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Counter and Complicit Masculine Discourse Among Men's Shed Members

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Abstract

Men's Sheds is a growing international movement aimed at providing men with places and activities that facilitate social connectedness. Despite Men's Sheds' focus on males, little attention has been paid to masculinities within the specific context of these settings. The current study used a gender relations framework to explore the ways in which attendees discussed Men's Sheds, with particular attention to discussions that were complicit and counter to traditional, hegemonic views of masculinity, and diverse positions in between these binaries. The data consisted of transcripts and field notes from four focus groups comprising mostly older, White, retired male members of a Canadian shed (N = 22). The analysis revealed three overall themes: (1) focus on work, (2) independence, and (3) need for male-focused spaces. These themes and associated subthemes suggest that shed members ascribe to dominant masculine values and ideals, but also support more fluid and flexible views of masculinity. Implications are discussed for how working with an array of masculinities within the Men's Sheds movement will be helpful with respect to their future growth in Canada and internationally.

Keywords

Men's Sheds, masculinities, community programs, aging, hegemonic

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Masculinity refers to established stereotypes and structures that influence how men think and act in relation to their view of what "being a man" means (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Monaghan & Robertson, 2012). Differing conceptions of masculinity range from traditional, hegemonic views which suggest that men should be strong, independent, and aggressive, to more fluid and complex views which suggest greater flexibility in what it means to be a man. In contrast to models that understand gender and masculinity as consisting of sets of characteristics or traits that men possess to a greater or lesser extent, this work situates itself within a gender relations framework which conceptualizes masculinities as relatively enduring sets of normative male practices yet simultaneously as practices that are open to and currently undergoing normative shifts. The objective of this study is therefore to understand such masculinities as they occur among male participants of Men's Sheds—a men-centered community program that has experienced tremendous international growth in recent decades (Golding, 2015). Although research on Men's Sheds is experiencing similar growth to that of the movement itself, little attention has been paid to the influence of masculinities in this growing literature.

Men and Masculinity

The social construction of masculinities has garnered much attention in the academic literature. Masculinities are not

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easily defined, as gender practices shift under the influence of historical narratives, as well as social, political, and economic structures (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Creighton & Oliffe, 2010). Hegemonic masculinity refers to masculine norms that are considered ideal and dominant over other forms of masculinity in a given place and time (Connell, 1995). Hegemonic masculinities are often represented by established stereotypes and structures that influence how men think and act in relation to their view of what "being a man" means. Such stereotypes have in recent history included being strong, unemotional, aggressive, providing for one's family, and having limited involvement in household tasks (Monaghan & Robertson, 2012). Some suggest that these are changing and that masculinity is becoming more "inclusive"; more egalitarian and active in incorporating and adopting previously stereotypically feminine attributes, values, and practices (Anderson, 2009; Kaplan, Rosenmann, & Shuhendler, 2016). Others suggest that, while these changes are apparent, they are not as extensive as some think and they have done little to alter structurally embedded gendered power relations and indeed might be happening as a way of maintaining these established relations within a neoliberal economic landscape (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014). Certainly, such changes in hegemonic practices are slow to occur, perhaps especially so for different age cohorts, because they are embedded in social structures over time. It is within this context that patriarchal power influences many men (although certainly not all) to be complicit in sustaining hegemonic masculinity to draw significant dividends—though we should not think that such complicity is always, or often, a deliberate decision or process; it is often part of a far less conscious form of daily practice (Robertson, 2007). This is not to say that men attain hegemonic power, but there is often implicit incentive to embody it because of the collective benefits that it offers men.

Though influential, hegemonic views of masculinity have also been criticized for suggesting that masculinity is rigid or trait-like. A more flexible approach has been to view masculinities as complex and multifaceted (Connell, 1995; Robertson, 2007). According to this viewpoint, masculinity is constantly in flux because it is relational, often times co-constructed and deeply reliant on context (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). For instance, a man's view of masculinity is likely to change across the life course (van den Hoonaard, 2007). Furthermore, different practices (behaviors) accrue masculine capital in specific contexts or may be shaped by personal characteristics such as acquired or lifelong disabilities that conflict with traditional views of masculinity that value being powerful and autonomous (Shuttleworth, Wedgwood, & Wilson, 2012). However, while this view may suggest that men can choose from a range of masculine identities, it is important to note that men are influenced by the myriad of social forces that play a role in defining dominant masculine ideals (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Ogrodniczuk & Oliffe, 2010). Men must navigate their identities through political, economic, gender, sex, power differential, race, and cultural factors, which all play a role in influencing how they embody and perform masculinity for themselves and those around them (Phillips, 2006). So, while there is some fluidity, constraints invoked by institutions and contexts facilitate and restrict the ways that men behave in masculine ways. To espouse a one-size-fits-all model to masculinity is to lose sight of the diversity within and across men. It is through this gender relations framework that conceptualizes masculinities as plural but constrained within the wider social order (Robertson, Williams, & Oliffe, 2016) that we explore men's involvement in a male-focused community-based program—Men's Sheds.

