

Collaborating with rural-dwelling older men with dementia: Lessons for researchers and practitioners

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Background:

- People with dementia must be engaged in the design, implementation and delivery of well-being initiatives (Oksnebjerg et al., 2018)
- Older men with dementia can be reluctant to engage in health and social initiatives (Milligan et al., 2015; Thompson and Bennett, 2015)
 - Partly attributed to male help-seeking behavior and perceptions of masculinities
 - Scripts of orthodox/traditional 'hegemonic' masculinities can be difficult to shift
 - Stoic 'stiff upper lip' mentality and need to display strength and control
 - Downplay health concerns, avoid seeking help and resist community initiatives
 - Masculine scripts favouring independence and self-sufficiency can be stronger in rural-dwelling older men
- Need to consider these masculinities when seeking to engage older men

'Men born before the advent of the gender revolution of the 1960s are likely to subscribe to more traditional gender identities. This is a generation that may be inhibited by the gender roles of the past' Coston and Kimmel (2013).



Methods:

- Reflexions from a Doctoral study addressing a 'real world' research problem for a local charity
- Three rural, male-only community 'tech' initiatives were implemented across the county in bucolic and bypassed areas
 - Author was both the researcher and facilitator of the initiative
 - Sessions ran for 9 weeks (1 session per week for 2 hours)
 - Use iPads, Nintendo Wii, Microsoft Kinect to provide enjoyable activities that promoted mental, physical and social stimulation (Hicks, Innes and Nyman 2019)
 - Men asked to name own group (Old Boys, Done Roaming and Marching On)
- Data collected in the form of interviews and focus groups with 22 men as well as researcher's reflexions across the study period

Findings:

1. *Establish collaborative working relationships and democratise the process:*

- Set-up consultation groups with older men and key gatekeepers in the rural area prior to introduction of the initiative- useful as 'outsider' researchers
- Position men as 'experts by experience.' Seek their feedback throughout the design, delivery and evaluation of the initiative to ensure that it is fit for purpose.
- Reduces the power relationship and so lessen the threat to their masculinities

2. *Create physically and conceptually safe environments:*

- *Dementia-free zones enable men to retain stoic resolve yet in this unspoken environment they could still create a sense of solidarity*
- *Male-only environment so men do not feel that they have to curb their language to protect women*
- *Include only men with dementia to reduce chances that they are 'othered' by men without dementia who may seek to exert their masculinities*

Findings and recommendations:

3. *Provide activities that enable the expression of masculinities:*

- Multiple activities that can be tailored towards the multiple interests and masculinities of the men including physical activities and competition as well as social group activities that promote 'shoulder-to-shoulder communication
- Think outside the box with activities and so challenge what is considered 'dementia-appropriate'
- These can help to challenge and redefine the social construction of what it means to be an 'old man' as well as enable re-connection with contemporary culture

Recommendations:

1. Practitioners engaging with this population need to be mindful of the continuing influence of masculinities on older men with dementia.
2. Create initiatives that acknowledge these gendered identities and provide safe spaces where older men can maximize their masculine capital- considering activities, spaces and approach of facilitator

References:

1. Øksnebjerg, L., et al. (2018). Towards capturing meaningful outcomes for people with dementia in psychosocial intervention research: A pan-European consultation. *Health Expectations*, 21(6), 1056-1065.
2. Milligan, C., Payne, S., Bingley, A., & Cockshott, Z. (2015). Place and wellbeing: shedding light on activity interventions for older men. *Ageing & Society*, 35(1), 124-149.
3. Thompson Jr, E. H., & Bennett, K. M. (2015). Measurement of masculinity ideologies: A (critical) review. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 16(2), 115.