

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

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

An ethnographic case study

A thesis submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology

at Massey University
Albany, New Zealand

David Anstiss
2016

ABSTRACT

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

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

So many people have contributed directly to this thesis. I would like to extend my appreciation to those people, here. Many more have supported me by merely being present at some point or another in my life. I wish I had the space and recollection to list every single one.

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge and thank the Sheddies of the Men's Shed North Shore, who not only accepted my presence in the Shed, but made me feel welcome there. Without their warm accommodation, this thesis would not have been possible. From the outset of my participation in the Shed, the Trustees were interested, accepting, and welcoming. I would like to thank them for permitting me to participate in the Shed, and to develop and grow as a Sheddie, and as a father, while being there. I would also like to thank the men who participated in the interviews and focus group. Their contributions were invaluable and comprise a significant knowledge-base for this research and give it substance. I would like to acknowledge the Sheddies who passed away during this research, particularly Bernie Ash, who welcomed my son and I into his home and shared his tea and biscuits with us on several occasions. Most of all, I would like to thank the men who were present in the Shed and took the time to get to know me, and who opened up to me to get to know them in return. As I note later in this thesis, they are more than just 'informants' to this research. I consider them my friends.

I would like to thank my supervisors, Professor Darrin Hodgetts and Doctor Otilie Stolte. Their immense intelligence, and proficiency and passion for research and teaching have gifted me constant inspiration and aspirations. Darrin, I tracked down after seeking advice from a past supervisor, and would like to acknowledge the risk he took in supervising a doctoral candidate whose grade history was not "s**t hot". Darrin's interest in engaging personally with research and participants is both refreshing and inspiring, as is his desire to realise real change through engaged and empathetic research. I would like to express my appreciation for Otilie's in-depth editing, feedback, and suggestions. The time she has taken to provide extensive commentary has had a significant impact on my growth as an aspiring scholar. This journey—like many doctorates, I'm sure—has been a long one, dotted frequently with the many 'excitements' of life. Over the space of about four and a half years, Darrin and Otilie have not only guided my professional development as an academic, but have supported my family and I (socially and financially) through significant hardship, including housing insecurity, redundancy, and considerable administrative complications. I

cannot convey enough, just how lucky and grateful I am to have had Darrin and Otilie accompany and guide me over the past few years.

Finally, I would like to thank my friends and family who have nurtured me as a human being, before and throughout the realisation of this thesis. It sounds cliché, but I really am fortunate to have so many incredible people pass through my life, even for a brief moment, who have contributed to shaping events that made this work possible. My close friends in particular have been a constant source of encouragement and inspiration throughout my studies. I would like to acknowledge my Great Aunt, Joyce Tolley, whose belief initially gave me the idea for attempting doctoral study. I would also like to acknowledge my mum, Christine Anstiss. She has always had faith in me and encouraged my studies, and unreservedly helped both materially and socially. I would like to convey my unyielding love for my son, Eli Anstiss. Eli, while still young (4 years old, as I write this), never ceases to amaze me with both his tenderness and his insight. Eli provides me with constant inspiration in striving to be a more patient, empathetic, and loving human being. He deserves no less in a father. Most of all, I would like to acknowledge, thank, and express my sincerest love to my partner, Liza Savage. Together, we have faced so many of life's challenges over the past few years, and survived. I know that we will face and overcome many more in the years to come. Liza has loved and supported me unconditionally throughout, and beyond, the completion of this thesis. I wish she could see herself through my eyes; realise her beauty and talent, and understand the difference and positive influence she has had on my life.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	vii
LIST OF TABLES.....	viii
PREFACE.....	1
CHAPTER ONE Men’s Sheds and the Men’s Shed movement	6
1.1 The historical backdrop of contemporary shed culture in New Zealand.....	6
1.2 Contemporary sheds.....	11
1.3 Men’s Sheds and healthy aging	13
1.4 Chapter summary.....	16
CHAPTER TWO Conceptualising the Shed through self, relational being, emplacement, and material practice	17
2.1 Relational selves at the Shed	18
2.2 Emplacement and ‘fitting in’ through social interaction	19
2.3 The interaction between human and non-human ‘actors’ at the Shed	23
2.4 Chapter summary.....	25
CHAPTER THREE An ethnographic case study approach	27
3.1.1 Stage one: Participation-observation and journaling	27
3.1.2 Stage two: adding value to the ethnographic approach through a group discussion and interviews.....	31
3.2 Ethics and engagements in the Shed	32
3.3 Stage two participants	35
3.4 Analysis process	36
3.5 Chapter summary.....	38

CHAPTER FOUR The research site	40
4.1 Locating the Shed.....	40
4.2 A tour of some important objects located at the Shed	50
4.3 Chapter summary.....	62
CHAPTER FIVE Reworking selves: Maintaining health and dignity in retirement, through socio-material practice	65
5.1 Responding to disruption through re-placement	66
5.2 The shared reworking of selves, and resistance to popular representations of retired life, through continued engagements	72
5.3 Reworking gendered identities	83
5.4 Chapter summary.....	89
CHAPTER SIX Shed Camaraderie: Relational being through socio-material practice	92
6.1 Relational being through social identification and shared practice	93
6.2 The development of camaraderie across space	97
6.3 Project-mediated camaraderie	100
6.4 Camaraderie as an important element of building supportive and sharing networks.....	106
6.5 Chapter summary.....	113
CHAPTER SEVEN Considering this research as a whole	116
7.1 Consolidating the research findings.....	120
7.2 Final reflections and moving forward	124
APPENDICES	129
Appendix 1: Host information sheet.....	129
Appendix 2: Participant information sheet.....	130
Appendix 3: Group facilitator reference	131
Appendix 4: Interview guide	133
REFERENCES	134

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Photographs depicting the physical construction of the Men’s Shed North Shore	42
Figure 2. Photos of the Shed’s workshop space, and organisation of practical and symbolic objects such as tools.....	44
Figure 3. Floor plan diagram of the Shed.....	46
Figure 4. Thank you letters from local kindergarten for the Shed’s contribution to learning materials	49
Figure 5. Photographs that depict the restoration of a damaged bandsaw.....	51
Figure 6. Various forms of scaffolding used to construct the internal Shed	57
Figure 7. Photograph of Deasy’s boat during its construction, and the plans used to construct it	60
Figure 8. Photograph of Tuatara’s diagram of Joseph Campbell’s Monomyth.	67
Figure 9. Photographs showing the open plan of the lunchroom, and the small ‘pockets’ of men that form around construction projects.....	99
Figure 10. Photographs of co-created and meaningful objects.....	101

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Participant information (at time of stage two of the research).....	36
--	----