find work. He had grown up in an environment in which relying on the state was shameful: "when I was younger, being on the tick was something to be ashamed of. You lived within your means...the only debt I've ever had was my mortgage, and I didn't even like to talk about that". Neil's self-reliance, demonstrated by his unblemished employment record and his lack of benefits claims, was therefore "something to be proud of".

As to the source of this attitude, Neil looked to his father, who felt he had to work harder than others to demonstrate that physical disabilities gained during the First World War did not reflect a deficiency of character. While others procrastinated playing cards, Neil's father worked without a break, a lesson his son had never forgotten. Like Cliff, Neil valued the intergenerational continuity of his work ethic, handed down in his case from father to son, though he also stressed his frugality, having dispensed of his car (sold to a relative for a nominal sum) and foreign holidays, and rejecting expensive food and clothes (some of his clothes were decades old, though the fact that he could still fit in them provided a source of pride regarding his fitness; see chapter six). The attitude Neil had adopted throughout his working life was of greater importance to him than its products, and enjoying a comfortable retirement, any money he had in his bank and savings accounts became almost meaningless to him: as he said, "it's only money, I might not live that long to spend it...it may be a lot to you, you're a student, but to me it's only numbers in a bank account". Another shedder shared this understanding of the importance of financial security: "money can buy you happiness, to an extent, but as long as you're comfortable it's alright. I mean, my

pension's not that generous, but me and [my wife] both got a lump sum so we can do what we want". Importantly though, to achieve this comfort, "you have to work, you can't just sit about doing nothing".

The norm among participants at the Men's Shed was one of hard work and self-reliance, with legitimacy achieved through earning one's keep and managing how it was spent. Such norms, those of the self-made man, of course have deep historical roots, being among the most enduring characterological and behavioural aspects of masculinity (Catano, 2001; Kimmel, 2006). Though they had reached the end of their individual hegemonic masculinity scripts, and lacked the cultural legitimacy employment imbues upon men, participants could still proudly reflect upon their achievements and continue to assert the attitude underlying their previous practice. As an aspect of their aged masculinity, it is unsurprising that these attitudes, enacted throughout the lives of participants, endured in the present as an uncomplicated form of internal continuity (Atchley, 1989), and that this aspect of selfhood found a new medium for expression in an organisation such as the Men's Shed. In the socio-cultural context of neo-liberalism and the crisis view of population ageing, these attitudes served as a means of establishing a self-reliant status in later life. In the local-level context of the Men's Shed, they served to demonstrate the individual's suitability for inclusion in a group which valued above all the willingness to utilise one's particular skills to contribute towards the collective. The counterpart to this was participants' disdain for those considered free-riders, those who gained the benefits of other's work without themselves contributing, and again this translated into their assessments of non-contributors at the Men's Shed (see chapter eight). It can therefore be concluded that although the purpose of participant's conduct (generally, the development and flourishing of the Men's Shed) reflected a communitarian, rather than an individualistic stance, both the specific means and the underlying attitudes structuring its pursuit demonstrated the practice of, respectively, external and internal continuity.

Men and Women

All participants had been married to women during their lives, and the vast majority remained so, typically having been for decades. Participants obviously

loved their wives, and those who had lost them missed them deeply. In this sense, their relationships were mutually supportive, and by no means lacking in respect, but nevertheless could be understood as structured according to traditional gender norms. Participants humorously considered the domestic sphere to be under the control of their wives, referred to jokingly as the 'boss' or the 'management', who organised the household and cared for their husband. One shedder even asserted that this 'natural routine' contributed to older women's better health, due to the lack of any sharp break in continuity of the kind men experience on retirement. Like the notion of the self-made man, the marital home being the domain of women is an attitude steeped in history, structuring a social arrangement existing for many years, and one which participants were comfortable with (Russell, 2007). Due to this demarcation, an important function of the Men's Shed was relieving underfoot syndrome, the tension that can arise within marriages following the husband's retirement and greater presence in the home (Golding *et al*, 2008). The Men's Shed firstly allowed participants to conducts projects their wives would rather they did not do at home. Participants, one shedder said, "want to carry on stuff they've been doin', but they either don't have the tools, or their wives won't let 'em do it in the house" (though this was not as problematic for those that had their own workshops). One shedder, who visited the Men's Shed to work on a crossbow, noted in a promotional video:

> *"I'm using the Men's Shed to do this [make a crossbow], because, well essentially, my wife got fed up with large lumps of wood under the bed and wood shavings all over the house, and um, the Men's Shed came up as a project and my wife immediately shooed me out of the door and said take your wood there, so here I am".*

Secondly, the Men's Shed allowed participants to simply get out of their wife's way for a few hours, granting them time to engage in their own, typically feminine, activities:

> *Arnold: "The good thing is, when the husbands come along, it gets them out the bloody way".*

> *Steve: "Oh, my wife likes me coming here, it gives her some space".*

> *Andy: "Yes, my wife's fine with it, it keeps me out of her hair".*

> *Anthony: "I only come here because my wife says get out of the road".*

Peter: "I like coming up here to the Shed, it's great, plus the fact that it gi'es my wife a chance to get on with the housework, saves her worrying, saying 'would you get your feet out the road, I'm brushing'. Okay, sorry dear, it's like that".

Ben: "My wife makes me come to the Men's Shed, she gets angry when I don't come. She's not sitting at home while I'm here, she's out shopping".

Derek: "I come to the Shed to avoid going shopping with my wife! But seriously, she is delighted with the Shed, it gets me out of her hair, and she can get on with what she wants to do without me bugging her".

According to participants' reporting of their wives' attitudes, their attendance at the Men's Shed was fully supported. Indeed, participant's wives appeared to be a vital motivating factor. As one board member noted, whenever he discussed the Men's Shed with mixed groups, "the men'd be saying 'no, no, I don't need that, I don't need that', and all the wives'd be nodding their heads, saying 'yes you do'"![3] Similarly, another board member stressed that "women are particularly enthusiastic [about the Men's Shed] and usually follow it up with their men", encouraging them to give it a go, both for their husband's sake, and to enjoy their own free time.

The roles typical to underfoot syndrome (a man getting under a woman's feet) can be reversed, as in one shedder's experience. Having retired before his wife, he attended to jobs around his house, and was ably conducting them until his wife's retirement: "my wife's retiring was the worst thing she ever did. When I'm doing a job at the house, she'll be hanging around, trying to supervise. I have to say to her, look, I got on fine before...just leave me to do it, get out of the way"! In the following extract, Andy generalised this complaint:

Joe: "It seems like the railway group go as slow as molasses, they just get a little done each time".

Andy: "Oh, but that's fine! At the Shed you go at your own pace, you can take your time and do your own thing. It's not like at home, where the wife's on your case, asking 'is that not finished yet'? You come here of your own freewill, there's no pressure here". (Fieldnotes, 4th December 2013)

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[3] For newcomers, the trepidation apparent here was common, stemming from fears about fitting in (see chapter five), and because, as the management team recognised, the expression of neediness is decidedly un-masculine. It was, therefore imperative, as one member put it, to "never tell a man he needs help", but rather "ask him if he can help us", as the former assaulted their conception of self-reliance, while the latter emphasised the need for their skills, offering them a place within the group and immediately imparting collective attitudinal norms.

Andy here highlighted the ethos of no pressure, alongside the concurrent notion of participant's 'freewill'. Attending the Men's Shed is something a man chooses to do, giving himself freely, unlike in the domestic sphere, in which the husband has to avoid not only being under the feet, but also, as several shedders put it, 'under the thumb', a situation whereby a man is humorously judged as being overly controlled by their wife. In both these examples though, alongside that in chapter three, the home is (somewhat humorously) conceived as a women's space, in which the husband assumes, in relation to domestic management, a subordinate position (Russell, 2007). This gendered understanding is also apparent in the typically feminine activities participant's wives were reported to engage in, things like shopping and housework, activities that men stereotypically do not enjoy. One shedder, for example, proudly informed participants that he never did Christmas shopping, another had never been into a new local shopping mall, and others balked at the suggestion that they would conduct domestic cleaning duties. As discussed in chapter four, participants were reluctant to conduct certain cleaning duties around the Men's Shed, with hoovering being particularly associated with femininity. One shedder, who was informed by his colleagues that he would "make a good wife for someone" on account of his workshop cleaning role, humorously took offence when it was implied he also did the hoovering at home (as I took on cleaning responsibilities in the social area, this phrase was also directed towards me on several occasions). Other participants similarly stressed that they would not vacuum at home, while a single shedder joked about getting a female lodger at his home, in order that she could do his housework, and enquired as to why the Men's Shed did not employ a maid to fetch the tea and do the cleaning. Men attended the Men's Shed to engage in typically masculine technical practices, while their wives were granted the time to engage in typically feminine practices, in both cases activities they enjoyed and were proficient in. In participants' understanding, such arrangements were entirely normal and acceptable, merely reflecting the different interests of men and women (Goffman, 1977).

Ageing, and the possibilities of ill health and death it entailed, meant that participant's standard domestic arrangements were not immune to change. A small number of participants had experienced significant alterations in their marital relationships due to their wives' health difficulties, and had taken on

caring duties for them. Having been married for decades, there was no doubt that these men wholeheartedly loved their wives, and in caring for them, stressed that they were simply doing their duty, as any loving husband would (Calasanti & Bowen, 2006; Ribeiro *et al*, 2007). The Men's Shed thus became hugely valuable to these men, as a space in which they could engage in 'me time'. In the context of these shifting domestic roles, Peter held a series of 'cooking for one' classes during the early stages of the fieldwork, which reflected a concern for how changes in the marital relationship could affect men. During these lessons, he brought in a portable stove and taught participants how to cook simple meals using one core ingredient, such as salmon, sausages, or mince. Questioned on his motives in a promotional video, he responded:

> *"The cooking? It's for the likes of guys on their own, they just lost their partner or wife, or divorced, or witever, and a lot of 'em, they're completely lost, when it comes tae cooking, comes tae kitchen work, they're completely lost, and so you come in and gi'e them a hand, an idea how to dae things".*

These classes allowed Peter to demonstrate his cheffing skills while also highlighting an important older men's health issue, as he stressed during the introduction to the first class:

> *"There's a lotta guys who know next tae nothing about how tae cook, guy's who'll say, 'oh the wife's always done the cooking', and when the wife's gone, or jus' if they're single, too many men just turn to eating crap. They see the bakers, the chipper, and they think, I'll jus' pick up a pie or a fish supper, and this can ruin your health. They're just puttin' so much crap intae their bodies, that's why we've got all this obesity and heart problems these days".*

Cooking, or indeed any form of kitchen work, is here conceived primarily as a women's role, something not even considered by men, and certain participants lived up to this, with one shedder, for example, stating that "I've never cooked for myself, my wife's always done it...my wife doesn't let me anywhere near the kitchen, I wouldn't know what to do". Peter did not challenge this gender norm; his classes were geared towards men who had to cook out of necessity, when a woman was no longer present or able to do so (Additionally, it can be noted that these classes highlight the supportive environment concerning men's health existing at the Men's Shed; see chapter six).

For participants who had lost their wives, through death or divorce, recalling the familiarity of intimate routines could be an emotional experience, as in the following discussion:

> *Ed: "Is she still with you"?*
>
> *Rick: "No, no, but sometimes I think she is. I'll be sitting in the chair there, and I'll just turn to her [Rick turns his head in his chair]. It's cus you've done it so often, and then you remember, she's not there anymore, it's hard.*
>
> *Neil: "With [Neil's wife], I still think she's there sometimes, even after fourteen years. If you dream, you wake up and turn to her, [Neil imitates turning to his wife in bed], oh, but she's not there. I still do that to this day...it can be hard, thinking she's still there, when she's not, and my neighbour, he's the same, he cries in the night, but she's gone".*
>
> *We sit for thirty seconds or so, Neil stares at nothing in particular, a slight melancholy etched on his face, then he says:*
>
> *"It's usually the men that go first, but it's harder for the men if their wife dies, they've got nowhere to go, they go home and shut the door, they're alone. With the women, they can go round to each other's house, like they've always done, and talk about it...it's hard for men, if they've got nobody to talk to, you see it even with animals, I saw a programme the other day, and it was a lion and a deer I think, and it looked after it, you can see there, even animals need company".* (Fieldnotes, 28th July 2014)

These men, although participating in some of the more humorous discussions regarding gender differences, nevertheless felt comfortable about reflecting seriously on the deep love they felt, and the companionship they had lost. Living with their wives for the majority of their lives, the jarring discontinuity of changed circumstances was intensely difficult, and it should therefore be reasserted that the stressing of gender differentiation in the marital relationship in no way implied a lack of love and respect. Neil felt that men find coping with bereavement harder than women, as they can openly express their difficulties among their friends, whereas men are more likely to grieve privately, as he and his neighbour did, yet another perceived difference between men and women. Indeed, the loss of his wife plunged Neil into despair, and the recovery narrative applicable to him was prompted at least partly by this break in continuity (see chapter six). The Men's Shed was in no way a 'replacement', but it could stave off the loneliness stemming from living alone, and provide opportunities for discussing one's concerns with men who had had similar experiences, in a context

in which the maintenance of an explicit masculine front was unnecessary (Davidson, 2013; Foley, 2014).

A Man's Space

The perceived fundamental differences between men and women is clear in participants' views regarding their personal relationships, and this also extended to more general discussions. Light-hearted humour was frequently utilised to assert gender differences, typically drawing on well-worn stereotypes, such as that of the incompetent woman driver. The following shedder's joke was typical:

> *"There was a woman, she wasn't getting the expected miles per gallon in her Ford Anglia, so she took it into a mechanic. Now he runs it, he doesn't find any problems, so he asks her to show him her usual driving style. She gets into the car, and drives away with her handbag on the clutch"!*

Another shedder would take in printed chain emails humorously outlining the differences between men and women, for example:

> *"WICOE (Women In Charge Of Everything) is proud to announce the opening of its EVENING CLASSES FOR MEN! Due to the complexity and level of difficulty, each course will accept a maximum of eight participants".*

Classes noted included "LIVING WITH ADULTS: BASIC DIFFERENCES BETWEEN YOUR MOTHER AND YOUR WIFE: Online class and role playing", as well as "GETTING OVER IT: HOW TO LIVE WITH BEING WRONG ALL THE TIME: Individual counsellors available", and "IS IT GENETICALLY IMPOSSIBLE TO SIT QUIETLY AS SHE PARALLEL PARKS: Driving simulation". These were passed around the tea table and adorned the walls of the Men's Shed, humorously reinforcing aspects of differentiation not as immediately apparent in the technically oriented, overtly masculine physical environment. Participants shared the opinion that the facilities and activities available within the Men's Shed were, as several shedders put it, 'man things', with one shedder proffering a typical view, while also stressing the environment of offence he felt existed in contemporary society:

> *"There's so much worry about offending people these days, you can't say anything, but the point is, the things here are male oriented, that's just the way it is, it's always been like that. Men and women are into different things, so it's not surprising that there are different spaces for them".*

Asked about the possibility of women using the Men's Shed's facilities, another shedder stressed the difficulty of workshop activities, and questioned women's capability for involvement given the degree of skill required. As he put it, "the women are taking over, but I would say, if they want to come in here, just tell them it's hard, the things they do through there in the workshop are hard". He therefore felt that "if you let them in, they wouldn't want to come back after a few weeks. It's difficult, you see".

Participants agreed with the management team's assessment of the interactional differences between men and women. One shedder, for example, stressed that "women are far more sociable than men", as they can meet and chat for no particular reason, whereas men require a topic around which they can indirectly express their homosocial desire, such as sports, drinking alcohol, or the activities available at the Men's Shed (Kiesling, 2005). As one board member said in a promotional video, "my wife goes out every week for a coffee, she goes out once a month for dinner or lunch, she goes out in the evening to various clubs. I don't have that, and I find that very difficult". Participants also agreed with the management team's assessment regarding the lack of social spaces available to men. One shedder felt that "women have enough spaces of their own", while another questioned why female-exclusive spaces are not criticised in the manner the Men's Shed occasionally was. As he said:

> "We haven't really had any women coming in wanting to use the place, and I actually think it would spoil it if you let women in, it wouldn't be the same. You get things like the WRI, the Women's Rural Institute, and that's all women, and nobody says anything about that...[the Men's Shed] is the same as that".

Challenged on the male-exclusivity of the Men's Shed, one shedder responded by noting an example of perceived female-exclusivity he had experienced:

> "About ten years ago, when I first had my health difficulties, I tried to go into a bums and tums class, cus I needed to get fit. So I'm there in my vest and shorts, and I got asked to leave, apparently I was making the women uncomfortable, they didn't feel they could wear their lycra leggings or whatever while I was there. I needed to lose weight with the condition, but I had to find another way to do it".

Though this fitness class was not officially female-exclusive, it was nevertheless a female-dominated environment, and this gender-exclusivity facilitated comfort

and ease for members; the Men's Shed, this shedder stressed, was really no different. One shedder's solution should women come into the Men's Shed reflected this notion of comfort in homosociality, from the male point of view: "if a group of women do come in, just tell 'em we're having a discussion about prostate cancer, that would ha'e them fleeing pretty quickly"! Though the Men's Shed was explicitly geared towards technical activities, the similarities between participants prompted an openness that has not always been apparent in male-exclusive groups. In this instance, it was highlighted that participants' preoccupations can and did extend beyond the workshop, into areas that women may find distasteful. Men's health, particularly a topic as sensitive as the prostate, was understood as a men's issue, and the Men's Shed, a space in which these issues found local expression, was therefore rightly men only.

Most women were thought to understand the necessity of male exclusivity, and from my limited interactions with participant's wives, this appeared true. Like their husbands, they particularly noted the underfoot syndrome argument, the mutually beneficial nature of their husband's routine absences from the home, and the need men have for time and space to pursue 'men's' interests.[4] It was also stressed that the Men's Shed was not entirely closed to women, as participant's wives regularly attended social events. As one shedder put it: "see how we get over it, we have these social events, the wives come, they get to see what the men are up to". At the first Men's Shed Burns supper (24th January 2014), Dan took this point literally, reading out a poem he wrote informing the assembled group of participant's wives of what occurs within the organisation:

> *'Men Shed'*
>
> *To the Men Shed they let us go,*
> *For that we thank our lassies,*
> *But what we do there, they do not know,*
> *So we must tell them about our classes.*
>
> *We do benches, tables, and funny chairs,*
> *But added to that there is much mair,*
> *Engines, cooking and model railways,*
> *And new friendships along the way.*

---

[4] Considering the point of male-exclusivity in relation to participant's wives, one board member also stated that "if we did let women in, a lot of the wives wouldn't let their men come here". Male-exclusivity was thought to grant peace of mind to participant's wives, as they could be sure their husbands were not socialising with other women while at the Men's Shed.

We meet three times during the week,
And projects small or large we seek,
Ye can pop in and have a chat,
And know you will be welcome back.

We stop for tea two times a day,
And the crack is good I have to say,
The Shed no doubt improves our lives,
But it is fine to go home to the wife.

The member's board deserve our applause,
For developing and progressing this just cause,
We will continue to support and as you know,
The Men Shed concept will always grow.

Consistent with the notion that participant's wives assumed a degree of control over their husband's actions, Dan expressed thanks that they allowed them to go the Men's Shed. Once inside though, one enters a secret world of 'funny' men's things, their chairs, engines, and model railways, the toys, that another of Mark's comedic printouts noted, that men can legitimately play with throughout their lives. However, for Dan, this is secondary to the (homo)social aspects of the organisation, the 'crack' and the warm 'welcome back' one is sure to receive. In concluding his explanation though, Dan recognised the Men's Shed to be somewhat of a fantasy space. While it may be enjoyable to take one's time working on a project, going home to one's wife is ultimately what a man needs.

Aside from social events, women had to have a legitimate reason for their presence. They may be commissioning a project, seeking help with a technical problem, bringing, as one local women did (described by one board member as the "fairy godmother of the Shed") home bakes, or acting as a carer for a male companion. In these cases, benefits accrued from the temporary presence of women, and those adopting these roles were treated accordingly. On the rare occasions that a woman was present without a reason, their acceptance was based upon their adherence to gendered behavioural norms reflective of the perceived differences between the interests and capacities of men and women. To those questioning male-exclusivity, it could therefore be stated, in one shedder's words, that "we have women in here all the time", and he was correct in the sense that they were *women*. Only once during the fieldwork was a woman perceived as crossing the line, when a participant's wife came in and cleaned the kitchen following a social event during which she had witnessed its filthy state.

She then proceeded to sit at the table during a tea break, an unknowingly provocative action that enraged participants. One shedder, for example, stated that "I hope this doesn't become a regular thing, when she was sat there, even the conversations changed, we can't allow this anymore". This participant's wife, although fulfilling a traditional gender role, had taken the initiative in a contextually unacceptable manner, and then interrupted participants' tea break. She acted as a man would in the Men's Shed, affecting participants' ability to act as men, anathema to a group that met, fundamentally, for this very purpose. However, when pushed to explain why a women's presence caused conversation to change, participants were unforthcoming, considering it a subtle, largely unexplainable, but devastatingly real shift. One board member did, however, stress that a woman's presence would restrict men's openness regarding sensitive health topics: "couples need their own space occasionally and the inclusion of women would change the nature of the conversation and certainly hinder discussions on medical problems". On the rare occasions in which women enquired about using the workshop, the 'inner sanctum' lying beyond the more multi-purpose social area, they were simply informed that it was male-exclusive, and turned away. The single time this rule was breached during the fieldwork occurred when another participant's wife, as he put it, 'crossed the threshold', and helped him put the finishing touches to a notice board he was making for a community group. She brought in one of the few tools the Men's Shed lacked, an iron, to apply one of the few skills participants lacked, ironing out the creases of the felt used to back the notice board.

Heterosexuality

Elaborate sexual storytelling often functions as a means of homosocial bonding among groups of younger men. In-depth reporting of sexual exploits, outlining the 'conquest's' aesthetic appeal, the pursuit of said conquest, and the mechanics of the sexual act, can serve to position the individual favourably within the group's 'pecking order' (Bird, 1996; Kimmel, 1994; Flood, 2008). Such overt expression of heterosexuality were largely absent at the Men's Shed; Page 3 was giggled at, rather than slathered over, and sex was approached through generalised, often self-directed humour, for example, above the toilet a sign was hung proclaiming 'please stand closer. It's shorter than you think'. In a similar

vein, jokes were made concerning the use of Viagra, not for enhanced sexual performance, but to stop oneself peeing on one's shoes, or rolling out of the bed when sleeping. Innuendo was a further frequent source of humour, functioning as a common means of vaguely asserting heterosexuality and confirming gender differentiation when women were present. There was certainly plenty of opportunities for such humour in an environment full of 'tools', 'shafts', 'rubbing', 'screwing', the 'Swedish model/blonde' (a Swedish-made workbench), and 'kitty' (the KITY combination woodworking machine), the joke being that it would be difficult for participants to explain to their wives exactly what they were doing at the Men's Shed. While guaranteed to generate laughter, this kind of light sexual humour demanded no intimate details of participant's sexual activity. This lack of in-depth discussion served to differentiate the group from younger men, and rendered individual sexual endeavours inconsequential to the dominant form of aged masculinity, the legitimate means of establishing one's manhood, within the group.

Bradley provided a notable exception to this coyness, considering his appeal to women as a defining aspect of his masculine identity that had not declined with age. He had, he informed me, always enjoyed the company of women, and was experienced in engaging with them:

> *"I'm very good with women, see, what they want is human contact, they want you to be close to them, they don't get that with all these younger men, they're always out drinking. I can offer them excitement. Women, I think, they want to be taken out, they want swept off their feet, that's what they want in their life, I can take them out for a nice meal, that's what I can give them".*

Bradley enjoyed regaling his fellow shedders with stories of his youthful misadventures in the clubs he used to frequent, and sought to highlight his continued attraction to and for women in the present. His youthful physicality had, he felt, been superseded in later life by a more measured approach to courtship, and a fuller comprehension of the means necessary to attract women. This understanding mirrors, in the area of heterosexual relationships. Spector-Mersel's (2006) understanding of the differing conceptions of power men wield in the workplace as they grow older, and the source of labour shifts from the hands to the mind. Despite his recent health and relational difficulties (see chapter six), the maturation of his understanding allowed Bradley to establish a

favourable comparison between himself and younger men, in a manner similar to Coles and Vassarotti's (2012) participants. He felt that he could offer women a more traditional conception of romance, a deeper and more fulfilling engagement than his younger counterparts, concerned as they were with drinking to excess.

Given the informal strictures imposed upon in-depth discussions regarding sexual practice, Bradley's opportunities to express himself in this area were somewhat limited, though he did find an ostensibly kindred spirit in Ed. Together, they were positioned as the Men's Shed's resident jokers, from whom robust 'banter' that playfully skirted the line between humour and offence could be sought (thus serving a valuable function for certain participants, who sought to re-experience interactional forms previously enjoyed in the workplace; see chapter nine). Their regular 'performances' occasionally escalated into disparaging sexual remarks about women, mimicking the kind of in-depth sexual storytelling engaged in by groups of younger men, a point which Ed was aware of:

> *"You always used to boast about how many women you'd been with, you always used to exaggerate it in front of your mates, you'd say 'yes, I was with all these beautiful girls', but really, there's no way of telling whether it's true or not. Do younger guys still do that, do you still do that these days"?*

For Bradley, discussions around this topic, although the details may be exaggerated or fabricated, allowed him to assert, to his peers, what remained an important aspect of his masculine identity. In contrast, Ed comprehended the interactional function of such discussions, the fact that overt sexual humour could be utilised to assert his intra-group status, thus rendering his involvement, in which he never directly referred to his own sexual prowess, somewhat tongue-in-cheek. Through engaging with Bradley, Ed found a reliable means of demonstrating his ribald sense of humour, allowing him to live up to his status as the joker in the pack, as a pusher of boundaries, through the deliberate contravention of the informal taboo regarding in-depth discussions of sexual activity. It is important to recall though, that this kind of overtly sexual discussion was largely restricted to Bradley and his partner-in-crime Ed, forming part of their repertoire, in the eyes of other participants, as the Men's Shed's resident comedians. While they enjoyed laughing along, other participants typically

remained as observers rather than directly engaging with the crude substance of the discussions. Indeed, for Bradley and Ed, their predilection for off colour humour came at the expense of perceptions of them as unserious men (Klapp, 1949). Far from boosting them up the 'pecking order' (Bird, 1996), their willingness to engage in this kind of overtly sexual discussion differentiated them from the dominant aged masculinity existing among participants, for whom the stressing of one's sexual endeavours was inconsequential. In general terms, it is therefore fair to conclude that the organisational culture of the Men's Shed, the manifestation of the dominant form of aged masculinity existing among participants, was positively differentiated from the overtly heterosexual hegemonic form apparent among groups of younger men.

Conclusion

In areas in which a reasonable approximation remained viable, participants continued to adhere to hegemonic norms, an observation that lends empirical support to Coles and Vassarotti's (2012) suggestion of this point. Participants took pride in their occupational success and self-reliance, and though they had reached the end of successful hegemonic masculinity scripts, they could look back fondly on their achievements, and continue utilising their skills at the Men's Shed, though they were directed towards a different end. Likewise, in their marital relationships, they could, by asserting the perceived fundamental differences between men and women, reinforce their symbolic distinction, distinguishing themselves as men, engaging in 'men's' activities, in a men's space which they controlled, as they had done when employed (Bourdieu, 2001; Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009). Having a successful career, and engaging in a heterosexual relationship exhibiting clearly distinct gender roles, are both central 'markers of manhood' (Kimmel, 1994) in the lives of men concerned to adhere to hegemonic norms, and the conservation of these elements was typically straightforward. Most participants were happily married and had achieved lifelong financial independence, affording them the opportunity to pursue the lifestyles to which they had become accustomed. For the majority who were retired, the Men's Shed provided an occupational replacement exhibiting conservation, in the use of knowledge and skills in a contribution-based male-exclusive environment, and a sought after change, in the lack of pressure. For those still desiring employment,

their knowledge and skills ensured they could return to fulfilling roles on their own terms. Retirement can also have negative consequences for the marital relationship, potentially fostering underfoot syndrome, a situation stemming from the dissolution of men's long-established working routines. The Men's Shed provided participants, and by implication their wives, with a consistent routine that mimicked but was less rigid than those of their working lives. In cases of widowhood or divorce, discontinuity in the form of a loss of companionship could be openly discussed and, to an extent, practically remedied. While ageing inevitably engenders change, in these areas at least, the threat of discontinuity was successfully neutered through involvement at the Men's Shed. Through both the quasi-work nature of the activities conducted, and the routine engendered by regular attendance, the organisation provided a novel context that facilitated the enactment, and reinforced the veracity, of familiar behavioural, attitudinal, and relational norms mirroring those of the main field of masculinity (Coles, 2008, 2009).

6

Health and Wellbeing

The body is a primary resource for 'doing gender' (West & Zimmerman, 1987) among younger men, allowing for the projection and enactment of a masculine identity aligned with the muscular, powerful, hegemonic ideal (Dutton, 1995; Pope *et al*, 2000; Wienke, 1998). As a resource utilised to facilitate a dominant status, the body can be considered a physical form of capital valuable both in itself, and for its potential convertibility into economic, cultural, and social capital, though this capacity typically declines with age (Coles & Vassarotti, 2012; Shilling, 2012). Alongside the maintenance of size, shape, and appearance, the management of embodiment, in particular the individual's response to changing physical capacities, is also subject to assessment in the field of masculinity (Coles, 2008, 2009). On this point, biological ageing, a universal experience among participants at the Men's Shed, has been demonstrated to prompt varying reactions. Individuals may choose to adhere to hegemonic norms that lionise stoicism in the face of ill health, or alternatively they may seek knowledge and medical aid in order that the body remains a viable basis for the enactment of masculinity in other areas of life (Springer & Mouzon, 2011; Tannenbaum & Frank, 2011). Throughout the fieldwork, an openness indicative of a willingness to understand and combat health issues prevailed among participants, without any specific prompting; as one board member put it, "we don't try to force it, it just happens". Initially this was limited to simple statements regarding declining physical capacities, for example, one shedder reported that he required a banister to climb his stairs, while another had trouble getting up from the sofa. Knees were said to be 'buggered', skin was stretched, the sense of smell was 'shot', fine motor skills declined, 'senior moments' were frequently experienced, and the rattling of pills in pockets, as one shedder put it, "sound[ed] like a maraca". Generally, participant's health adhered to one shedder's self-appraisal, as "not what it used to be"; lifting, running, and the ability to consume excessive amounts of alcohol were all among the capacities lost to age. Participants shared similarly pragmatic

views regarding these physical changes, rendering their commonalities an important point of 'bounded solidarity', the powerful form of camaraderie that is the "emergent product of a common fate" (Portes, 1998:8). Recognition of this 'common fate' allowed participants to both offer advice and support to their fellow shedders, and receive it from others in kind.

Ageing and Physical Change

That the passing of time altered physical capacities was generally accepted by participants, at least after the fact. Prior to the actual experience of ageing, participants admitted a degree of, if not ignorance, certainly doubt that they would find themselves in their current state, as if ageing had crept up and surprised them. As one shedder dramatically put it, "when you're younger, I mean I looked at my aunties and uncles, you never think you'll be as old as them, but now I fucking am, I'm fucking seventy"! Despite immediate familial evidence of ageing, this shedder found it difficult to imagine himself undergoing the process until it actually occurred, a problem Dennis noted in general terms when discussing his initial introduction to the concept of Men's Sheds in a promotional video:

> *"I didn't really understand that there was a problem, because of course when you're in your twenties, thirties, forties, you're never gonna get old, it's never gonna happen to you, you're so busy with your life…maybe looking after your family, or becoming the managing director of the firm, or travelling the world. You're never gonna retire, what is that thing, that distant thing that never happens, you're so busy doing all the time".*

In Dennis' view, a man's life is busy spent 'doing', pursuing a hegemonic masculinity script (Spector-Mersel, 2006) and living so resolutely in the present that retirement appears a "distant thing that never happens", and hence is not always planned for as it should be. His personal motivation for establishing a national Men's Shed Association in Scotland took this into account, as he asked "what about when I'm seventy, what will I do? I want a Shed"! Through establishing a national network of Men's Sheds, and inculcating positive and widespread regional-level conceptions of their purpose, Dennis aimed to remove the surprise, the element of the unknown, from retirement (as well as other changes prompting discontinuity, such as unemployment and armed forces discharge). He sought to provide, for himself and every other man in Scotland,

comfort in the knowledge that they will have somewhere beyond the workplace to call their own.

This naivety regarding personal change is also apparent in relation to participants' understandings of their bodies and health, as one shedder noted in discussing a standard folly of youth, that of perceived invincibility:

> "I can't go skiing anymore, my knees can't take the stress of it. Both my knees are in pretty bad shape actually...that's the thing, you don't think that you'll ever get injured when you're young, you think you're invincible, it's only when you get older you realise that's not the case...I can't go sailing either, I can't get the boat in and out of the water because of my knees".

This shedder had to withdraw from his previous sporting engagements because his body no longer allowed him to pursue them (Coles & Vassarotti, 2012). Such physical changes are, however, comprehended only through experience, and even this may be misinterpreted, as in the following extract:

> Neil: "I was just having a chat with Thomas about prostates, he enlightened me about his prostate, and I enlightened him about mine...I got it seen to in the early nineties. I didn't get it seen to at first, I thought it was normal for a man of my age...I was playing golf after a couple of pints, I went into the bushes to pee, and I was taking a long time, so my friend calls out, and I'm still in the bushes, just trickling out! He told me it wasn't normal, so I went to the doctor...when you're in your middle-ages, you should get it checked regularly, you shouldn't think it's just normal...your prostate is normally supposed to be the size of a walnut, but mine was the size of a peach [Neil makes a large 'O' shape using both thumbs and forefingers]. That was the one time I was bigger than usual"!