The Men's Sheds Movement

Although men benefit from maintaining homosocial relations (Cordier & Wilson, 2013; Golding, 2015), it is also well documented that they tend to have greater difficulty than women developing and maintaining social relations (Richardson & Smith, 2011). Perhaps as a result, there has been tremendous growth in recent decades in Men's Sheds, which offer men spaces to come together, to engage in a variety of activities, and to connect with one another. Men's Sheds started in Australia in the mid-1990s, there are now more than 900 sheds associated with the Australian Men's Shed Association (AMSA), and the AMSA is recognized as one of Australia's largest male-focused community development organizations (AMSA, 2016). The Men's Sheds movement has also expanded internationally to Ireland, New Zealand, Canada, the United Kingdom, and throughout Europe (Golding, 2015). According to the AMSA, a Men's Shed is:

> any community-based, non-profit, non-commercial organization that is accessible to all men and whose primary activity is the provision of a safe and friendly environment where men are able to work on meaningful projects at their own pace in their own time in the company of other men. A major objective is to advance the well-being and health of their male members.

As the Men's Shed movement has proliferated, so too has research on this topic. Golding's (2015) book on Men's Sheds includes a narrative review of 103 studies published between 1995 and 2014. This review provides good evidence on who participates (largely men who are older, retired, or unemployed, living in rural areas, without university educations) and what the primary outcomes are (primarily enhanced social interaction, social outcomes such as friendship, and learning new skills). This review

and others (Wilson & Cordier, 2013) point to limited evidence of health and well-being outcomes. Additionally, there is very limited attention in this research literature to masculinities.

Milligan et al. (2013, 2015) suggest that participating in traditionally male activities allows Men's Sheds members permission to become more open with each other in discussions. Engaging in traditional male activities while also facilitating companionship, openness, and closeness suggests complex masculinity practices, and highlights that nontraditional practices of masculinity can be found when men have implicit or explicit permission and the setting is safe to do so. Similarly, Golding (2015) suggests that sheds can be "both a shelter and welcome relief" from negative and stereotypical views of gender, where men "can be empowered and encouraged to experience and express themselves, with other men, as men" (p. 370).

While research on Men's Sheds has largely ignored the role of masculinities to date, research on masculinities has traditionally neglected the experiences of older men, although this situation is beginning to change (van den Hoonaard, 2007). It is relevant, therefore, that Men's Sheds have a high proportion of older members, many of whom are retired (Flood & Blair, 2013; Golding, 2015). Emerging research suggests that while aging is associated with losses of strength, autonomy, and mental and physical resiliency (Bennett, 2007), older men tend to adapt to these losses by rejecting and reformulating masculine ideals (Saxton & Cole, 2012), emphasizing the value of masculine capital with respect to wealth, wisdom, and life experiences (Coles & Vassarotti, 2012), and adopting alternate views of masculinity that provide more fluid gender identities (Coles & Vassarotti, 2012; Tannenbaum & Frank, 2011). It may also be the case that changes in roles following retirement allow older men to more fully express other qualities and characteristics that did not fit in contexts that support traditional masculine paradigms (Coles & Vassarotti, 2012). The present study will therefore not only add to the Men's Sheds literature but also to the literature related to older men and masculinity because the participants in the current study are over the age of 55 years.

Given Men's Sheds international growth, it is important to consider the ways in which men who are involved in sheds embody masculinity, and how they engage in varied masculinity practices. The aim of this article was therefore to reflect on how masculinities emerged, as an implicit value, during focus group discussions with older male attendees at a Canadian Men's Shed. These discussions emerged within the context of a qualitative study in which shed members shared their views on the importance of Men's Sheds and factors that are important to consider when starting new sheds. Although the focus of that study was not on masculinities, they were evident throughout the research process as men discussed the influence of gender on their involvement in community programs as well as their decision to attend a male-focused community program. We expected to find evidence of both hegemonic masculine ideals, as well as evidence that countered this traditional view in the form of more fluid conceptualizations and practices of multiple masculinities. We also expected to find evidence that more dynamic conceptions of masculinities might benefit men and their communities.

Method

Participants and Procedure

As part of a larger study aimed at developing a toolkit to help men start new Men's Sheds in Canada, men were recruited through Canada's first Men's Shed in Winnipeg, Manitoba with help from one of the shed's cofounders. The cofounder, who did not take part in the focus groups, invited Men's Sheds members to take part in the study through personal invitations and announcements in their weekly newsletter. We also employed snowball sampling, where men were welcome to invite other members to the groups. Approval was obtained from the human ethics review board at the University of Manitoba and all participants provided written consent prior to participation.

After providing consent and prior to beginning focus groups, participants completed a brief sociodemographic and health questionnaire. As reported in Table 1, the participants were older, White, and most were married, had a high school diploma or postsecondary degree, were retired, had a moderate household income, and spoke English as their first language. Approximately one-quarter had experienced mental health problems in the past and one-fifth sought help for them. Participants rated their current health close to the midpoint between poor and excellent.

The 22 Men's Shed participants were separated into two groups to keep the focus groups a manageable size, and to accommodate members' schedules (which resulted in unequal focus group sizes of 8 and 14). Participants remained in the same groupings for three focus group sessions over a period of 6 months, for a total of six focus groups. The goal of the first focus group was to establish a baseline understanding of how men engaged in social activities, what gaps existed in terms of community programs for men, how they heard about Men's Sheds, and how their shed developed. The goal of the second focus group was to hear participants' perspectives about content they thought important for men thinking about starting a new shed, and to discuss activities that shed members might be interested in, how to brand and market

Table 1. Sociodemographic and Health Characteristics of the Sample.

