

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.

**STRIKING THE BALANCE:
THE SOCIAL DYNAMICS OF SHARED HOUSEHOLD LIVING AMONG
YOUNG ADULTS IN NEW ZEALAND**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology at Massey University, Wellington, New
Zealand**

Victoria (Vicky) Audrey Clark

2017

ABSTRACT

Shared housing or flatting is an affordable, popular housing pathway for young adults in New Zealand and the Western world. The current protracted transition period between adolescence and traditional markers of adulthood status, such as stable employment and marriage has extended flatting tenure into early thirties and beyond. Whereas the dominant motivation is economic, the lifestyle is also socially attractive. Literature on peer co-residence is limited, particularly with regard to how interpersonal relationships are managed in the domestic intimacy of shared living. The rationale for this research was to expand on what is currently known about sharing by contributing a more comprehensive understanding of the social dynamics of young households. With an ontological commitment to social constructionism, discourse analysis was employed to analyse talk of the a posteriori knowledge of experienced flatters between the ages of 20 and 35. The approach is inductive and data driven. In total 37 people were interviewed, 14 in individual interviews, and 23 in flat groups. Participants were Pākehā apart from 2 Māori and 2 who identify as mixed Māori/ Pākehā. Twenty-two were female and fifteen were male. Analysis considers the construction of ideal flatmates; preferences for flatting with friends or strangers, couples or singles; whether the social advantages of flatting are compromised by household chores; the efficacy of rosters; conflict and how participants conceive the concept of the household dynamic. Discourses are extensively interrelated and overlapping with a number of competing tensions evident. For example, desirable housemates were constructed as being cognisant of the need to be sociable but also independent. A requisite fine balance across a number of spheres to sustain a functional household was a dominant, pervasive discourse. Talk was driven by the fundamental value associated with having a working living arrangement. In an unregulated environment with no cultural blue prints, young New Zealanders are acutely conscious of the need to carefully navigate domestic relationships and avoid potential complications that impact on quality of life. While this study provides rich insight into the complexity of house sharing it also sheds valuable light on small group dynamics and the extended transition to adulthood.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am extremely indebted to my primary supervisor, Associate Professor Keith Tuffin, for his ongoing support, guidance, encouragement, patience and humour throughout my post-graduate years. In particular, he has played a great role in refining my writing skills and curbing my Joycean verbosity to that almost approaching the apothegmatic. I would also like to thank my doctoral co-supervisors, Dr. Natilene Bowker and Dr. Karen Frewin, for their valuable contribution by way of feedback, reassurance and attention to detail. The professionalism, dedication and kindness from academics and support staff at Massey University is the best I have encountered in the three universities I have attended. The much appreciated comradery of periodic meetings with the Massey University Critical Health and Social Psychology Research Cluster made the limbo of being a distance student somewhat easier. In addition, I was honoured to be awarded a Massey doctoral scholarship, which substantially increased my motivation to succeed.

This research would not be possible without the participants, who willingly gave up their time to talk about the vicissitudes of their house sharing experiences. I have been privileged to meet these young adults and have incredible respect for the positive way they face the challenges of today.

My husband and adult daughters have been instrumental in my somewhat selfish pursuit of a resurrected youthful dream to do a PhD and I thank them for their encouragement. I have been immensely inspired by my daughters' academic successes through impecunious student years, living in often substandard flatting accommodation, and working part-time to make ends barely meet. Thank you for unwittingly stimulating my interest in shared households and your insight into this way of life.