> Thomas: "I wish I got my hearing aid sooner. You don't realise it, I thought my hearing was normal, but my wife kept on pestering me for a few years, so I went and got it checked out. It's much better now, I can hear the ping of the microwave".

In these reflections on their past health difficulties, neither Neil nor Thomas directly avoided seeking medical attention (Courtenay, 2000), but rather lacked the knowledge to interpret their experiences as requiring of it. They considered changes to their bodies to be 'normal' and hence unworthy of consideration until being informed otherwise by friends and family, following which they willingly sought professional advice.

In the present, participants adopted a pragmatic attitude towards their health, predicated on an intimate self-knowledge of their own bodies. They dismissed

both the stoic denial of the inevitable difficulties of ageing and a fatalistic resignation to frailty and disengagement, instead seeking to closely monitor their health and address any issues as they arose.[1] This adaptive and optimistic stance is apparent in the following extracts, in which participants stressed that the necessity for change need not preclude fulfilment in areas of life both current and novel:

> *Steve: "I've been busy today, I was golfing this morning, then I was out in the garden, then I was at the Shed".*
>
> *Jeremy: "Do you have a handicap"?*
>
> *Steve: "Well I do, officially, but I don't play to it anymore. I can't play as well as I used to, my body won't let me. My legs are gone, I've got no power in my arms, I've got no power in my body anymore. I can only hit it a hundred and fifty yards, and that's with my driver...I lose it on occasion, it really puts you off, but you adapt, you have to adapt, you learn your limitations. I've learnt to use the woods more, get to the green in three and one putt".* (Fieldnotes, 2nd September 2013)

Because he had adapted specific aspects of his game to account for physical decline, Steve retained his competitiveness, within what was a personally important 'domain of proficiency' (Atchley, 1989), even when playing against younger and more physically powerful opponents. Bradley likewise recognised and responded to a specific difficulty he was experiencing, namely the decline of his physical and mental acuity, by taking up video games, as he described during a health talk on Alzheimer's disease:

> *Presenter: "Are there any ways you can lessen the risk [of Alzheimer's disease]"?*
>
> *Bradley: "With the vascular dementia, you can live healthily and that lessens the risks, if you stay active, and speaking with others is good. I actually felt myself going downhill once I retired, so I took up computers, I play these fast-moving games, you're all over the place, and I felt right up there, like a young man again, they keep you sharp. So learning new skills can help".* (Fieldnotes, 19th March 2014)

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[1] The management team's promotional stance regarding men's health issues aligned with this tendency, as health talks provided participants with clear information on which physical signs should cause concern, and how they should be responded to. However, among such a receptive audience, health talks could also elicit a slight hypochondria, as one shedder explained; "yeh, the prostate talk was good, but it got me a bit worried. When you know all the symptoms, you start to notice that you might have them, like ooh, I've had a sore back for a couple of days, ooh, I've been up to pee in the night. It makes you think".

Roger adopted a wider view, focusing on the retention of his general physical capacities, as well as criticising me for my sedentary lifestyle:

> Roger: "I want to keep active, I've started going swimming, just once a week, it's surprising how you can go from six lengths to twenty lengths, so I try to keep busy, get out and about, I come to the Shed, I've got my grandchildren, I see them every week. I mean, I'm seventy years old now".
>
> Jeremy: "You don't look it".
>
> Roger: "Well I know, I want to stay young for as long as possible, I don't want to just sit in front of the television or the computer, you said you do nine hours a day, that's far too much".
>
> Jeremy: "I do try to get out for walks when I can".
>
> Roger: "That's good, but it's better to have half hour bursts than to walk for miles y'know".[2] (Fieldnotes, 4th August 2014)

Whether focusing on and responding to challenges arising in their specific sporting activities, the lived experience of their bodies, or their lives in general, participants took steps to ensure they remained active, flexible, and healthy (Springer & Mouzon, 2011). They clearly expressed an unwillingness to disengage with a world that offered them a fulfilling variety of new opportunities and experiences, whether as grand as cruising the Moskva, a six-week road trip across America, walking the beaches of the Australian Gold Coast, or the simple pleasures of community involvements, be it the Men's Shed, taking on the role of Santa Claus, joining the community council, or acting as a STEM ambassador, visiting schools to promote engineering among young children. These men had much to live for, and pursuing a sedentary, stay at home lifestyle (not least because of underfoot syndrome) was neither a desired nor healthy option. As one board member noted, participants, and, he felt, older men in general, were "not happy with the TV and slippers anymore".

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[2] Other participants also criticised my sedentary lifestyle and the affect it had upon my body. Having assumed my heterosexuality, one shedder frequently commented that I would not be attractive to women in my current condition: 'gosh', he said, patting my stomach, "look at it, you're too large for a young man". I joked that he himself had a large belly, though he justified this based on his age: "come on, I'm an old man, you're still young! I think you need some motivation, yes, you need a girl to chase, you'd be amazed. I think you should try swimming, that'll drop right off". As a younger man, I was expected to be fitter than I was, in contrast to participants, for whom operating in the field of aged masculinity provided sufficient reason for a degree of belt-loosening. As Bird (1996) recognises, even those men who cannot adhere to hegemonic norms are aware of and will utilise them in assessments of others they feel should adhere to these standards.

Universalisation

The success of the Men's Shed depended on the establishment of intra-group bonding social capital, achieved through the expression of experiential and attitudinal similarities (Putnam, 2000). In this sense, the collective recognition of shifting physical capacities functioned as an important point of bounded solidarity among participants, a commonality of experience prompting understanding and sympathy for their fellow shedders. Contrary to popular notions, participants were not afraid to share their experiences, because they operated in the field of aged masculinity, in which the standards applied to men's bodies fall below those of the hegemonic ideal (Coles & Vassarotti, 2012). In this environment, it became apparent that the disclosure of health issues served not to differentiate, but rather to equalise, in two directions. Theirs were neither bodies adhering to the hegemonic ideal, nor, for the majority, bodies that restricted involvement at the Men's Shed or most other valued areas of practice. A common strategy I observed, particularly during the early stages of the fieldwork when participants were seeking aspects of commonality, was therefore what I termed 'universalisation'. This strategy involved participants recognising the decline of their physical capacities, while also either highlighting the (intra-group) universality of this, or being informed of it by other participants:

> Joe: *"There's nobody here that's a perfectly fit guy, we've all got some problem or other, some of us may have dementia already and we don't even know about it".*

> Joe: *"When you get to our age, you will find that everyone has some sort of health problem".*

> Joe: *"Sometimes there's a sense of 'mine's worse than yours'".*

> Graham: *"Yes, I think we've all experienced that".*

> Steve: *"Don't worry about that, it happens to all of us, believe me".*

> Arnold: *"We've all got something".*

> Anthony: *"We're all a bit creaky here".*

> Cliff: *"When you're old like us, you feel the cold more".*

The terms utilised here ('everyone', 'all of us', 'old like us', each referring to the conclusion of a different discussion) served to reassure the individual that the

physical difficulties they were experiencing were points of similarity, rather than differentiation. Similarly, participants conducted regular pill counts, where they would compare the amount and variety of pills they took daily; like the general creakiness each experienced, taking pills was a collective aspect of their experience of ageing, and was recognised as such.

There was tremendous power in these simple affirmations of similarity, primarily because they encouraged openness. There was no shame or emasculation in discussing age-based health issues, because the universalisation strategy ensured everyone that experiencing some form of physical deficiency was the norm in the context of the Men's Shed. As Goffman (1990) observes, this strategy is commonly witnessed among groups of stigmatised individuals. Those he terms 'the own' share common experience of the discrediting characteristic, while for the purposes of this enquiry, I acted as 'the wise', a 'normal' individual 'intimately privy' to the group and their difficulties. In a discussion about clumsiness, for example, I was considered anomalous for apparently not yet suffering from it, as one shedder noted, "this will all be strange to you, the clumsiness, it comes with old age"; again, the notion of age-specific physical standards and capabilities is apparent here. Even relatively serious issues, such as a lack of speech, were classified along a continuum including more general issues; for example, one newcomer, who communicated via a text-to-speech app, was told by one shedder that "your disability is not an issue here. When you get to our age, all these guys have something wrong with them, it's just in your case it's a little more noticeable". In this instance, the universalisation strategy was used to reassure the newcomer that should he attend regularly, his disability would not differentiate him from other participants. On the contrary, it would actually bring him closer to them, as everyone suffered from some issue or other, a lack of speech was merely a 'more noticeable' instance. In the local-level context of the Men's Shed, participants' conception of 'normal ageing' (Atchley, 1989) therefore tended towards inclusivity, recognising that what were understood as the inevitable physical limitations engendered by ageing manifested in various manners, and tended towards 'pathological ageing' only when they precluded competent independent action, as discussed in chapter four.

In this general environment of openness borne of similar experience, participants were granted opportunities to seek advice from others regarding even the most challenging of health issues, granting them reassurance that they were not facing their condition alone. In a promotional video in which he discussed what he felt were the purposes of the Men's Shed, Peter stressed the importance of this:

> *"I know a guy who's jus' had a triple bypass, am supposed to be going in fer one, and I'm a wee bitte apprehensive aboot this, wonderin' what'll happen, I think I'll ha'e a word with him and see wit he says, wit's happenin', and a' the rest o' it. But we need tae know, that there's somebody there who's been through that, they've had the experience so they can turn roond and help you that way. That, to me, is what a Men's Shed's about".*

For conditions more serious than the natural creakiness or pill diet of later life, Peter considered the reassurance that could be found at the Men's Shed through informal discussion to be an absolute necessity; as he said, "we need tae know". Men, traditionally so reluctant to open up about their health, could do so at the Men's Shed in a welcoming and comfortable environment. They could share tips and advice, and inform others of the hardships they had experienced, and how it had altered their capabilities and perceptions. For example, Neil, although older and less able than other participants, relied on his body as a source of masculine identity to a greater extent than other participants (see below), and he was often reassured regarding changes he was experiencing. Peter himself reassured Neil when he began using a hearing aid, offering practical advice and explaining that modern devices were easy to use and barely noticeable, as well as stressing that using one did not indicate the beginnings of a terminal physical decline, as Neil had feared.

Rick likewise discussed his forgetfulness when conversing with Neil, again stressing the commonalities between them, and the unique experiences they engendered:

> *Neil: "I've been having mental problems, I forgot where I kept my driving licence".*
>
> *Rick: "Oh, I can be forgetful too, I'll go upstairs, and I'll forget what I went up for, I'd forget where my glasses are. As my daughter said to me, you have to remember what to remember".*

> *Neil: "The long-term memory, it stays in there, you remember it forever, but the short term is the short term [Neil motions 'in one ear, out the other']".*

> *Rick: "It's funny what you remember, what stays in there, like on my holiday, I enjoyed it, but a few times I was meeting the family, and I couldn't remember what I wanted to say to them".* (Fieldnotes, 24th February 2014)

In both these instances, Neil did not directly seek reassurance, instead merely sharing practical problems he was experiencing with his memory and hearing, but Peter and Thomas, sensing his concern, nevertheless granted it. On the continuum of health issues, these difficulties may have been more severe than the typical aches and pains associated with ageing, but those bearing them nevertheless found others at the Men's Shed who could reassure them that their experiences were, if not universal, certainly not abnormal, nor status-reducing, for men of their age.

Help Seeking

In the open and supportive environment of the Men's Shed, participants could openly discuss even serious health concerns, safe in the knowledge they would be treated respectfully. This encouraged the reporting of all manner of conditions, alongside the expression of a universal inclination towards help seeking. As one shedder put it, participants had "nothing left to prove" in this area, allowing them to forego the damaging stoicism apparent among men concerned to uphold hegemonic norms (Aléx *et al*, 2008; Courtenay, 2000; Tannenbaum & Frank, 2011). The norm among participants, therefore, was quite straightforward, as one shedder put it: "If you're ill, you go to the doctor, it's as simple as that". For example, one shedder reported an occasion on which he had been out drinking, and was unable to pee when he got home. On calling the NHS 24 service, he was told to wait until morning before attending hospital, but, feeling concerned, instead went in, past midnight, and got a catheter fitted, a pragmatic approach that took into account his personal experience of his body, and regarded medical intervention as an uncomplicated necessity. When help was needed, it was sought and utilised straightforwardly; asked by a fellow shedder to put aside 'the bravado' and admit his concern about an upcoming operation, one shedder refused, simply noting "if it's got to be done, it's got to be

done". Likewise, another shedder, asked about a leg injury, said, "I went to the doctor because it wasn't working, and now it is". Participants also encouraged adherence to this simple norm among others:

> Derek: "I've had this sore leg the last few days, I just woke up with a pain in the joint".
>
> Peter: "You should get a knee bandage".
>
> Derek: "Yeh, I've had this for a wee while, it's usually not that bad, but just the other day I woke up and I could hardly stand on it, I couldn't put any weight on it, I don't know what's causing it".
>
> Andy: "Cycling might help you with that, it certainly helped me".
>
> Peter: "Yeh, you need to go to the doctor, see your age is there now".
>
> Clive: "It could be a cartilage problem, those can be serious, you should get to the doctor". (Fieldnotes, 21st October 2013)

Derek frequently reported his knee problem, and was offered advice from other participants on dealing with it. Drawing on his own experience, Andy suggested cycling as a remedy, while Peter and Clive told him to see the doctor right away. Although Derek was slightly younger than the majority of participants, Peter also recognised the process of biological ageing, in his opinion an extra factor requiring consideration (again highlighting a similarity between himself and Derek that the latter had perhaps not considered). Similarly, participants, having learned of the particular health difficulties of others, would intervene on occasions in which they could potentially injure themselves. When one shedder returned to the Men's Shed following an operation, under doctor's orders to avoid strenuous activity, participants did not allow him to engage in any heavy lifting, stressing instead that a helping hand was always available. Likewise, when another shedder, who had a persistent heart condition, reported blood in his stool following a strenuous day chopping wood, he was informed by participants that he should not push himself so hard, even if he enjoyed the work.

While help seeking was a normal and expected behaviour, this did not always entail agreeing with professionals. One shedder, who had been experiencing heart difficulties, rejected his doctor's proposal that he have a pacemaker fitted, arguing, based on monitoring his pill diet, that his breathlessness was better explained by a change in his medication. He was proved correct when he switched

to different pills and found his condition improving. Other participants likewise rejected professional opinion based on the lived experience of their bodies. Peter had suffered heart problems a number of years ago, but continued to lead a full and active life, engaging in various community responsibilities, and caring for his wife and new puppy, despite his doctor's concerns:

> *Jeremy: "You do too much"?*
>
> *Peter: "I've had two doctors telling me that, one of them's told me to stop altogether or I won't be here".*
>
> *Barry: "Yeh, but if you're coming to the Men's Shed, and you're enjoying it, it must be good for you".*
>
> *Peter: "That's it, these doctors are saying they want men to come here, but they don't want me to come. What's that all about"?* (Fieldnotes, 31st January 2014)

Peter's doctor, and his wife, tried to persuade him to slow down, but he was neither willing nor able to. His circumstances, and, concerning the Men's Shed, the tool management duties he had adopted (see chapter nine), mandated his continued involvement, which Barry noted could only be good for him. Matt had experienced significant periods of ill health throughout his life; a skin cancer operation had left a gnarled hollow in his lower back, which he delighted in displaying and inviting me to touch, and he had suffered diabetes for the past decade, which caused various difficulties. With his body 'falling apart', and the various pills he took more annoying than curative, Matt was absent for long periods during the fieldwork, but kept in touch via telephone and always eventually returned with a defiant 'I'm still alive'. While following doctor's orders in managing his diabetes though, he rejected suggestions that he may be undergoing cognitive decline:

> *I am shooting some pool while chatting to Matt, who is sifting through the health leaflets and books laid out on the round table next to the pool table. Seeing a leaflet on back pain, he says 'I've got that', and he then proceeds to point out all the conditions he has on the leaflets: "I've got that, and I've got that, I don't think I've got that, not yet"...he then lifts one up in particular, concerning mental wellbeing, and says:*
>
> > *Matt: "Know the signs of mental distress? I have mental distress with people telling me I have Alzheimer's. I don't, it's low blood sugar levels".*
> >
> > *Jeremy: "Does your doctor think you have it"?*

> *Matt: "Yes, but I don't. I do have gaps, it's not Alzheimer's though. She's obviously not read this American study about blood sugar levels and forgetfulness [Matt takes out a small piece of laminated newspaper from his wallet, a column detailing a study linking sugar depletion to 'senior moments', and hands it to me]. When the blood sugar kicks in, you try to remember something and you just cannot, that's what's causing it".*
> (Fieldnotes, 29th July 2013)

Matt's research had led him to link his forgetfulness to his diabetes, as opposed to his doctor's suspicion of an underlying cognitive deficiency. Like Peter, he willingly sought medical advice, but preferred his own understanding of his body to professional opinion, even carrying evidence with him to support this assessment.

Recovery Narratives

During the fieldwork, several participants experienced episodes of discontinuity that were managed and overcome primarily through their involvement at the Men's Shed. Barry suffered a serious injury in the early stages of the fieldwork, and there was real doubt whether he could ever return to work, frustrating him both because he identified as a self-reliant working man, and because he had lost the daily interaction with members of the community his job allowed for. As chief community fundraiser, Barry was an important figure at the Men's Shed, and following his injury, his attendance increased to the point where he was second only to me. The organisation provided him with a consistent involvement around which he could structure his days, and he could conduct as much 'homework', in the form of writing letters to businesses and sports teams looking for raffle prizes, as he liked. As a highly sociable character, the Men's Shed helped prevent him from 'going loopy' during his layoff, and he stressed that "if it wasn't for the Men's Shed, I'd be tearing my hair out, sitting at home going mad". He acknowledged it as a 'godsend', a means of engaging in goal oriented social interaction with agreeable company, as well as allowing him to vent his frustrations with his treatment. Barry's situation was frequently utilised by members of the management team when promoting the Men's Shed, who highlighted that the organisation was helping him to cope with his injury and providing him with the social interaction his injury otherwise denied him. While Barry adhered to this understanding when required, for example, when council officials visited, he

stressed that fulfilling his personal needs was merely one aspect of his attendance. He also conducted several roles within the Men's Shed, including community fundraising and helping to organise social events (in this role, he referred to himself as the 'assistant catering manager'), contributions that demonstrated the mutual beneficence of his involvement.

The death of his wife shortly after his retirement plunged Neil into depression, shaking his previously stable sense of masculinity, that of a solid triad. As one fit and healthy man, married to one woman (for 41 years), working for one company (for 50 years), he suddenly found himself alone and 'falling apart', with nothing to do and nowhere to go. The loneliness he suffered during this period lingered into the present, with his doctor recommending the Men's Shed as a possible salve, and I grew particularly close to him as a willing conversational partner, and, over time, a close friend who I looked forward to seeing at the Men's Shed (Pitts & Miller-Day, 2007). During our discussions, Neil frequently and proudly recalled his military service as a young man, and his later employment record (five weeks sick-leave in 50 years), though I found that, in later life, his masculine self-conception was primarily built around his compact, but always flexible and healthy, body. His favourite stories to recall from his youth were playing beach football, swimming for miles in the sea, and his briefly held weight division record as a weightlifter. Later on, he progressed to the more sedate pleasures of golf and bowls, but one point remained constant, namely that he always taken care of himself:

> Sat at the comfy chairs, the teenage smokers from the Academy arrive for a cigarette. Neil looks them over, and says:
>
> "Here are the puffers! In a year's time they'll be spending money on Nicorette to try and quit. I've never smoked in my life, and I've never had any problems with obesity...I see all these adverts on the television for stopping smoking and weight loss products, I know I don't need any of them, I'm still quite fit". (Fieldnotes, 27th January 2014)

Neil knew that he had never been, and never would be, large or muscular, but nevertheless took pride in the continued hardiness of his body. While he had lost his speed and agility, he retained his solidity and fluid movement, the basics of physicality, and utilised what he termed 'perspective' to compare this low (in

relation to the hegemonic ideal) but personally acceptable stock of physical capital to other older men he knew. As he said:

> "I see other people, they're much worse off than I am, I reckon. I should remind myself more often how lucky I am really. Some people I know can drive, but they can barely walk. I can't drive, but I can walk. I'd rather be able to walk".

Neil's lunch club was his main source of comparison; at this weekly gathering, he frequently informed me, one man was in a wheelchair, and another used a Zimmer frame. Seeing these men struggling to move reassured Neil about the vitality of his own body, which despite its inevitable creakiness, still enabled him to do as he wished.

After five months of fieldwork, Neil began suffering significant health difficulties. Firstly, a bout of labyrinthitis caused a two-week absence from the Men's Shed, as well as a nasty gash on his nose from a fall, and while I was initially relieved to discover his unsteadiness was an illness, rather than something more terminal, this was short-lived. Two weeks after returning from his layoff, he stumbled dizzily into the Men's Shed, barely able to walk, indicating to me that he had lost his voice, and that it was not a sore throat. Fearing a recurrence of his labyrinthitis, and possibly more, I urged him to see the doctor. He left the Men's Shed immediately, and following this, I heard nothing of him for seven weeks; his answer machine remained full each time I called, and he was not at home when I visited. Chatting to Joe, who had spoken to Neil's neighbours, I was informed that he had suffered a stroke, and was now 'essentially housebound'. I had to turn my head at that, and take a moment to resign myself to the fact that Neil would no longer be a part of the Men's Shed, a part of the fieldwork, or a significant part of my life. However, two weeks on from learning that he was housebound, Neil returned to the Men's Shed, appearing hauntingly frail, walking with a stick, and wearing thick padding on his right ankle and an emergency bracelet around his wrist. Speaking with evident difficulty, he filled me in on the details of his stroke, his subsequent six-week hospital stay, and his treatment regime. Following his stroke, I continued to spend a relatively large portion of my time with Neil, my attention pulled by his "need to speak to people". As a self-confessed 'bletherer', Neil had always enjoyed conversation, and following his stroke felt that it had a specific and noticeable health benefit, serving to 'warm up' his speech capacities,

which diminished unless consistently practiced. Getting up in the morning, Neil informed that he struggled with even simple words, but once he had engaged in prolonged conversation, his speech was practically indistinguishable from his pre-stroke abilities. Based on the need he presented, I could not help but feel an obligation towards Neil, a welcome friend throughout the fieldwork, and I was aware that I was in a position to practice beneficence, the ethical principle of positively benefiting a participant's life (Gilhooly, 2002). Neil himself recognised this, stating that, "Jeremy's role at the Men's Shed is blethering with me", and I felt tremendous pride when he told others that he considered me vital to his recovery.

Neil refused to let his stroke overpower him (as he felt it would have done to less fit men), and in the following months he began climbing what he termed 'the learning curve', taking all the advice he could and exercising his mind and body hard to recover his previous physical and mental baseline. During conversations with me and other participants he sought to exercise and demonstrate his continued capacity for speech, alongside his resilient memory, through reciting famous speeches and literature that he had learned decades ago, including the works of Shakespeare and Omar Khayyám, or practicing multi-syllabic words and phrases ("the honourable gentleman is guilty of a terminological inexactitude" and 'demagogical pedagogue' particularly tested him). His 'trademark' though, and a speech I heard dozens of times during the fieldwork, was the Gettysburg Address:

> *Me and Lewis are playing snooker, while Joe and Barry are sat at the board table, counting the money box; Neil is also at the table, and Joe is asking him whether the stroke has affected his memory, whether he just gradually started to remember things again. Neil replies that it has not adversely affected his memory, indeed, he can still recite the Gettysburg Address, saying "it never left me". He clears his throat, and begins: "four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the prop, prop, prop-o-sition that all men are created equal"...as we realise he is going to the finish, a hush descends upon the social area. Me and Lewis rest on our cues, Barry and Joe leave the piles of coins alone for a minute..."and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth". There is a small round of applause, though Joe humorously points out that Neil was a little quick in his recitation; Neil notes that his doctor recommended inserting an imaginary comma after each word, and says he forgot to do that.* (Fieldnotes, 20th September 2013)

Neil's was by no means a rousing oratory, in the traditional sense of the term; it was somewhat rushed, and broken in places, and it was obvious to see which bits he could recall clearly, and those he struggled with. Though far from perfect in a technical sense, these performances aided in the reestablishment of his cognitive and linguistic capabilities, in his progress towards an acceptable mental baseline. This was vitally important both for his recovery and to stave off the potential onset of cognitive decline, which would be devastating to his self-conception as a sociable, outgoing man. Neil took every available measure to retain control over his cognitive capacities (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009), for fear of slipping irretrievably into the 'black hole' of the 'fourth age' (Gilleard & Higgs, 2010, 2014), thus placing his fate in the hands of those who could not possibly understand and respond to his needs as he currently could. Neil's demonstrations of his continuing mental capabilities were met with validating reassurance from other participants, whether a round of applause or admiration of his skills following his performances.[3]

Neil similarly sought to highlight his continued physical capabilities; while his stroke mandated physical accompaniments such as a walking stick, ankle brace, and emergency bracelet, he considered them an unnecessary nuisance, the shedding of which marked milestones in his recovery. Likewise, the fitness tests he underwent at the hospital, were, he felt, "easy...they're for men in a far worse position than me". While the passing of time had weakened him, and his stroke had severely shocked his system, Neil drew strength from his proud history of physical activity, relating this to the conservation of his basic physical capital into the present. Like Steve's golfing, Neil competed with younger players when bowling, and enjoyed demonstrating his bowling technique and recovery exercises to me, reporting how he could bend both knees and hold the position, the transition from needing two hands to one hand to get out of a chair, and his falling 'lap times' when walking around Carstonwood. Furthermore, he stressed that he could still look after himself, noting that "I can still do all the things I need to, I can still get up, get dressed, wash myself, I can cook myself"; the only

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[3] Though me and other participants were consistently supportive of Neil, he was self-aware enough to recognise the potential annoyance that could be caused by his consistent need to speak, and particularly to recite his repertoire of speeches, poetry, and prose. Accordingly, he frequently suggested that his stroke had been a cause of relief to participants, as well as family members, as it had given everyone a bit of peace and quiet for a few weeks.

concession he made was taking on a weekly cleaner. Even retaining his own teeth, crooked and yellow though they were, to the surprise of younger men who used dentures, was a source of pride for Neil. He was also particularly pleased when his application for Accommodation Allowance (which he was encouraged to pursue by relatives) was declined, as he was judged too fit. This served both to validate the efforts he had made to recover from his stroke, as well as retain his record of financial self-reliance. While the basic physicality discussed here may be inconsequential to most men, accomplished without conscious recognition (Leder, 1990), for Neil it acquired great significance, representing the core of his masculine identity. This stance differentiated him from other participants, for whom reasonably well functioning bodies were merely the necessary precursor to workshop-based manhood acts (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009; Springer & Mouzon, 2011). Dennis, always seeking to demonstrate the efficacy of Men's Sheds in his promotional role, utilised Neil in a promotional video 'to show', as he put it, that "just because you've had a stroke, it doesn't mean your life has come to an end", and he took great pride in sharing his recovery narrative with a wider audience. A constant presence at the Men's Shed, whether reciting his repertoire of stories, poetry, and prose, or, increasingly as the months went on, snoozing on the sofa, Neil's future held few possibilities for novelty, but this did not dishearten him. He was, as he also liked to highlight, financially secure due to his previous labours, and his ambitions extended merely to conserving control over his mind and body and enjoying the simple pleasures of unfettered conversation and movement, as achieved through his current labours.

Prior to attending the Men's Shed, Bradley underwent a testing period, the pressures of which had caused him to become reclusive; he informed me that he had not socialised outside his somewhat isolated countryside home in three years, and his tall walled garden had begun to "feel like a prison". The Men's Shed had, he frequently reported, 'saved my life':

> "I'll tell you, if I didn't come here, I wouldn't be stood here, honestly, because I'd be dead. I've had a terrible time...I had the shingles, I had that for three-and-a-half years, a heart attack, and a divorce, I had my walled garden collapse, it just collapsed, a fire, a fire in my home, awful, and it all just came at once [Bradley pulls both hands inwards towards his chest]. Funnily enough, it was my wife who told me about this place, she left out that leaflet, I just picked it up and came along, now I'm here three days a week, and it's saved my life, it really has".

Bradley's multitudinous issues pushed him to the brink, but the Men's Shed rapidly and significantly improved his condition, allowing him to establish friendships, learn new skills, and, through working on an antique table for sale, become a contributor:

> "I walked in here one day and everything's changed for me, it's the company...I'm a very personable guy, and I come in here, I'm seeing old school friends, I'm meeting other guys, then everything else started to fit in. I got this job, it was kinda forced on me, I mean, I've never done anything like that before, but I did it, that for me was the thing, and now I've done that table...yours for fifty quid".

Despite singing the praises of the Men's Shed, Bradley did not feel fully accepted within the organisation, stressing perceived power differentials between himself and longer-standing participants (see chapter nine). His masculine self-conception did not align with the sober and technically skilled form of aged masculinity apparent among the rest of the core group, and he instead sought to highlight other personally satisfying areas of his life, namely his business and financial success and his appeal to women, in which he had successfully adhered to hegemonic norms. However, in striving to 'maintain the male façade' (Aléx *et al*, 2008), Bradley focused on aspects of selfhood that were of little consequence to other participants, thus subordinating himself in relation to the dominant form of aged masculinity enacted by other participants (Coles & Vassarotti, 2012).

Bradley's successes were, he felt, underpinned by his extroverted personality, which placed him immediately at ease in social situations:

> "I'll speak to anyone. I can walk into a pub by myself, and within minutes, they'll be wanting to buy me a drink".

> "I could walk into a place, and within an hour, within ten minutes, they'll think I work there, they'll be looking after me, I'm very confident, very outgoing, y'know".

Like Neil, set apart by a focus on his body, Bradley liked to highlight his sharp, ever-youthful mind (Featherstone & Hepworth, 1991), a consistent aspect of selfhood buffeted, but not broken, by his unfortunate recent circumstances. As he said to me, "that's the thing about me, I could get your mental age in a few seconds, I can analyse somebody in a few seconds. Honestly, I can think ten times faster than you". And to a newcomer he was giving a tour to:

"See, I've got a very young mind, a very sharp mind, I'm always analysing, thinking what's going on here? See, Jeremy's helped me with that, he's a young guy, he's got a young mind, so I don't have to speak down to all these old guys all the time, no, Jeremy's got to speak up to me". (Fieldnotes, 30th June 2014)

While Bradley recognised that the Men's Shed was crucial to his recovery, he also contended that his presence had improved the social environment:

Roger: "What do you do now"?

Bradley: "I'm retired".

Roger: "No, what do you do with your time"?

Bradley: "I come here! No seriously, this place has been tremendous for me, it really has, and I've shaken it up. Before I came in, everyone was just sat here, all 'uuurrrgghh' [Bradley puts his face down on the table], they weren't talking, but now they're a lot happier [directed towards me], aren't they, aren't they"? (Fieldnotes, 30th April 2014)

Bradley felt that he had "got the banter going", and raised participants' spirits through encouraging open discussion: "before I came in, there was all this conflict, these guys were talking behind people's backs". Objectively, Bradley's assessment of his impact on the Men's Shed can be questioned, as gossiping continued unabated (see chapters eight and nine), but he stood by the efficacy of his social and observational skills. Ageing had profoundly affected Bradley, though he retained one constant, his confident, outgoing personality, which had served him well in the good times, and managed to see him through the bad. As he understood it, the meaning of his presence at the Men's Shed was twofold; the organisation improved his own life, through the provision of a novel context conducive to the expression of his personality, and through this expression, the experience of other participants was enhanced. He included me in the assessment of his positive impact, as he felt his presence allowed me to interact with a man (mentally) 'closer' to my age, while also allowing me to gain insight from his experience.[4]

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[4] The main example of this occurred when Bradley took it upon himself, entirely unprompted, to teach me how to play snooker/pool on the small table in the social area. Despite suffering numerous health and relational issues prior to attending the Men's Shed, Bradley retained his unbridled self-confidence, and I felt that, alongside technical snooker/pool skills, he sought to educate me in this area. As he said "the man who taught me snooker, fifty years ago, he didn't just

Upon first attending the Men's Shed, Thomas reported chronic pain in his limbs, which he felt precluded any workshop involvement; accordingly, for the first few months, he was content to sit in the social area with other non-practical shedders. However, prompted by the arrival of some wooden furniture requiring his French polishing skills, and the consistent prodding of participants (his transition was, one shedder noted, "all done through banter"), he decided to give it a go. Within weeks he was attending every session, boiler suit on, and putting in a day's work scraping and polishing wooden furniture for sale, to the point where participants worried that he was over-exerting himself. Thomas garnered a huge degree of respect for choosing not to wallow in self-pity, instead taking positive steps to improve his quality of life, and alongside the enjoyment derived from utilising his specialist skills, the workshop had another unexpected effect on him. As he stated, "just doing this, it makes me forget about my sciatica, I just forget my pain when I'm working in here...It's the only time I get that relief...I've been amazed at what I've been able to do, I really am". Thomas' engagement in the workshop granted him relief from his chronic pain, causing his body to temporarily 'disappear' from consciousness (Leder, 1990), an effect so acute that within minutes of stepping back into the social area, he would again recognise his joints seizing up. Such was the impact of this new involvement, he felt that it had granted him "a new lease of life", or even 'a second life', and he came to consider the Men's Shed his 'second home'.

Participants lavishly praised Thomas for seizing the opportunity provided by the Men's Shed, with one shedder noting that "he's looking younger and younger each day", while another considered it "amazing, at that age, he's in the workshop

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teach me snooker, he taught me how to be confident, and now...", at which point he fixed me in the eyes and gestured 'giving' towards me. He recognised in me a similarity with his younger self;

> "I was looking through some old photos the other day, and I came across this photo of me, at the snooker table [Bradley shows me a curling old colour photo of a young man, wearing a suit, concentrating on a shot in a wood-panelled pool hall], with this guy that trained me, it must have been fifty years ago, and I thought I'm just like you. I couldnae believe how much I looked like you".