Characteristics	*N* (%) or *M* (*SD*)
Mean (*SD*) age	70.0 (5.9)
White race/ethnicity	22 (100%)
Marital status	
Married	21 (95.5%)
Widowed	1 (4.5%)
Education	
Less than high school	3 (13.6%)
High school diploma	9 (40.9%)
College or university degree	10 (45.4%)
Work status	
Part-time	1 (4.5%)
Disability leave	1 (4.5%)
Retired	20 (90.9%)
Household income ($)	
20,000-34,999	5 (23.8%)
35,000-59,000	12 (57.1%)
60,000+	4 (19.0%)
Mean (*SD*) years since retirement	9.2 (6.1)
English as first language	19 (86%)
Mean (*SD*) self-rated mental health (1 = *poor* to 5 = *excellent*)	3.3 (1.1)
Mean (*SD*) self-rated physical health (1 = *poor* to 5 = *excellent*)	3.1 (1.0)
Have experienced problems with stress, anxiety, or depression	6 (27.3%)
Have sought professional help for stress, anxiety, or depression	4 (18.2%)

sheds, and how best to reach out to potential new members. The goal of the third and final focus groups was to introduce participants to a preliminary version of a Men's Sheds toolkit and to elicit their feedback. A research assistant documented field note observations from each of the six focus groups to capture noteworthy observations from the groups (e.g., nonverbal communication, the emotional tone of the groups) and to make note of topics for potential inclusion in subsequent focus groups. This research assistant also made field note observations from online searches of Men's Sheds websites, including the local shed's website and international Men's Sheds organizations.

Analysis

We analyzed focus group data using the framework method comprising six stages: (1) familiarization, (2) identifying a thematic framework, (3) indexing and sorting, (4) reviewing the extracted data, (5) summarizing the data, and (6) abstraction and interpretation. This analytic method does not require all six steps in all cases (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2014). During the first phase, research team members read the transcribed focus group data, noting patterns and preliminary themes, and discussing these in detail in weekly team meetings. An initial coding framework was identified in Stage 2. During the third stage of analysis, research team members coded the transcripts according to the central themes and subthemes from the previous stage. In the fourth reviewing stage, we refined the framework to minimize the number of original themes (six) and reorganize the data into the most salient categories, resulting in four themes. We did not employ Stage 5 as it is typically done (summarizing transcript data into a chart or spreadsheet according to the index codes) and instead finalized the framework during team meetings in the abstraction and interpretation stage, where we identified associations and patterns in the data to ensure the full range of participants' discussions had been described. In this final step, the research team pulled together the key findings, interpreting the data set as a whole to describe the participants' full range of discussions concerning masculinities, and further reduced the framework to the final three themes outlined in the following section.

Research quality and rigor was ensured in four ways. First, four team members reviewed the data and the themes and subthemes, allowing for ongoing peer review (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Second, the initial framework was shared with participants (member checking) during the third focus group interviews, explicitly asking for feedback regarding the representativeness with regard to the previous two focus groups. Therefore, only the data from the first two sets of focus groups were included in the current analysis. Third, we worked with multiple forms of data (field notes and transcribed audio data) to triangulate various perspectives (Flick, 2009). Finally, we conducted a thorough review of relevant literature to ensure theoretical sensitivity (Braun & Clarke, 2013) while ensuring that the current article contributed to advance understandings about the connections between masculinities, men, and Men's Sheds.

Results

Analysis revealed three themes: (1) focus on work, (2) independence, and (3) male-focused spaces. These are discussed below.

Focus on Work

Within this theme, the men discussed being defined by and focusing on their paid work to the detriment of social relationships, and the challenges this raised for them following retirement. Underscored were the participants' stereotyped/traditional understandings of male and female gender roles; that is, the idea that men's role was to work

outside the home in paid employment and women's role was to take care of the home. Men's Sheds participants consistently positioned themselves and potential attendees as "hardworking men" who did not have much time for friends and social activities while they were focusing on their careers. This resulted in the men tending to be isolated, especially after retirement when even work acquaintances were no longer available to them. In describing an example of someone who focused on work to the detriment of friendship, and who could now benefit from Men's Shed involvement, one participant said:

> He is a perfect example of someone who needs Men Sheds. He was in the retail business, he worked 16 hours in a day, he hasn't got a friend in the world. I had lunch with him once a week and uh that's about all the time he gets out, you know. So there's millions like him.

This participant described this acquaintance as being similar to the men at Men's Sheds because many of the current members joined Men's Sheds after retirement and the loss of work-related contacts. Most participants explained that they did not have many (in some cases any) close male friends throughout their work lives, but they justified this by their being too busy and productive earning a living to cultivate friendships: "Yea but I was busy making a living at the time, you know. I mean that, that was . . . there wasn't a need for it [friends] then."

While it was difficult for men to focus on fostering friendships while prioritizing work, participants did not think that their female partners who worked experienced the same lack of friendships: "Actually no they don't. My wife recently retired and she's had girlfriends over the past years and she has kept in touch with them and she'll go out for lunch with them." The men were often explicit in their belief that women are generally more social.