And lastly, retrospective thanks to my old running comrades, who helped me conquer ultra-marathons. Completing a PhD has distinct parallels with long distance running: if you prepare thoroughly, and doggedly put one foot in front of the other, even when the going gets tough, you will eventually cross the finish line. That said, the licence to spend my time devoted to reading, thinking deeply and writing in my advanced years has been an amazingly enjoyable experience.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of contents	iv
Introduction	1
Motivation for the research	2
Scope of the study	4
Thesis structure	4
Chapter 1: The research context	
Introduction	7
The concept of flatting	7
The historical emergence of flatting in New Zealand	8
Increasing popularity of the lifestyle in the Western world	9
Protracted transition to adulthood in contemporary youth	11
A singles century?	15
Lack of constraint or lack of traditional anchors?	16
Is flatting elitist?	18
Economic and social reasons for flatting	19
Economic factors	20
Social factors	24
Social- psychological advantages of sharing	25
Negative psychological aspects	27
Families, home and intimacy	27
Why is shared living under researched?	31
Conclusion	
Chapter 2: Literature review of house sharing dynamics	
Introduction	34
Models for interpreting the dynamics of shared living	34
Communitas and liminality	34
Neo-tribalism	35
The tragedy of the commune	36

Communitarianism	37
Review of extant studies on the dynamics of peer-shared living	40
Finances	40
Who will clean the toilet?	41
The communal larder	41
Communal dining	42
Other common problems	42
Personalities	43
Interpersonal relationships in groups	43
Conclusion	48

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction	49
Conceptual framework of methodology	49
Social constructionism	50
Discourse analysis	52
Method	60
Design and recruitment of participants	60
Context	61
Procedure	62
Participants	63
Interviews	66
Questions	66
Ethical considerations	66
Transcription	68
Reflexivity and reflections	68
Data presentation	70
Conclusion	70

Analysis and discussion

Chapter 4: Construction of desirable flatmates

Introduction to chapter	72
-------------------------	----

Abstract	72
Research paradigm	74
Method	75
Analysis	76
Separate but connected	77
Similar versus different	80
The fundamental prerequisites of comfort and trust	84
Discussion	88
Conclusion	93

Chapter 5: Avoiding complications in domestic relationships

Introduction to chapter	95
Abstract	95
Background to study	97
Research paradigm and method	100
Participants	100
Analysis	101
Singles versus couples	102
Sharing with friends versus sharing with strangers	106
Discussion	111
Conclusion	114

Chapter 6: Do household chores subvert the social psychological advantages of shared housing?

Introduction to chapter	117
Abstract	117
Method	119
Participants	119
Analysis	120
Companionship	121
Friendship	122
Mutual support	125
Increased social skills and self-reliance	127

The challenge of communal co-operation with household chores	130
Discussion	132
Conclusion	136
Chapter 7: Household rosters	
Chapter introduction	138
Abstract	138
Research paradigm and method	141
Analysis	142
Rosters do not work	142
If rosters are used they need to be flexible	149
Discussion	150
Conclusion	154
Chapter 8: Conflict	
Chapter introduction	156
Abstract	156
Backdrop to study	157
Research paradigm and method	159
Analysis	160
Sources of conflict	161
Managing conflict	167
Consequences of conflict	171
Discussion	172
Conclusion	178
Chapter 9: The social dynamics of shared household living	
Introduction	179
Abstract	179
Research paradigm and method	182
Analysis	183
The impact of the building on the social dynamic	184
How flatting works	186

A workable balance	193
The right fit	193
Discussion	194
Chapter 10: Conclusion	
Introduction	200
The ideal flatmate	201
Avoiding complications	201
Social psychological advantages	202
Rosters	203
Conflict	203
Social dynamics	204
Possible future papers to be written	205
Did the research design address the aims of the study?	206
Contribution to extant literature	207
Limitations of the study and suggested trajectories for research.	209
References	213
Appendices	238
Appendix A: Participant information sheet	239
Appendix B: Group consent form	242
Appendix C: Individual consent form	243
Appendix D: Release of interview transcripts form	244
Appendix E: Jeffersonian transcription notation	245
Appendix F: Summary of research results for participants	246
Statements of supervisors' contribution to publications	
Appendix G: DRC 16 (Chapter 4)	252
Appendix H: DRC 16 (Chapter 5)	253