Recreating at the Men's Shed his pool hall experience, with himself in the role of knowledgeable teacher, Bradley informed me that I had to learn how to take the game seriously ("none of this oh, it's just a game, it's just a game"), to have confidence in my ability, and how to accept wins and losses ("when you win, you just say to yourself inside, I did good. You need to cut out all this hands in the air stuff, I don't want to see any more of this cockiness"). Having taken me under his wing in this fashion, Bradley, like Neil, became a good friend during the fieldwork, and it was satisfying to witness the positive effects his involvement at the Men's Shed had for him.

every day...he's an inspiration to us all". A third shedder utilised Thomas as a primary example of the Men's Shed's life-enhancing potential:

> *"You can't measure it, there are intangible benefits. I mean, look at Thomas, he's a prime example, he came in at first, sat by himself, feeling sorry for himself, and he thought, 'I'll give it a go', okay, and now you can't get him out of there [the workshop]. He looks better, he sounds better, even just standing and walking, you can burn two thousand calories a day doing that".*

While a fourth considered his own role in Thomas' remarkable transformation:

> *"He's improved so much since I started coming in, it's since I gave him that pills. I'm not saying it was that pills, but you can see such a change, now he's through in the workshop, he's got a job to do, it's amazing...I would say, since he started through there, he's looking, must be seven times better for having done that...he was bad, he had all this pain, but now, he's looking twenty years younger, see, even how he's moving, it's easier".*

Unlike healthier participants, whose bodies allowed for unproblematic involvement in the workshop, and therefore adherence to a central aspect of the dominant form of aged masculinity existing at the Men's Shed, Thomas had to consciously alter his mind-set, becoming involved not because of, but in spite of, his body. The lavish praise he received served as recognition that he had overcome his physical restrictions, to achieve what for others came without issue, namely being an ordinary practical shedder. As he did with Neil, Dennis took an interest in Thomas, utilising his status as an armed forces veteran to advance this aspect of his work, and generally, he became the go-to example utilised by the management team in explaining the Men's Shed's potential for reinvigoration even in the face of chronic pain.

Both Neil and Bradley tapped into their pasts to construct a continued sense of masculinity following difficulties that terminally endangered it. While Neil prided himself on his physical and mental solidity, Bradley considered himself a man of wealth and sexual magnetism; two different masculinities, two endangered self-conceptions, and two recovery narratives enacted primarily through their involvement in the Men's Shed. Barry preferred to highlight his fundraising skills, engaged in for the Men's Shed despite his physical difficulties, and similarly, on this point of contribution, Thomas had to give so he could take, because his troublesome body only disappeared when he applied himself in the workshop. Barry, Neil, Bradley, and Thomas, four men who had suffered significant physical

and mental health difficulties, all stressed that these discontinuities did not define them, and while recognising the Men's Shed's role in their recovery, they also highlighted their own particular strengths, and how these had contributed towards organisational goals. Barry's relentless dedication to fundraising contributed directly towards the upkeep of the Men's Shed. The continued solidity of Neil's mind and body was utilised in promotional activities to demonstrate that a stroke need not overly derail a man's life. Bradley's effervescent personality, which ensured his success in other areas of life, had, he felt, revitalised the social environment of the Men's Shed. Thomas, a modest man, was less forthright, considering his conduct normal and un-extraordinary, but his transformation towards that normal, towards the dominant form of aged masculinity existing within the Men's Shed, was considered singularly impressive by other participants. He demonstrated the personal rewards of taking one's chance, of hard work pursued for a worthy cause, of at once giving and taking.

Conclusion

Participants had all, to differing degrees, undergone biological ageing, a process which precluded any significant alignment with the muscular, powerful, hegemonic ideal. These bodies were lived in, the passing of time rendering them weaker, rounded, scarred, aching, and occasionally painful. Operating within the field of aged masculinity as it manifested in the Men's Shed though, an environment frequented almost exclusively by older men, meant that this did not adversely affect their masculine status. While Coles and Vassarotti (2012) suggest that older men assess their remaining physical capital against younger men, this was not apparent at the Men's Shed. Participants did not seek to compare themselves to the impossible hegemonic ideal, but rather to their peers, quickly realising and willingly highlighting the physical similarities they shared. Despite the pill diets, the odd walking stick or hearing aid, and even more serious issues such as prostate cancer and heart problems, they could all, to a reasonable degree, walk, talk, see, and hear. They actively sought to preserve this physical baseline in order that they could continue to pursue their workshop interests, a pragmatic stance which they also keenly promoted among others (Tannenbaum & Frank, 2011). Comparisons between participants were therefore not intended to differentiate, but rather to equalise, functioning as an assertion of bounded

solidarity, with each individual realising that the advice and support they granted others would be willingly returned in kind. As such, the group's collective lack of physical capital actually comprised an important aspect of the bonding social capital it exhibited, with their similar personal experiences of living in, with, and through their older male bodies forming part of their collective identity as a group of shedders. For those who had experienced a greater degree of change, the Men's Shed served a particularly important role in their lives, allowing them to re-establish their physical and mental baseline in a non-service environment in which their recovery relied not upon any special, differentiated methods, but merely upon conducting themselves as others did. As just another "one of the guys" (as many shedders put it), they, like others, gave, and they, like others, took, the only differentiation being the substance of the latter.

7

Past and Present

Although participants were financially and physically well positioned to enjoy personally fulfilling lifestyles, they nevertheless found much to be critical of in their assessments of contemporary society. This manifested as an idealistic nostalgia, encompassing "positively toned evocation[s] of a lived past" (Davis, 1979:18) arising from largely negative perceptions of social change. The nostalgic individual imbues the past "with special qualities [that acquire] significance from the particular way we juxtapose it to certain features of our present lives" (Davis, 1979:13). This juxtaposition involves reverence for that which once was, but no longer exists, at least in the individual's life, and the comparison of this light with the relative darkness of the present. Like the collective concern with supporting each other through changing physical circumstances, the Men's Shed allowed participants to unite around and seek to address these common social concerns. In the first part of this chapter, I consider participants' lamentations for a particular form of community, those exhibiting naturally occurring strains of bonding social capital, in which consistent, largely unavoidable interactions fostered enduring cooperation and friendships (Putnam, 2000). Though participants lived in or around Carstonwood, a town that prides itself on the strength of its community, their reflections indicate an absence in their lives, and indeed in the life of their community, that resonates with the concerns of the 'community lost' approach in urban sociology (Wellman & Leighton, 1979; Wirth, 1938). Accordingly, I sensed that the Men's Shed was conceived as the beginnings of a cure, a means of at least partially recreating the bonds characteristic of the past in the present (Boym, 2001). However, while engendering resilient intra-group loyalties, bonding social capital can also promote a degree of insularity, and this was apparent in participants' criticism of shifting social norms and standards (Portes, 1998). In the second part of this chapter, I discuss participants' skilled use and knowledgeable appreciation of technological objects, an area in which the critique of contemporary practice, and the setting apart of participants, was

especially ardent. These objects served the vital function of topic indirectness (Kiesling, 2005), providing a common interest around which participants could establish the kind of cooperative relationships they sought. Furthermore, they acted as tangible symbolic instances of a resilient, dependable past having survived into a present in which such values are no longer as apparent.

Community Lost

Nostalgia yearns for "the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams" (Boym, 2007:8), and this was literally the case among participants. They fondly recalled their childhood years growing up in tight-knit communities, in '*Gemeinschaften* of locality' (Tönnies, 2002) demonstrative of an intense form of bonding social capital generated through close proximity, and the unavoidable daily interaction this entailed:

> *Clive: "In the days of the old tenements, women used to have their windows fully open all day, they'd chat to anyone coming past. No, it's not like that these days".*
>
> *Neil: "No...I remember when I was a boy, there would be women stood at their doorsteps chatting, they were hanging washing out and chatting over the fence. People were always in and out of other people's houses, all day, everyone knew each other then, and if somebody on the street was sick, people would bring you round a pot of chicken soup. It's not like that these days, people are more concerned with their privacy these days".*
>
> *Jeremy: "I guess that can cause loneliness"?*
>
> *Neil: "Yes, you can get isolated. But I guess I'm lucky really, I've got my neighbours to help me out, if I need a light bulb changed or something, but they won't bring round chicken soup if I get ill...people don't have time to stop for a chat anymore, I see all the young women taking their children to school, none have time to stop and chat. I sit at the window, desperately waving to get their attention, and they just think I'm strange...people don't know their neighbours like they used to, they don't know what they're like, are they psychopaths or what"?* (Fieldnotes, 6th January 2014)

Neil had lived in Carstonwood for decades, but stressed that "I still don't recognise everyone. I think I should by now". He recalled when the town comprised only two streets, "but now its building fifty houses here, fifty houses there", a never-ending expansion that overwhelmed his capacity simply to know those around him. Clive shared a similar issue; in the past, "walking down the street would mean stopping to talk to two or three people, but these days, I don't

know anyone". Neil venerated his late wife, whose job ensured that she could name practically everyone in Carstonwood, and this was what he and Clive desired, the reassurance of recognising people's faces, of chatting to people on the streets they shared, and knowing their neighbours could be relied upon in times of difficulty. This desire took on an extra significance in light of the loneliness that had blighted their retirements, and later their widowhoods.

As visitors to the Men's Shed were frequently informed, personal difficulties arising from changing social circumstances can affect even the most outwardly successful of men, and arise even in relatively privileged locations like Carstonwood. Though generative of retrospective pride, Neil's accumulated economic capital, a primary 'marker of manhood' in contemporary society (Kimmel, 1994), was, currently, largely meaningless to him as he could not convert it into what he really needed, social capital. This was generally true of participants; mostly financially comfortable, happily married and relatively healthy, and enjoying new experiences in their pressure-free later years, they may be understood as textbook examples of successfully ageing individuals (Rowe & Kahn, 1997, 1998). Nevertheless, they recognised somewhat of an absence in their lives, a lack of opportunities to cultivate the kind of caring and cooperative friendships they understood as characteristic of the past. Like Neil, Dan grew up in a small, tight-knit community, and recalled an idyllic childhood, earning pocket money delivering messages to the fishermen, eating ice cream from the van, exploring the harbour, and simply knowing everyone around him. In contrast, he offered a critical assessment of contemporary Carstonwood:

> Dan: "When I moved here, from [a smaller community], I always felt at home there, everybody knew everybody, everyone had time for you, y'know, I was quite outgoing, but down here, people are more cold".

> Jeremy: "Yes, I've heard that quite a bit from the guys here".

> Dan: "Now I live down here, I don't even know my neighbours, there's just a few that'll say hello to you. One of them did keep a parcel for me while I was out, but he just handed it over without any meaningful conversation, it's just so strange that they don't speak...that thing that Joe was speaking about, how Carstonwood's a small, tight-knit town, that's a good thing, but I feel like the Men's Shed's really the only place that I've felt that kind of solid friendship since I moved. I was feeling a bit lonely, so the Shed's helped with that". (Fieldnotes, 23rd October 2013)

For Dan, the capacity of the Men's Shed to facilitate storytelling was vitally important, and he always had a supply ready to hand, whether referring to his childhood, his work, or the various leisure activities he engaged in. Reflecting on his ageing, he observed a shift in his perceptions, a deeper understanding of the world that he wanted to preserve for future generations (Coles & Vassarotti, 2012). He therefore kept a journal of prose, poetry, and drawings detailing his experiences, in order that someday, his grandchildren could share in them. Through keeping records of his activities for younger relatives, and sharing his stories with them, he sought to play his role in the maintenance of a familial 'community of memory' linking himself to his descendants in a sense beyond that of merely being related (Bellah *et al*, 1985).

Other participants shared a similar fascination with getting to know those who lived and worked around them. One shedder, for example, recalled his experiences as a young man during the Second World War:

> *"They're fighting this war, and they suddenly realised, hang on, we're running outta coal here, so they sent me down the mine...only the strongest guys were mining, I was taking the pony along, a thousand feet down, three miles along...I loved it down there, seeing all these different characters. I couldn't understand all their accents, but it was all just a big adventure for me, I just liked meeting people. Honestly, I've had a magic life".*

Though working in a hot, crowded, and stressful environment, the 'characters' this shedder met rendered his time in the mine a treasured memory. The Men's Shed offered similar opportunities to learn of and from other men, as another shedder noted in a promotional video:

> *"You get to meet a lot of characters, and when I say characters, I mean some real characters. Some guys here, they should be on stage, no' brushing it, no' brushing it. Spontaneous comedy, I would call it, yeh, it's good for a laugh. And it's very interesting, you hear a lot about other guys, what they've done, through their life, and where they are now, retired, semi-retired, and some of them say they're past it, hah, you're never past it, till you're in your wooden box or something like that, you're never past it. There's always something to be done, something to be said, good fun".*

Participants' 'life histories', as one board member put it, 'are fascinating', and they enjoyed nothing more than "getting advice or giving it, telling stories of events in their lives, some of which would make a book". Dan in particular described himself as an 'enabler' who provided the impetus for storytelling, encouraging

others to share their experiences as he did. Of course, the content of storytelling was not limited to specific recollections of the past, though each sharing of experience can be understood to have functioned, indirectly through the adoption of an interactional format considered increasingly scarce in contemporary society, as a general instance thereof. It was felt that society, and the communities comprising it, had become overly atomised, with people living alongside each other for years without sharing even the most basic of interactions, thus denying the opportunity for the collective establishment of the kind of community previously existing as a matter of course.

In this understanding, Carstonwood is conceived as a 'lifestyle enclave', a gathering of private individuals who, although sharing a similar socio-economic status and comparable consumption and leisure practices, lack common historical roots and the strong sense of interdependence this prompts (Bellah *et al*, 1985). This point was reinforced by other participants, who shared a dislike for the diluted day-to-day interactions characteristic of contemporary communities, with one's neighbours being little more than strangers. One shedder complained that:

> *"I've lived in Carstonwood for thirty years, I used to speak to all my neighbours in my old house, it was a really international street, there were Iranians and everything, but since I've moved house, the neighbours hardly speak to me anymore, I've never been in their house, all I get these days is a 'hi'".*

This shedder used to live in an 'international street' that incorporated various ethnicities without issue; in his understanding, the difficulty was not where people came from, but whether they were willing to integrate into their community. The Men's Shed was understood as addressing the fragmentation participants observed, allowing like-minded neighbours not merely to converse together, but to work together, and establish cooperative bonds directed towards collective ends. In this sense, the organisation can be said to have functioned as a site of 'restorative nostalgia' (Boym, 2001), building upon the solid foundation of participant's relatively common socialisation (or 'norm introjection' [Portes, 1998]) to provide a tangible reproach to present deficiencies. As another shedder explained:

"As far as I'm concerned, you have to think why [the Men's Shed] was set up here...there's lots of farms around here. I was born, lived out on a farm in the country, fifty years ago, where everyone knew everyone, perhaps a little too well, and the Shed, well, it's the first step in trying to recreate that...connections these days are shallow...I mean, I'm not a city person, I had to live in [a large English city] for a while for work, I hated it, there was no sense of community like you used to get in the country...every morning, I'd walk out the door, the guy opposite me would walk out, I'd say 'morning', he never replied. For months I was there, he never said a thing. It was as if I didn't even exist to him".

Raised in a remote farming community, this shedder had experienced the intense bonding social capital naturally occurring in such an environment, and felt that Carstonwood, being surrounded by farmland, was a location in which such experiences remained treasured in the memories of certain older residents. Though the substance of many such communities had been lost, memory could function as a guide to at least partially recreating it in the present, and it is on this point that the importance of the Men's Shed becomes apparent. Another shedder shared similar sentiments regarding the purpose of the organisation:

"I think the place has become too cosmopolitan, people are moving about far too often, they come in and move out after two or three years. My street has two halves, there's my side, where people have lived for years, and the other side, with people always moving in and out...community has to be made these days, because in a town like Carstonwood, where fifty percent of the residents are moving out every couple of years, it's business and all that, it's difficult to get that sense of community. The Shed's like the start of that process".

This shedder felt that people do not put down roots in locations like Carstonwood, a town developed only 45 years ago to service local economic development. There is, he thought, little motivation to get to know one's neighbours when economic considerations may dictate moving away after only a few years. Islands of stability, spaces fostering what he termed 'togetherness', or as others put it, 'comradeship', now needed to be consciously established, as occurred at the Men's Shed.

Participants reflected fondly upon communities without strangers, of chattering housewives and bobbies on the beat, admonishing youngsters with a stern "what d'you think you're doing laddie"? (Unlike today where they whizz around on bikes and in cars). Theirs was a community in which New Year was welcomed in with first footing, in which "you could have an arrangement with the farmer, you

could nip into the field and take a turnip or whatever, as long as you let them know what you were doing" (unlike today, as this shedder said, where thieves would pillage the whole field). Theirs was a community in which, as one shedder recalled, "the sharpening man would go house to house seeing if you've got any tools needing sharpened", and in which a local woman would dress the bodies of residents who had died. Theirs was a community in which people simply and unquestioningly helped each other, drawing upon strongly held, even formally outlined, norms of reciprocity ensuring one's contributions would be recognised and rewarded (Portes, 1998). As one shedder described it:

> *"I remember when I was lodging in [an English city] for a few months, it was like bob-a-job, and if you did two hours work for somebody, it was any kind of job so everyone was involved, you could be cleaning metal or get your clothes repaired, and they'd pay you back doing something for you. I did a lot of these jobs, but I was just lodging, so I couldn't ask them to pay the time back working on the house. I must be owed a week's work! You don't see that kind of thing anymore...I like doing favours for people, cus you find, things have a way of coming back to you. If you do something for somebody, when I need something done, there's a list of people I can phone up and say 'can you help me with this'? Yeh, that's how it works".*

In such communities, deep roots were nurtured over time, and the term 'neighbour' implied not merely geographical proximity, but responsibility, respect, and a duty of care to one's fellows, including older residents, rather than, as one shedder complained, "putting them in these homes, sitting in front of the TV all day, not doing anything...their brains rotting away".[1] Participants fondly recalled social arrangements lost to privacy, security, individualism, and cosmopolitanism, prioritising a selective, even utopian recollection of "ostensibly lost values...of some ineffable spirit of goodness having escaped time, [alongside] the conviction that, no matter how advanced the present may be...it is in some deeper sense meaner and baser" (Davis, 1979:20-21). "One hundred years ago", as another shedder put it, "even though they didn't have a lot, there seemed to be a happiness back then that you can no longer find". Participants considered the Men's Shed, an organisation whose maintenance and progression wholly

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[1] Though it was recognised that more traditional arrangements still existed elsewhere; as one shedder put it, "in the Mediterranean, and Asia, people care for the elderly, they respect them. The families look after them, and they're respected in society, people can learn from them...it's not like that in the UK", where it was felt that older people were unwanted; "you only get two points [on your driving licence] for killing a pensioner, they want to get rid of us, there's too many of us".

depended on the kind of cooperative interactions commonplace in the past, as providing at least the starting point for recreating this kind of community in the present. This recreation was not based on immediate proximity, instead necessarily manifesting as a '*Gemeinschaften* of mind' (Tönnies, 2002), a deliberate coming together of men of similar intellectual, physical, and social stature, for whom friendship came naturally due to these similarities, and for whom recreating that which they had once experienced was a worthwhile goal.

Critiquing the Contemporary

Nostalgia manifests strongly when present "fears, discontents, anxieties, or uncertainties" (Davis, 1979:34) can be clearly recognised and articulated, and for participants, contemporary society presented many disorientating challenges to past certainties. As one shedder would say, settling down with the newspaper, "the world's in a terrible state, somebody's got to clean up this mess". Another would "see all these things on television, about depression and death and that, it can make you depressed, I have to turn it off". In a promotional video, Peter recognised the Men's Shed as a sanctuary from contemporary concerns:

> *"The Men's Shed. The place for learning and laughter. No stress, and friendships are made. All men are welcome. As the pace of life gets faster, we need a place as a sanctuary. To get peace of mind, to have a laugh, and carry on in a good way. For ourselves, for our family, and for our community".*

He continued:

> *"The wife'll say, 'the papers there, have a read o' that, read the headline', you say, oh no, nae again, oh I've hud enough ae this, am gonnae relax somewhere, I'm away doon to the Men's Shed for an hour or so, just tae have a cup of coffee, a chat with some of the boys. I'll me'be dae a wee bit o' work, I'll me'be tak some o' they tools down, see if they'll help me sharpen 'em, because I dunno how tae sharpen these tools, and I know there's a couple a guys down there that can do that. That's what I'll do. That, to me, is what a Men's Shed is, and then me'be I'll have a chat wi' some of the guys as well, wit's happenin' politically, wit's happenin medically".*

In this statement, the promise of the Men's Shed is fully apparent; the stress-free, supportive environment is highlighted, as is the opportunity to learn from one's fellow shedders and engage in serious discussion. The organisation was a space in which real concerns could be aired to sympathetic ears, and while there were

occasional disagreements concerning the pressing economic, political, and social issues of the day, there was a general respect for the opinions of fellow shedders that prompted robust and friendly dialogue. Participants' was, if not complete resignation, certainly frustration with the social change they had experienced. This encompassed criticism of even the smallest details, for example, GP's wearing open-necked shirts rather than tweed suits and bowties, the loss of 'the old foods', which one shedder felt were "dying off, it's these supermarkets, they're only stocking what sells, you can't find the old stuff anymore", and the 'appalling' behaviour of today's drivers.

Alongside these small-scale irritants, larger-scale shifts, including the *bête noire* of many critics of contemporary society, "health and safety gone mad", also attracted criticism. The following complaint was typical:

> *"People haven't got any common sense these days, it's not like in the past, we would see something, and we'd say alright, let's look at this, we'd deal with it. These days, people don't have that, that's why we need all these health and safety guidelines".*

The culture of health and safety had, it was felt, eroded self-confidence to the point where individuals no longer trusted in their own experience, and therefore needed guidance through even the simplest of tasks. Also on the theme of the contemporary workplace, another shedder criticised the need for formal qualifications to gain entry into employment:

> *"Now, see these apprenticeships, in my day, they were taking them on, you could just walk up and ask, cus to them, it was cheap labour, you work for a builder, after three or four years you're skilled, they're getting cheap labour for five years. Now these days, it seems like everyone is going to college, you need that piece of paper, or else they won't even consider you".*

A third large-scale shift that participants criticised concerned the rise of political correctness. On this topic, participants rejected what they perceived as an unwelcome restriction on the terminology they used (Mackey, 1992). This attitude is apparent the following extract, in which Ed, in his typically mischievous style, humorously discussed the benefits of electric drills, granting Rick the opportunity to make a general point about the evolution of humour:

> *Ed: "Oh, it's much quicker, and it penetrates it better, ha, that's all I meant by that"!*

Jeremy: "Well"!

Ed: "I guess people get used to my jokes".

Jeremy: "Yeh, you get used to people".

Rick: "That's the thing though, these days with all this political correctness, you can't tell a joke anymore".

Ed: "You can't tell a decent joke".

Rick: "We used to do it all the time, me and the boys, you'd call somebody something, they'd call you something, nobody seemed to mind it back then". (Fieldnotes, 4th August 2014)

In the pre-political correctness context, Rick outlined how often harsh name-calling was treated simply as an uncontroversial form of humour, an aspect of the typical joking relationship which he engaged in with colleagues (Kaplan, 2005; Dynel, 2008; Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 2006); the manifestation of this kind of interaction at the Men's Shed is discussed in chapter nine. In a similar vein, another shedder discussed the term 'wife':

"There's all these words you can't say anymore, like I don't think you can even say 'wife' any more, you have to say 'partner', because you don't know any more what kind of relationship people have with each other...in a few years' time, you won't know what the word wife even means".

This shedder here criticised the contemporary non-acceptability of what he considered merely descriptive terminology. This was an unwarranted impeachment on his ordinary interactional patterns, but moreover can be understood to represent a dissolution of old certainties, changes in the acceptability of words reflecting changes in long-standing social arrangements.

Another aspect of participants' critique of contemporary society concerned today's youth, who were thought to lack simple skills previously learnt as a matter of course. As one shedder said:

"You see kids these days, they can't even add up without a calculator, they put in two plus two, and they're amazed it equals four! They can't do it in their heads, they can't do their twelve times tables. We had to learn them by rote, you could recite them just like that. Nowadays, these kids can only do their ten times table, why don't they practice their twelve times, or their seventeen, or their thirteen?...and they don't teach foreign languages in schools anymore, they do it everywhere else, practically everyone can speak English, but how many British kids can speak French or German"?

A lack of discipline was also stressed:

> *Ed gives me a lift to the shopping centre, and I tell him about the refurbishment plans for the area:*
>
> *Ed: "Ay, it's not that the building's tatty, it's the kids that make it tatty, they're just dropping all their crap, you try to go up and tell them, they just tell you to fuck off, they winnae listen to you. I mean, you got those guys out in [a nearby town], they went in and burnt down that shop, I mean, what d'they get out of it, why would they do something like that? It's shocking, they're out of control".*
>
> *Jeremy: "Perhaps its peer pressure, it's the same with kids trying drugs and alcohol".*
>
> *Ed: "Ay, they take them and end up killing themselves...no, no, I've never tried any drugs, I was never into anything like that".* (Fieldnotes, 18th July 2014)

One shedder informed me that he "never had a rebellious phase", going "straight from school into work", and the use of mind-altering drugs was extraordinary to him. As he put it, "the Zulu's used to take these drugs before going into combat, to get into a frenzy for battle, nowadays they're taking the same thing at parties, I don't know why they do it...it just seems so strange to me". Another shedder felt that youthful indiscretions had evolved beyond reflecting the natural cheekiness of youth to a hardened disdain for that which should be afforded the utmost respect: "what is it with these vandals, I mean, vandalising a war memorial, what do they get out of it? I mean, we'd take an apple from an orchard, but that was as far as we'd go". Vitriol was especially reserved for the teenagers who, in the early stages of the fieldwork, smoked cigarettes and cannabis in the entranceway of the Men's Shed, often leaving a mess, engaging in vandalism, and intimidating participants. One shedder fantasised about "throwing them over the barrier, beating them up", while for another, who had experienced vandalism at several clubs he attended, a steel cage around the entrance would prevent their gathering. Another shedder though, was realistic, noting that "there's nothing ordinary people can do, you have to call the police, but the police can barely do anything either". This proved to be the case; despite repeated attempts to get a police officer to visit the Men's Shed to deter wrongdoers, this never materialised.

A central aspect of participants' criticism of younger people referred to their use of modern communication mediums:

Ben: "When I had sciatica, I had a sore back, I got relief using one of those big exercise balls, basically rolling my back along it".

Cliff: "It's like a space hopper that kids used to bounce on. It's not like that these days, the kids are all like this [Cliff imitates texting]. When my grandkids come to see me, they're all on their phones, they've got these earphones in, I have to tap them on the shoulder to let them know I'm there".

Steve: "That's the kids these days"!

Roger: "The kids these days are always at it, texting on their phones. I saw a group of five on the bus the other day, they were all texting each other, they're so fast at it [Roger imitates texting]. They're good at texting, but not so good at talking, although when they do talk, on their phone, they're always shouting out loud".

Derek: "It's these clubs they go to, the music's so loud you can't have a normal conversation".

Roger: "I've tried texting, but it takes about three hours, I've got better things to do with my time, I could do a lot in three hours".

Anthony: "My family's always telling me to text, but I only ever speak to three people on this phone. I don't tweet, I don't text, there's no internet. Why not just phone them up, hit a couple of numbers, it's much quicker"!
(Fieldnotes, 10th March 2014)

The main point here was the deleterious effect modern technology was felt to have upon the quality of communication, and the contention that today's youth are worse off for it, having replaced the simple pleasures of a space hopper with an electronic screen or a set of headphones. As one shedder put it:

"If I'm walking down the streets, I'll always say hello to people, and some of them will talk back, but these young people, they won't talk. They've got their heads down in their phones, and they've got these earphones in. They'll walk into you, but they won't talk to you".

In this shedder's view, the increasingly media-saturated and self-absorbed behavioural norms of the younger generation further encroached on the face-to-face interactions that form the basis of resilient communal bonds.[2]

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[2] Regarding participant's use of computers, the group reflected wider society, with a small group of knowledgeable men who utilised their skills in a contributory fashion, either through teaching others or managing the Men's Shed's IT requirements, a group who knew little and did not care to learn, and a larger mass in the middle, who utilised computers and the internet for basics like bookkeeping and shopping. On the former of these points, one board member stated that:

"There are a number of older men who visit the Shed regularly who are not all computer literate. The Shed model is based on men mentoring each other and we aim to use this

Men and Machines

Peter made a clear statement of this disconnection between men, borne of technological progression, in the introductory segment of a promotional video produced by Dennis, designed to be shown to groups interested in establishing a Men's Shed. In the video, he narrated over various black-and-white photographs that appeared for around five seconds each, firstly depicting late 19th century rural scenes:

> *First, a line of nine men, stood in a field, each holding their tools, spades and pitchforks. Second, a group of six; three bright-eyed, muscular young men share the scene with their older counterparts, not a smile among their weather-beaten faces. They wear flat caps, the dirtied clothes of agricultural workers, and period moustaches; stolid, stoic, proud looking men. The pictures continue in a similar vein...a man tends to a working horse, animals plough rolling fields dotted with little cottages, and men are dwarfed by mighty steam engines and giant towers of hay [as Peter opines]:*

> *approach to break down the barriers to computer access. We won't do classes. We will use the 'over the shoulder' intro to computing in which non-users will see computers in use by their friends. They may be checking an online tool catalogue, searching for a work tip or seeking advice through a helpline. Getting started is a big barrier and we aim to remove some of the mystery, show the computer's usefulness, build their confidence and help them overcome initial problems. They will have buddies to assist them at every stage. We want to show them in a comfortable, friendly environment how they can look up facts, find bargains, do their shopping or contact distant family... we feel the informal, 'one old guy to another', 'if he can do it, I probably could too' approach may work".*

Few participants actually took the opportunity to learn about computers, which was somewhat frustrating for those offering it, given that the kind of expert teaching being offered would typically have to be paid for. The difficulty was that those who knew the basics were satisfied with their skill-sets, and did not attend the Men's Shed to use computers, while those that knew little did not want the added complication of computers in their lives. As one shedder put it, "no, no, I don't need a computer, I don't have one at home. My computer is up here [he indicates his head]". Similarly, Another noted that "I'm not that great with them. I got given one, I sat and looked at it and it sat and looked at me. I didn't turn it on, and it didn't turn me on". This shedder did not know how to fruitfully engage with a computer, nor did Neil, who considered himself a 'computer ignoramus', believing that "me and computers are incompatible". He criticised the way in which computers 'absorbed' individuals, cutting off their potential for interaction, and frequently recalled with disgust the time he attended his reminiscing club to find them discussing iPads:

> *Jeremy: "Did you have your reminiscing club this week"?*
> *Neil: "I did, but they had this lesson for Ipad, how to use it...had a brief look at it, and handed it on, and the next man was the same, he handed it right back to me, saying 'I don't want it'. I said I don't want it! I don't need to learn how to use it. I just thought it was odd, they were speaking about how to use an iPad, but a reminiscing club is for speaking about the past, that's what I thought. I think this iPad's the future, and I'm not interested in it". (Fieldnotes, 5th June 2013)*

This breach of Neil's expectations perturbed him greatly, a betrayal of the promise of a club he felt should be exclusively concerned with the collective recollection of the past, as opposed to educating members about irrelevant 'futuristic' technology.

"Men together, shoulder-to-shoulder, young men, old men, and grandfathers. Think aboot it, handed down from father tae son, from son tae grandson, hard working men, on the land. Look at that, men have stopped their work for a wee mintie to get their photograph taken. Now wit are they dae'in? They're herstin, they're usin' scythes to cut doon all that stuff, and then they'll be bailed up later on, and a' the time they'll be hae'in a joke and a laugh and a giggle, a good bit a banter between them. Different days now. Now? It's a' done wi' tractors and computers, even the ploughin' ae the fields, ye used to ha'e horse n' cart, put a' the stuff intae carts n' towed awa' wi' the horses. Nowadays, it's a' done, again, by tractors, tractors ay, wi' big, big machines, wi' a' these fancy computers in 'em, it does ev'rything, it ploos the field, it even cuts e grass, n' it even cuts e hay n' stra', n' piles it up n' a'thing. People's changed, ways changed, everythin' seemed to go one way or the other, nae the same feelin', nae the same camaraderie".

The pictures reflect the changes Peter describes, as clothes become noticeably modern, and agricultural machinery begins to appear...the twenty-seventh picture shows three young men, stood outside a workshop, the wall of which is festooned with a large sign reading 'PRATT'S MOTOR SPIRIT'...there are young men leaning against tractors, and then a bustling street market...the thirty-ninth photograph, a close up of a map, reading 'WAR MAP OF THE WESTERN FRONT, Supplement to the GREAT WAR, NUMBER 1. 27th OCTOBER 1939'. [Peter continues]:

"Then it came, two world wars, and that knocked everythin' on its heid, the women had tae come in tae work the lands, tae work in the factories while the men were awa' fightin'. Then things changed again, they came back the same men leavin' the country, and gan' intae factories, workin' in different factories, makin' these machines. Now remember in the country it was nice and quiet, they could ha'e a laugh, in the factories it turned out right gae noisy, the only time you had the chance tae ha'e a laugh or a joke wiz at tea time, and then it wiz quick, quick cup ae tea and awa' back tae work again".

The pictures transition into a black and white video of the Lister engine and water pump being worked on at the Men's Shed. Grant turns the crank, and it cuts abruptly to colour, history having arrived at the present, and the words 'Men and Sheds'? appear on screen. [Peter asks]:

"Now when you look back, and you see wit's going on around ye, and you look around and say, hey, here's a Men's Shed. Wonder wit's happenin' there"?