Within the discussions of men focusing on careers and neglecting friends earlier in their lives was some discussion about female partners' (seemingly subordinate) role as that of supporters or facilitators who accommodated the men's career aspirations. This lack of support from male friends and reliance on female partners is evident in the following quote:

> She's really good at her thing, you know supporting me. I decided to go into business for myself, here we are with a mortgage and two kids, and you know my wife was behind me 100 percent with going into my own business. But my male friends, like I say they were non-existent for 20, 30 years.

The participants' apparent complicity around traditional male–female gender roles was also evident in discussions of retirement. Since home was often described as "women's spaces," many participants identified conflict emerging once they retired and were home more often:

> [M]y wife told me I had to do something, get out of her hair. She was newly retired at that time and she didn't like the fact that I was hanging around the house getting in her business, getting in her space. So I was quite comfortable with that. I needed some place to go and get out of the house. . . . So Men's Shed was sort of in the back of my mind at that time. . . . And [in a joking tone] my wife has regretted it ever since . . . now that she's got nobody around the house to do the chores.

It was clear that many participants understood the home as "women's territory" even if their wives had worked outside the home.

Participants, however, discussed work in ways that oscillated between aligning with and counter to the dominant masculine narrative of men as workers who do not develop friendships through statements such as "men need to get together and work shoulder to shoulder." Using such language allowed them to acknowledge their need for social connection while still maintaining the dominant view of men (and Men's Sheds men, in particular) as productive workers. Another participant noted, " . . . if you're a male, uh you relate more with uh your other buddies by doing an activity together."

Participants sometimes countered discussions related to gender normative roles around work and home because they acknowledged that women also worked outside the home. At the same time, however, the following quote supports the hegemonic view of masculinity being defined by work, with the expectation that women will experience negative relationship outcomes as their focus on work increases:

> I think we're gonna find something else, that in 15 or 20 years, maybe it won't even take that long, women are going to need groups like this because so many women are in the work force and the same dynamics are gonna happen to them.

Further reinforcing a traditionally hegemonic view of the impact of work on women, in order to fill this upcoming void that women might face, shed members anticipated that women would need to seek out activities in a similar way as Men's Sheds members have. However, they explained this using examples that defined women's activities as distinctly different from men's; for example, emphasizing that women would seek out participation in "book clubs or . . . sewing." In describing women's activities this way, they could still maintain an important sense of unique identity as men in the context of women's emerging role as workers.

Participants acknowledged tensions emerging in retirement, due to the loss of structure and their identity as workers. In describing the adjustment to retirement, one participant quipped: "what happened, you used to be gone from 8:00 in the morning till 5:30 at night and now you're here [at home] all the time."

Independence

A second theme emerging during focus group discussions was around independence, which was underpinned by two subthemes, choice and self-reliance. For the participants, independence had to do with having options regarding their involvement in Men's Sheds, but also that men's involvement in sheds can be hampered by valuing self-reliance over social connection.

Choice. Participants emphasized the importance of choice concerning their attendance and participation at the Men's Shed as a key reason they liked the group. They alluded to this sense of choice resulting from the group's distinctly grass roots and "bottom-up" style of organization which they contrasted with senior's centers that are typically run in a "top-down" fashion.

Specifically, the members frequently described their shed as being a bottom-up organization run by men, and where members have independence and choice rather than being told what to do. Describing the appeal of the Men's Shed, one participant said "I think that was really one of the keys, when they said it was bottom up. One man made this point by saying that you're not going to hear people say 'here's what you're going to do.'" Choice was important because participants described having worked jobs with assigned roles and deadlines their entire lives, and they now wanted to enjoy retirement in less structured and obligated ways:

> When you've worked for 50 years in my opinion you don't retire to go back to work again, at least I didn't. I didn't wanna have somebody laying down rules and . . . to be roped into something on a regular basis. That wasn't what I was looking for at all.

Counter to this, however, was acknowledgment of the need for some leadership and group organization. While one participant described the group as bottom up, another participant responded:

> I thought it was top down. So I don't know how you describe Men's Sheds. I think we prefer to be bottom up, you know. . . . Because you can get a hold of a bunch of ideas but if there's no driving force, it's not going anywhere. I think probably even in our own organization there's some variation. It's not totally bottom up.

In discussing the structure of their group, one participant asserted "we want to differentiate ourselves from the seniors' centers . . . so in the description of Men's Sheds we will have to define what Men's Sheds is and I don't know if we've done that."

Self-Reliance. Participants described involvement in social groups as a primarily feminine activity that contrasted with dominant masculine discussions about men being stoic, independent, self-sufficient, and not wanting to get involved in social activities. The participants' discussion of this issue was complex; even though they talked about men as not wanting to socialize or get involved in groups, they themselves were involved. Nonetheless, they continued to describe women as more eager to get involved, and often framed this positively:

> You go to some of these 55 plus things and it's full of women, but women socialize a lot more than men do. And . . . men are just to themselves a lot. They're not interested in getting together with a group of individuals as women would. So I think that's a real handicap for us. I think we're missing out on a lot of opportunities that we could have had or could have.

