

## **A shed of one's own: The meaning of space and place in older Australian men's lives**

Mandy Stanley, Katrina Jaworski  
*University of South Australia, Adelaide, Australia*

### **Introduction**

The backyard shed is a documented social and cultural phenomenon in Australia and indeed other parts of the world. Nevertheless, limited research attention has been given to analysing what the shed, as private and personal, might mean outside it being understood as a self-evident storage space and/or place of activity for many older retired men.

### **Objective**

The aim of this study was to gain a better understanding of the environmental context of the shed as a private place and a site of engagement in occupations for many older men.

### **Methods**

This qualitative study involved the analysis of selected photographic images depicting sheds belonging to men, to consider how they can be understood as more than practical spaces and places.

### **Findings/ Results**

The sheds depicted in the photographs were imbued with meaning in at least five different ways. These were: as museums; functional places of doing and fixing; connecting the past and the present; connection to family and worklife providing a sense of continuity; and, contemplative spaces for being. There is a connection to the occupational identity of the owner of the shed, rendered possible by the personal meanings attributed to them as occupationscapes, that is, sites through which histories of occupational behaviour enable purpose and meaning in retired older men's daily living.

### **Conclusion**

The findings from this study add to knowledge about the environmental context in which particular occupations are undertaken, and the interaction between spaces and the occupations that are conducted there. Older men need private spaces and places where they can continue to negotiate their occupational identity following retirement. Future research needs to pay greater attention to what private and personal spaces mean in relation to health aging.

### **Contribution to the practice of occupational therapy**

The new knowledge gained in this study has implications for occupational therapists to enable older men to participate in occupations in shed spaces so that they can continue to construct their occupational identity and masculinity. The findings also have implications for urban planners and designers for creation of environments that are age friendly.