Through these evocative images, combined with Peter's thickly accented narration, a highly idealised view of the past was constructed, an older form of rural masculinity considered lost to technological progression (Campbell *et al*, 2006). Peter first highlighted the intergenerational transfer of knowledge, "from father tae son, from son tae grandson", a habitual knowledge of working the land that the passing of time rendered first as tradition and now, due to technological

and social changes, history. These men worked hard, but were thought to have had plentiful opportunities for "a joke and a laugh and a giggle, a good bit a banter between them", thus enjoying a consistent homosociality borne of working shoulder-to-shoulder. The Men's Shed emerges at the end of the segment as a modern reimagining of this historical period, a means of again facilitating the pursuit of common interests, and thus allowing participants that which is most basic and fundamentally important in their lives, the simple notion of spending quality time interacting with their peers.

Peter's commentary offered a distinctly Marxian materialist reading of historical progression driven by technological change, and a reflection on the interactional effects thereof. Although mechanisation simplifies agricultural labour without sacrificing gender exclusivity (Nusbaumer, 2011; Saugeres, 2002), Peter considered it detrimental to homosociality, a theme also applying to men who, returning from combat, entered factories, where the needs of machines outweighed those of men, who could communicate only during quick tea breaks. While pre-mechanised agricultural labour required greater physical exertion, this occurred in a context more amenable to interaction. The camaraderie of old declined when the conditions engendering it altered, when monotonous routine and thunderous noise replaced the bucolic serenity of the fields. The accuracy of Peter's diagnosis could be challenged on the historical specifics, but to do so would be to overlook its purpose. His one-dimensional version of technological progression specifically focused on its negative interactional implications in order to position the Men's Shed as a contemporary cure, as an island of unbridled homosociality where men can once again bond with like-minded others against the backdrop of hard work conducted at an agreeable pace. Of course, as a site of restorative nostalgia (Boym, 2001), there are certain necessary provisos, related to the organisation and focus of the Men's Shed, that differentiate past from present. The Men's Shed had to be consciously established, and participants engaged in it as a form of leisure, rather than employment. The primary purpose of the organisation was the establishment of conditions conducive to cooperative homosociality, as opposed to conditions maximising productivity; recall that the Men's Shed was 'not a business'. The organisation is nevertheless positioned as a unique space in contemporary

society, a space in which the dormant, and almost wholly gender-specific, social rhythms of old find renewed expression.

Topic Indirectness

Technology in the service of labour is present throughout Peter's narration; from scythe and shovel to the great machines of industry and war, his history sees men interacting with technological objects to achieve specific economic goals. These objects also influenced the quality of interaction their users could engage in; in the quiet of the late 19th century farm, interaction is consistent because non-mechanised agriculture is simply quieter, and the technology utilised makes no demands on the worker, who remains in complete control. This is in contrast to mass production contexts in which individuals are tied to static stations, always serving the noisy demands of the machinery. The Men's Shed was cast in the mould of the former, the point being that certain technologies utilised in certain contexts are particularly amendable to consistent homosocial interaction. This was doubly so at the Men's Shed, as firstly, the leisurely ethos of 'no pressure' ensured (in theory at least) that participants' technological engagements were always directed towards enjoyment, rather than necessity, as would have been the case in even the most idyllic of historical agricultural settings. Secondly, the technological objects encountered at the Men's Shed proved consistently fascinating for participants in and of themselves. In this second sense, technological objects did not merely allow for homosocial interaction, they actively facilitated it, through serving as a means of 'topic indirectness' ('indirectness' here refers to the distinction between the stated and implied meaning of speech).

Kiesling (2005:714) outlines topic indirectness in the following terms:

> "One general property of male groups in North American and other European-based societies is the use of common "nonpersonal" interests as a metaphor or conduit for creating both connection and status, and sometimes a shared status of a group. These interests are often groups formed around professions, objects, or technology...this indirect use of a topic about a domain not overtly focused on personal relationships is a result of the competing cultural discourses of male solidarity and heterosexuality".

In Kiesling's linguistic take on hegemonic masculinity, these regional-level cultural discourses "refer to widely shared "background" assumptions, or "truths", about how the world works" (Kiesling, 2005:696). These 'assumptions' reinforce gender differentiation and are experienced as desires by men, who find in them a means of constructing a socially legitimate identity. However, Kiesling also contends that the substance of these discourses is contradictory. Consider the discourse of male solidarity (which the Men's Shed was created to serve), in which "men are understood normatively to want (and need) to do things with groups of other men, excluding women" (Kiesling, 2005:696). This clashes with both the discourse of heterosexuality, because homosocial desire can be misinterpreted as homosexual (Kimmel, 1994), and that of male dominance, because functional intra-group relationships imply the collective ceding of dominant tendencies. Homosocial interaction therefore requires a collective 'balancing act' (Kiesling, 2005) that facilitates togetherness while also guarding against any personal status loss. Male enclaves such as pubs or fraternal groups are recognised in the literature as spaces facilitating homosocial interaction, often through the utilisation of alcohol or sport as topics around which bonding, and in certain instances the pursuit of collective goals, can occur (Cameron, 1997; Kiesling, 2005; West, 2001; Whannel, 2002). The issue with certain of these spaces though, as members of the management team recognised (see chapter three), was their promotion of potentially unhealthy behaviours. As a male-exclusive space in which men can collectively engage in another culturally sanctioned male activity, namely admiring, discussing, and working with technological objects, the Men's Shed provides a further empirical instance of topic indirectness being utilised as a means of establishing solidarity, in a manner that was not harmful to participant's health.

Technology exhibits a 'durable equation' with masculinity (Faulkner, 2000), thus providing a legitimate topic through which homosocial bonding can occur (McIlwee and Robinson, 1992; Mellström, 1995, 2002; Nusbaumer, 2011). The Men's Shed presented a vast collectively owned and maintained collection of engineering and woodworking tools and resources, and offered a wide variety of projects men of all skill levels could pursue. Due to the scope of interests catered for, and the desire to attract as many men as possible, the Men's Shed's 'collection' was more general in its capacity to facilitate the enactment of an aged masculine

identity than, for example, the specific tools identified as symbolic of rural masculinity, or those of middle-class DIY 'class tourists' seeking to embody the craftsman ideal (Brandth, 2005; Moisio *et al*, 2013; Nusbaumer, 2011). The discussion and conduct of workshop-based activities was central to interactions at the Men's Shed, providing the initial pull factor for most participants and the conduit through which personal connections, and ultimately a group of shedders, was established and maintained. These activities also served to differentiate individuals, in a non-hierarchal fashion, defining their function within the organisation according to their particular interests and skills. This general interest in technological objects was considered meaningful and worthwhile, in contrast to the frivolity of modern culture:

> Matt: *"I remember, I was walking in the hills and it flew over my head, zzzuuummm [Matt imitates watching a plane going over his head], a Brabazon, made by Bristol, and I couldn't believe it, it was flying very low when I saw it. This plane didn't even make it into full production, it wasn't popular, they only made one of them, then they went onto the Britannia…".*
>
> Ed: *"How do you know so much about it"?*
>
> Matt: *"Well, I don't read any of these celebrity gossip magazines, you know all these magazines, I'm not interested in Beyonce's boobs falling out, though I'll say, she certainly has got something".*
>
> Ed: *"Are you an engineer by trade"?*
>
> Matt: *"No, I'm not, I'm merely an enthusiast, and I had a good father, he taught me a lot about it".* (Fieldnotes, 23rd December 2013)

Participants were not concerned with celebrity gossip, the *X Factor* or *The Voice*, preferring television shows like *How It's Made* and *Inside Rolls Royce*, and the bookshelves at the Men's Shed were filled with copies of *Classic Tractor*, *Professional Engineering*, and *Model Rail*, rather than *Hello!* or *OK!*. Though each had various specific passions, the vast majority of participants shared a deep interest in technological objects, in what were considered quintessential 'man things', as expressed in the desire to understand, work with, and admire exemplars both within and outside of the Men's Shed. Such appreciation was an important aspect of their masculine identities, and, through the mechanism of topic indirectness, provided a relatively simple means of immediately connecting with others at the Men's Shed.

In the early stages of the fieldwork, when the core group of participants was being established, I observed many examples of topic indirectness in practice, which I initially found frustrating, due to my inability to take part (see chapter two). In time, however, I came to realise that technical talk provided an uncontroversial means of interaction that allowed for the assertion of individual status and group commonality. Discussions occurred regarding concrete, cars, chemicals, windows, wood, lighting, heating, planes, trains, ships, practically anything that allowed participants to share their knowledge and experience, and comment on that of others in turn. These were discussions about functionality, how things work, and basic physical and chemical properties, why things work, and were interspersed with participants' stories regarding their own experience of particular objects, thus linking the purely technical with real-life experience. Another example of bonding through topic indirectness occurred during Grant's regular display of rare and unusual tools. He would bring in selections from his collection, such as a pair of pliers with curious spherical grips, perhaps something to do with ball bearings, or a tool designed for a specific mechanism, or a foot-long, bulbous hunk of rusty metal, the end of which tapered and curved into itself, which perhaps had something to do with the insemination of cows. These would be passed around the table during the tea break, with each participant offering his educated guess as to its functionality. On occasion, Grant would reveal the function following the guessing, though occasionally even he himself, acknowledged as the pre-eminent expert on rare and antique tools, was unaware of these strange object's functions.

These discussions allowed participants to impart partial biographies of the self, centred on their working lives and technological interests, allowing for the immediate assertion of broad commonalities. When welcoming newcomers, it was important to quickly discover their particular interests, in order that they could be introduced to relevant participants and begin workshop-based activity, in a broader sense assuming their place within the Men's Shed. The welcoming procedure was also typically accompanied by an expression of need regarding the individual's particular skills. Like the universalisation strategy regarding participant's health, this was about highlighting the broad similarities, and therefore the possibility of cooperative work, existing between participants. While the substance of the differences, in terms of interests, experience, and

skills, existing between participants differentiated the particular roles and status assumed by the individual, this was ultimately secondary to the expression of an interest in working with and on some form of technological object alongside like-minded others. Doing something, aiding the progression of the Men's Shed in some way, regardless of the individual's skills, mattered more than what was done. Technological objects in and outside of the Men's Shed thus provided the crucial 'topic' around which participants formed and structured relationships, providing a solid interactional foundation that, over time, facilitated the discussion of the other aspects of their identities reported in this study. It could therefore be said that technological objects functioned merely as means to a greater end, namely the creation of a caring, cooperative, social environment. While technically correct, as there would be no cooperative environment without the presence of things facilitating that cooperation, this view understates the important symbolic function certain technological objects also had for participants. The physical environment granted a tangible substantiality to their nostalgia, with old machines allowing participants to literally rebuild the past, and the interactions characteristic of it, and old tools allowing them to wax lyrical about its qualities as embodied in them, qualities of strength, durability, and skill, that were not so apparent in the present. The meanings assigned to the persistence and use of certain older technological objects thus served to positively differentiate the group, allowing them to assume a position of perceived superiority in relation to others thought to lack their depth of understanding (Coles & Vassarotti, 2012).

Tangible Reminders

The reverential treatment granted to donated tools of a certain vintage is especially revealing with regards to the symbolic function of technological objects at the Men's Shed. Through accepting these tools, which would otherwise have been dumped at the local recycling centre (or were rescued from the recycling centre, either by participants themselves, or through contacts established with staff), the Men's Shed provided a valuable service, particularly for widows who wanted to ensure that their husband's tools went to go to a 'good home'. Accordingly, the Men's Shed was frequently visited by local residents dropping off tools, and several times throughout the fieldwork, a group of

shedders conducted garage clearances. Discarded in a skip, all meaning is sapped from an item, its status as interchangeable rubbish below even that of a protocol object (Morin, 1969). Taken to the Men's Shed though, tools and other items were granted purpose and admiration, a new phase of their biography in which their symbolic function assumed primacy (Appadurai, 1986; Kopytoff, 1986).[3] The popularity of the tool recycling service offered by the Men's Shed meant that the back room was completely overrun throughout the fieldwork, a mess of overflowing shelves groaning with all manner of tools, with boxes containing hundreds of screwdrivers, long, short, cross, Phillips, and posi-drive, large block planes older than participants, as they had used as apprentices, and modern metal versions, spanners, whole sets, partial sets, silver or black, hammers, claw, ball pein, toffee, and double faced, woodcarving tools, pipes, tubes, stacks of wood, biscuit tins full of nuts, bolts, pins, and screws, and some bizarre items, like antique dental forceps, sheep shearers, and a full set of fishing equipment. Stood surrounded by these dusty, old, but high-quality tools, turning them over in one's hands, being surprised by unexpected finds, was an experience participants greatly enjoyed, because of the meaning imputed to these objects. As one shedder said, explaining the functioning of a saw set:

> *"It's a long job, you've got to take it slowly, most people won't bother to do it anymore, they'll jus' buy a new one, but these, these are special tools, some of these are fifty years old or more. Now they might say, 'who'd be using that these days'? But a lot of the older guys in here, they remember these tools, they'll come in and say, 'oh, I recognise that, I used to work with one of those'".*

For another shedder, the experience was one of discovery and learning:

> *"It's great just to have a root through things, finding all these random things and wondering what they are. I was lucky actually, when my father died, I didn't have to clear out his house straight away, I got to take my time and really go through things, I was pulling stuff out, oh, what's this for, what's this, and y'get that here".*

While for a third shedder, it provided him with a tangible reminder of his past:

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[3] The similarity between the work conducted on technological objects and the renewed sense of purpose participants found in their lives was not lost on the management team. As one board member put it, in a sign seeking participants to work on the restoration of the Lister engine and water pump, "we have been offered an old rusty engine and water pump in need of restoring to working order. We're looking for a few old, rusty men to work on it and restore themselves"!

"I love this kind of thing, looking through these tools. These clamps [a set of old clamps, with wooden threading], gee, these take you back, they remind me of my apprenticeship, they were one of the first things you had to make. I've still got mine, and I've got my father's as well, they've both still got our names stamped on them".

Rooting through boxes of tools was an experience that participants thought others would enjoy, and at tool sales conducted at the local shopping centre, several participants requested that items were not laid out clearly, as may be expected, but rather left in storage boxes, so customers could enjoy rummaging as they did.

Each donated tool, the age and condition of which varied hugely, was considered for functionality, its potential workshop use, and its potential exchange value. Arnold and Peter managed this area, informally at first, though Arnold later adopted the store man role which formalised their control. Arnold and Peter demonstrated a strong desire to never discard anything, and when helping sort donations, I was often chastised for placing what I considered useless items (bent, rusty pieces of metal, tools lacking handles, old screws, etc.) in the rubbish. While Joe expressed concern regarding the Men's Shed's capacity to store, and continually add to, this collection of tools, Arnold thought that "you should never throw things out, cus you just never know when you'll need something" (This difference of opinion was the crux of the 'chucker/keeper' debate discussed in chapter nine). Adhering to this make do and mend attitude, waste metal could be used to fashion replacement lawnmower blades, small lumps of plastic, wrapped in duct tape, could function as replacement feet for a stool, discarded shell casings could function as parts for a metal lathe, and the dental forceps noted above as precision clamps. Languishing in garages or the skip, weather-ravaged bench ends were mere scrap, but at the Men's Shed, they were infused with a new possibility, that they may once again be singularised (Kopytoff, 1986); so it passed, with one shedder constructing a memorial bench for his golf club, and others doing so for their gardens or as gifts for others. The use value of high-quality older objects, whether intended or refashioned, was understood as never wholly exhausted, in contrast to typically newer, less high-quality objects:

Arnold: "I took that toolbox that had been put for throwing out back through, alls it needs is a wire brush and a bit of oil, there's guys that could work on that, that's something they could do. And this [Arnold pulls a rusty

screwdriver from the toolbox], I'd never throw out an old screwdriver, just sand it down, get rid of the dust, that's fine, it's better than these new ones, you stick 'em in like that [Arnold mimics using a screwdriver], they just bend".

Peter: "That's true, and when you see these old screws, keep 'em, keep 'em, these new brass-like screws, these ones made in China, they're crap".

Arnold: "They just burr straight away don't they, useless". (Fieldnotes, 13th June 2014)

If a tool could not be utilised at the Men's Shed, it was retained for potential sale, to the public or tool collectors, raising money for the organisation at a later date. In certain instances, even non-functioning tools were considered suitable for sale due to their aesthetic appeal, as Peter told me:

"Jeremy, look at this [a rectangular metal spirit level, Stanley brand, dull silver, with a decorative pattern carved into the sides]. Jus' look at that, feel the weight o' that, we'll tidy it up and we'll sell it, that's fine, you might no' want to use it, you can see there, the bubbles nae aligned, but you can jus' place it up on your mantelpiece, somebody'll want that".

The same consideration was granted to the antique clamps noted above; though functionally exhausted, given their worn wooden threads, it was felt they may find a space on somebody's wall, or failing that, the walls of the Men's Shed, as tangible reminders of the way things used to be done. As one shedder thought, the Men's Shed functioned almost as a 'museum' in this sense, a space in which specific material aspects of the past were preserved and admired.

Older technological objects functioned as archaeological remnants embodying desirable aspects of the past while simultaneously shining harsh light on the present. As participants sought to recreate older social forms, so material artefacts served as tangible symbols of the qualities they valued, aiding in the construction of an identity differentiated from contemporary consumerist norms (Coles & Vassarotti, 2012; Nusbaumer, 2011). Frequent contrasts were made between high-quality older tools and cheaper modern tools, with, as one shedder said, "cheap tools from China", or as another put it, "the cheap plastic shite you get these days", considered a false economy. Although they could be bought cheaply, they did not possess the qualities of strength, solidity, and durability, as older tools did:

Peter: "See all this stuff, all this made in China, you dinnae know wit you're getting. Look at these [Peter picks up a set of old, dirty, garden shears], look at the quality, you cannae trust these new ones in the same way...lots of this stuff is made of aluminium these days, so it bends easily".

Derek: "These days, you want to buy a name brand".

Peter: "But even that's no guarantee of quality. These shears dinnae have a name on them, but you know they're quality, you can tell". (Fieldnotes, 28th October 2013)

Peter recognised the 'quality' of these shearers simply by looking at them, and knew they could be trusted to fulfil their function simply because he was holding them in his hand, because they had survived the ravages of time. A quick rubdown, and they would be as good as (or better than) new, likewise a quick sharpening for a blunt chisel, or a re-handling for a hammer, would render these objects fully functional. Tools like these were considered worthy of preservation because it was reasoned that they had previously belonged to craftsmen who had themselves treated them respectfully. One shedder stressed that a set "obviously belonged to someone who's done a lot of engineering", another described a set as a "lifetime's collection of treasured items", while a third considered an exceptional set of woodcarving tools to be "somebody's pride and joy". While it was impossible to know the truth of this, participants believed it so, as nothing else could conceivably be possible for such high-quality tools. Peter, as highlighted in chapter two, would often expand upon this with me, lovingly demonstrating how their original owner would have used them, recreating his imagined actions in the present. In this sense, the tools were granted a basic, necessarily general, imagined biography; as Gosden and Marshall (1999:170) note, objects "often have the capability of accumulating histories, so that the present significance of an object derives from the persons and events to which it is connected". Participants sought to grant these tools a significance beyond their functionality, beyond their basic use value, but in the absence of certainty, the main feature attributed to them was simply that they had been used and treasured by previous craftsmen, and that, entering a new phase of their biography, they would continue to be so.[4]

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[4] Stressing significance beyond functionality was also a useful sales strategy, as is apparent in Bradley's understanding of an antique table he had refurbished. Working under Dean's guidance, he felt he had done an excellent job, repairing cracks in the legs and finishing it to a high shine, though when I pointed out imperfections on its surface, he argued;

Projects

The engineering group essentially scaled up the small-scale restoration of tools to larger pieces of old machinery. These machines were, like smaller tools, admired as surviving examples of engineering craft, and were tidied and restored to working order, but unlike smaller tools, once completed they had effectively no use value, because the context of their intended use, narrower and more historically specific than that of individual tools, no longer existed. The Lister engine and water-pump, the testing of which is described in the introduction, was a primary example of this. Once completed, it was rigged to suck water up from a bucket, run it through its pipes, and dispense it back in the bucket, an objectively pointless spectacle demonstrating only that the machinery itself worked. The main significance of these projects therefore stemmed not from what they did, their functionality, but rather what they allowed participants to do, the potential they had to facilitate cooperative homosociality. Once the Lister engine and water pump was completed, the engineers sought a greater challenge, and following extensive debate, decided on a steam engine, a Marshall single cylinder inverted vertical model to be precise. In order to gauge the scale of the project, chief engineer Cameron organised an initial assessment from a local expert:

> *In the workshop, a group of 15 participants gather around the steam engine in a circle, as I hang slightly back, observing, before the expert arrives…this mighty half-ton totem in rusted brown has a thick base, about 1.3m x 0.8m, and is still bolted to the pallet it was delivered on, from which it flows upwards, bell-shaped, to about 1.8m. At the top, there is a box-like section, containing within it intricate mechanisms currently enjoying a bath of WD-40. Through the middle of the body runs a piston, attached to a flywheel, about 0.9m across, the motion of which turns a thick crankshaft, to which other machinery is attached. In normal operation, the conversion of water into steam allows the piston to function; in this case,*

"Oh no, you don't want to take it all off, it's got to retain some of that. Its patina, its history, is there in those markings, they're there to stay, they're the history of the table. When you're refurbishing it, you don't want to hide them, you want to make them look better. If you just sand it down to the bare wood, you lose all that character, nobody's gonna want it then. With furniture like this, its value is in that history, nobody's interested in old furniture that's been completely worked over".

Bradley also sought to construct a biography for the table, imagining a substance to the history he had worked to highlight; "this table, it would have been in a lawyer's office at some point, I can tell, the lawyer would have had his papers and his files on it, next to his desk perhaps". Removing its many small imperfections would eradicate the table's (possibly erroneous) history, reducing it to a mere protocol object. As Bradley stressed, this embedded history, beyond the object's basic functionality, was what interested buyers; rightly enough, the table sold for £50 within weeks of its refurbishment.

it pumps vertically, though it was previously agreed that compressed air will be used to run the engine, as opposed to boiling water, for safety reasons. A simple design, the expert informs us, steam engines have been used for centuries, and provided the power driving the industrial revolution. The investigation begins, with participants passing comments while peering into the mechanism using torches..."we'll need a stand to get the flywheel on", "it would have been stood on a plinth", "just a flat valve in here", "are these usually worn"?, "this looks odd, there should be a cast plate on there"...this technical talk continues for about ten minutes, before the men step back and listen to the expert discussing the machine's history. He says it is a shame that the metal identification plate has been removed, as this is vital to discovering its history. As it is, all that is known is that this type of steam engine was manufactured in Britain, though they were shipped throughout the world, and it could have run all manner of machines in its working life. It is then time to open it up; Arnold does the heavy work, cranking the rusty bolts off the top and side plates with a hefty spanner (he breaks a nail, though as Graham jokes, "you'll be getting a manicure soon": 'As if'! is his response to that). With the side plates removed, Cameron and Henry probe it delicately, bringing to mind the work of a surgeon, down to the typical handing of tools ("spanner, about half-inch...hammer...get a photo of that"), while others take measurements, of the flywheel, the crankshaft, and the pistons, on torn scraps of paper...Graham buzzes around with the camera, capturing this special moment. It is good practice, the expert says, to document the removal and storage of each part, because "any idiot can take apart a steam engine, it's putting it back together that's the tricky part". After about 15 minutes, the expert concludes that the machine is actually in a reasonable state; various parts need to be identified, replaced, or made, but there are no real problems with the internal mechanism, and hence no overly complicated work. Participants seem a little deflated by this...Graham says "that's why we bought this one, it would be a nightmare if its finished in a couple of months, we wanted it to last two years or so, and it's got to be a bit of a challenge at least"...they are finished for the evening, though stepping back, Henry says "if only it could talk, tell us where it's been". (Fieldnotes, 12th February 2014)

Participants were disappointed that the steam engine did not arrive with historical documentation, and that its identification plate, which would have provided clues to its previous functions, had been removed, denying them knowledge of its biography. Henry's brief lament can thus be understood as an expression of the desire to restore, in the abstract, this machine's 'capacity to act' (Ahearn, 2001). Of course, through its presence at the Men's Shed, and beforehand in its refashioning as a hobbyist's project, this capacity had been neutered by its removal from the network of agentic 'things', or 'actants' (Latour, 2005), that it was intended to exist within. It certainly no longer ran the workshop that built the ships that fought the war, or built the chimney parts for

factories that provided employment for thousands. Its specific history was unknown, where it had been, what it had done, the networks it had existed within, and at the Men's Shed, it was further removed from this intended history, from the task it was built to perform. It was certainly not, as some objects are, made with its nostalgia value in mind (Davis, 1979), but at the Men's Shed found itself living out a new phase of its biography, retaining great significance not as a steam engine fulfilling its intended function, but as a project which granted participants the opportunity to conduct a challenging and enjoyable restoration process. Through this process, participants, though further nullifying the machines historical 'agency', recreated the kinds of social interaction that would have occurred in its presence during the first, intended, phase of its biography.

That is to say, the steam engine, despite being functionally and historically neutered (being prettified for show, and, for safety reasons, made to run on compressed air rather than steam), still retained its capacity to generate contextually-specific routinized human activity (Kien, 2009). The refurbishment was a process the group wanted to savour, desiring that it be neither too easy nor too brief, hence Graham's concern regarding its current state. An acceptable degree of challenge was sought, in which difficulties, and therefore learning, could occur, with the latter eventually overcoming the former (Kleif & Faulkner, 2003). As to its destiny post-refurbishment, the idea was to sell it; the management team knew of a community of men interested in completed machines, "guys who like to play with them, fire them up, take them to shows or put them in a museum", and with the money raised, another machine could be purchased, beginning the process anew. Hence while Kleif and Faulkner's (2003) participants (fighting robot builders and software engineers) highlighted the public visibility of their work as the main reward of their endeavours, at the Men's Shed, the process of structured but relaxed cooperative work, engaging with, simultaneously, machines and other men, functioned as the main reward. Indeed, aside from personal jobs, participants tended not to keep completed projects; woodworking and small-scale engineering projects were almost wholly commissioned, while large-scale engineering projects were sold to finance the next project. Nobody knew the final destination of the model railway, but as one member of the group said, "the fun's in making it, there's not that much you can do with it when it's finished, unless you've got a really big set-up". Generally, in

relation to projects, the enjoyment resided not in the completion of the task, but rather in the process of conducting it (Moisio *et al*, 2013).

Like the widows donating their husband's tools to the Men's Shed, participants sought to ensure saleable engineering projects would be looked after, that their future biography reflected the care and attention they warranted, which meant selecting a suitable buyer. This was not overly difficult, given that anyone interested in buying a refurbished engine was likely to be an enthusiast. This concern was evident in the sale of the Lister engine and water-pump. Graham, the overall project leader, at first believed it should be kept for posterity, as the first large project completed by the engineers. However, keeping the machine in practice meant leaving it in the already overcrowded back room to gather dust, with only occasional visits to local shows to display it, and therefore Graham decided to sound out the group about selling it to Charlie, an occasional visitor to the Men's Shed who was heavily involved in the local show subculture:

> *Graham: "Charlie's interested in buying the Lister, and I just wanted to get everyone's opinion before we go ahead with any negotiations. The general consensus so far seems to be that selling it will be alright if it goes to a good home...we didn't want to sell it at first, it was our first project, but it's Charlie, he'll look after it".*
>
> *Peter: "I don't mind, I know Charlie's a collector".*
>
> *Cameron: "Oh, it's alright to sell it if it's going to a good home, and it is, it won't sit rusting at the back of a garage, it'll be out at the shows every week, come rain or shine".* (Fieldnotes, 11th June 2014)

Participants considered it important that the engine went to a good home where it would be appreciated, rather than being allowed to fall into disrepair. It had, through its refurbishment, transitioned from its former status as a farming machine, built for long days in the fields, to a gleaming example of the model fit for admiration in the travelling museum of the show subculture. Painted and polished to a shine that would not have graced it in its working days, it was, like the steam engine, no longer an agent in history, but rather a glorified representation thereof, its potent symbolic value and potential to facilitate homosociality having superseded its mundane use value (Nusbaumer, 2011).

Differentiation

In contrast to the reverence granted to older technological objects, modern versions were felt to have succumbed to the scourge of price and quality reducing mass production, and therefore, as one shedder put it, "aren't built to last these days". Aluminium is nowadays a common material for blades, rather than the old steel standard, and saws, another shedder complained "are all hard point these days, you use them once and throw them out", in contrast to a donated pre-1955 Henry Disston, for which participants shared the sentiments etched onto the blade: "for beauty, finish and utility, this saw cannot be excelled". The same distinction applied to objects as varied as, for example, doll's house furniture, as one expert in this area put it: "I much prefer the wooden furniture, because with wood, you get the feeling that it's alive, y'know, when you feel it. The plastic parts are more common these days, but they're dead. The wood, the wood is alive". The spread of cheap disposable items was considered symptomatic of the contemporary 'consumer society':

> Arnold: "People don't get things fixed these days, they just throw them out. You can go down to the skip on any weekend, you'll see all sorts of things, televisions, dishwashers, bikes, people just throw them out as soon as they can't get them to work. Sometimes, they haven't even switched the bloody thing on"!
>
> Cameron: "That's the consumer society".
>
> Arnold: "It's good for us in a way though, we can get all these things from the skip to work on". (Fieldnotes, 23rd December 2013)

Likewise, another shedder could not "believe what they're throwing out down at that skip", noting in particular a "Flymo that hadn't even been taken out of its box"! He considered it:

> "Such a shame that people are so quick to throw out their bikes these days, even if all they've got is a flat tyre, they're still brand new…and with wood, you used to fix it, if it was broken you fixed it, nowadays they're just chucking it out, it's such a waste".

People, it was felt, no longer have the knowledge, inclination, or time to repair their possessions, and in this alteration of their typical lifespan, they remain as protocol objects, to be used and discarded without the establishment of meaningful relationships between men and their possessions (Morin, 1969).

Participants considered themselves immune to this kind of wastefulness, a point of differentiation, for as one shedder said, "there aren't a lot of guys like me about anymore", while another noted "I love fixing things, I hate buying things when you can fix it". This was in contrast to 'ordinary people', who participants felt were unaware of the difference between high-quality older tools and cheap modern tools, and therefore duped by the false economy of the latter. Participants knew that despite the apparent value, a cheap tool from a pound shop is neither as reliable nor as long lasting as a good quality second-hand tool, because it is not designed to be.

This desire to differentiate past from present is apparent in the following extract:

In the back room, Peter's is helping his wood supplier, Jeff, carry in a donation. Arnold and Henry lend a hand, and when they have finished, they discuss the tool chests rescued from the skip last Wednesday:

Henry: "Now that's a kist! [a Scottish term for a wooden tool chest] Och, there's two of them, there's three of them"!

Jeff: "You found all this at the skip? Somebody was just going to chuck that out? That's scary".

Arnold: "You're right, it is scary, it's unbelievable".

Arnold begins to pull out various metal tools, chisels and suchlike:

Arnold: "Now see in this here, that's all stainless steel, ninety percent of it is anyway".

Henry: "You can't beat old tools can ye"?

Peter: "No, you're right, you cannae".

Henry: "Yep, they just don't make them like that anymore".

Peter rakes in the chest, and pulls out what was once a flathead screwdriver, adapted by the previous owner into a curved spike:

Peter: "See, in the olden days, if they didnae have a tool, they would make one or adapt one, just look at that, he's made that himself".

Arnold: "It's just part and parcel of life isn't it"?

Peter: "Dean's got to see these, he'll decide if they want them".

Arnold: "That's part of my job, we'll go through them together and sort them out. Some guys would want to just throw all these out".
(Fieldnotes, 16th July 2014)

This extract demonstrates the typical excitement around the arrival of donated tools to be assessed, organised, admired, and put to use or sale, alongside the no less than 'scary' though that their previous owner could possibly scrap them. This excitement manifested with cries of joy ('oh yes'!, 'you beauty'! 'magnificent'!), and in certain instances even clapping and jumping on the spot, justifying frequent comparison of the box-by-box unveiling of donated tools to the unwrapping of Christmas presents. The inherent quality of these older tools was highlighted, quality which it was felt cannot be beaten, while Peter also admired the adaptations conducted by the previous owner, a tangible reminder of the make do and mend mind-set which used to be, and still was in participants' eyes, "part and parcel of life".

This aspect of participants' critique of contemporary society thus had two aspects; firstly, the skills utilised to repair and adapt technological objects have declined, and secondly, technological objects are no longer designed to be repaired or adapted, having mostly shifted towards the protocol end of the spectrum. The Men's Shed presented an absolute contrast, with participants both utilising their skills to repair and adapt objects, and being granted opportunities to use and admire high-quality historical tools. This is not to say that newer tools were not utilised when practical, for example, nobody considered manual sawing necessary when an electric bandsaw was quicker and produced a cleaner finish. It was rather felt that knowledge in the use of newer technologies should complement, rather than supersede, knowledge of older methods, which need not have been gained professionally. As Matt stressed when discussing his interest in planes (see above), he was 'merely an enthusiast', fortunate to be taught by a 'good father', an advantage also noted by other participants with regards to workshop conduct, who were taught the kinds of small tips and tricks, regarding particular operations, that provided a sense of comfort in the environment. Mindful of the contemporary decline of such expansive skill-sets, participants considered the intergenerational transfer of knowledge to be of great importance. Indeed, for one board member, speaking in a promotional video, the Men's Shed was about:

> *"Getting the elderly, and...bringing them back into being elders, and that's a very important journey, that I think needs to happen again in our villages, and for our teenagers to see, that our elders in the village have so*

much to offer, so much to offer our communities...I think this model has been here forever, but the industrial revolution came and changed it, and we're really not reinventing the wheel, we're just bringing back the kind of community I want to live in".