For this reason, most participants felt it was hard to get (other) men to "leave their comfort zone" and join their Men's Shed.

In keeping with more fluid conceptions of masculinities, Men's Shed members also discussed how expectations for men to be on their own and not part of social groups was an expectation that may now be changing, despite being dominant in the past:

> That stems way back in society when men were a pillar to themselves. They needed nobody. A lot of men's jobs you're by yourself, you might have a dozen men working under you but you're still by yourself. Whereas women intermingle more.

As this conversation continued another participant described how he resisted this expectation for solitude and independence. He gave the example of his shifting perspectives at his workplace later in his career prior to retirement and how, perhaps because of aging, experience, and wisdom, he began to appreciate the benefits of interacting:

> We all helped each other a lot and sometimes I couldn't figure out a problem by myself. You try by yourself and then you finally go to someone else in the group . . . and sometimes two heads are better than one. And it's, you know, in all these answers you didn't see it and it's not embarrassment, "oh, you idiot you didn't see how to fix it." It didn't bother me

> anymore that maybe I didn't see what a simple solution was. It was a real relief.

In keeping with this narrative that countered the notion of valued independence and self-sufficiency, while the participants described women as more sociable, they emphasized how the existence of their group exemplified a breaking away from prior expectations that they (men) should not be sociable or involved in groups. Participants provided examples of breaking with expectations of independence, suggesting also that other men would benefit from doing likewise.

Need for Male-Focused Spaces

The third theme emerging from the data focused around what it means to be a man that underscored the participants' explanations of why there is a need for men's spaces. We organized this into four subthemes: (1) personal discussions, (2) diversity, (3) male-friendly banter, and (4) activities.

Personal Discussions. The men highlighted the challenges they have discussing emotions or personal health topics, clearly echoing previous work identifying "restrictive emotionality"—a fear or difficulty in expressing feelings—as a key factor in men's interactions (Levant et al., 1992; O'Neil, Helms, Gable, David, & Wrightsman, 1986). On the one hand, there was frequent talk of men being uncomfortable discussing these topics with female partners, physicians, or other health care professionals. Relatedly, participants indicated that they had been given the message by others that men are not supposed to talk about personal topics:

> In my circle of friends . . . there's a lot of women. I normally don't talk about my prostate. The subject just doesn't come out. And if it did there would be a gasp. But they'll [women] talk about their problems in front of the guys. But you don't dare mention anything, whereas my God, like you got no class, you know.

While acknowledging the traditional hegemonic view that men feel pressure to keep emotional or personal topics close to their chests, the Men's Sheds members frequently highlighted that men need support around these topics but approach them differently than if they were talking with women or health care providers, and that this was a primary benefit of having a space for men. For example, one participant talked about his relationship with his father-in-law:

> My father-in-law has a bond [with me] out of necessity but I actually enjoy going to see him more than his daughter enjoys going to see him, well because he feels more comfortable sharing with me than he does his own daughter . . . because guys talk differently.

The notion that men need to talk with one another, but do so differently than women, was further highlighted during a discussion of mental health problems among (male) military personnel. The men suggested that, since their group understands men's unique differences, Men's Sheds or similar models might be preferable to traditional health care services to tackle the issue of (male) suicide among military personnel:

> The army guys that are killing themselves . . . they were trying to build the case that these guys need a lot of help . . . Don't you think these guys that are blowing their brains out in the army would benefit from a group like this where you can sit and talk to guys. You know, like where the hell's the mental health people to encourage something like this [Men's Sheds] for them.

In this way, the men implied that the culture of the Men's Sheds, in which it is understood that guys talk differently than women, would provide a better place for military men to overcome emotionally sensitive topics.

Participants spoke with a sense of pride that the Men's Shed was a place where they could discuss personal topics, identifying that there was a great deal of openness by Men's Sheds members to discussing ordinarily taboo subjects. As one participant noted:

> If I come in here on a Tuesday and I was concerned about something, if I mentioned it to the group or one of the guys that's been involved with it, there doesn't seem to be any hesitancy in saying, "well yeah well I had that," and then they will openly talk about it.

Participants suggested that this openness to discussing personal issues made Men's Sheds an appealing place for men, a narrative counter to their initial descriptions of men as not talking openly. The comfort in discussing emotionally sensitive topics is likely a function of the safety they felt within their relationships with men that they knew well and trusted.

Diversity. During discussions of how to attract new members to Men's Sheds and also how to market and promote sheds, themes emerged relating to heterosexist scripts and discussions of non-White cultures. Field notes documented discomfort and some hesitancy during these discussions, perhaps reflecting some tension between hegemonic norms and men's awareness of political correctness surrounding diversity.

Men's Sheds group members defined themselves implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, as heterosexual. This emerged during a focus group where the men

provided feedback on visual materials that served as examples of images that might be included in a guide for starting Men's Sheds. One of the images included a collage of men from diverse ethnic backgrounds, rural men, indigenous men, and (possibly) gay men. Initially, one participant responded to the images with "You got it right." After a pause, however, a different discussion emerged. One man suggested, "with the two guys hugging there, could we get two guys playing cards?" and "Ya, I think that image should maybe be taken out. We're getting to be an open society but I think that's maybe just a little . . . " One man joked "Let's put lipstick on one of them." Another participant recalled how the name Men's Sheds was sometimes mistaken by others to imply that their group was for gay men specifically, saying

> Actually that's one of the deterrents that I found for approaching men to come to Men's Sheds—because they're afraid of homosexuality, if you will. I've had people come to me and say "is that a group of senior gay people?

