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.
BEING COMFORTABLE: HAVING AND MAKING A COMFORTABLE COGNITIVE AND ENVIRONMENTAL HABITAT: A GROUNDED THEORY ON THE MEANING OF HOME

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in Psychology
at Massey University, Albany,
New Zealand.

Charlotte Nicola Aspinall
2008
Abstract

Prior research on the meanings of home represents a rather fragmented set of studies. The present research utilises phenomenology and aims to create a grounded theory on the meanings of home which is explorative, participant-led and integrates the current state of home research. 15 participants singularly took part in semi-structured interviews, including myself as a participant-researcher. The interviews were audio taped but not transcribed. The interviews were then analysed qualitatively as per grounded theory methodology. Participant's interpretation of the word home was both construed as having a spatial definition, and varying along a continuum from home as a house to a more subjective definition of home. The core code that the data generated on the meanings of home was that home was primarily about being comfortable. The basic social process of making a comfortable habitat was the main axial code. While the idea of comfort held strong between participants there was much individuality as to what was comfortable and which particular strategies were employed to make home comfortable. The result was a grounded theory about person environment interactions in the field of home, a cognitive and a physical habitat. Implications of this theory are discussed in relation to current and future home research as well as suggestions for practical applications.
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my supervisor Linda Jones who didn’t give up on my work when I frequently gave up on it myself. I am so grateful for your strength and courage in accepting me as your student, a complete stranger at first (and a very disorganised student), in a series of giant leaps of faith (and tolerance) by you.

I am grateful for the support of my friends and family during this process. Thank you, Liam and Morgan, for your patience while I was working on this project. You are the best boys a mommy could ask for. Tesimoni (Des) thank you for entering my life in the midst of a conversation about home involving many discussions on psychology that made no sense (for an outsider to the discipline) and for listening and standing beside me despite our differences in languages initially. Now it is time for me to learn your language.

Thank you to the people in this study who gave your time, your stories, and your trust that I would represent you truthfully. I hope I have returned your trust sufficiently. This conversation is yours.
# Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................... ii  
Acknowledgements ....................................................................................... iii  
Contents .......................................................................................................... iv  
List of Illustrations ......................................................................................... vi

Chapter One. Conversations about Home: Introduction ........................................ 1  
Chapter Two. Underlying Conversations: Theoretical Backbones ......................... 12  
  Considering Epistemological Complexities .................................................. 12  
  Phenomenology ........................................................................................... 20  
  Grounded Theory ......................................................................................... 27  
  Summarizing the Theoretical Complexities of this Project ......................... 32  
Chapter Three. How the Conversation was Undertaken: Method ......................... 35  
  Participants .................................................................................................. 35  
  Materials ...................................................................................................... 36  
  Procedure ..................................................................................................... 42  
  Ethics ........................................................................................................... 43  
Chapter Four. The Substance of Home: Initial Results ......................................... 44  
  The Word Home ......................................................................................... 45  
  The Meanings of Home ............................................................................... 48  
  The Core Code: The Comfortable Habitat ................................................. 73  
  The Not Comfortable (Home?) .................................................................. 79  
  Dialectics, Continuums and the Particular Function of the Substantive Category The Real Home ................................................................. 81  
  Reintroducing the Word Home .................................................................. 85  
  The Major Axial Code: The Process of Making the Comfortable Habitat .... 87  
  The Properties of the Major Axial Code ................................................... 89  
  Further Axial Categories .......................................................................... 94  
Chapter Six. Conversing with Context: Discussion ............................................. 104  
  Summary ..................................................................................................... 104
List of Illustrations

Table 1: Substantive Categories on the Meaning of Home........................................72
Figure 1: Continuums of Comfort.............................................................................82
Table 2: Core and Axial Components of the Full Grounded Theory......................88