Another shedder reflected on the technological progression the had eroded the historical legacy formerly adopted by younger men as a matter of course:

"I saw this television programme the other day, and it was these younger guys working alongside older guys. That's so important, these young guys have got to learn how to use their hands, these are traditional skills that men have used for centuries, not a lot of them know how to do these kinds of things now. It's all about these machines these days, it's about jus' pushing a button, and that's no' the right way to do things".

This shedder felt today's youth, raised on mind-numbing computers, have lost the kind of embodied practical knowledge participants themselves possessed and valued (Heidegger, 1962; Merleau-Ponty, 1962); as another shedder lamented, "it's just such a shame, these things aren't being passed on anymore, it just seems like such a waste".[5]

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[5] While the central location of the Men's Shed in Carstonwood certainly increased the visibility of older men, it did not substantially increase productive intergenerational interaction. The difficulties inherent in welcoming under-18's into the Men's Shed (the need for disclosure processes) meant this occurred only once during the fieldwork, when Dennis, at the time a council employee, brought in a group of teenage boys to build bird boxes. This event was greatly enjoyed by participants, and keenly recorded and mentioned in grant applications, but was an exception to the norm. Indeed Joe, always alert to threats to the Men's Shed, mildly chastised participants who helped some teenagers repair their bikes, in what was a less 'artificial' instance of intergenerational cooperation. Regarding over-18's, again intergenerational work only occurred once, when participants worked alongside members of a charity and design students from a local university to produce wooden and plastic toys for a local disabled children's charity. One shedder reflected on this;

"I like to see young people with an open mind, they're engaged and enthusiastic, asking questions, they're coming up with ideas we would never have thought of...it's such a breath of fresh air, they're not these narrow-minded young people, they're creative, and they weren't raw, they're third years, so they knew what they were doing, not like us. I mean, give me a plan, I'll draw up a basic mechanical design, but nothing more than that...it's brought us together, the young creative people, and us old guys with years of experience".

Given the correct context, a challenging design and manufacturing project requiring the combination of youthful creativity alongside technical experience, this shedder felt young and old could successfully work alongside each other. It was, as one board member noted, such a shame that this kind of intergenerational collaboration did not occur more often, as he felt it did in the past, and he stressed how "privileged [I was] to be learning from these guys", that in my relatively long-term presence at the Men's Shed, I was undergoing an educational experience few young men now do, a point that I would not disagree with. A further point can be noted here, namely that participant's criticisms of young people, as discussed above, were mainly non-specific, reflecting upset with general trends as opposed to individuals. When actually working alongside younger people, participants consistently noted their interest and engagement, as well as the enjoyment they derived from it. The Men's Shed provided occasional opportunities for them to

In stressing the importance of using one's hands, the above extract primarily refers to the use of tools to intimately connect with and understand technological objects, rather than using machines that are, aside from button pressing, completely disconnected from the body. On this point, contemporary car mechanics in particular were criticised:

> I am sat at the board table with Arnold, Peter, Ralf, Cameron, Dean, and Joe, flicking through Autocar magazine:
>
> Joe: "Are you looking for your first car"?
>
> Jeremy: "Yes, I think the Aston Martin looks good".
>
> Arnold: "What about his car [Arnold nods towards Ralf]"?
>
> Ralf: "Yes, I've got a Jaguar, it's a replica, the SS100, all aluminium body, it's V6, 4.2 litre engine, a Jaguar one, it's got the big grill and everything, it's a good replica, it's very loud".
>
> Arnold: "I know! I live a few doors from him, I can hear it every time he fires it up, 'bbbbrrrrroooommmm'! [Whispered to me] He can't actually drive it".
>
> Ralf: "It's off the road at the moment, it's not taxed and needs an MOT".
>
> Joe: "It's probably hard to find anyone that would carry out an MOT on a car like that".
>
> The group exaggeratedly sigh.
>
> Cameron: "Yes, now the problem with mechanics these days is that they're not trained as mechanics, they're just technicians".
>
> Dean: "They're fitters, Kwik-Fit fitters".
>
> Peter: "It's all computerised these days, all these garages are using them. I knew a guy, and his car widnae start, the computer couldnae find anything wrong with it. It wisnae starting"!
>
> Ralf: "Ay, the Carstonwood Garage is bad for that, they told me not to bother taking in the car, cus they couldn't get the parts for it".
>
> Arnold: "That's right, I lift up the bonnet on my car to take a look at the engine, and there's just a black box, it's a closed system, so you can't do it yourself, you've got to take it to these garages". (Fieldnotes, 30th December 2013)

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engage in intergenerational interaction, though such instances were artificial in character, rather than arising spontaneously, as would have occurred in the past.

'Everything', one shedder complained, is "modularised these days, you can't get in to fix it, so when it breaks, you have get a new part, place it in", while another complained that Haynes Manuals, self-repair guidebooks for cars, have been rendered useless because of this. Though recognising the increased technological complexity of modern cars, participants felt that not allowing men to tinker with them was a deliberate strategy on the part of manufacturers seeking to ensure profits in the lucrative service market. This both contravened their ownership rights, and discouraged the learning of repair skills formerly known as a matter of course.

In contrast, past mechanics were considered to possess an in-depth embodied knowledge, allowing for a greater connection with an engine, thus elevating their labours to an art form:

> Arnold: "Now these old mechanics, it's an art, a real art, they could strip down cars, take apart the engine and rebuild 'em, get 'em running again".

> Peter: "Ay, they kent wit they were daein, it's no' like these guys you see today, they're no' actually even mechanics, they're like [Peter imitates dumbly pressing buttons] 'oh, the machine says it disnae work, we'll just replace it, oh, the machine says this disnae work, we'll just replace it'…I used tae know a guy, completely stone deaf, but he could still fix these things [Peter puts his ear down to the table, imitating close listening], he could hear the vibrations coming from the engine, y'know, he could jus' feel them, amazing". (Fieldnotes, 14th June 2013)

Past mechanic's skills manifested as a multi-sensual absorption in the engine, with the body itself functioning as a most sensitive diagnostic tool. In the conduct of such 'nuts and bolts' work (Faulkner, 2007), there is minimal physical distance between man and machine, both because of the confidence past mechanics had in their knowledge of engines (different in each case, hence a creative process meriting being labelled art), and because older engines were more open to examination. Peter felt that past mechanics exhibited a 'kinaesthetic sense' (Harper, 1987), responding to the machine's 'voice' through a kind of practical embodied knowledge only articulated in its enactment (Mellström, 2002). Such intimacy is impossible with modern cars manufactured using sealed units, the diagnosis of which require the intermediary use of computers, which were considered rigid and lacking the intuition and accuracy of a knowledgeable man. Though computers are themselves gendered technologies (Kleif & Faulkner,

2003; Wajcman, 1991), within the field of aged masculinity existing at the Men's Shed, younger men who utilised them in favour of hands-on labour were subordinated, their disconnection from the machines they work on also disconnecting them from the history of their craft (Coles & Vassarotti, 2012). No longer mechanics, but merely 'Kwik-Fit fitters', they were considered "users rendered ignorant and clumsy by *distance*" (Latour, 2005:80, original emphasis).

The kind of embodied practical knowledge admired by participants is said by Merleau-Ponty (1962:144) to exist "in the hands, [and] is forthcoming only when bodily effort is made, [it] cannot be formulated in detachment from that effort". Such knowledge was called upon daily at the Men's Shed, for example, sharpening tools on the grinding wheel or woodturning on the lathe both required the precise physical application of tools, requiring the user to know, find, and maintain the correct angles and pressure while avoiding overheating. In the hands of experienced craftsmen, Arnold could again stress the artistry of such work. The cultivation of such skills, transforming 'present-at-hand' tools to 'ready-to-hand' tools (Heidegger, 1962), necessarily encompasses active processes of learning and habitualisation, through which comfort, competence, and confidence in application arise. Dean therefore stressed, in the beginner's woodworking classes that he led, that "I can show you how to do all these things, but in the end it's something you've got to try yourself". Likewise, one shedder, making a crossbow, said, "I've got loads of books on how to make a crossbow, but I've only actually read about half of one. Making a crossbow, it's not really the kind of thing you can learn from a book, you have to do it to know how to do it, if that makes any sense". Knowing both which tool to use, and how to correctly apply it was, one board member noted, "the difference between a craftsman and just a man using a workshop", and for the majority of participants, the retention of this 'handiness' was an important aspect of continuity achieved within the Men's Shed (Atchley, 1989). For those whose lack of experience precluded their identification as a craftsman, the expression of an eagerness to learn from others through immersing themselves in the community of practice served to equalise their status, as is discussed in chapter nine.

Conclusion

One shedder rounded up participants' general critique of social change thusly:

> *"You say progress, progress is not always a good thing. In the past, you've got these traditions handed down through families and communities for years, we can't allow them to die out. We can't forget them, they're often a better way to do things than all these current trends".*

This concern with changing or forgotten forms of practice, specifically related to the quantity and quality of interactions between peers, between members of one's community, and between men and technological objects, formed the substance of participants' critique of contemporary society, and the focus of their restorative zeal (Boym, 2001). The Men's Shed was conceived as a space in which these connections, rendered shallow by social and technological change, and in certain instances the combination thereof, could be restored to a depth valued by participants. The organisation certainly bolstered connections between men who could be considered peers, men whose similar socialisation (norm introjection) and current experience (bounded solidarity) provided a firm basis for comradeship, and a mandate for structuring the Men's Shed as they saw fit (Portes, 1998). Of course, other community organisations may be thought to serve ostensibly similar purposes, and there was no shortage of these in Carstonwood, as discussed in chapter three. The Men's Shed certainly aided in the establishment or reinvigoration of participants' connections with members of existing community organisations, bridging the gap between them and those they aided (Putnam, 2000). This wider sense of the term 'community' was undoubtedly important to participants, and the Men's Shed allowed them to utilise their unique skillsets to aid local charities, schools, churches, and suchlike. However, the extracts in this chapter demonstrate a desire for a quantity and quality of interaction that surpasses that possible with inter-group connections. While 'doing for' was rewarding, 'doing with' held deeper possibilities for gratification, and current community organisations did not fit this bill to the extent that the Men's Shed did. Recall that these organisations did not cater directly to (older) men's needs and desires, nor did they share the characteristic openness of the Men's Shed. They were more varied, in terms of age and gender, and contained members who did not necessarily share participants' views

regarding social change, hence they proved inadequate to the particular restorative task set of the Men's Shed. Participants found in the organisation a site in which they could voice concerns reflective of their age and experience, and be assured of a sympathetic ear. Moreover, they found a site in which they could assume a high degree of control, a freedom unavailable in other organisations. The Men's Shed was theirs, its purpose and functioning could be shaped as they saw fit, an expectation of particular forms of interaction could be woven into its social fabric. The cooperative social environment duly established is the subject of the following two chapters.

Technological objects played a vital role in this environment, serving three particular functions. Firstly, they mediated connections between participants, which over time developed into the cooperative environment they considered crucially important. Secondly, they served as tangible reminders of the past they valued. Thirdly, they acted as a point of differentiation in relation to younger men. The past, Olivier (2001) reminds us, unavoidably accumulates in the material world, as objects exhibit, to a greater or lesser extent, the quality of duration (Bergson, 2004). The past envelops and gives substance to the presence, and individuals cannot help but live within its 'layers' (Olsen, 2010), in the long-worn streets and buildings, and around the objects they interact with, that constitute the present. More often than not though, those objects specifically recognised for their 'pastness' are set apart for this purpose; museum objects, family heirlooms, or war memorials are spatially separated, consciously bracketed opportunities for a reflective form of nostalgia in which a clear division between then and now is maintained (Boym, 2001). This was the case with certain of the older technological objects that turned up at the Men's Shed, though it was because of their very survival into the present (their duration) that these objects could serve their representational function; the medium in this sense constituted the message. Participants treated such objects with great respect, recognising and in some instances constructing their biographical historicity, and emphasising the solidity and durability of the past, as embodied within them, over the more ephemeral materiality of the present. Participants likewise considered the shifting connections between men and technological objects; previously akin to that between artist and canvas, these purportedly had shifted due to the malign influence of technological progression, and in their defence of embodied practical

knowledge, participants assumed a position of perceived superiority over younger men lacking such skills. The physical environment of the Men's Shed was therefore vitally important, providing a novel material context amenable to the cultivation and expression of this superiority, not merely at the personally fulfilling level of individual continuity, but moreover at the collective level of goal-directed cooperation.

8

Give and Take

As discussed in chapter four, managerial and fundraising responsibilities shifted towards participants over the course of the fieldwork, and expectations regarding their conduct changed to reflect this. At the outset of the fieldwork, the distinction between the management team and participants was stark, because the latter's capabilities were initially unknown. As it became apparent that the Men's Shed was attracting highly capable men who sought involvement in decision-making processes, the management team embraced this, allowing participants to assume a high degree of ownership over the organisation. One board member initially pursued this by proposing a 'member's forum', based on the 'smoko' practiced in some Australian Men's Sheds (whereby participants discuss their concerns with the management team), but this was unpopular, as it still suggested a vertical hierarchy. Recognising this, another board member felt that all such differentiation should cease: "we have to stop speaking about the management, because we're all in this together". Sure enough, the distinction between the management team and participants blurred over the course of the fieldwork, with the membership of the board shifting as participants joined and original members 'retired', and as the decentralisation process occurred, whereby participants took on important organisational roles. While the Men's Shed was legally obliged to maintain a board of trustees as its formal decision-making body, the day-to-day running of the organisation was gradually adopted by participants, with board membership coming to represent not a distinction, but merely another role participants could adopt to support the organisation and progress within it. These related points, an "open organisational structure, formal but flexible, [with] open governance", combined with a "spirit of contributory involvement" (in one board members' words) thus came to define what was termed the 'Carstonwood model', a particular means of running a Men's Shed whose participants exhibited the characteristics and desires they did. Another board member summarised this in the following terms, also noting the

egalitarianism inherent in the model; as he put it, the Men's Shed was about "having a support network of men...all voluntary, so no one's paid at the Shed, no one's the boss". The organisation can thus be said to have matured towards a horizontal social structure, the form best positioned to secure long-term sustainability through drawing on the diverse abilities and solid commitment of all involved (Ostrom, 2001).

The Men's Shed could therefore be advertised, as one board member put it, as an environment of "respect, acceptance, and mutual support", and this was largely correct, with the important proviso that personally benefitting from the social capital inherent in the organisation, legitimately enjoying the opportunities for continuity made available, required from the individual a commitment that they would support the organisation in kind. Though 'not a club', and hence not formally demanding of participants, to be respected, accepted, and supported, the individual had to respect the Men's Shed, and accept that it too needed supporting. Uphoff's (2001) distinction between the cognitive and structural aspects of social capital provides a relevant framework for analysis here. The former, discussed in this chapter, refers to the subjective norms, values, attitudes, and beliefs which predispose the holder towards mutually beneficial collective action, and render it a rational and respectable pursuit. These can be thought of as the guiding principles that motivated participants' conduct, shaping how a man is to *think* if he is to assume the status of a shedder. The latter, discussed in the following chapter, refers to the objective roles, rules, precedents and procedures that provide a framework for the consistent achievement of organisational goals, and therefore can be said to shape how a man is to *act* once he has assumed the status of a shedder. Both the cognitive and structural aspects of social capital function as a basis for differentiation. Those that recognise the collective expectations of the group, and respond to them through diligently conducting their particular roles and consistently adhering to the rules, can expect acceptance, whereas those who do not can expect to be met with harsh criticism and corrective action (Coleman, 1988a; Krishna, 2001; Portes, 1998). In the case of the Men's Shed, those that failed to comply with the expectations of the group were subject to critical gossiping, which, in relation to the cognitive aspects of social capital in operation, served both to set apart and confirm the deviance of

offenders, as well reinforcing the virtue of those doing the gossiping (Foster, 2004).

Mutual Reciprocity

Much of participants' behaviour could be defined as mutually reciprocal, that which is "productive for others as well as for one's self" (Uphoff, 2001:216). This may be immediate others, in cases of teaching or health discussions, or more commonly, the organisation as a whole. In such generalised reciprocal relationships, "each individual contributes to the welfare of others with an expectation that others will do likewise, but without a fully contingent quid pro quo" (Oakerson, 1993:143). This cognitive aspect of social capital was "embedded in common understanding" (Ostrom, 2001:179), and was typically understood as the willingness to engage in what participants termed 'give and take', whereby the individual could legitimatise their presence, the 'taking' of whatever it was they desired from their involvement, based on their contribution towards the collective. Two specific examples serve to illustrate this point. The first concerns Ali, who had just moved to Carstonwood from a non-English speaking country, and sought to establish a social network and improve his English. Steve and Peter felt that he demonstrated the correct attitude for a newcomer:

> Steve: *"How's Ali getting on with his English"?*
>
> Jeremy: *"Yeh, I think he's doing fine, it has really improved".*
>
> Steve: *"Yes, he seems to speak it alright. I'll tell you though, I was helping him out with his doll's house today, and he's been helping me out with some painting. It's a bit of a boring job to be honest, but he did it well. I liked his attitude, he came in and he's looking to help out where he could, he wasn't shy, and he wasn't demanding people do things for him, he wasn't trying to bully his way in".*
>
> Peter: *"That's the kind of guy we need here, he was willing tae help, and he was willing tae listen".* (Fieldnotes, 28th June 2013)

In order to legitimately immerse himself in the environment, and derive the particular benefits he sought, Ali was expected to contribute where he could. Though he was largely unskilled, he actively sought out a task, and did not complain when given what Steve felt was a rather tedious painting job. This

willingness was judged positively by Steve and Peter, who positioned Ali as the kind of man the Men's Shed needed to succeed.[1] The second example concerns Fred, who came from a nearby town in order to learn how to develop a Men's Shed in his own location, seeking knowledge of everything from securing a property to operating specific tools. By way of contribution, he spent his own time and money making intricate fretsaw artworks, dozens of which he gave to the Men's Shed to be sold for funds. This exchange involved the trading of knowledge, gathered through both general immersion in the community of practice and specific instances of training, for items of economic value, from which everyone would ultimately benefit. Fulfilling his end of the bargain was no hardship for Fred, who 'loved' making these artworks, often spending eight hours a day working on them in his garage (to the point where his wife worried he was becoming obsessed), and this hints at an important general point. The 'giver' tended to enjoy contributing utilising the skills they possessed, valuing their involvement in an organisation in which generalised reciprocal exchange, like the old 'bob-a-job' scheme described in the previous chapter, guided participation.

In relation to raising funds, certain participant's contributions summed to thousands of pounds over the course of the fieldwork, mainly through their work on commissioned projects. Again, personal benefits can be observed to accrue from such involvements, be it exercising one's existing skills, learning new skills, working (and socialising) alongside like-minded others, or knowing that one's work was benefiting the wider community. In each case, the whole organisation, and hence all participants, also benefited; the money received for bookcases made for a local primary school may pay for the heating and lighting that allowed such projects to be conducted, or for leaflets to attract new participants who enriched the social environment, or for a supervisor's first-aid course to improve participants' safety. However, participants felt that the monetary value of contributions made mattered less than the demonstration of the correct attitude, as encapsulated by one shedder: "if you're gonna be a member of something like

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[1] Ali had to stop attending the Men's Shed due to personal issues, though the acceptance afforded him during his brief involvement did serve to highlight the openness of the group. Though the majority of participants were white, middle-class older men, those of a different ethnic background (Ali), and indeed those of a different age (me; see chapter two), were willingly incorporated on the basis of adherence to the fundamental principle of give and take. Likewise, as is discussed below, those who did not adhere to this principle were criticised, despite sharing many characteristics with participants.

this, especially if you don't have anything else going on in your life, you should be getting involved with the running of it". Similarly, in reviewing the Men's Shed prior to my leaving the field, one shedder told me why he thought the organisation had been so successful:

> *"It's going great, isn't it?...yes, it's going really well, and I think it's because everybody's got a chance to contribute, y'know, over here, over there, there's always something you can do...I went out to [a nearby town], to help with the Shed building over there, and there's this one guy who seems to want to control everything. It's not like that, it shouldn't be like that, y'know, that's not the way to run a Shed".*

'Everyone', several policy documents stressed, "has a contribution to make to the success of the Shed", and one board member outlined how this could occur in practice, noting the range of potential contributory involvements. "Men at the Shed"?, he asked, "you need a guy who washes the dishes, you need a chairman, you need a secretary, and you need guys who can work the tools, who can mentor, who can dance and sing". Similarly, an early advertisement further indicated the role differentiation essential to the Men's Shed, stating that "we need all levels of ability from Bob the Builder to Tony the Tea Maker". Hence while certain members of the core group of participants raised considerable funds, less involved participants (it was understood that not all participants wanted to, or could, make the Men's Shed a major part of their life) could, by working on commissioned projects, selling raffle tickets, producing lathe ornaments for sale, or helping at a tool sale, demonstrate their understanding of the norm of give and take, and structure their limited involvement accordingly. There was also a variety of non-financial means of contributing, for example, those raising money required a tidy and organised workshop, functioning tools, a regular supply of refreshments, and men willing to conduct the necessary administration; certain of these tasks are discussed in the following chapter. To reiterate then, demonstrating the correct attitude by willingly engaging in some form of contributory activity mattered more than the specifics of what was done.

This contributory mind-set became so firmly established that certain participants willingly adopted prominent organisational roles to a degree which severely limited their time to pursue personal interests. As Arnold said after a typically busy day:

> *"I didn't get much of my own work done today, seemed like every time I got down to it, somebody was asking me to help out with their project, they're saying, 'oh, Arnold, can you help us with this, Arnold, what do I do with this'. Well, I don't mind doing this, it's what it's all about isn't it".*

Peter similarly said:

> *"I started refurbishing my chair months ago, it's still nae done, I really don't get the time tae work on it. Seems like every time I come in here, there's something else needin' done, there might be somebody who needs a hand, or tools to sort through, or going tae pick up some wood".*

Both Arnold and Peter reached the point where they almost never had time to conduct personal projects, so busy where they with their role assignments. In particular, the organisation of donated tools became a 'full-time' job for these men. This entailed the continual assessment, organisation, and storage of the never-ending flood of incoming items, the coordination of relations between the back room, those working to repair and refurbish items, and those photographing and advertising them for sale, and the production of detailed logbooks recording all aspects of the process for the hundreds of individual items dealt with. There truly was "always a job needing done", and as Arnold put it, this was what "the Shed is all about"; in effect, fulfilling these collectively beneficial roles became Arnold and Peter's primary reason for attending the Men's Shed. A snatched half-hour on their own projects merited highlighting, as when Peter found the time to work on his antique chair: "look what I'm doing"! he said excitedly, and just to ensure others were aware of this rare occasion, he left a post-it note on it after finishing, noting 'PETER'S CHAIR AT LAST'. Likewise, Arnold consistently expressed an interest in learning to use the lathe, an ambition still unfulfilled as I left the field, as he was simply too busy in the back room. Cameron was another whose contributory duties were overwhelming; he had very little opportunity to work on the steam engine, instead dedicating himself to the dozens of lawnmowers that members of the public brought in for repair, or the conduct of PAT tests on donated electrical items prior to their sale.

For these shedders, their involvement took the nature of a duty; helping others, and furthering the collective through contributing in areas they were 'qualified' to do so (being knowledgeable about the substance of their roles), was what they understood the Men's Shed to be about, more so than merely pursuing their own projects. Their conduct may appear 'sacrificial' (Knoke, 1988) when considered

from the 'official' point of view focusing on the personal benefits of participation, but these men, and indeed the rest of the core group of participants, looked beyond this, to the point where what they gave and what they took was indistinguishable. This may appear paradoxical, at least in relation to the examples given above, where there is a clearly distinguishable contribution (that which is given), and a clearly distinguishable benefit (that which is taken). Recall though, that the majority of participants did not consider themselves to be disadvantaged, and did not approach the Men's Shed from the point of view of fulfilling the particular needs that the literature notes these organisations address (see chapter four). Their reflections instead referred to an absence in their lives, a desire for a sense of community that for most has been lost to social change. They sought to recreate this particular communal form, a cooperative collectivist environment in which others are helped as a matter of course, and hence playing their part in its maintenance and progression functioned as its own reward. For those that did present with more specific needs, it was ultimately through immersion in this environment that a man may improve his English, seek guidance on how to establish a Men's Shed, learn how to use a particular tool, or find a sympathetic response to health or social concerns. During my time at the Men's Shed, a wide variety of such challenges were confronted and overcome, but mutual reciprocity, contributing in the knowledge that doing so would sustain organisational functioning for the continual benefit of all, remained as the consistent principle shaping participant's involvement. Hence while "most discussions of networks emphasize that they are held together by mutual expectations of benefit", the Men's Shed provides evidence indicating that "they are crucially sustained by expectations (that is, by norms) of reciprocity" (Uphoff, 2001:219, see also, Cavanagh, 2013; Finkel *et al*, 1989; Knoke, 1988). From such expectations, a simple shared workshop, a community *of* practice, became, when underpinned by the reasoning outlined in the previous chapter, a community *in* practice.

Non-contributors

Finding other men of similar age, physical, and social standing allowed for intra-group bonding built upon norm introjection and bounded solidarity (Portes, 1998), and these shared aspects of participant's aged masculinity generated

positive distinctions from certain other demographics. However, distinctions were also established between participants, between those members of the core group who most willingly recognised and adhered to the norm of mutual reciprocity, and those who failed to do so. Strong intra-group norms are typically governed by an authority system that monitors and sanctions non-adherence (Turner, 2001; Uphoff, 2001). However, due to the Men's Shed's open, non-club status, with all men encouraged to attend, and the lack of authority figures stemming from the horizontal operating model, a formal system of sanctions could not be implemented, with gossiping instead providing a means of venting frustration. Gossiping, defined as "informal and evaluative talk in an organization, usually among no more than a few individuals, about another member of that organization" (Kurland & Pelled, 2000:429), is a near-universal social experience, and the Men's Shed was no exception. As Kniffin and Wilson (2005:282) note, "the likelihood of gossip emerging in a given environment is partly a function of the interdependence of an organization's members and partly a function of the presence of conflict within - or facing - an organization". Both of these conditions were apparent at the Men's Shed, with the latter stemming from perceived difficulties regarding individual's recognition of, and adherence to, the former. Although gossiping can refer to positive evaluations (Baumeister *et al*, 2004; Rosnow, 2001), for example, participants' assessments of Thomas' transition into the workshop (see chapter six), here are discussed instances of the commonest conception of this interactional form, involving negative evaluations of the attitude and conduct of others. Gossiping also need not be conducted clandestinely, but instances at the Men's Shed were, without exception, secretive, occurring in the back room, in car journeys, quick whispered comments, and even in one instance, a note passed under the table, thus aligning with the standard conception of the term in the literature (Foster, 2004; Kniffin & Wilson, 2005).

Gossiping occurred in relation to both the cognitive and structural aspects of social capital in operation at the Men's Shed. Non-observance of the former was considered the gravest of offences, as it demonstrated that the offending individual held an incorrect conception of the organisation, and how they should act in relation to it (as discussed in the following chapter, non-observance of the latter was a lesser offence, as it entailed only disagreements between dedicated participants, with no doubt cast over the offender's understanding of the

principle of give and take). At the Men's Shed, contribution came to be expected of all capable participants; in doing their duty for the collective, be it teaching, fundraising, organising the physical environment, or any other specific tasks, a man's presence was legitimated. Accordingly, the presence of certain individuals and groups was considered illegitimate due to the perceived individualistic focus of their involvement. Studying a university rowing team, Kniffin & Wilson's (2005) participants identified 'slackers', free-riders who sought the personal status benefits of team membership while failing to train as diligently as other members, thus not contributing towards team goals (Coleman, 1988a; Dunbar, 2004). A similar distinction was made at the Men's Shed, between those termed 'team players', who understood that the success of the Men's Shed relied upon the contributory involvement of all concerned, and those termed 'lone wolves', who, in taking without giving, failed to grasp this fundamental point. According to the conception of gossip as a form of social comparison, "when people make negative evaluations of others, they are, implicitly or explicitly, presenting themselves as better than those they are talking about" (Wert & Salovey, 2004:133). Through highlighting the cardinal sin of non-contribution, those indulging in the critical evaluation of others positioned themselves as superior shedders, who held a deeper understanding of the operation and purpose of the Men's Shed. Because of its secretive enactment, gossiping could not directly prevent deviance, but could, through the consistent re-assertion of what constituted wrongdoing, and the collective remembrance of individual's misdemeanours, generate and maintain substantive distinctions between participants. Gossiping was therefore always purposeful, serving to both clarify collective expectations and differentiate transgressors, as the following examples demonstrate.

The core group of participants worked hard for the Men's Shed, with certain members policing the contribution of others with particular 'zeal' (Coleman, 1988a), and expressing disdain for those unwilling to provide assistance where it was required. In particular, members of the bridge club, which was established towards the end of the first year of opening, were criticised. This group, which quickly expanded from four men (the minimum required number to play bridge) to eight (such that there were two games occurring at once), met on Friday mornings and played for around two hours in the social area. Though the players demonstrated a degree of commitment to the bridge club, by bringing in card

tables, paraphernalia, and establishing a network of players (should a regular player be absent), they were somewhat isolated from other participants, with members of the core group taking umbrage at their perceived individualism, and the subsequent lack of contribution this engendered, as is apparent in the following extract:

> *Wednesday 7:40pm...Barry and Bradley are sat at the middle table as I tidy up. I had earlier taken out the bridge paraphernalia for Friday, and Barry and Bradley start fiddling with the bidding boxes, so I intervene:*
>
> *Jeremy: "Hey come on, stop mucking about with those".*
>
> *Barry: "Thirty pounds"!*
>
> *Jeremy: "What"?*
>
> *Barry: "How about charging them thirty pounds per year to play bridge here? It might be a good way to make some money...they are playing for free aren't they? They're using the space for free. See, I tried to give them raffle tickets, and none of them wanted to, they all said 'oh, no thanks, no, no, we'll take them later', and they never did".*
>
> *Jeremy: "Well, they put a few quid in the box every time".*
>
> *Barry: "Yeh, it's hardly a lot though is it".*
>
> *Bradley: "See, they should want to take them, everyone else has, I have. They should want to help out. But yeh, I've noticed that, they don't speak to anyone else, they're always just by themselves, it's almost like they think we shouldn't be here, like they should have this space to themselves, y'know, you make a noise when they're playing, and they're looking up at you like [Bradley makes a disgusted face]".*
>
> *Barry: "They don't do much to get involved do they...y'know, it's give and take, I do something for you, you do something for me, but no, they're not interested. Well I won't be playing bridge with them if they ask me to, I'm not interested in that".* (Fieldnotes, 9th July 2014)

During the following session, Barry expressed similar grievances, while also stressing that he always offered members of the bridge club the opportunity of redemption through contribution:

> *Barry: "What do they do for the Shed? They don't contribute anything, and that's what it's all about. I try to give them raffle tickets, they don't want any, and I've asked them, but they don't come to any of the social events we organise...you have to give a commitment, it's no use saying you'll check your diary to see if your available, then coming back and saying no...they're always putting it off, finding an excuse, what are they going to*

do when it closes down due to a lack of funding? 'Oh, I could've, I should've, I should've lent a hand', y'know, it's just not good enough".

Jeremy: "I'd be happy to ask if they could take more raffle tickets".

Barry: "No, we don't want to do that, they have to do it on their own".
(Fieldnotes, 11th July 2014)

In these extracts, Barry and Bradley questioned both the actions and underlying attitudes of members of the bridge club, mirroring similar points raised by other participants. Members of the bridge club were considered aloof and snobbish, choosing to take their tea separately, as opposed to sitting at the table with other participants. As Bradley noted, they considered the noisy presence of other participants, be it the roar of machine tools or laughter from the tea break, the inherent soundtrack of a successful Men's Shed, a nuisance that distracted them from their own interests. They also stood accused of pillaging the biscuit box and failing to wash their teacups, and while these were not notable offences in their own right, they helped to further solidify perceptions of their selfishness. Regarding their lack of social engagement with other participants, their non-attendance at social events, despite Barry consistently offering them the opportunity, was also highlighted as being especially deviant. These events were considered important in strengthening bonds between participants, as they served as discernible demonstrations of the fact that participants did not attend the Men's Shed merely to work on projects, that it was far more than a place to pass idle hours, which was how the bridge club were understood to treat it. It was not merely that they did not pay enough for the electricity that lit the card tables, that they were free riding in a material sense; this was largely inconsequential given the financial success of the Men's Shed. The real sticking point was their failure to understand and adhere to the dominant conception of the organisation that had been established, the failure to realise why both free riding, and shying away from social engagement with other participants, was unacceptable. Note also that Barry and Bradley stress that members of the bridge club should not be pressurised into contributing, they should simply 'want' to. It was felt that adherence to the norm of give and take should not need to be forced on participants, it should arise naturally through immersion in the community of practice, as a recognition of the personal benefits of participation.

Given the degree of vitriol directed towards it, it was somewhat ironic that the bridge club was, in the early stages of its existence, utilised by members of the management team as a prime example of the fact that all men are welcome at the Men's Shed, and that participants may pursue any interest they please. This was not entirely untrue, as nobody could be asked to leave the premises for not contributing. However, the frosty reception given to the men discussed in this section made it clear that there were certain expectations that the core group of participants expected everyone to adhere to (the tension on Friday mornings, particularly as the bridge club became established, was quite palpable, though nobody sought to directly address the matter during the fieldwork). Participants reasoned that the Men's Shed would wither and die if a critical mass of non-contributors occurred, taking from all concerned the opportunity to enjoy the particular benefits of participation they sought. Everyone should therefore "come in and do their bit", as one shedder put it, they should express a willingness to help out where they can, even if it was something as simple as selling a few raffle tickets. Related to this point, discussions were held regarding a possible charge to use the Men's Shed's facilities, with Ed proposing the following reasoning, after a typical complaint about non-contributors:

> Ed: "I see it was all the usual guys helping today…all these other guys should be helping out. There's plenty of men that's come in a few times, they just come in to use the tools, without contributing, and then they leave. They come in, and they feel like they don't have to tidy up after themselves or anything like that, it's just common sense, that you tidy up after yourself".