This discussion was countered when one participant noted knowing someone who was gay, although he was quick to agree that the picture of two men hugging should be removed. Another participant countered with "of all the pictures the one that is not fitting to me was the [picture of a rural] peanut farmer" because peanuts are not grown in Canada.

There was also discussion of the local Men's Shed as predominantly comprised White men, and how best to market Men's Sheds to Canada's ethnically diverse population. This emerged during the discussion of the same collage. Participants discussed whether there should be ethnic diversity within sheds, or if diverse groups might prefer to develop separate Men's Sheds. For example, one participant said:

> Don't know if you want one chapter for Oriental, one chapter for Caucasians or, is that what you're thinking of? Why don't you put a colored fella in there, a picture—not hugging!

This quote both encourages diversity, thus countering traditional views, while at the same time uses politically incorrect language that suggests complicity with respect to hegemonic norms.

It is important to note that many of the men refrained from comment altogether during these sensitive discussions. Also, some participants noted the importance of promoting inclusiveness within Men's Sheds. In discussing whether they promote their group as open to new members, one participant shared his thoughts on how sheds should remain open to all groups and individuals, saying "groups should never be closed. That's a sure way to make them die." Participants also noted that they might be perceived as exclusive if they talk about their group as being closed to new member because "when I see a group may be closed, they may be thinking we're closed because of discrimination." The tension throughout this discussion of sexual and racial/ethnic diversity was evident in terms of differing views that supported and also countered traditional hegemonic discourse. Interestingly, our field note observations of Men's Sheds websites, where photographs and images from these sites focus on White members and traditional male activities such as woodworking, portray sheds as traditionally masculine.

Male-Friendly Banter. Throughout the focus groups, we saw constant evidence of the men connecting through rousing and teasing, otherwise known as male-friendly banter (Hansji, Wilson, & Cordier, 2015). For example, one participant said: "I'm an old guy, and I enjoy going to the executive meetings and making suggestions so other people can work hard."

There was an understanding that some men swear, and that one difference between male-only groups versus mixed-gender group is that the men felt more comfortable swearing if they want to: "if it's a mixed group, first off you don't swear, or I, you don't say the F-bomb." Some men discussed feeling policed by women in their lives, and, for that reason, needing a place of their own, as the following quote highlights:

> We're really going back to our childhood here. What this is, it's the tree house up in the tree that says 'no girls'. No girls allowed . . . Oh they could visit, but if they hear us swearing that's too bad. You don't like it, don't you open your mouth and bitch to me 'cause you'll be told.

In line with established hegemonic norms were examples like this where the men continued to construct their masculinity through rejection of that which is female and feminine.

Activities. The final subtheme focused on men having unique interests that are different from women's, and that these frequently involved working with tools, building, and fixing things. Our field notes documented that when participants were discussing activities consistent with hegemonic notions of masculinity, the majority of men were engaged, nodding and/or expressing agreement with each other verbally. One activity described as uniquely male within this Men's Shed was woodcarving. One man expressed his surprise when he noticed that some men were not interested in carving at one of the Men's Sheds meetings, saying that "I've got two women carving walking sticks, none of the men, what's going' on?" Once again, this quote highlights the complexity concerning masculinities within Men's Sheds; on the one hand, the

fact that women were in attendance and engaged in a traditionally masculine activity suggests fluid conceptualizations of gender and masculinities within their shed, while on the other hand, this man's surprise reflects a traditionally hegemonic position. The following also shows the participants' efforts to describe men's activities as distinct from women's:

> The Men's Shed was sort of a good place to start to get to know some men and do something with them that is of a common interest, working with my hands, doing tools, carving, whatever work might be needed to be done, away and apart from the female aspect of my life.

The idea that men enjoy working with their hands, tools, and carving, was further highlighted through a discussion of the local Men's Sheds logo (which depicts a pair of hammers crossed over top of a Canadian maple leaf). One man joked: "Well, I think a hammer is more of a male fixture . . . You know it's not a doily or a spoon or a fork crossed or anything." Another participant reinforced this idea with the traditional hegemonic view of men as warriors by saying "Men always carry the, well kind of a weapon like a hammer." Our field note review of Men's Sheds websites further reinforced the emphasis of traditionally male activities. The Australian and Irish Men's Shed Association websites, for instance, have wood backgrounds and pictures of tools incorporated into many aspects of their website designs.

However, even though woodworking and using tools were defined as masculine activities common to sheds, once again, there was evidence of other men countering this view. One man said: "Oh yeah, not everybody's interested in woodworking" and another described himself as unusual because of his lack of interest in "manly" activities:

> I'm an odd ball, I don't have a hobby, I don't like working with my hands, I don't like to hammer . . . I'm a lazy bugger I guess that's what it is. But I hung around because I see the need, it is just immense and the guys who should be here aren't.

