

# **Victorian Men's Sheds: History and Evidence**

Rick Hayes, Lecturer  
School Public Health

La Trobe University, Bundoora, VIC

# Acknowledgement

As I begin, I would like to:

- acknowledge the traditional custodians of this country
- honour any of the Elders who may be present
- remember what has been lost
- hope for what might be gained again

# Why Do Men Need Social Space? 1/2

- *Older Men:* 30 years ago 75% of men over 50 worked full-time in their chosen career field. Today, less than 50% work full-time, much less in their chosen career. Larger numbers of older men are divorced and separated from their children.
- *Younger Men:* Perhaps 30% of young men are considered nonviable partners for economic reasons—their mothers wanted lovers, their peers want bank accounts—they may never marry.

# Why Do Men Need Social Space? 2/2

- *Adolescent Boys*: Completion of secondary college increasingly precarious for those at relative disadvantage and tertiary studies seem irrelevant for many young men from working classes (their father's stories are of apprenticeships at the same age and greater independence)—fewer uncontested public spaces generously offered and generatively used (Byron Bay, *Growing Up In Cities*).

# The Problems of Too Much Solitude

- Social isolation is associated with higher rates of morbidity (illness) and premature mortality.
- Depression is a growing concern around the world and is associated with social isolation.
- Men over 65 years old are 31 times as likely to commit suicide as women of the same age.
- Men who are single and live alone are at greater risk of suicide; young men particularly

# Sociability and Connectedness 1/2

- Paradoxically social connectedness can allow for more independent living in the sense of remaining longer in one's own home when older.
- Sociability is prized by older men who often indicate that supportive feedback and emotional support is of more importance than instrumental support.

# Sociability and Connectedness 1/2

- Younger men appreciate inspirational support from older men who can pass on wisdom and understanding in a non-judgmental fashion (Haemophilia Foundation Discussions)
- Many younger men are afraid to speak with their fathers about important matters because they worry that their fathers will feel ashamed of not having the answers and this will create irreparable awkwardness in the relationship (Broadband Commercials)

# Styles of Being Together

- The gendering of many cohorts of men taught them to engage with other people in a “side-by-side” manner rather than a “face-to-face” manner.
- Activities and informality are often (but not always) more desirable than inactivity and formality.
- Many cohorts of men (generally the working class) were taught to prize teamwork and group activities over private pursuits.

# What Have Men Lost?

- Workspaces are less likely to be a safe spaces in which to meet peers sociably (competition)
- Sporting clubs are keen on competition and fund raising for viability (VFA—VFL—AFL)
- Pubs are oriented towards consumption of gaming experiences and not cheap food
- Social clubs are disappearing in the cities
- Separation and divorce often means that men no longer have access to the “family” home

# Where Can They Gain?

- Men in safe, well-facilitated groups associated with their networks can and will talk about the things that concern them and will act on what they talk about
- Safety is about low shame and high aspiration
- Well-facilitated means solving problems, seeking possibilities, making decisions, negotiating difference, resolving conflicts when difference offends
- Network associations means enhancing social connectedness

# A Brief History of Victorian Sheds 1/3

- Pre 1995 (fading fast by the Bicentennial)
  - Indigenous Men's Business
  - Joseph Furphy: As a bullock driver, On the track; as a foundry worker, Shepparton (Miles Franklin); as a father, Perth
  - Shearing crews; Mechanics Institutes
  - Men in the military (Japanese POW/BTRR); RSL Clubs
  - Service Clubs; CFA; Unions; Church Fellowships

Sociability and society (primary industry ethos)

# A Brief History of Victorian Sheds 2/3

- 1995-1999 (changes begin c. 1987, Bananas)
  - First National Men's Health Conference (1995)
  - Men's Sheds as Individual's Haven (1996: ABC Documentary; Earle, Earle & Von Mering)
  - Men's Health and Well-being Association, Inc.; Men's Groups; Men's Leadership & Mentoring
  - Behavioral oriented groups
  - Men's Health Promotion Strategic Framework (1997-1999 VicHealth + NEHPC)

Class and other cultural issues (primary self-interest)

# A Brief History of Victorian Sheds 3/3

- 1999-2005 (selected for illustration, Bendigo)
  - Stuart Willder, Western District—Circuit (1999)
  - “Men in Sheds” CH Bendigo—Plant (1999)
  - Manningham Men’s Shed—Rehab (2000)
  - Nowa Nowa Men’s Choir—Communal (2000)
  - Creswick, Castlemaine, Orbost, Darebin (2001)
  - Mallacoota, Frankston, Brimbank (recent)

Rurality and marginality (primary health care)

# Types of Men's Sheds

- Five Broad Types by Ethos (20 sub-types):
  - Work (Occupational): Workshop, Plant, Rehab
  - Clinical: Therapeutic, Coordinated, Behavioural
  - Educational: Study Group, Learning Centre, Circuit
  - Recreational: Residential, Social Club, Select Club
  - Communal: Service Club, Grange Hall, Healing

Ethos, Function (Utility/Social), Support

# Five Considerations in a Men's Shed Project or Program

- Origins (Conversation)
- Operations (Coordination)
- Activities (Cooperation)
- Funding and Resources (Calculation)
- Linkages (Collaboration)

# Best Practice is Good Practiced Well

- Practice doing good things
  - Truth-telling
  - Generosity, Accountability
- Produce good works
  - Safe ways of being together
  - Supportive environments
- Seek after excellence
  - Virtues magnified
  - Values exemplified

# Evidence-based?

- The First Men's Sheds Conference in Victoria?
- The First Men's Sheds Conference in Oz?
- The First Go at Men's Sheds Guidelines?
- Or, Are Men's Sheds History Before They Begin?

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