> Jeremy: "Well there is the idea of charging guys to use the Shed".

> Ed: "Now I don't think we should be charging, that's not a good idea, but it might discourage these guys from coming along and using us and then dropping us". (Fieldnotes, 14th April 2014)

Charging participants was ultimately rejected, for two reasons. Firstly, it would discriminate against those who already gave significant contributions of time and effort towards the Men's Shed. Secondly, it essentially forced participants to make a contribution, when the point was that they should want to do so, of their own freewill, given that doing so was, for the majority of participants, the very source of the personal benefits gained through participation. The lack of formal charges

did not stop participants donating small amounts of money though, a point on which one board member made the following comment:

> "Lots of people I notice in here every once in a while drop the money in there, but it's not like y'know, pass through the door, put the money in the turnstile kind of thing, it's not at all like that, that's not the way that we want it to be. We want it to be, men feel better if they give the money is my point of view, 'here's some money for the Shed', fine, you feel good about that, you're helping out. It's not like 'I'm going into the Shed, here's my pound' kinda thing, it's not like that".

On the topic of monetary donations, this view echoes Barry's point regarding the importance of the underlying attitude motivating contribution. It was felt that participants should not feel pressurised into making donations, nor should it be made a formal demand of entry. Any donations made should instead reflect the desire to contribute that arises through involvement, and the fulfilment of this should engender personal satisfaction.

Two workshop-based incidents further highlight the disdain participants felt towards those who failed to live up to the expectation of contribution. The first case involved Jake, who visited the Men's Shed occasionally to process pieces of wood:

> I am in the workshop, sanding down parts of a climbing frame, which is kicking up lots of dust, so Joe puts on the extractor fan and opens the fire exit. At the same time, Jake is feeding long wooden planks through the combination woodworker, making an unpleasant vibrating noise, far worse than usual for this machine...Grant and Charlie come in to work on the engine alongside Cameron and Henry, and I see them chatting, shooting glances over to me and Jake, but I cannot hear what they are saying...[five minutes later] they walk out of the workshop, saying they cannot work in these conditions, and convene in the social area. Concerned that my sawdust was annoying them, I go through to ask:
>
> > Henry: "No, no, it's not you, it's that guy on the combo, it's impossible to concentrate with that noise going on, every time you think he's finished, vvvvuuuurrrr!, it starts up again"!
> >
> > Cameron: "He's using the wrong part of the machine, he should be using the thickness planer. He's feeding it through to the other blade inside the machine, that's amplifying the vibrations. Grant and Charlie have gone home cus of that. They've been working, they've come out here to help us, we can't work when that's going on. Joe's supervisor, he should be dealing with this, but he's hiding in the back there".

I get the hint and speak to Joe, gently pushing him in the right direction...[ten minutes later] Jake is doing the hoovering in the front area, apologising to me and saying that he didn't realise he was causing a problem, and that he is trying to make up for it; he seems genuinely remorseful. (Fieldnotes, 12th March 2014)

Reflecting on this incident, participants highlighted Jake's general lack of contribution, and its bedfellow, an undesirable individualism. As one shedder put it: "well, he's one of those guys who never contribute, I've not seen him tidying up, doing anything really, in months, he just comes along and does his own thing". For his part, Jake was initially unaware of his deviance, until being informed by Joe, the day's supervisor, by which point the damage had been done. As with the bridge club, nobody sought to directly inform Jake of his wrongdoing, and again, the notion that an understanding of how the Men's Shed operated had to be arrived at independently was apparent. Following this incident, Jake was not seen again, nor was he missed, because his unwillingness to consider the needs of others, amplified by his general lack of contributory involvement, had firmly established his deviance.

Newcomer Roy's case produced similar results:

Me and Barry are playing pool when Roy comes in, going straight into the workshop without signing in or greeting anyone. I go through to check that everything is alright, and he tells me he wants to use the router to shape some wooden planks. I inform him there is nobody to train him right now, which angers him, as he has been in twice before and been disappointed. Not wanting to upset him further, I poke my head through to the social area and ask for assistance, prompting Barry, Bradley and Joe to come through. Thankfully, Joe takes him off my hands, telling him to come back on Friday, when somebody will help him. He leaves, prompting Bradley to say to me and Barry:

> *Bradley: "I hate that kind of person, just coming in and expecting somebody to help him, then he complains when it doesn't happen. I came through to back you up because I've seen that kind of man before".*

> *Barry: "Does this guy not realise we're all volunteers? I mean, what was he saying, he wants us to phone somebody to come along and help him [Barry imitates putting a phone to his ear], 'oh hello, yes, I'll come in, I'll just finish my tea'. Yeah right! Joe shouldn't have even told him somebody would help him on Friday, there might not be anyone, they might not have the time".* (Fieldnotes, 25th June 2014)

Roy came back the following session, and Dean agreed to help him, but there was a further issue. As the router was not professional grade, it was unfit for Roy's

requirements, which further angered him, causing Ed to angrily and uncharacteristically 'flood out' by directly addressing his deviance (Goffman, 1961):

> *Roy is getting increasingly angry. Work is dropped, heads are turned, and men are whispering; it is quite extraordinary. Ed has had enough; he marches across, and, standing close to Roy, jabbing his index finger towards him, angrily says:*

> *"You do know we're all volunteers don't you?! I mean, come on, you can't expect to just come in here and have somebody do it for you, when you don't even get involved yourself, it's just not on"!*

> *Incensed, Roy gathers his belongings and storms out, carrying several planks of wood over his shoulder, with everyone maintaining a studied indifference despite his difficulty opening the front door. As soon as he is out, the post-mortem begins:*

> *Barry: "He just waltzes in here, he doesn't even sign in when he comes in, you know that? He does know we're all volunteers doesn't he? Somebody should tell him we're all volunteers, we're not just going to drop everything to help him".*

> *Ed: "He's like, who was it? That other guy, the fat guy who came in a few times, he did his own job and didn't contribute, it's not acceptable".*

> *Bradley: "He comes in, wanting to get his job done, but he doesn't want to contribute? I'll tell you what, I'll give him a call and see if he wants to come in and help me with something when he's sitting at home [referring to Roy wanting me to phone somebody to come and help him during the previous session]...if he was just a bit nicer when he came in, saying 'oh, I need a hand with this, can you help me with this', not saying 'oh, do this for me, do that for me', he might have got somebody to do it for him, but he's coming in and just expecting us to do the job for him".*

> *Anthony: "Another dissatisfied customer! Now, see in our reviews, we'll be 99.9% good, and then that one".*

> *Jeremy: "Well, I don't think we'll be seeing him again".*

> *Bradley: "I don't know, he's that kind of guy, he's got that brass neck that he would come in and try it again. It's simple, if he wanted a professional job, he should have gone to a professional".* (Fieldnotes, 27th June 2014)

Although Roy adhered to formal workshop rules, refraining from using the router until an expert was present, his perceived individualism, like that of Jake, caused significant difficulties. He sought only to conduct his own project, and failed to respect the voluntary nature of involvement, the fact that participants were not formally obligated to offer assistance, particularly if an angry sense of entitlement

was apparent. Typically, experts willingly imparted training and advice because they were dedicated to the community of practice they had helped construct, and wanted to share their skills while ensuring a safe working environment. However, the trainer-trainee relationship also implied a degree of respect which was felt to be lacking in this case. The three examples discussed here demonstrate group delimitation, and the setting apart of those free-riders considered outside of the boundaries (Coleman, 1988a; Portes, 1998). As with the bridge club's complaints about the happy noise of contented participants, and Jake's lack of workshop etiquette, Roy's anger revealed an unacceptable selfishness that went hand-in-hand with a lack of contribution, a lack of immersion in the community of practice, and hence a lack of respect from participants. These men, it was felt, only wanted to use the Men's Shed's resources without engaging in either the economy of mutual reciprocity required to maintain the organisation, or the social environment such maintenance was directed towards preserving.

Conclusion

In the previous chapter, it was noted that there was a difference between a craftsman and a man merely using a workshop, a distinction based on knowledge of how to act in given situations. Considering the above extracts, it may equally be said that participants identified a difference between a shedder and a man merely using the Men's Shed. Considering the characteristics of the former, it can be seen that in order to take, to reap the various personal benefits of the Men's Shed, participants felt as though they had to give, they had to contribute in some way towards the organisation's upkeep and development. The Carstonwood model developed in this direction due to the alignment of the management team's needs with participants' characteristics and desires. The former, facing a changing funding landscape, and the need to ensure long-term sustainability, hoped it would be so, the latter demonstrated the dedication to make it so. Adhering to the norm of give and take was, for the most part, easily accomplished, because for the core group of participants, there was no substantial distinction between the former and the latter. Participants wanted, in certain cases needed, to experience immersion in this novel reimaging of an age-old communal form, and the only way this could be consistently achieved was through personal contribution in tandem with others. In every contribution, whether organising

and maintaining the physical environment and resources, or raising money to make these things possible, in every interaction, whether giggling over innuendo or sharing health concerns, in every instance of teaching and learning, whether passing on particular techniques or ensuring others could safely utilise machine tools, participants continually created the benefits they derived. Social capital is unique among forms of capital in this sense, because its 'consumption', at least in circumstances exhibiting universal agreement regarding attitudes and conduct, simultaneously generates further 'stocks' (Turner, 2001; Uphoff, 2001). Participants could not, however, abide those they perceived to be free-riders, those who merely used the facilities available at the Men's Shed while failing to acknowledge that mutual reciprocity, rather than selfish individualism, shaped conduct within the organisation. Non-contributors could not be forcibly ejected, because in a voluntary organisation that in principle practiced openness, there were no formal mechanisms to facilitate this. Indeed, although the cognitive aspects of social capital in operation at the Men's Shed were expressed with clarity, consistency, and near uniformity, there were no formal sanctioning mechanisms to address divergence. Gossiping therefore provided a means of venting sometimes furious frustrations, while also serving to both reaffirm group expectations and differentiate the faithful from the deviant.

9

Rules and Roles

By the structural aspects of the social capital existing at the Men's Shed, I refer to the objective realisation of the cognitive aspects, the means by which the commitment to mutual reciprocity set forth in the previous chapter found expression. A set of rules and role assignments, the development of which was observed over the course of the fieldwork, structured conduct within the organisation, allowing for its continual functioning in a manner satisfying to participants (Uphoff, 2001). Both norms and rules function through creating expectations, the distinction in the Men's Shed being that the cognitive aspects of the social capital in operation shaped *attitudes* taken towards the organisation, mandating a collectivist and (for those within the legitimate bounds of the collective) egalitarian mind-set, whereas the structural aspects provided guidance regarding *conduct* within the organisation; the former was translated into purposeful action through the latter (Krishna, 2001). In this chapter, I first briefly consider general interactional conduct, as occurred when participants were, as it was frequently described, "putting the world to rights" in the social area. Although not governed by formal rules explicitly limiting acceptable speech, difficulties arose regarding instances of 'banter', in which the friendly and humorous intent of the interaction was not always recognised as such. This presented a potential stumbling block to the otherwise good-natured homosociality of the social area that required the informal monitoring and regulation of the behaviour of certain participants. I then discuss the workshop, an environment more strictly controlled via both formal and informal rules. The former, established by the management team, were concerned with protecting participants and the whole organisation in what was a potentially dangerous environment. The latter, mainly established by participants, and here labelled 'ask not assume' and 'non-interference', structured, respectively, the individual's relationship with the collective, and vice-versa. Operating alongside the rules was a series of role assignments adopted by participants, generating "shared and

mutual expectations about what [the] person…should and will do under various conditions" (Uphoff, 2001:228). The adoption of roles, based on prior expertise, specific interests, or simply a sense of duty, granted authority over the area in question, and functioned as a central realisation of the contributory norm, a visible, substantial means of legitimating one's involvement. Participants felt that the Men's Shed functioned successfully because each of the main individuals knew the particular cog in the machine they were. Role differentiation was thus concerned with filling the positions necessary for the continual operation of a system of functional interdependency, in which the work of all participants was accorded equal value, rather than conferring higher or lower statuses upon particular individuals. Like the identification and criticism of non-contributors, those identifying rule breaking were quick to air their complaints through gossiping (Foster, 2004). Though vociferous on occasion, such instances were of lesser magnitude than those of non-contribution, as they entailed only differences between attitudinally aligned participants regarding the functioning of the Men's Shed, rather than the more pronounced attitudinal differences that set apart contributors and non-contributors.

The Social Area

The management team considered it unnecessary to enforce formal rules regarding general interactional conduct. Indeed, they expressed surprise at the formal rules of an Australian site that had contacted the Men's Shed, which informed participants to avoid discussing certain issues, due to the wide variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds present, for fear of puncturing the environment of respect and mutual support being aimed for. These issues were not applicable in Carstonwood, where there were barely any substantial differences in participant's backgrounds and identities, and they were therefore free to express their views as they wished. Conversations, based around health, technology, politics, or various other issues, were typically friendly, respectful, and stimulating, with each man coming to understand and tailor their conduct according to the particular characterological quirks of others. However, this mainly comfortable and inclusive interaction order was, on occasion, threatened by attempts to instigate joking relationships, of the kind often observed in male-dominated workplaces (Collinson, 1988; Kaplan, 2005; Sion, 1997). During such

interactions, communication is characterised by what objectively appears as insults, hence joking can:

> "Be interpreted both as an act of hostility and domination disguised in a joke form and as an act of affection disguised in curse-form. It is left to the respondent, not to an outside audience nor…the speaker himself, to make sense of the expression and to resolve the ambivalent emotion in a direction that may eventually further the attraction or extend any animosity between the parties" (Kaplan, 2005:581).

Among friends, micro-interactional signals, including facial expressions and tone of voice, assert the indirectness of the statement, inviting a response in similar terms. Joking can therefore function to affirm intimacy, as both parties, unlike uninformed observers, are aware that in the context of their relationship, the intended meaning of the communication diverges from that of the words exchanged (Dynel, 2008; Keltner *et al*, 2001; Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 2006; Hay, 2000).

For certain participants, the Men's Shed was attractive because its male-exclusive, quasi-work environment, structured to allow for periods of conversation, offered opportunities to engage in the robust banter they had experienced in their workplace. For example, newcomer Vince outlined what he was seeking at the Men's Shed:

> *Vince: "What I'm looking for is that kind of banter, like you get at your work, y'know, you can say something to another guy, you can say something like slagging him off, that was how it was, nobody minded that. It's the kind of banter that only happens when you get a group of men together, it doesn't work with mixed groups, if you've got men and women. It doesn't work even with different generational groups, y'know, they'll say, 'hey, you can't say that about me'".*
>
> *Bradley: "That's true, if you say something to another guy here, they'll just laugh, they'll know it's not serious".*
>
> *Barry: "Well, you'll get to know who's up for that sort of banter, there's maybe six or seven guys who come for that. There's some guys you'll find, their more up for it than others, like Bradley and Ed, they're up for it".*
> (Fieldnotes, 4th August 2014)

The kind of banter Vince sought, in which a man could offer an affectionate insult and be reciprocated in kind was, he felt, exclusively within the purview of groups of similarly aged men. It would not work in 'mixed' gender groups, nor could it span generations, as younger people, more attuned to being personally offended,

were thought to misunderstand the subtlety of such interactions. Though the literature suggests that Vince's views on the demographics engaging in banter are incorrect (Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 2006), their expression did serve to highlight the perceived exclusivity of the kind of interactions he hoped to find at the Men's Shed, the difference between him and his peers, and everyone else, as expressed in the pattern and content of speech. Bradley confirmed that Vince could engage in such interactions at the Men's Shed, and Barry provided more detail, highlighting other participants, most notably Bradley and Ed, who were 'up for it'.

Bradley and Ed considered themselves, and were generally understood by others to be, the main exemplars of this kind of interaction, a position frequently reinforced during conversations about them, for example:

> Anthony: "Was Bradley in on Friday"?
>
> Barry: "[Humorously] No, I've banned him, I told him his services were no longer required".
>
> Anthony: "Och, you can't ban Bradley, he's a laugh, and when you get him and Ed, together, when you get those two together, oh boy".
>
> The group enthusiastically agree, stating 'oh yes', 'oh God', 'too right'.
>
> Anthony: "That's why I just like to get in the middle of them…I like a crack, you've got to be sharp around them, it keeps you on your toes".
>
> Steve: "I jus' like to feed 'em [Steve imitates feeding an animal], jus' feed them, there you go, there you go, and watch them start". (Fieldnotes, 28th July 2014)

Other participants also confirmed their position, referring to them as 'jokers', or 'stirrers'; 'here's trouble' was the standard phrase employed when either came in, and mock cheers were often heard as they left. Although these were not formal roles, both Bradley and Ed willingly adhered to this conception of their personalities and status within the Men's Shed. The former, as noted in chapter six, considered himself the catalyst that sparked banter, while the latter referred to himself as a 'bounder', often concluding joking exchanges with some variation on the statement 'typical Ed', or "I can't say that can I"? It was a common site to observe them conducting 'performances' of back-and-forth banter, at the tea table or during lulls in the workshop, as well attempting to engage in joking

relationships with other participants (Klapp, 1949). Through the continual reassertion of their status as jokers, Bradley and Ed provided both immediate amusement for others, and an important aspect of external continuity for certain participants (Atchley, 1989), as Fred makes apparent in the following extract:

> *Fred has brought in more examples of his fretsaw art, and shows them to other participants at the table. He receives praise for the intricacy of his work, and responds:*
>
> *Fred: "Since I've come here, I can honestly say I like everyone, honestly, everyone's been willing to help me [Fred pauses, for about two seconds]. Expect one person [Fred exaggeratedly points at, and nods towards, Ed]".*
>
> *Ed: "Well, I'm not lending you a hand, ya cunt".*
>
> *There is much laughter at this, and a slight 'ooohhh' from the men.*
>
> *Barry: "Er, guys, guys, could you try not to offend each other"?*
>
> *Fred: "No, no, don't worry about that, I like it, it's just like you got at your work".* (Fieldnotes, 21st July 2014)

Having received praise for his work, Fred responded by noting participants' agreeableness and willingness to help him, demonstrating his respect for the community of practice. In humorously excepting Ed, through pausing before mentioning him, and utilising exaggerated body language when referring to him, he successfully elicited the response he was hoping for, at which point Barry intervened, attempting to defuse the escalation of what he perceived to be a potentially offensive situation.

Similarly, during another tea break, Ed jokingly disparaged Clark's financial status, again prompting Barry to intervene:

> *Clark: "I was at this show the other night, it was a Beatles tribute group, it was really good actually".*
>
> *Ed: "Where were you sitting, up in the gods"?*
>
> *Clark: "No, it was in the stalls, it was quite expensive actually, thirty-five quid per ticket".*
>
> *Ed: "What? Thirty-five quid? There's no way you could afford that"!*
>
> *Barry: "That's it, how to be nice to other members at the Men's Shed, saying they can't afford this or that. Will you try not to offend everyone Ed, please"?*

Clark laughs off Ed's humorous accusation, and the conversation shifts to focus on a recent donation of tools. (Fieldnotes, 28th April 2014)

Barry's concern for monitoring potentially offensive speech in the social area is apparent in these extracts. As he expressed no interest in the workshop, the majority of Barry's time at the Men's Shed was spent conversing in the social area, and he was keen to maintain a welcoming environment, such that the benefits of involvement he drew, as discussed in chapter six, may be extended to as many men as possible. Accordingly, alongside his fundraising role, he also adopted what he referred to as a 'communications manager' role, policing general social interactions and intervening when he felt that conversations were veering towards potentially offensive territory. An important aspect of this role involved giving detailed tours to newcomers, as he explained:

> *"It's an open house, it's about socialising and community…the Shed's important for getting guys out of the house, the social side is important, so I try to make guys feel as welcome as possible when they first come in, because I know it can be difficult, coming into a group of strangers. Like if you just came in, and nobody greeted you, you just went through there [Barry indicates the workshop] and nobody said anything to you, you'd not bother… y'know, it's all about making guys feel welcome".*

Barry recognised the difficulties that entering into a group of strangers can hold for men, and as one of the first representatives of the Men's Shed newcomers met, he felt that he served a pivotal role in ensuring initial curiosity was transformed into long-term involvement. It may be noted that the warm welcome Barry offered to newcomers sharply contrasts with his disdain for non-contributors, as highlighted in the previous chapter. The difference was that each of the former had the potential to become valued members of the community of practice, and were welcomed as such, while the latter had squandered the opportunity, justifying any criticism they received. During his tours, Barry would outline the physical layout of the environment and discuss his and other participant's interests and roles, such that the newcomer would know who to consult regarding their own interests. Barry also sought to inform newcomers about aspects of conduct that could not be made apparent in standard advertising, the specific interactional minutiae he had observed as a consistent attendee. He would stress that a sense of humour was an essential prerequisite for involvement, highlight running jokes, and, following the newcomers first tea

break, inform them that "this is where the banter starts", or "this is the kind of banter to expect".

On the point of banter, Barry was sure to inform newcomers to exercise particular caution when interacting with Bradley and Ed, those whose conduct could most easily be misinterpreted. On his part, Bradley felt that his effervescent personality had positively impacted the social environment, lifting men out of the stupor he perceived when first attending. Although he utilised the Men's Shed as a means of asserting his status to a group of his peers, he also fashioned himself as a keen social observer, a man conscious of the effects his behaviours yielded. When interacting with others, he therefore controlled himself to a greater extent that Ed, whose behaviour, in failing to take into account differences of personality and tolerance, could occasionally be problematic. Though neither Fred nor Clark took offence in the above extracts, rendering Barry's interventions unnecessary in these instances, he felt that proffering an intervention when conversation veered into potentially offensive territory was a sensible policy. Consider an incident that occurred early in the fieldwork, when Ed repeatedly claimed that newcomer Lewis procured the services of prostitutes. Lewis' reaction, leaving quickly without acknowledging anyone, concerned Barry:

> *Jeremy: "What did you think about that then"?*
>
> *Barry: "For you or me, it's like water off a duck's back, but it might not be with him, we don't know. He just kinda got his jacket and walked out without saying anything, he didn't say 'bye' to anyone, he seemed to be offended by it. Ed's not a bad guy, and I know he didn't mean to offend him. I know he means well, but Ed sometimes puts his foot in his mouth, he's not thinking before he says something. It's not worth losing a member just because of what one person has said".* (Fieldnotes, 5th August 2013)

While Barry recognised that he and I would not be personally offended by Ed's risqué banter, he was unsure whether Lewis, a quiet, reserved man who had only attended for a few weeks, would interpret it humorously. Considering his immediate reaction, and the fact that he missed the following session, Barry had reason to believe offence had been taken in this instance. Accordingly, he raised the issue with then chairman Joe, and took Lewis aside, upon his return, to assure him that Ed meant no offence, and that he had been informed to tone down his typical banter. Barry utilised this incident when discussing the social environment with newcomers, informing them that Ed could be sought should

they wish to engage in a joking relationship, and that should Ed engage with them, they were not to take him seriously. For the majority of participants, this was not an issue, as they had dealt with such interactions throughout their working lives, and could laugh them off without further consequence. Barry nevertheless considered it necessary to highlight the kind of relationship Ed would likely establish with newcomers, informing them that what they may be exposed to was merely banter, with no malice intended.

As no formal rules governed general interactions at the Men's Shed, and because conceivably any man could enter, participant's expectations of the social environment occasionally clashed. For some men, the promise of continuity extended beyond the workshop to encompass immersion in an environment exhibiting a familiar, valued form of interaction, commonly labelled 'banter'. However, Barry thoughtfully recognised that there would be differences regarding tolerance for interactions based upon the trading of insults, and he therefore policed the social area, intervening when he felt that conversations were veering into potentially offensive territory, which served two purposes. If intervention was unnecessary, participants simply said so, or laughed off what was said, thus confirming the solidarious function of banter (Dynel, 2008; Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 2006). On the other hand, if offence was taken, the fact of intervention demonstrated concern for the individual, and highlighted that the Men's Shed was not the kind of bullying, sink-or-swim environment characteristic of many male-dominated settings. On Ed's part, he told me that he neither intended to offend, nor did he initially realise his behaviour could be perceived as such. As was recognised, he meant well, with his affection for the Men's Shed translating into a consistent contributory effort, but as with his workshop conduct (see below), it was felt that he failed to think things through, assuming others would accept his robust interactional style in the humorous fashion intended; most did, some did not, the point was to ensure that both parties could co-exist. It can thus be said that the chance to engage in homosocial banter was, like the chance to discuss personal health, learn new skills, or use machine tools, one specific function that certain participants understood the Men's Shed as fulfilling. Interested newcomers would be directed towards Bradley and Ed, those who could fulfil this desire, and in effect this was no different to pointing those seeking engineering advice towards Cameron, those

seeking woodworking advice towards Dean, or those looking for particular tools towards Peter and Arnold.

The Workshop

Both formal and informal rules governed participant's conduct in the workshop; the former were concerned with what participants could and could not do in this potentially dangerous environment, the latter with what they should and should not do as part of the community of practice. Briefly on the former, regarding the use of machine tools (such as the bandsaw, pillar drill, or combination woodworking machine), where correct conduct was clearly defined, a formal system was immediately implemented. Prior to using these tools, participants were informed that they must receive training from a 'qualified' supervisor, whose authority derived from expertise gained during previous employment or use. Once deemed competent, the training was recorded in the individual's paperwork, and they could officially use the machine by themselves, though it was often the case that participants would still seek supervisory oversight to ensure correct use. A formal rule was required in this area both because machine tools could be dangerous in untrained hands, potentially harming the individual and, by extension, the Men's Shed's reputation, and because the organisation's insurance policy was granted based on the conduct of such training (thus also protecting the Men's Shed's financial status). Of course, participants brought their own sense of competency to the Men's Shed, but this was meaningless until they underwent the agreed initiation process, whereby specific competencies were granted only at the behest of those authorised to do so. In the following extract, participants discussed a newcomer who had questioned the need for training, while also highlighting their own adherence to the rule:

> *Bradley: "'You know you get those guys, they would come in and say, 'oh, I know how to use that, I know how to use that', you do get those. Maybe some guys'll think because there's no boss, anyone can just come in and do as they want".*
>
> *Fred: "I did know how to use these machines when I first came in, but I still asked Dean just to take me through them, because I know they're not my machines, they're the Men's Shed's machines".*

Anthony: "I'm the same, if I'm going to use one of those tools, I'll let Dean know beforehand, just so he can keep an eye on me". (Fieldnotes, 23rd June 2014)

As Fred noted, formal workshop rules did not consider the individual's prior knowledge. They may have used near-identical machines throughout their life, yet still they were required to undergo the same training process as complete novices, because it was realised that a severed finger, or worse, would be disastrous, placing the entire organisation at risk. When Graham assumed the chairmanship (just prior to my leaving the field), he sought to further formalise training and record-keeping procedures. New in-depth training requirements were established for each machine tool, as well as handheld electrical tools, and a list detailing the training undertaken by each practical shedder, as well as who conducted it, was placed in a prominent position in the workshop. These measures aided in the apprehension of those not conforming to training guidelines, and smoothed the exchange of knowledge by making it immediately apparent who to consult for particular training (Cavanagh, 2013). Such formalisation, involving the gradual development of policies and guidelines, alongside the enhancement of record-keeping (regarding both human and material resources) was, like the transition towards a social enterprise model, and the decentralisation of responsibility, a long-term process, instigated by the management team and supported by participants, that was ongoing as I left the field.

Ask not Assume

The informal rules governing the workshop, which I have termed 'ask not assume' and 'non-interference', were concerned with managing the utilisation of participants' individual and collective knowledge. These rules were informal in the sense that they were not recorded as official policy, instead inhering as a collective means of structuring workshop conduct in alignment with the cooperative social environment participants sought to establish (Dasgupta, 2001; Uphoff, 2001). The presence and consequence of these rules was, however, readily apparent, firstly in the simple sense of being noted in workshop training manuals that newcomers had to read and sign-off on before becoming involved. Of greater interest though, is the reasoning underpinning these rules, the

consistent policing of the expectations they generated, and the fact that adherence or deviance structured long-term perceptions of participants' conduct, as established through gossiping. The authority of expertise underpinned the rule of ask not assume, which referred to the expectation that participants should always ask, listen to, and follow the advice of those knowledgeable in their area of concern, rather than assuming their own competence:

> *"Rule Number ONE: if in doubt, ASK! We are all here to help each other".* (Workshop Safety Manual)

> *Peter: "If you don't know how tae dae something, you ha'e tae ask…that's it, if I dunno how tae dae something, I'll ask, because there are guys here who'll be able to tell me exactly wit tae dae".*

> *Cameron: "You can learn here, if you watch, listen, and ask the right questions".*

> *Joe: "Just asking him for help, that's one of the best compliments that a man can give another man, that's how it works at the Men's Shed".*

As noted in chapter four, asking for help did not imply emasculation, as may be expected in a male-exclusive environment, but rather healthy curiosity and a willingness to learn, while also indicating the respect granted to knowledgeable individuals. As the majority of participants adhered to the directive to ask, the Men's Shed provided plentiful opportunities for what one board member called the 'reusing of knowledge', granting those exhibiting the necessary willingness entry into a cooperative network in which, as one shedder put it, "John puts you onto Tom, Tom puts you onto Harry, that's the way it works here". Immersed in a community of practice rich with skills and experience, the individual could be practically certain that they will find the required guidance:

> *Roger: "I've always been confident using tools, I've done it all my life, but things like my project, things I'm not very good at, I'll get a hand, and that's it for me. I think it's the same for all these guys".*

> *Anthony: "There's always somebody who knows what they're doing here".*

> *Barry: "It's amazing the knowledge the guys bring, and they're always willing to help each other out with it".*

> *Derek: "I'm not only getting the benefit of the tools and facilities here, but also I'm getting the benefit of the knowledge of some of the guys that come here who know, actually, far more about woodwork and tools and stuff than I do, so I'm getting a double benefit there".*

Harold: "When I drop into the Men's Shed, I can carry out my hobbies with a group of other men, and when I get stuck on something, somebody helps me to sort it out. If I need four hands instead of two, they're there waiting for me. So the Men's Shed is providing me with a great deal of interaction, and an awful lot of help".

For Dean, realising the opportunity for teaching and learning was central to the experience of the Men's Shed, as he questioned, "what's the point in even coming here if you're not going to learn"? Understanding his vast knowledge as a transferrable resource, he put this into practice by leading woodworking, woodturning, and tool sharpening classes, the goal of which was to increase participant's range of skills while also ensuring they were conscious of safety issues. During these classes, Dean explained both the 'theory' underpinning the use of particular tools (such as the difference between cross-cut and rip-cut saws, and to which particular jobs they are to be applied) and their practical application, prior to overseeing participants testing themselves on what they had learnt.

A man's age, or the current limitations of their knowledge, was considered largely inconsequential, because it was felt that the capacity for informal learning, and through this self-improvement, always existed (Golding, 2014; McGivney, 1999); as one shedder put it, "if you ever say you've stopped learning, you're lying". Bradley, a relative novice, expressed similar sentiments, while also stressing the value of age-based experience (Coles & Vassarotti, 2012):

Bradley: "You can always, always, learn from older men, y'know, their experience, even when I'm a hundred years old, I'll still be learning from older men".

Jeremy: "At one hundred"?

Bradley: "Yes, of course. You have to realise, these older guys, they know so much, they've learnt throughout their lives, that's what you have to do, learn from these guys". (Fieldnotes, 5th May 2014)

Whether in a position to grant or receive it, these shedders felt the centuries' worth of experience and knowledge available at the Men's Shed was a resource simply too good to ignore. By immersing oneself in this community of practice, the individual was afforded the opportunity to develop their own competency and increase their confidence to the point where they could work alongside

others conducting personal or commissioned projects, rather than having others do the work:

> Barry: "There's always guys who can help you, like Dean will give you a hand with the woodworking stuff, but he won't do it for you, that's not the idea of the Shed, you do it yourself, y'know, you don't just leave it for others to do".

> Arnold: "It was good that [the expert] came in to give us some advice about the steam engine, but it was only advice. Well, that's the best way to teach, give them a push in the right direction, but not telling them exactly what to do, and not doing it for them, that's how we do it at the Shed".

Arnold here echoed Graham's point, also made in relation to the steam engine, regarding the importance of pursuing manageable challenges (Kleif & Faulkner, 2003; see chapter seven). In his view, teaching at the Men's Shed served to demystify particular tools and techniques, providing a general understanding from which participants could utilise their own problem-solving capacities to generate solutions.

Participants particularly enjoyed working and learning within teams, which often required temporary role assignments, as one shedder said to a group visiting the Men's Shed:

> "There's always a helping hand available here...I don't have any direct engineering experience, but there's always somebody on hand who can help me out if I need it. It's quite diverse like that, there's a load of different guys with different interests, they've got different skills they can contribute to a project. One guy can source the parts needed, for example, one guy can work on one part, one guy on another part, and another guy could see about selling it when it's finished. Working together, that's what it's all about".