This quote emphasizes that despite not fitting within traditional constraints of what it means to be a man, it is still possible for him, and many other men who might be like him, to experience the social benefits of Men's Sheds.

Discussion

Findings from this study affirm the embodiment of diverse masculinities within and among Men's Sheds participants. Shed members discussed topics that initially appeared to fit with hegemonic norms; particularly previously researched factors such as the importance of work, self-reliance, and limitations of emotional expression that are prevalent and well-developed within the psychology of men and masculinities literature (Levant & Wong, 2017). However, also present were discussions counter to these norms that revealed flexible masculine practices consistent with Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) work. Evident also, and consistent with the aging and masculinity literature (Coles & Vassarotti, 2012; Tannenbaum & Frank), was the presence of degrees of fluidity concerning conceptualizations of multiple masculinities among the older male members of the local Men's Shed. This work therefore contributes to the growing literature on aspects of inclusive or nontraditional masculinities as well as that on conceptualizing older men's masculinity practices.

Most study findings aligned with hegemonic notions of masculinity: the primacy of work and providing for one's family, valuing independence and autonomy, being reluctant to seek help, keeping emotional topics to oneself, and enjoying "manly" activities such as woodworking (Donaldson, 1993; Levant & Wong, 2017; Tannenbaum & Frank, 2011). While such findings are not new within the masculinities literature, the dynamics of them within the specific context of Men's Sheds, and counter hegemonic narratives within that context, have not previously been fully explored. Participants discussed topics reflecting an overt complicity in sustaining hegemonic masculinity, for example, when emphasizing how the shed activities were "things that men are interested in." The performance of masculinity through male-friendly banter or activities, for example, was central and deviations, when activities that did not comply with a hegemonic view, were explained away as exceptions to the "rule" of masculinity. This appeared to affirm their individual and collective sense of being men who were asserting their masculine social capital.

Humor was one notable tactic used, explicitly and implicitly, to suppress countermasculine discussions. Similar to its use in male prostate cancer support groups (Oliffe, Ogrodniczuk, Bottorff, Hislop, & Halpin, 2009), the men used humor to mark the boundaries for what "truly" counted as manly practices and activities. Art and painting references brought on teasing and male-friendly banter. Although previous research has reported that this banter provides comfort and support (Hansji et al., 2015), in the current study, it also seemed to signal what was seen to be "peripheral" rather than central to men and the work of the Men's Shed. One man's reference to his gay relative led to silence, another possible tactic used to suppress points of view that ran counter to predominant hegemonic narratives. Though humorous and mostly nonconfrontational, a strong group culture prevailed that clearly asserted the core work of the shed as masculine and its attendees as "manly."

Relatedly, it is interesting to consider the way in which Men's Sheds promotes itself through websites, toolkits, and other promotional materials with respect to masculinities. The local Men's Shed logo of a hammer superimposed over a Canadian maple leaf signals "working men" attendees with building skills and is suggestive of an ongoing recognition of the primacy of work in this context despite the retired status of most attendees. When asked about the inclusion of a tool in the logo, the men stated that they felt it was appropriate for their shed because it appealed to other men. The implication was—if you are a real man, you like to hammer and do carpentry or you at least recognize the importance of work as a male signifier. Participants went on to say that it represented the activities that their shed did, and that it was important to let potential members know this. Through the process of researching existing Men's Sheds, it was apparent that the majority of Men's Sheds websites and promotional materials employed language and imagery consistent with hegemonic masculinity practices, including phrases like "men coming together, standing shoulder to shoulder making, fixing, and talking" a slogan for the U.K. Men's Shed Association (2016).

While there was support for the use of traditionally masculine imagery such as hammers, that were linked by some men to weapons, it is also noteworthy that several participants stated that they do not feel like carpenters and appeared to be uncomfortable countering this ideal. These individuals mentioned that the visual depictions of hammers, for example, initially deterred them from feeling welcome or aligned with the shed movement. These men clearly felt like outsiders in these discussions, which ran counter to the group's assertions about being open and welcoming of diversity. These conflicting messages about the inclusive and open nature of sheds—saying they are open and accepting but promoting, albeit unintentionally, a rather narrow view of what is acceptable—can serve to exclude other potential male members who do not ascribe to such practices. This suggests a relational dynamic whereby endorsing more traditional views of masculinity may be a comfortable way through which to enter into conversations and to begin connecting to other men. However, as the current findings affirm, once this door has been opened, less traditional versions of masculinity and engagement with other men become possible, and even normed. This expanded dynamic of masculinity is likely to extend as sheds become more well established and members develop stronger, trusting relationships with one another. Unfortunately, men who do not fit the hegemonic norm may not benefit from this acceptance if they are initially dissuaded from joining sheds in the first place.

As Hearn (1994) asserts, public and private performances around masculinity vary widely, and understanding hegemonic rules of engagement also enables some men to legitimately and creatively break with these. Relationships among the group of men who took part in this study were largely well established, such that dynamics of engagement were likely well known. The longstanding relationships among the group members may also have facilitated the emergence of countermasculine dialogue. This suggests that, on the surface, men must enter Men's Sheds through complicity in sustaining hegemonic views of masculinity, but are then afforded legitimate opportunities to break from hegemonic masculinities within those communities of practice (Creighton & Oliffe, 2010). This is not true in all cases, however, and must be noted that the Men's Sheds members we interviewed were by majority White, working-class men, who had been employed and married over their lifetimes. While being welcoming and open is a clear goal of the Men's Sheds movement (Golding, 2015), this particularly narrow demographic could also result in promoting another "old boys club" which excludes and limits its true potential. Canada and other countries where the Men's Sheds movement is emerging could benefit from learning about capacity building in indigenous Men's Sheds in Australia (Southcombe, Cavanagh, & Bartram, 2015). With nearly 1,000 sheds operating in Australia and a growing international Men's Sheds movement, it will be important for men to consider how they are promoting this movement, and whether those methods promote or restrict diversity (at least in terms of sexual and racial/ethnic diversity discussed in the current study).

A recurring discussion revolved around challenges to men adjusting to life after retirement, reflecting prior literature on this topic (Calasanti & King, 2005; Collinson & Hearn, 2004; Loretto & Vickerstaff, 2013; Oliffe et al., 2013). Because many men have focused on the primacy of work and concomitant achievement and success throughout their adult lives, and this has likely been a key determinant of their identity as men, they often face internal conflict when they leave the workforce and are forced to find new identity markers (Brown, 2008). Findings here are consistent with prior research on the retirement transition that is often associated with a loss of work-related friendships, which can contribute to men's social isolation (Perren, Arber, & Davidson, 2003). This understanding of retirement in the context of masculinity might add to the larger discussion about how men form relationships with other men in Men's Sheds (Ballinger, Talbot, & Verrinder, 2009; Cordier & Wilson, 2014; Golding, 2011; Golding, Brown, Foley, Harvey, & Gleeson, 2007).

Although many of the current findings were consistent with hegemonic notions of masculinity, the general finding within the aging and masculinities literature is that aging is associated with a sense of increasingly flexible and open gender roles, and this was evident in the counter-hegemonic discussions among the Men's Sheds members. The current countermasculine findings suggests that sheds

are settings where men can express and perhaps adopt less rigid and traditional views of masculinity and gender, although the current findings also identify that these dynamics are far from totally fluid. As some participants noted, the role of women in their lives as they retire, and as women continue on working and also retiring from work, may shift these masculinity discourses and practices further.

Another example of counterhegemonic masculine narratives were discussions about how Men's Sheds were safe spaces for men to forge meaningful relationships with each other. Traditional ideals and social norms are that men need to be seen as solitary, emotionally restricted individuals capable of remaining healthy without relying on others. This traditional view has of course been reported to misrepresent most men, and it has a negative impact on men's overall health (Creighton & Oliffe, 2010; Oliffe et al., 2013; Robertson, 2006). Indeed, the current findings counter the static notion that men are emotionally restricted, highlighting that they are willing and able to have emotional and personal discussions with other men given the right time and place. Therefore, one of the primary themes from this study that has been established in previous Men's Sheds literature (e.g., Golding, 2015)—that men need and value social interaction and benefit from social connections with other men—is a positive message for all men. Such counterhegemonic masculine discourse highlights the importance of reimagining masculinities beyond a select group of men and within the overall international sheds culture in ways that move beyond dominant hegemonic views (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Robertson, 2007).

This study represents the first we are aware of exploring the dynamics of masculinities within the context of Men's Sheds. Using a gender relations framework to do this has facilitated consideration of the seemingly contradictory hegemonic and counterhegemonic narratives and practices within that setting. However, there are a number of limitations. First, this study represents the views of a single Men's Shed in central Canada. Therefore, research involving other Men's Sheds from other regions to account for cultural, economic, and other social factors that may influence results is required. It would also be valuable to go outside of attendees at Men's Sheds to see who is not included and why. Second, and relatedly, the participants in this study were older adults, whereas sheds in some parts of the world, notably Ireland, have a younger participant group (Golding, 2015). Despite these limitations, the current findings suggest that masculinity dynamics are an important area of inquiry within Men's Sheds research.

In conclusion, although the Men's Sheds participants in the present study tended to promote hegemonic masculinity practices, the men also demonstrated that counternarratives and practices can be, and indeed are, welcomed once relationships and trust have been established. However, Men's Sheds could perhaps benefit from expanding further to attract more diverse groups reflective of the wider community, following examples of capacity building within Aboriginal and indigenous communities in Australia (Southcombe et al., 2015). Although the Beyond Blue report (Flood & Blair, 2013) indicates that Men's Sheds are diverse organizations in many respects (e.g., they are both urban and rural, they focus on disparate activities, and they attract men of all ages), we are not aware of demographic research to date reporting on the prevalence of sexual or racial/ethnic diversity within and among sheds. As a result, it may benefit the Men's Sheds movement to consider the ways in which Men's Sheds are branded and promoted in order to invite more marginalized groups. While hegemonic masculinity influences Men's Sheds, it is also fair to say that Men's Sheds exhibit alternative dynamics and discourses. Explicit ownership and promotion of nondominant views of masculinity could be helpful in opening up the Men's Sheds movement to a broader and more diverse group of men moving forward. Such a discussion could play an important role both within markets where Men's Sheds are established, as well as those in which the movement is emerging.

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