Before transitioning into his store man role, which took up the vast majority of his time, Arnold was interested in water-pumps. He worked alongside experienced engineers in a sub-team of the engine and water-pump group, which was led by Cameron, a man for whom entering into the cooperative network naturally meant adopting an expert role. As noted in a review document, "some like to pass on their knowledge and [become] known as an expert...[they are] always willing to help [and] become the go to guy for their expertise". Regarding woodworking, Dean was the 'go to guy', while Cameron could always be relied upon to lend his expertise with engineering queries:

> *Ed: "There's always somebody to keep you right, I mean Dean, you could call him super-skilled, I've done a few projects with him, so there's always somebody to help you like that".*

> *Arnold: "I use the Shed to get help from the other men, men who really know their stuff. If I don't know what to do, I can always turn to Cameron to keep me right...we're all here to help each other".*

In certain instances, those working alongside Dean, Cameron, and other experts, considered the relationship in a 'master' and 'apprentice' form, recalling their formative years serving their time. Those leading projects or providing teaching were therefore frequently referred to as the 'boss' or the 'master', while those benefiting from their experience were referred to as 'workers', 'apprentices', or 'journeymen'. Other employment related terms were also utilised in the workshop, for example, one experienced shedder, who oversaw several participants working on several projects at once, was said to be "running a production line", staying on past the end of the session was considered 'overtime', taking a break as 'leave'. On the latter point, another shedder noted that "of course the kettle goes on on a regular basis. It is almost as if union rules were in effect because everyone downs tools and comes for a chat". As highlighted in chapter four, participants did not consider themselves to be taking part in formal 'education', with the 'service' undertones the term entails. The use of suitably masculine employment terminology was therefore a practical means for participants to label their position in the workshop, allowing them to redefine what were educational relationships according to a scheme they were familiar and comfortable with, and affording a further means of respecting those sharing their knowledge.

These temporary roles were informal; 'apprenticeship' at the Men's Shed meant being guided on specifics, rather than receiving a systematic education in a particular craft, and therefore a man could be an apprentice one day, and working on his own project, being his own boss, the next. But for the individual using it, such familiar terminology allowed for an acceptable understanding of their position within the cooperative network at any particular point in time. The development and nurturing of this environment, in which participants helped and were helped by others to achieve personal short-term goals, ultimately allowed for the achievement of a more fundamental collective long-term goal, the recreation of a communal form in which such mutually reciprocal relationships

naturally occurred, as mediated in the workshop through the construction, use, and repair of technological objects (Boym, 2001; Nusbaumer, 2011). Hence while the rule of ask not assume was ostensibly concerned with the safety and efficiency of workshop practice, it implied something greater, namely the individual's immersion in the cooperative network, where they may be both asker and asked, and their respect for, and utilisation of, the experience and knowledge of others. It thus served as the manifestation, in the specific context of the workshop, of the wider norm of give and take established within the Men's Shed as a whole. This emphasis placed on asking for help in the workshop is revealing with regards to participant's aged masculinity, which can be seen to sharply divergence from the competitive, individualistic masculinity identified among groups of younger men (Bird, 1996). At the Men's Shed, asking for assistance affirmed a point incongruous with hegemonic masculinity, namely that a man cannot achieve his goals individually, that his personal fulfilment ultimately depended upon the establishment of mutually reciprocal relationships with others of a similar mind-set.[1]

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[1] The manifestation of such cooperative attitudes is a common aspect of the 'show' subculture, comprising regular events bringing together those with an interest in various technological subjects. As Nusbaumer (2011:116) notes in his study of antique tractor enthusiasts:

> "The communities created by antique tractor collectors reflect a significantly more cooperative orientation to interactions reflective of older rural cultural practices rather than a competitive one often associated with newer corporate masculinities. This can be seen in cooperation, mutual trust, and support in the sharing of technical/mechanical knowledge among collectors".

This cooperative orientation was apparent at the Men's Shed, as well as at local shows attended by the engineering group, events which allowed for the procurement and sale of parts and projects, and the gaining of specialist knowledge. Participants' experiences were therefore similar to those of Nusbaumer's:

> *Peter: "How wis the show"?*
> *Henry: "It was good, there must have been two thousand people there…the engine was running smoothly, after we got it going. The thing is, as soon as these guys saw we needed a hand, there must've been twelve guys coming in around, saying 'oh, I've got two of those, I've got three of those, do you need one, do you need a plug'? It was a young guy, he gave us a plug, did he get it back? I don't know".*
> *Barry: "Yeh, he got it back".*
> *Henry: "That's what I like about that place…everyone's willing to muck in, so it was really good".*
> *Graham: "Yes, it went well, we managed to speak to about twenty men over the weekend, so it's good publicity for the Shed".* (Fieldnotes, 21st May 2013)

While Henry appreciated the cooperative environment apparent at shows, Graham, adhering to his management role, understood them as a means of attracting new, potentially highly skilled participants to the Men's Shed.

The Danger of Perceived Assumptions

The majority of newcomers adhered to formal training requirements without question, and participants were typically willing to utilise the knowledge and skills made available through the community of practice. However, the rule of ask not assume could occasionally be fuzzier in practice, due to differing interpretations regarding what constituted correct conduct. General workshop competency at the Men's Shed, as opposed to that related to particular machine tools, could be considered as relational in the sense that it was decided by other participants, individually in the first instance, through one-to-one interactions, and then collectively, through gossiping assessments which typically structured long-term perceptions of the individual in question. Ed was one shedder whose actions were considered questionable, even occasionally dangerous, and his consistent contrarianism irritated other participants, with several small incidents contributing to this perception (Ormsby *et al*, 2010). Firstly, early in the fieldwork, he attempted to varnish an off-colour patch on the wooden wall behind the front desk. Never the most precise worker, he pursued the job enthusiastically, slapping on different varnishes, applying varnish over still-drying varnish, and allowing it to drip down the wall to the carpet. Peter took umbrage at Ed's perceived incompetence, reinforcing his view by noting an additional instance, Ed's unprofessional use of the router, and imagining the damage he would have wrought to a set of lawnmower blades brought in by a member of the public for sharpening:

> *"Ed's somewhat clueless about technical things, isn't he? When he wis varnishing that wall, he's jus' ploughin' on regardless, he's piled on coat after coat without even tryin' tae match the colour...he's the same with the router, if he's got a job on that, he jus' goes right ahead without thinking about wit he's doin'. I tell ya, if Ed had done those lawnmower blades, there wouldnae've been any blades left, he would'a kept on grinding awa' until there wisnae anything left".*

As with his behaviour in the social area, Peter felt that Ed failed to think the project through before beginning, failed to step back and assess the damage he was doing, and failed to seek or accept advice when this became obvious. In the case of the wooden wall, Ed insisted that the project was an inconsequential aesthetic change, that would likely be covered with posters anyway, a classification of the job that Peter did not recognise. Despite his self-described

'amateur' status, Peter was immensely knowledgeable concerning technical conduct, and held the attitude that if a job was worth doing, it was worth doing well, even if this involved a long and laborious process. He twice offered his assistance with the varnishing, attempting to get across the point that rushing the work would inevitably lead to sub-optimal results, and was greatly offended when Ed refused to even try the suggestions made.

Cameron was another participant who critically assessed Ed's conduct, when the latter sought to mix two chemicals, which he felt were innocuous, to clean a paintbrush. Cameron, recognised by his fellow shedders as an extremely knowledgeable engineer, frantically stopped him, instigating an argument in which Ed's uninformed opinion clashed with Cameron's certain knowledge that such a mixture was potentially explosive. Ed eventually yielded, he said, only to appease Cameron and diffuse the conflict. Later, Cameron retreated to the back room and shared his views regarding the incident with me and Roger. He legitimised his argument by detailing how he had acquired the relevant knowledge (demonstrated to him as a child, by a responsible adult in a controlled environment), and stressed that Ed's haphazardness was extremely dangerous, risking lives and property damage, while his defensive insubordination demonstrated an undesirably stubborn attitude. Roger backed Cameron, stressing the rule of ask not assume: "if a man has some kind of specialist knowledge, they should be listened to, other guys should try to learn from their example...really, it's just common sense". In both these incidents, it was not Ed's lack of knowledge being criticised, because in the context of the Men's Shed, the capacity for learning always existed. What riled was his assumption that he knew best, his unwillingness to ask for assistance, and his rejection of the learned advice offered by those collectively recognised as being positioned to provide it. The transition from personal to collective assessments is also apparent in these incidents (Klapp, 1949). Peter and Cameron both experienced problems with Ed, but rather than discussing his transgressions with him, they expressed their disdain through private gossiping, both reinforcing the correctness of their own conduct and differentiating Ed's as deviant (Wert & Salovey, 2004). Such perceptions were periodically restated, structuring long-term perceptions of Ed, though on his part, he correctly felt there would "always be conflict in a place like this, when you get different men with different ways of doing things". In other

words, while the majority recognised the value of drawing upon other's expertise, in an organisation lacking a formal authority system, there was no means of systematically enforcing the objectively correct approach in each instance, rendering the potential for conflict perpetually apparent.

Despite the difficulties he experienced with the ask not assume rule, Ed's commitment to the Men's Shed could not be doubted. He obviously cared deeply about the organisation, and despite the often vociferous criticism of his conduct, his status as a contributor, and therefore a shedder, was never called into question. Indeed, Ed was well aware of the dangers that can befall voluntary social groups, frequently recalling his involvement in a now defunct club, where he had witnessed early enthusiasm wane into gradual non-contribution and non-attendance. He expressed concerns that a similar fate would befall the Men's Shed, which would be problematic for him, given the amount of time he spent attending, and the evident enjoyment he derived from his involvement. Accordingly, he would phone in if he was going to be late or could not attend, to inform his fellow participants that he had not 'abandoned' them, and he also took to scanning the attendance sheets, checking the figures, and moreover what other attendees were doing. Alongside other participants, he felt that too many social users would be detrimental to long-term success, as they would not utilise the workshop facilities, and therefore not raise funds through social enterprise projects, which became increasingly important as the organisation matured. Ed focused his own contribution in two main areas, firstly the tidying of the workshop, for which he produced laminated signs detailing participant's responsibilities, policed their conduct, and carried out extra tidying duties himself.

On this issue, Ed outlined his concerns in the following terms:

> *"I know I moan on about it, but it's fucking horrifying, the guys that don't clean up after themselves in the workshop, what are they thinking? I mean, I don't mind cleaning up sometimes, and don't get me wrong, there's a few guys who'll do it, but there's plenty of guys that won't...it's just selfish when guys don't hoover their sawdust at the end of the day...I know you're tired of hearing me go on about it, Ed's moaning about cleaning again, but it's got to be sorted...just imagine, what would happen if I was away for a month"?*

Ed felt very strongly about men who failed to tidy up after themselves, considering it no less than 'fucking horrifying' that the simple respect for others demonstrated through clearing one's workspace was not always adhered to; as with other instances of non-contribution, this indicated a selfish unwillingness to consider the needs of others. Ed knew he did "go on about it", but only because he felt he had to, because without his vigilance there would be chaos. He thus positioned himself as vital to the functioning of the Men's Shed, fulfilling a role only he was willing to do. Secondly, Ed took on the supplies manager role, which involved purchasing workshop resources, both on request and through his own initiative. If something was needed, Ed would be informed, and within a week would arrive with the item, typically through internet purchases. This role lessened the risk of duplicate purchases, a valuable function in a charitable organisation of relatively modest means. Furthermore, Ed also took responsibility for the 'rogue's gallery', a regularly updated collection of passport-style photographs of participants which could be consulted to put names to faces, and he extended this by offering a passport photo service, "free to Shed buddies". As I was leaving the field, Ed's dedication, expressed through these roles, was recognised in discussions regarding his joining the board, though he was continually rejected when possible new supervisors were discussed. The board member role required dedication but was not directly concerned with day-to-day workshop activities, whereas supervisors were responsible for ensuring adherence to formal safety rules. With his history of haphazardness, and the consistent perception of him this generated, this role was considered unsuitable for him.

Non-interference

Conflict also arose when individuals were considered to have over-extended themselves, and interfered in particular projects or general areas under the control of others; the prohibition against this can be classified as a further informal rule, which I have termed non-interference. This rule also functioned in relation to the cooperative network, being concerned with the recognition of the individual within it, and the granting of due respect to the expertise or role they held. Generally, though any participant could legitimately seek involvement in any aspect of the Men's Shed, it had to be pursued under the guidance of those

who oversaw the area if it were not to be classified as interference. While there was no lack of respect between the two parties, the dispute between Joe, the chairman, and the stores team of Arnold and Peter, was a long-running difficulty which demonstrated perceived violations of this rule, as summarised in the following conversation I shared with Barry:

> Barry: "He always tries to do too much, he should just do what everyone else does, everyone else just sticks to their skills".
>
> Jeremy: "He's good at what he does though".
>
> Barry: "Yeh, he is, the problem is that he won't stick to those things, he's got to have a say in everything. I mean, look how smoothly the Shed's been running while he's been away, everyone's getting things done, no problems, well that's going to change now that he's coming back". (Fieldnotes, 5th February 2014)

Joe was universally recognised as an exceptional chairman; whether producing successful funding grants, speaking to crowds and decision-makers, or networking in the local community, his writing and interpersonal skills proved consistently impressive. He dedicated four years of his life to the establishment and management of the Men's Shed, often putting in weekly hours equivalent to a full-time job, and it can thus be said that, like Ed, the problem with Joe was in no way related to his commitment to the Men's Shed. The difficulty instead related to his perceived control-freakery; despite his championing of the decentralisation process, he did not limit his involvement to those areas in which he evidently excelled. Barry, who expressed no interest in workshop activities, felt that:

> "It's like if you're doing a project through in the workshop, and I come in about and start doing it all wrong...Joe can't stop interfering, he doesn't know what he's doing with some things. Thing's would work if people, if people, y'know, just stuck to what their good at".

Arnold agreed, noting that "he can't help interfering", as did Peter, who said that "he tries to micro-manage everything. There are experts here, they should just be left to do things". Peter therefore felt that "he needs to stick to his paperwork", his particular role, the particular cog in the machine he was. The directive was therefore quite simple in this case, as one shedder put it, "everyone's got their own area of expertise, and they shouldn't overlap". By contravening this directive, Joe was considered to be interfering, claiming an expertise he did not possess,

and asserting an influence not mandated by his actual level of expertise. The view was therefore that despite his chairmanship, he did not have the right to do as he saw fit, as he did not always know best. The difficulty here was that the chairman's role was not as clearly defined as others, implying different degrees of involvement to different individuals, as was clear in Joe and Graham's differing interpretations of the role (Uphoff, 2001).

The following example demonstrates a means by which perceived interference was addressed, namely the formal adoption of power through the creation of roles. Joe consistently involved himself with the management of donated tools, which eventually prompted Arnold to take on the store man role, allowing him and Peter to assume full, legitimate control of the area. This followed the prolonged 'chucker'/'keeper' debate between Arnold and Peter, who were unwilling to discard the vast majority of incoming tools, and Joe, who emphasised the need for adequate storage space. This dispute caused significant tensions, souring relations between the two parties and highlighting their differing conceptions of the Men's Shed and their status within it. Joe often took it upon himself to reorganise the back room, placing what he perceived to be useless items in the front doorway, the signal that they were to be discarded, only for Arnold or Peter to complete the cycle by bringing them back in, and even hiding them to ensure Joe could not discard them. From their point of view, Joe's eagerness to discard tools stemmed from his ignorance regarding their assessment and use, not an inherently negative characteristic for those willing to learn, but combined with his penchant for uninformed interference, potentially very damaging to the Men's Shed. As Peter put it:

> "It's obvious Joe's never been in a workshop in his life, he disnae know how it operates, he jus' throws things out without thinking. He disnae ask wit things are, he disnae ask whether they're needed or no'. And he tried to deny that he'd thrown out those two bits of metal I wis after. Now see, I ask when I need help, or if I don't know what's what, I'll ask somebody who does, I don't just go, oh, 'that's crap, I'll chuck it out, that's crap, I'll chuck it out'".

Arnold voiced a similar complaint, while also reiterating the quality of the older tools that Joe sought to discard:

> "If he thinks it should go out, then it goes out, it don't matter what anyone else thinks. What Joe don't realise is that these tools could be sold, he just

sees them and says 'oh, they're useless, that's rubbish', and he chucks them out! But these joiners, they all use these old tools, cus they know how to use 'em, and they're better quality, a lot of 'em are made of solid steel, they've got years left of use in them".

Neither Arnold nor Peter claimed professional expertise, only an enthusiastic appreciation, the correct mind-set in the context of the Men's Shed. Accordingly, when dealing with donated tools, Peter would always adhere to the rule of ask not assume, for as he said, "there's some things I don't know, and if I don't know, I ask, you've got to ask, unlike some people, cus there's guys that do know, it's as simple as that". Likewise, Arnold, acting as store man, would still consult Dean, recognised for his in-depth expertise regarding the assessment of tools, before making concrete decisions. The store man role thus granted the tools, which were understood to be a valuable collection of 'assets', a degree of protection, by ensuring each would receive a fair assessment of their potential use or exchange value.

Joe's perception of the back room, "things piled on top of things piled on top of things", was baldly accurate, and as the fieldwork progressed, he tried various means of removing what he felt were excess items, including secret disposals, without consultation, which further angered Arnold and Peter when they found out, storing items in his own garage and asking others to do likewise, and in one instance even buying items himself so he could legitimately dispose of them. He also attempted to appeal to authority (as Arnold and Peter did themselves), as in the following extract, discussing a badly damaged old moped that had been taken from the local recycling centre;

> *"See with this old moped, I know Peter doesn't like to throw anything out, so I want to get a group of engineers to say to him outright that they're not gonna have the time to work on it, then maybe we'll be able to get rid of it. If they can say it's too beat up, it's gonna take too much work and there won't be any payoff, then maybe they'll be able to convince him".*

Joe was, however, fighting a losing battle, and he gave up when Arnold adopted the role of store man and he began to scale back his chairmanship prior to stepping down. This battle of wills, between two parties who both deeply valued the Men's Shed, represented two different ways of perceiving the same space, and the objects within it. Both pursued what they considered to be the best interests of the organisation, and both felt they had the right to do this unmolested,

demonstrating the interplay between rules and roles in the pursuit of divergent organisational (and personal) goals (Uphoff, 2001).

Should someone purchase resources without consulting Ed, the supplies manager, or attempt to discard tools without consulting Arnold, the store man, their actions would be classed as interference, as these were clear-cut functions overseen by role-holders. However, the identification of transgressions was less obvious in standard workshop practice, where the necessary informality of both the ask not assume and non-interference rules caused certain difficulties. Without formal directives precisely dictating correct actions, what could be perceived as assumptive behaviour by one individual could either lead to perceived interference on their part, as with Joe, or prompt perceived interference by others, as in Ben's case. He utilised the rule of non-interference to highlight a perceived differentiation between himself and other participants, in terms of his autonomy to act in the workshop:

> Ben: "I've taken on this new job, but sometimes there are restrictions on what can be done".
>
> Jeremy: "Well, people pay for the things they want".
>
> Ben: "No, no, I don't mean that, I'm talking about some of the guys here. Some of the men in here will try and impose themselves upon you, they'll say there's one correct way to do things, but that's usually not the case…if there's more than one way to do things, I don't see why it matters how you do it". (Fieldnotes, 12th May 2014)

Ben felt that those purporting to know best would unnecessarily interfere in his work, pressurising him to do as they saw fit. He further elaborated on this point, noting that, "I like the guys here, but I wish they would let you do things your own way sometimes…I don't like this over-zealousness, you have to do it this way, but there's often more than one way to do things". Ben did not consider himself closed to advice, nor did he consider himself particularly skilled, as he said, "I like to do things, but you've got to know your limits, there's no point in making a mess of something". He hugely respected his fellow shedders, and their obvious dedication to the Men's Shed, and did not resent receiving help, only the unwanted imposition of help. He wanted to solve problems he encountered by himself, knowing that if he experienced any issues there would be others available to advise him.

Bradley also experienced difficulties in relation to interference, with several small incidents structuring his perception of certain other participants. His observations led him to consider the workshop a hostile environment for newcomers, and his reflections on this issue built upon the idea of power differentials between participants identified by Ben. The first example of perceived interference occurred when Bradley was using the router to shape pieces of wood for a bench he was making:

> *"I only had two bits to go, it would only have taken ten minutes, but Henry came in and tried to get me to speed up, he said I was making too much noise cus he wanted to work on the steam engine. He told me to use a plane, but I said why should I? I'd set up the router for that job, and using the plane would've taken ages, it would be a less precise finish. So he came over and tried to help me, but he rushed it, and look, he's warped the wood...I was in from the start, he should've come in earlier if they wanted to work without the noise. It's that group of guys, they've got all the power in this place, just cus they've been here from the start. I just wanna see some balance, guys should just consider each other a bit more, and just try to be a bit happier".*

Like Jake's case, discussed in the previous chapter, this incident highlights differing interpretations of what constituted consideration for others in the workshop. As he was present from the start of the session, Bradley felt that he should have been allowed to complete his work at his own pace, while Henry felt he should consider his needs and keep quiet, either by switching to a plane, or, as occurred, by his helping him to finish his job quickly. Bradley also experienced difficulties with another shedder (who he refused to name), on this occasion related to his use of a particular workspace:

> *Jeremy: "I've been surprised by how well everyone gets on".*
>
> *Bradley: "Oh no, well, not always".*
>
> *Jeremy: "Huh"?*
>
> *Bradley: "You'd be surprised. In fact, I've got something to tell you...just the other day, I was through there [the workshop], and this guy, he came up behind me, got right in my face, aggressive, and honestly, I was ready to knock him on the floor, I would've done...I was working on the dirty bench, it was a dirty job alright, and he came up and stood right behind me, and he said 'don't you ever, ever, use that bench for that'. I turned around and told him, 'don't you ever, ever threaten me like that again', and he took a step back and went all quiet, I could have knocked him out there and then...I've never seen anything like that, I just won't take it...I will say, some of these guys think they own the place". (Fieldnotes, 24th March 2014)*

In Bradley's understanding, this incident further evidenced the unjustified degree of ownership that a loosely defined group exhibited over the workshop. Also apparent is Bradley's reported willingness to resort to violent solutions, a rarity in the context of the Men's Shed, and a characteristic of the hegemonic masculinity that he, to a greater extent than other participants, was concerned to adhere to (Coles & Vassarotti, 2012).

Jaded by his experiences of unwarranted interference, Bradley retreated to the back room to work on his second bench, which he considered a protest of sorts, highlighting the problem he perceived without explicitly raising it. As he put it:

> *"I'm quite wary about working through in the workshop, there are certain people who've been telling me I'm doing things wrong. Fifteen times he must have said it, unscrew the wood, put it through the combo machine, but the screws wouldn't go back together if I did that, I wouldn't get them back in, cus they're rotten. I don't like that, it's my project, why can't I do it how I want to? That's why I try to work in there when there's only a few guys in".*

Bradley's similarity to Ben is apparent here; while he was not averse to drawing from the knowledge of others, in certain cases he felt he was not harming anyone by working on his project in a manner he was comfortable with. His fellow shedder's friendly advice, attempting to inform Bradley of the easiest and most economical means of completing his project, was thus perceived as an unwelcome interference, the multiplication of which contributed to his avoidance of certain participants. The interference of members of this group served for Bradley as the basis of a wider criticism of these men, who he felt had pushed the notion of participant ownership too far, by essentially claiming the workshop as their own. He therefore considered the official egalitarian view of the workshop environment, peddled in advertising and to visitors, to be incorrect, as his experience was one of petty squabbles over territory and a clique who considered themselves in control of the Men's Shed:

> *Bradley: "I'll stand up for anyone if they're right, I don't care who it is, even if I don't like them. See, there's that group, they think they own the place, well they don't, it's for everyone".*

> *Jeremy: "Maybe because they've been in from the start, they feel ownership over the Shed, maybe they think they know best because they are, like, experts".*

Bradley: "They're not though, with the health and safety, they're the worst. I've seen them, like with one guy, I was working, I stopped for a cup of tea, now I knew you couldn't go through to the workshop with it, but he's through there, drinking tea, and I told him that's against the rules, and he said 'oh, I make the rules, I can break them if I want'. What's that about?! When it says on the leaflet that there's no boss, well there is a boss, it's them. We need some sort of rules written down, so everyone can see them, so you know what you can and can't do".

Jeremy: "I don't think he was being serious then...and maybe it's difficult to make rules about everything"?

Bradley: "No, not at all. Everyone needs to know where they stand".

Jeremy: "So basically we need more guys like you"?

Bradley: "Yes, that's exactly what we need. I try to get on with everyone, I accept everyone". (Fieldnotes, 27th June 2014)

Bradley here contrasted his acceptance of 'everyone' with those he considered less welcoming, and highlighted the consequence of their elevated position, namely that they can do as they please, even, as he said, breaking 'rules'. However, the difficulty with the rules that Bradley wanted to see formalised was that the issues they would govern were of minimal importance to other participants. For example, while it was best practice not to take cups of tea into the workshop, nobody objected should this occasionally occur. Likewise, referring to another of his grievances, supervisors were not supposed to take advantage of their access to the building by working outside of official opening hours, nor should they technically be allowed to work past closing time, but again, this frequently occurred without objection. Bradley felt these rules were being breached by certain individuals who were doing things that "wouldn't be accepted if it was me, but it's alright with them", in effect breaching the principle of egalitarianism that he and other newcomers were promised underpinned the Men's Shed. For Bradley, the apparent triviality of the incidents mattered less than this breaching of principle.

Bradley consistently recognised the value of the Men's Shed in his life, with any newcomers he greeted sure to learn that his involvement had saved his life, and he eagerly contributed where he could, which early on involved monetary donations (payment for various tools), and later working on social enterprise projects, "for the good of the club", as he put it. Bradley did this despite not particularly enjoying the physical aspects of his labours, given his health

difficulties, but he felt he could not justify his presence, and personally his twenty-mile round trip, unless he engaged in contributory productivity. He got involved because he recognised that the workshop, and the network of cooperation generated against its backdrop, was the highly valued focal point of the organisation. In these senses, Bradley was a model participant, a man for whom the Men's Shed had greatly improved his life, allowing him to again practice his natural sociability following a difficult period of isolation, a man who recognised the importance of contributing towards the collective, and a man who, like Ben, understood the need for rules governing acceptable conduct. What Ben and Bradley disliked was the perceived lack of clarity regarding instances of interference, and as Bradley developed it, the notion that a small clique of participants held the power to judge and interfere in other's conduct, and do things that others would be reprimanded for. He thus proposed a clear, objective statement of all the rules governing the Men's Shed, a statement beyond anyone's manipulation, in order that everyone knew exactly what they could and could not do, and how they could expect others to act in relation to them. This, he felt, would reduce disagreements and private gossiping, which he greatly disliked, despite the fact that, in sharing his grievances with me and a select group of other participants, he indulged in it more than most. However, when I told Bradley that he could bring this proposal to the board, a forum through which his concerns could potentially be addressed, he refused. As a keen social observer, he thought that the consequences of such revelations could be devastating, that he "would tear this place apart", he would 'destroy it'. While he would stand up for himself in particular instances, even stressing his willingness to use physical violence on occasion, he feared that speaking what he perceived as the unpalatable truth would generate an irretrievable schism, endangering both his own presence, and the entire organisation.

Conclusion

The structural aspects of the social capital existing at the Men's Shed served to organise and maintain the community of practice that the cognitive aspects urged into being. In the community of practice apparent in the workshop, the rules and roles in operation granted substance to participants' motivations, providing, for the most part, a harmonious means of pursuing, alongside others, short-term

project and learning goals. In turn, the pursuit and conduct of these goals continually forged that which participants most valued, the regular to-and-fro of a community in practice. Certain formal rules, related to the use of machine tools, were required to protect participants and the Men's Shed as a whole, because while it was important that participants did positive good, it was vital that they did not harm themselves or others. A bad injury could be both individually harmful, and cause irreparable damage to the organisation's reputation and financial standing. The rules of greater concern to the current enquiry though, those shaping the individual's behaviour within the community of practice, informally defined the parameters of acceptable workshop conduct, to the degree allowed for in an environment lacking an enforceable disciplinary system. The first of these rules, ask not assume, was ostensibly concerned with the safe and efficient conduct of workshop-based activities, but in a more general and profound sense governed the individual's immersion in the cooperative network made available to them, and in turn continually made by them, at the Men's Shed. On the part of the individual, the simple act of asking for help, which even the most experienced of participants occasionally had to do, served to highlight that their personal goals could only be achieved through cooperating with others, a fact which also encouraged generosity in giving aid. This most typical of interactions sometimes occurred in classes, or specific master and apprentice relationships, but more often simply involved asking the man across the bench how, for example, to sharpen a chisel, or if he will lend a hand with tightening a nut or reattaching a fiddly lawnmower starting cord.

As the rule of ask not assume was concerned with the individual's recognition of the collective, so the rule of non-interference concerned the collective's recognition of the individual. The Men's Shed exhibited a reasonably complex set of functional requirements regarding the sourcing, management, and application of resources and personnel. Accordingly, it was felt, particularly following the decentralisation process, that everyone had their place within the network, based on the possession of specialist skills or the desire to fulfil one's duty. This translated into the adoption of specific roles, in which it was felt role-holders should be granted, within reason, the autonomy to act as they saw fit. The collectively recognised role-holder was understood as the best man for the job, not merely for the efficiency gains produced by restricting functions to

individuals with the requisite skill-set, but moreover because adopting a role was a means of contribution typically involving an extensive commitment that would not be made by those unwilling to fulfil it. The granting of autonomy to role-holders functioned as a recognition of their competence and commitment, and therefore to interfere with their conduct was to insultingly imply that a man who had stated that he could do something could not, in fact, do it to the required standard. The rule of non-interference was also invoked in cases where participants intervened in other's work without being asked; both Ben and Bradley identified this tendency in others, citing perceived power differentials between sub-groups of participants as the reason. Generally, the rules of ask not assume and non-interference structured a cooperative network affording all-comers the opportunity to find and maintain a place, but Ben and Bradley's issues, stemming from differing interpretations of the rules, do highlight the difficulties inherent in non-codification, whereby one man's assumption was another's reasoned response, and one man's friendly assistance was another's interference. As with cases of non-contribution, the lack of formal disciplinary mechanisms meant that evaluations of those understood as deviant occurred through gossiping, and this typically included the imputation of characterological flaws considered to underlie deviant behaviour. Assessments of Ed therefore focused on his recklessness, leading him to act without thinking, both in his attempts at humour, potentially alienating other participants, and in the workshop, potentially endangering them. Joe likewise was considered a control-freak who could not resist interfering in areas he was unqualified to do so, though on his part, ensuring there was adequate space in the back room was a perfectly rational course of action. The tensions in each case highlight, as Ormsby and colleagues (2010) also note, that relational difficulties can and do occur in Men's Sheds, even in groups exhibiting strong similarities between members, and an overall unity of purpose.

Conclusion

In terms of establishing, developing, promoting, maintaining, and progressing a novel form of charitable organisation in the Scottish context, the Men's Shed was demonstrably successful across a number of indicators. Fundraising, both in the grant funding and social enterprise phases, was consistently impressive, as was the organisation's recognition in the charitable sector, whether attracting the interest of high-ranking politicians, being nominated for and winning prestigious charitable awards, or serving an important role in establishing other Men's Sheds throughout Scotland. Not for nothing did Dennis, a man deeply involved in the national Men's Shed movement, and therefore well placed to judge, describe the Carstonwood site as "streets ahead…the most organised, jacked up Shed in Britain". These successes relied upon the commitment of a skilled management team who dedicated vast amounts of time and effort towards establishing the organisation, an experienced and enthusiastic core group of participants willing and capable of providing a greater degree of contribution than has been the norm in charitable organisations serving older men, and full organisational autonomy that allowed both to develop the organisation as they saw fit. As the grant funding landscape shifted, the transition to a social enterprise model was made with ease. This enabled participants to engage in plentiful valuable works for deserving causes, activities that also served to secure the organisation's long-term financial stability. The conduct of these commissioned projects relied upon both the utilisation of pre-existing links with other organisations held by the management team and, as the Men's Shed's services became well-known, the establishment of fruitful new relationships with local charities, schools, and community groups. Through the cultivation of this bridging social capital, both the Men's Shed and its 'customers' shared valuable resources that would otherwise have been difficult or impossible to obtain. The former secured financial and reputational gains, the latter benefitted from a relatively cheap, high quality, and wholly reliable service (Putnam, 2000). Recognising the importance of retirement to participant's self-conceptions though, the management team keenly stressed that the Men's Shed was 'not a business', despite tendencies in this direction as the workload, and the subsequent need to formalise procedures, increased. Participants, it was always stressed, were not employees, but rather volunteers, men who freely dedicated

themselves to the Men's Shed, and hence it was felt that pressure, of the kind experienced in paid employment, should be minimised wherever possible.

Social enterprise fundraising was a constituent element of the wider discourse of contribution that came to define expectations of participants' conduct. This also encompassed the pursuit of a second transition, that from a primarily management-led organisation towards an arrangement in which participants largely assumed control over decision-making and implementation procedures, a process labelled 'decentralisation'. The Men's Shed did not necessarily have to evolve in these directions, both in terms of the development of the characteristic features of the Carstonwood model, and as a site in which the parameters of an aged masculinity were identifiable (Coles & Vassarotti, 2012). Other examples of the concept identified in the literature and reported by members of the management team demonstrate this, and there was initially little to indicate that this particular format or group of men was being aimed for (Carragher, 2013; Hayes & Williamson, 2007; Morgan *et al*, 2007). Indeed, the original intentions of the management team were necessarily vague and broad. While it was recognised that the Men's Shed would mainly attract older men, it was advertised as potentially catering to all men, regardless of age, background, or capabilities, thus addressing a perceived deficit in the opportunity for healthy, focused forms of social interaction available to them. Furthermore, the management team initially demanded no commitment from participants, highlighting that any man could, within reason, do as he wished at the Men's Shed. Capturing in a negative definition this lack of exclusivity, it was emphasised that the Men's Shed was 'not a club', the point being that there would be no barriers to deter men from attending. The initial expectations of the management team regarding the purpose and functioning of the organisation can therefore be said to align with the standard benefits discourse set out in the current literature, which stresses that the personal benefits of participation flow from such freedom.

Considering these personal benefits, in the initial documentation I found that the organisation was pitched as providing increased opportunities for social interaction, opportunities to promote and enhance health and wellbeing, and opportunities to engage older men in informal education. It is unsurprising that the management team pursued this path, given the evident national concern for

these issues, the effects of which are readily apparent in the average mortality age gap between Scottish men and women, and the plethora of statistical information positioning Scotland as the 'sick man of Europe' (McCartney *et al*, 2011; see also, Kvaavik *et al*, 2010; Leishman and Dalziel, 2003; Mackenzie, 2012; ONS, 2011). I had no cause to doubt the sincerity of these intentions, nor do I deny that certain older men in Scotland are experiencing profound health and wellbeing issues that their participation in a Men's Shed could potentially address. However, it was also possible to identify a practical concern underpinning this approach, namely the need to secure grant-based funding to establish and develop the organisation, ultimately steering it towards a position whereby it could begin to at least partially generate its own income. The initial documentation can therefore be considered an exercise in impression management, an attempt to highlight the Men's Shed's capacity to engender the individual betterment funding bodies demand as a condition of their support (Wilson & Cordier, 2013). In certain of the cases reported in this enquiry, the organisation undoubtedly fulfilled this requirement, but while it was well intentioned and strategically fruitful, the inaccuracy of conceiving of the majority of participants in these terms became apparent as the fieldwork progressed. The vast majority of participants were older, white, economically secure males, either retired or semi-retired, and married, divorced, or widowed (all heterosexual). Although each of them experienced various health problems, they could physically conduct themselves without issue. As knowledgeable, hardworking, community oriented men, they remained very much 'in the male centre' (Aléx *et al*, 2008), with this categorical uniformity serving as the basis of the strong bonding social capital that came to define the social environment and purpose of the Men's Shed (Putnam, 2000). The disempowering medicalised discourse that has arisen around older people was therefore wholly inapplicable to their lived experienced, and they responded negatively on occasion to those who more closely adhered to it being present at the Men's Shed, and indirectly making demands upon them they were unwilling to fulfil. Though neither a business nor a club, the organisation was also 'not a service', with participants dismissing the negative, decidedly un-masculine connotations of the term, such as passivity and dependency, as inapplicable to the environment they were striving to create (Davidson, 2013). As I came to recognise this dominant perspective, it prompted

me to reassess my initial expectations of the Men's Shed and those men who would make it their own, causing a significant alteration in the scope and conduct of the research.

One for All

Given the novelty of the Men's Shed in the Scottish context, it is unsurprising that negative definitions, those stating what the organisation was not, featured so prominently in the management team's understanding. Following participants' lead, the main distinctions, that the organisation was neither a service nor a business, can be understood as representative of a desire for balance, an equation factoring in the changes inherent to the ageing process alongside the persistence and development of masculine identity. Hence participants rejected the claim that they attended the Men's Sheds to address personal issues, while embracing the support of their peers regarding medical matters, and rejected being pressurised, while embracing the responsibilities inherent to participant ownership. These negative definitions were fairly clear-cut; though a degree of formalisation occurred, through both its formal classification as a charitable organisation and the lack of pressure, deadlines, and competition with actual tradesmen, the Men's Shed could not be a business. Likewise, participants lacked the need, willingness, and resources for it to function as a service. As the organisation matured though, the third negative definition, that the Men's Shed was 'not a club', was somewhat stretched. While the organisation lacked a formal authority system capable of disciplining or removing deviants, clear expectations regarding participants' attitudes and conduct were developed, centred on conformity to the norm of mutual reciprocity, as the gossiping assessment of those considered free-riders clearly demonstrated (Coleman, 1988a, Dunbar, 2004; Foster, 2004; Krishna, 2001; Uphoff, 2001). The Men's Shed exhibited a system whereby participants:

> "Generate intrinsic and jointly produced goods - such as social approval, friendship, and solidarity - that increase their commitments to the organization. Under these conditions...individuals positively reinforce each other for their conformity to the rules and contributions to meeting organizational goals" (Turner, 2001:132).

Inculcating the individual self-regulation of behaviour is more efficacious than developing and maintaining an authority system, as in the former, behaviour is motivated by the desire to achieve organisational goals, rather than merely to avoid punishment. The Men's Shed exhibited this informal approach out of necessity. A formal system of authority was out of the question, as it would have required openly stated power differentials between participants, thus diverging from the horizontally structured social environment that allowed them to work harmoniously alongside each other.

Self-sustaining voluntary organisations dedicated to the collective enrichment of participants require their dedicated maintenance if they are to thrive. Free-riders are anathema to such groups because they withdraw personal benefits without contributing towards the commonwealth from which they are drawn. The core group of participants judged others based on their adherence to the norm of reciprocity in operation, because for these men, those claiming ownership, the Men's Shed was more than merely a place to pursue personal interests. As they rejected conceiving of the organisation as a business or a service, so they rejected conceiving of it as merely a workshop, just a place to work on personal projects, or merely a social club, just a place to converse with other men. Through their labours, and indeed their reflections on the environment they had created, participants heralded the transformation of a community *of* practice into a community *in* practice. Of course, in comparison to the tight-knit communities of old that served as its inspiration, there was an unavoidable artificiality to this environment. It resided entirely in a single building, and in involving only categorically similar men, each of whom chose to engage, manifested as a '*Gemeinschaften* of mind' as opposed to a naturally occurring '*Gemeinschaften* of locality' [Tönnies, 2002]. Nevertheless, this artificiality, a consciously constructed, highly concentrated communal form, did over time acquire a unique substantiality, manifested as the structural aspects of social capital developed to manage contribution and the exchange of knowledge (Uphoff, 2001). For individual participants, acceptance by the collective depended on their acceptance of the collective, on their willingness to immerse themselves in the cooperative network while making tangible contributions towards the organisation rendering it possible. The workshop environment can thus be said to challenge the discourse of domination central to enactments of hegemonic

masculinity, because for the achievement of participants' goals, the individualism implied in the desire for domination would have been detrimental (Connell, 2005; Kiesling, 2005).

The current literature paints an almost universally positive picture of Men's Sheds, and it would not be difficult to conceive of the Carstonwood site exclusively in these terms, as I was tasked with when preparing funding grants and internal assessments. I highlight the internal conflicts and the occasionally exclusionary rhetoric I witnessed throughout the fieldwork in order to avoid such idealisation, and to differentiate this ethnography from the broadly supportive agenda characteristic of the current literature, an approach that cannot provide a fully rounded account of what occurred within the organisation I observed. Though I concur with the assertion that Men's Sheds can exert positive effects over participant's lives (a point amply demonstrated in the recovery narratives presented in chapter six), my findings also highlight that the participant ownership central to the Carstonwood model generated highly protective attitudes among its adherents. In certain instances, this manifested in what has been identified as a negative aspect inherent in communities exhibiting high levels of bonding social capital, namely the exclusion of those considered outsiders, or as here described, non-contributors (Portes, 1998). The core group of participants did not draw up the drawbridge, as the warm welcome Barry and other shedders offered to newcomers demonstrated. However, having been granted the opportunity, he and the rest of the core group of participants fashioned the Men's Shed in their own image, and expected others to adhere to their conception. It should be recalled though, that newcomers would not be told outright what was expected of them should they attend regularly. The need to contribute, to foster a mutually reciprocal relationship with other participants and the organisation itself, was an understanding that had to be arrived at independently. It was felt that this should spring from an acknowledgement of a fact that was patently obvious to those who already observed it, namely that the personal benefits derived from involvement in a charitable organisation of modest means should willingly be repaid.

Of course, participants had different interests, and exhibited varying degrees of knowledge, skill, and experience. Such differentiation served to position them

within the community of practice, as a role-holder, an expert, a jack-of-all-trades, or a temporary apprentice. The substance of one's contribution though, mattered less than the assertion of a contributory mind-set; a man doing what he could was a man doing what he should. Though they were necessarily differentiated in function, participants exhibited a singular mind-set valuing above all immersion in this contextually novel but personally familiar environment of give and take. Their primary concern, having expended a great deal of time and effort developing it, was simply maintaining it through living it, and it is on this point that the indistinguishability of what was given and what was taken becomes apparent. Golding and colleagues' (2008) notion of the simultaneously conservative and revolutionary nature of Men's Sheds is here applicable. While these authors considered the local-level acceptance of male-exclusivity in these terms, the notion of a conservative revolution can also be said to apply to the recreation of the older communal form pursued by participants. This sense of restorative nostalgia, or personally speaking, continuity, encompassing both conservation (the general model of a cooperative community) and change (the Men's Shed's novel artificiality), was at once conservative and revolutionary, as participants looked to the past as a guide to fashioning an acceptable future (Atchley, 1989; Boym, 2001). Every instance of giving, every contribution, whether in formally defined roles, in clearing one's bench so others could use it, or in making oneself available to others, lending a hand or teaching a technique, continually rendered apparent and reinforced what participants sought to achieve. This collectively held cognitive aspect of social capital is what ultimately drives active participation, as opposed to mere attendance, in a voluntary organisation like the Men's Shed (Uphoff, 2001). The belief that one's labours are contributing towards, as Dan put it in his poetic eulogy to the Men's Shed, a 'just cause', generates in the assessment of others feelings of positivity regarding fellow adherents, expressed through the encouragement and support of their efforts, and feelings of negativity regarding non-adherents, expressed in this case through critical gossiping.

Parameters of an Aged Masculinity

Though participants staunchly resisted the Men's Shed being defined as a service, it is correct to note that their status as older men rendered impossible the full

realisation of a hegemonic ideal that prizes forthright heterosexuality, physicality, and competitiveness, as enacted through various contextually-specific manhood acts (Bird, 1996 Connell, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009). Western hegemonic masculinity scripts, the career-based narratives shaping men's assessments of their personal success at different points in time, do not account for the post-retirement period, allowing the void to be filled by damaging 'crisis' conceptions that homogenise and problematize the diverse older population. Considered redundant, their scope for worthwhile social contributions exhausted by their withdrawal from employment, older men are denied the agency that is an essential prerequisite of selfhood (Gee & Gutman, 2000; Mullan, 2000; Spector-Mersel, 2006; Thompson, 1994, 2006). The Scottish Men's Shed movement is, as Dennis and Joe understood it, about altering these disparaging cultural conceptions of older men, redefining the meaning of later life in a manner that grants a central role to the continuity of masculine identity. At the time of writing, there are dozens of Scottish Men's Sheds in various stages of development, many of which have drawn inspiration and guidance from the Carstonwood site. An informed assessment of any wider cultural impact these organisations may have is beyond the scope of this enquiry, and would, I suspect, benefit from pausing to observe whether the initial enthusiasm for the concept is maintained in the longer term. What can be said with certainty is that participants at the Carstonwood site rejected the applicability of negative discourses to their lived experience, and recoiled against understandings of the Men's Shed, their space, maintained by their efforts, in such terms. Accordingly, in mapping the parameters of the aged masculinity existing among participants at the Men's Shed, I sought to understand how these older men actually do 'do' gender, with reference to salient aspects of personal identity, and in relation to women, other men, their peers, and the dominant form of hegemonic masculinity apparent in Western culture (Coles & Vassarotti, 2012; West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Regarding those aspects of identity unaffected by the ageing process, Coles and Vassarotti suggest that older men continue to seek adherence to hegemonic norms, and this was apparent in relation to participant's socio-economic status, marital relationships, and their views on gender differentiation. Participants felt that they had earned their retirements, and highlighted the importance of self-

reliance and hard work as characterological attributes legitimising their comfortable socio-economic status, while also criticising those who 'choose' not to support themselves. Participants also expressed traditional views on gender differentiation without, with certain notable exceptions, descending into overtly sexist or misogynistic terminology. They asserted the value of the Men's Shed in providing a male-exclusive, quasi-workplace environment (socially and materially) capable of relieving underfoot syndrome following retirement (Golding *et al*, 2007). In both of these areas, the Men's Shed facilitated the maintenance of internal and external continuity, allowing for a manageable degree of change anchored in consistent attitudinal stances (Atchley, 1989). Involvement in the organisation provided a novel but familiar male-exclusive social environment, in which long-established, definitively masculine technical skills were exercised pursuing novel but familiar projects and activities. These similarities of age, socio-economic, and marital status, as well as the simple homosocial desire to spend time with other men in a male-exclusive environment, made participants susceptible to involvement in the Men's Shed, and provided immediate and substantial points of similarity between them. In terms of these basic aspects of their aged masculinity, the establishment of the organisation, and participant's conduct within it, was simply a manifestation of what were understood to be three concrete truths. Firstly, men are fundamentally different from women, and will therefore naturally choose to pursue different interests (though this difference, for the most part, implies no lack of respect). Secondly, in the community of Carstonwood (and elsewhere), men's interests are not catered for to the degree that women's are, an inversion of the long-standing distinction between the feminine private sphere and the masculine public sphere that the Men's Shed was intended to at least partly address. Thirdly, the maintenance of a space in which men's interests are catered for, and the personal rewards gained thereby, relies upon a second fundamental aspect of manhood, namely the willingness to work hard to achieve one's goals.

Age had diminished neither participant's conception of gender differentiation nor their work ethic, but they were certainly cognisant of the less desirable aspects of the passing of time, having all experienced biological ageing and a great degree of social change throughout their lives. It was these experiences of change that generated the bonding social capital existing among the group, and allowed for

an understanding of the purpose underlying their involvement in the Men's Shed. Regarding changes to their bodies, the majority of participants strongly rejected the assertion that they required a service, that they attended the Men's Shed to address specific health issues. This did not stem from an unwillingness to confront any difficulties they may be experiencing, a common, damaging concern among men seeking to adhere to hegemonic norms, but rather an unwillingness to be defined within the parameters of the standard benefits discourse that has arisen around Men's Sheds and other organisations geared towards older people (Courtenay, 2000; Davidson, 2013). Health, however, was firmly on the agenda at the Men's Shed; the management team recognised that participants could potentially be facing various age-related issues, and health talks on the typical topics concerning older men were reasonably well attended, semi-regular events recognising this. Of course, from a promotional point of view, these events also bolstered the perception of the Men's Shed as an organisation that addressed older men's health issues in a preventative fashion, a useful inclusion in funding applications. The male body, as symbol and seat of lived experience, has long been recognised as central to the enactment of masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), and the experience of physical change forms the cornerstone of Coles and Vassarotti's (2012) outline of aged masculinity. The threat to masculine identity presented by an ageing body deviating from the hegemonic norm led their participants to downplay the loss of physical capital in favour of stressing the development of an age-exclusive kind of cultural capital, manifested as experience, wisdom, and an increased capacity for reflection. Coles and Vassarotti's participants compared their bodies to younger men, and finding themselves unable to compete, shifted the emphasis to an aspect of selfhood that they alone, due to their aged status, could possess. Age and experience were therefore intimately related to masculine self-conceptions, indeed functioning as their source, with the assertion of a greater degree of control over one's mind replacing that over one's body.

Coles and Vassarotti do not, however, investigate how bodies and health are constructed and reflected upon among groups of older men, a notable omission given that masculinity is considered to be a primarily homosocial enactment (Kiesling, 2005; Kimmel, 2006). That is to say, masculinity is a construct created not only through comparison (at a distance), but furthermore through direct

local-level interaction with other men, who jointly establish acceptable parameters of attitude, speech, and behaviour. Most apparent at the Men's Shed was the environment of mutual concern, which allowed for wide-ranging openness, with in-depth discussions concerning all manner of health issues occurring without specific prompting. Participants continued to assert control over their bodies by adopting a pragmatic approach to their health predicated on intimate self-knowledge. All possessed a basic physical baseline, and sought to maintain a degree of continuity in this area by responding to specific difficulties through adapting their lifestyles and willingly seeking professional advice (though the confidence in their own self-knowledge meant they did not always agree with it). Within the field of aged masculinity existing at the Men's Shed, the experience of physical change was a point of commonality and a source of bonding, occurring specifically through the mechanism of bounded solidarity, the sense of a shared challenge stemming from similar experiences of difficulty (Portes, 1998). Participants highlighted their commonality through universalising their specific experiences, promoting togetherness and reassuring the individual that their experience was normal for men of their age, and in no way constituted a form of emasculation, at least within the confines of the group (Foley, 2014). As the specifics of a man's background mattered less than his general work ethic, so the specifics of a man's body mattered less than the uses he put it to. Indeed, there was a total lack of concern with adhering to hegemonic norms governing either the substance or management of the body. As an actual or symbolic assertion of masculinity, it carried little sway at the Men's Shed, where the norm was the collective recognition and individual management of physical deficiency. Participants did not compare their bodies to those of younger men, as did Coles & Vassarotti's, but rather with each other. Being entirely unconcerned with standards they could never reach, nobody was judged too thin or too fat, or too tall or too short, creating a positive and accepting environment for all 'normally ageing' male bodies (Atchley, 1989). The organisation was, however, unequipped to cope with men lacking physical independence, prompting a formal rule preventing their presence without a carer. Recall that the Men's Shed was 'not a service', and participants were neither willing nor able to ensure the safety of those requiring professional aid. Participation thus

required a minimum degree of physical capital, but beyond this, a level playing field was consciously constructed.

In this environment of non-judgemental openness, those participants that were looking to address specific social/physical/psychological issues could be wholly forthcoming regarding their difficulties, and they tended to generously praise the positive impact involvement at the Men's Shed's had upon their lives. Though these men suffered extremely trying circumstances, they sought to compensate by highlighting alternative aspects of their masculine identity, stressing in each case that their current difficulties did not define them. In terms of elaborating the concept of aged masculinity, and providing additional evidence of the role of continuity in its enactment, the cases of Neil and Bradley proved most illuminating. Both of these men expressed a greater need for the Men's Shed than regular participants, while also prioritising aspects of their masculinity that diverged from the dominant form as enacted by the majority. Neil took particular pride in how he had managed his body throughout his life; his stroke, he felt, would have killed a lesser man, but because he had consistently practiced age-appropriate sports and body maintenance, he retained the resilience to overcome it. Operating within the field of aged masculinity allowed Neil to continue utilising his body as a central aspect of his masculine self-conception. He drew on his past status and comparisons with other older men to position his current body as a continuation, that not even a stroke could disrupt, of that which it once was. Bradley likewise sought status from his past, drawing upon his youthful attitude and continuing appeal to women as a counterpoint to the difficulties he had experienced prior to attending the Men's Shed. Despite his troublesome body, Bradley considered himself to be highly successful with women, and ageing had actually bolstered this, as in comparison to younger men, he was more knowledgeable regarding women's desires. He also spoke of his business and financial success, which enabled him to mingle with celebrities and take early retirement, and he regularly flashed his cash at the Men's Shed. Evidently, maintaining the 'male facade' (Aléx *et al*, 2008) was important to Bradley, and this profound self-confidence informed his understanding of his impact upon the Men's Shed, where he felt he had breathed new life into the social environment. Certainly, alongside Ed, Bradley managed to carve out a niche for himself as a comedic presence at the Men's Shed, providing the kind of banter that certain

participants sought, but this came at the expense of being perceived as frivolous. Though his understanding had evolved over time, his concerns (wealth and women) remained those of a younger man, and in the context of the Men's Shed, in which a particular form of aged masculinity assumed dominance, this placed him in a subordinate position.

As Coles and Vassarotti (2012) suggest, older men utilise compensatory strategies that downplay the importance of those aspects of hegemonic masculinity they can no longer adhere to, while simultaneously assigning value to novel aspects of selfhood arising through ageing. In their study, this manifested as an intangible form of cultural capital stemming merely from having existed into later life. It is outlined, somewhat stereotypically, as an increased capacity for reflection which underpinned a general sense of maturity, wisdom, and a comfort in one's own skin. Participants at the Men's Shed, however, utilised their specific skills and experience regarding the use and understanding of technological objects to position themselves as superior to younger men, contrasting their own deep appreciation with ignorant contemporary button-pressers. This was a central aspect of a wider contrast in which the past, both experienced and imagined, and encompassing a three-fold conception of the interlinked material, physical, and social realities of life and masculinity once commonplace, was set against a present considered deficient in these regards. The material and physical aspects of the past naturally accumulate in the present, in objects and the embodied subject respectively. They typically do so without conscious effort, manifesting in participant's own workshops, on the shelves and workbenches of the Men's Shed, and in their own skilled hands. This is an inattentive form of remembering, a 'habit memory' (Bergson, 2004) in which aspects of the past are not actively recalled, instead simply being experienced in everyday life, typically in the midst of a perceptual blindness to the fact that one's conduct constitutes a form of remembering. The past, or rather, a variety of fragments thereof depending on the social and material context, can thus be conceived as ever-present, the individual's conduct being absorbed in and shaped by what, simultaneously, was and is (Olivier, 2001; Olsen, 2010).

From the individual's point of view, here described is the combination of embodied and external forms of continuity, a habitual means of positioning

oneself within, and interacting with the material world that is not overly remarkable in and of itself. It is vital to progress beyond such descriptive ontological accounts of conduct in everyday life to investigate the meanings that prompt specific forms of involvement in an organisation such as the Men's Shed. In this specialised environment, participants were granted opportunities to actively reflect upon, and assert the value of, the history around and within them. Certain technological objects present at the Men's Shed were intensely meaningful precisely because they were understood in this more specialised sense, as fragments of the past representing the qualities thereof, the most salient of which was duration (Bergson, 2004). The fact that they could still be trusted to fulfil their intended function as reliable, familiar, ready-to-hand objects (Heidegger, 1962) infused them with symbolic value, and formed the basis of a critical assessment of contemporary social attitudes towards technological objects. Participants criticised what was termed the 'throwaway society', in which the willingness and skills to make do and mend have declined in favour of a glut of cheap goods that one does not establish a relationship with, items that, lacking any historical biography, remain as mere protocol objects (Morin, 1969). This mind-set was not exhausted by the more obvious exemplars of past solidity; the neglected, the broken, the discarded, a great mass of objects rescued from the scrapheap, all found a home at the Men's Shed, granting the back room especially the feel of a curiosity shop, with messy fragments of multiple pasts protruding from the shelves. These objects were not, however, "freed from the drudgery of use" (Benjamin, 2002:39) to embody some airy sense of integrity (Olsen, 2010). Instead, they were rescued because it was recognised that they did retain value, as items of use, exchange, and again symbolism, as the very fact of their rescue set participants apart from those who, failing to realise their quality, would merely discard them (the basis of the 'chucker'/'keeper' debate). As with materiality, so with physicality; the past can also be said to endure in embodied habitual actions, and certainly, at the Men's Shed the utilisation of embodied skills in the use, creation, refurbishment, or adaptation of technological objects were, for the most part, acts of inattentive remembering (Heidegger, 1962; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Ageing had done nothing to dull the knowledge participants commanded; these 'old hands', one board member said, remained 'handy', and in a manner increasingly exclusive to them, given that younger hands were

increasingly infantilised by modern technology. Accordingly, when they did reflect on their workshop practices, participants could establish a further point of differentiation, relating to the decline of traditional skills among younger men.

Were participants exclusively concerned with experiencing only a personal continuity of environment and practice, many could have been satisfied by working in their own garages or home workshops. Participants though, sought more than this; not only did they want to continue practicing their skills for the personal benefits apparent through leading an active lifestyle, they also understood them as a transferable and collectively beneficial resource that could be shared directly with like-minded men, and indirectly with those benefiting from their work. Unfortunately for participants, they understood the kind of social environment amendable to such exchange as having declined in contemporary society. While it is relatively easy for the individual to maintain, through regular care and practice, those objects and embodied skills considered meaningful, the same cannot be said for social environments, and the norms, values, rules, and roles inhering within them. This requires on the part of all concerned a settled and directed mind-set, and a consistent cooperative effort derived from this, existing alongside a socio-economic and material context amendable to particular communal forms. The inherent complexity of such environments renders them vulnerable to decay stemming from both internal and external sources, changes affecting the quantity and quality of communications between neighbours. Certainly, participants felt that a particularly desirable older communal form, characterised by a strong sense of bonding social capital borne of norm introjection, of geographical, and therefore socio-economic and attitudinal similarity, had not persisted into the present. The reality or otherwise of such conceptions can be debated, but to do so would be to miss the point. The nostalgic individual need not hope that the past will be agreeable, they can, through selective constructions drawing upon personal experiences and certain wider cultural conceptions, know it was. There was therefore a certainty to it that, 'real' or not, was attractive to participants (Davis, 1979). Older forms of interaction based on mutual reciprocity, older understandings of acceptable behaviour, older perceptions of the value of particular objects, knowledge, and skills; each of these aspects of the past, understood to be endangered by social change, found renewed expression within

the confines of the Men's Shed (Boym, 2001). Through the men it attracted and the environment they fostered, the organisation can therefore be said to have provided a sanctuary from contemporary anxieties, a bastion of like-mindedness in a rapidly changing society.

Research has consistently demonstrated the agency of subordinated and marginalised men, and the means by which they challenge, adapt, and comply to hegemonic norms in constructing a masculine identity in light of their particular characteristics. Coles' (2008, 2009) understanding of subfields of masculinity also highlights the point that subordinated and marginalised masculinities are not internally static forms, but are themselves spaces of contestation exhibiting varied understandings of what it means to be a man. This observation is borne out even in this small-scale study of a particular social organisation, as the majority of participants who adhered to the dominant form of aged masculinity shared the space with others who emphasised the importance of alternative characteristics. The concerns of those who adhered to the former revolved around consistency, comparability, and comradeship. Friendships flourished because participants were alike, because they shared the same concerns, and because they understood the Men's Shed as a collective means of addressing them. Accordingly, on the point of health and financial status, the similarities between participants mitigated against the utilisation of either physical or economic capital as a means of securing a higher status within the group. Likewise, the in-depth discussion of sexual activity, often utilised by younger men as a means of climbing the 'pecking order' (Bird, 1996), was taboo within the Men's Shed, and actually served to lower the status of those who engaged in it. Indeed, aside from the necessary differentiation of function in the workshop and the wider organisation, those adhering to the dominant form of aged masculinity were not concerned with competing with, or setting themselves apart from, their fellow shedders. They instead sought to emphasise the many commonalities they shared, in terms of their lifestyles, their technological interests, and their concerns regarding social change. In doing so, they continually cultivated the resource, bonding social capital, that allowed them to realise the restorative purpose they assigned to the Men's Shed.

Though Neil and Bradley shared the concerns of the majority, they also emphasised more individualised aspects of their masculine identities. Despite his objective lack of physical capital, Neil focused on the fitness on his body, which had been tested, but by no means overpowered by a stroke, while Bradley emphasised his business and financial success, and his appeal to women, both of which were underpinned by his effervescent personality. To speak of a specifically aged form of masculinity then, is not simply to outline a specific constellation of traits universally inhering in later life. While Coles and Vassarotti's (2012) participants prioritised the possession of an intangible form of cultural capital exclusively available to older men, participants at the Men's Shed valued social capital, a resource that, far from arising as a matter of course, had to be consciously nurtured and defended. Likewise, those prioritising alternative aspects of their identities, Neil's pride in his body, Bradley's in his personality, had to put in the work necessary for maintenance and enactment. In every sense, participant's aged masculinity was an achievement, here observed in the ability to rise one-handed out of a chair, the willingness to tell a dirty joke, or in the flourishing of a novel form of charitable organisation (West & Zimmerman, 1987). The commonality underlying these diverse manifestations of aged masculinity, indeed that which qualifies them as such, if the term is taken to refer to a process of maturation, rather than an arbitrary chronological division, is the evident concern with continuity, the management of unavoidable change within an overall framework of the conservation of manhood. Participants did not fundamentally alter their perception or performance of gender, instead creatively incorporating aspects of the past, as experienced, and their general conception thereof, into their current self-conceptions. For the majority, men who lived as they had lived, who were raised in tight-knit communities, who had worked in technical occupations and fostered lifelong interests in technological objects, their involvement at the Men's Shed allowed for the shared manifestation of desirable aspects of the past in the present. This restoration was necessarily leisurely, artificial, and limited in scope, but it nevertheless provided a tangible counterpoint to a present material and social reality considered debased by the erosion of these most fundamental aspects of life.

Final Reflections

This study has investigated the means through which a group of men chose to address certain perceived social (and to a lesser extent, personal) problems through the establishment, development, and maintenance of a novel, yet reassuringly familiar, homosocial environment. Certainly, judging by the dedication these men demonstrated towards the Men's Shed, the value of the organisation for those who made it, and those who made it their own, cannot be doubted. In sites exhibiting strong bonding social capital though, hostility towards those exhibiting different characteristics is a recognised risk (Portes, 1998). As Adler and Kwon (2002:32) put it, "depending on the content of its norms and beliefs, a group with strong internal ties...may become insular and xenophobic or, alternatively, may use its internal social capital to encourage and help...members reach out to the surrounding world". The either/or nature of this statement does not account for the inevitable shades of grey characterising the Men's Shed. On the one hand, while the management team stressed openness and equality, in reality certain elements of exclusion occurred, most obviously that of women, but also of those with more pronounced physical difficulties and those not adhering to the norm of mutual reciprocity. Furthermore, certain of participant's conversations involved favourable comparisons of their own actions and attitudes with those of outsiders, and while not directly exclusionary, this served to highlight their concerns and solidify intra-group bonds. On the other hand, the Men's Shed afforded participants plentiful opportunities to engage in valuable works for deserving causes, and they were correct in stressing that their efforts were beneficial to both the group of shedders and the many community groups who utilised the services on offer. It has been frequently demonstrated that bridging forms of social capital rely on the prior presence of intra-group bonding, as "internally, associations instil in their members habits of co-operation, solidarity, and public-spiritedness" (Putnam *et al*, 1993:89-90), providing the foundation upon which inter-group connections rest. The Men's Shed, however, functioned more as a fulfilment of desire rather than a creator thereof, providing a means of converting participants' pre-existing community-mindedness into something tangible and continuous. An empty building, innumerable tools, and a wide variety of projects provided the material substance

of a community of practice, with the actions conducted within it transforming it into a community in practice.

Recognising this double-edged nature of social capital, particularly its bonding variety, Portes (1998) encourages critical reflection on the concept and particular exemplars thereof, arguing for a 'dispassionate stance' assuming neither universal positivity nor negativity. The norms and values underpinning the bonding social capital observed at the Men's Shed functioned to generate trust and understanding between participants and motivate collectively beneficial conduct, while also excluding those who, directly or indirectly, could or would not adhere to them. Further complicating matters is the fact that the instances of positive functionality the Men's Shed may be praised for directly depended upon exclusion. Participants' attitudes towards the inclusion of women demonstrate that their presence would thwart the important opportunity they took to discuss health issues, while a proliferation of free-riders would jeopardise the entire organisation, thus risking the many good works conducted for other community groups. This complexity should not be surprising, as social reality rarely affords the kind of clarity characteristic of the current literature. My purpose here though has been merely sociological, concerned with the provision of understanding rather than judgement, and hence promotion or critique. For those latterly inclined, greater emphasis may be placed upon the facts of gender exclusivity and the degree of insularity reported here, or, as the current literature has tended to prioritise, the undoubted improvements to participant's lives and the many good works their involvement allowed them to conduct. Future research into these novel social organisations, which offer rare opportunities to directly observe and further understandings of homosocial interactions among older men, should not be restricted by pre-conceptions based on either of these observations, nor bound to any particular methodology in service of them. The researcher should instead seek to comprehend and analyse the norms, attitudes, and configurations of practice arising at the intersection of ageing and masculinity, as they are developed, experienced, and enacted by a variety of older men in a variety of different Men's Sheds.

Through reporting and reflecting on 18 months of ethnographic fieldwork, I have, I feel, offered a holistic view of a single Men's Shed, outlining how and why the

organisation developed and matured as it did, and considering the concerns of those for whom it assumed an important place in their lives. I would therefore stress the impossibility of establishing generalisations concerning Men's Sheds based on this study. This was not my aim, and even if it were, the unique circumstances of the Carstonwood site and the men who frequented it (like those of all other Men's Sheds) would render any attempt to do so irresponsible. I have instead sought to provide, in what I hope will be the sociological legacy of this study, a deeper understanding of participant's responses to the personal experience of the intersection of ageing and masculinity. In doing so, I sought to develop Coles and Vassarotti's (2012) initial attempt to provide a more robust and widely applicable means of analysing the attitudes and behaviour of older men undergoing the inevitable changes characterising the transition into later life. Specifically, this approach has drawn together the fields of social gerontology and masculinities studies, highlighting the internal and external continuity (Atchley, 1989) that underpins the personal and collective (homosocial) construction of aged masculine identities. Such an approach clearly allows for differentiation based on prior experience, the many and varied paths of continuity that older men may pursue, and hence application among a wide variety of individuals and groups. Recognising the complexity of the ageing process, Coles and Vassarotti (2012:40) are correct in stating that "in contemporary western societies, men need to negotiate more than the changes encountered by their ageing bodies". The enhanced capacity for calm, spiritual reflection reported by their participants functioned as a personal counterbalance compensating for the diminishment of their physical capacities. For the majority of participants at the Men's Shed though, personal adjustments were inadequate in acquiescing their concerns, which, in stemming from negative perceptions of social change, rather than individual 'deficiencies' (hence the vociferous denial of the applicability of the standard benefits discourse to their lives), required a collective solution. Only through collective action, conducted alongside those whose similarity of experience led to a similarity of outlook, a bonding social capital borne of norm introjection and bounded solidarity (Portes, 1998), and characterised by a clarity, and moreover, an alignment, of ends and means, could this be realised. To take that which they desired, to experience again a community in practice, they had to give, they had to earn the respect of their peers through

contributing towards its development and maintenance. This end was achieved through exhibiting adherence to the hard working, technically minded, cooperatively oriented, and mutually supportive dominant form of aged masculinity existing among the group.

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