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**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**

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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.

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INTRODUCTION

Shared housing, or flatting, among young adults is a pervasive phenomenon in the Western world. Although it is difficult to obtain exact figures (Carlsson & Eriksson, 2015), several studies report that this informal housing market, previously almost exclusively confined to student lifestyles, features largely as a way of life for those in their twenties, early thirties, and beyond. Shared housing is documented in the UK (Jones 2000; Heath & Cleaver, 2003; Carlsson & Eriksson, 2015), Europe (Steinfuhrer & Haase, 2009; Schwanitz & Mulder, 2015; Arundel & Ronald, 2016), the USA (Goldscheider 1997; Mykyta & Macartney, 2012) and Australia (Natalier, 2007; McNamara & Connell 2007). In New Zealand flatting is an established tradition and regarded as a rite of passage for young adults (Wolfe & Barnett, 2001).

The dominant motivation for flatting is economic (Kemp & Rugg, 1998; Heath & Cleaver, 2003; Natalier, 2003a; Williamson, 2006). Significant problems with housing affordability, exacerbated by undersupply of housing, especially in the rental and lower priced housing market, with contingent increases in rent costs are expected to continue in the foreseeable future (Saville-Smith & James, 2010). Globally, there is rising concern about the housing difficulties that young adults are facing with radical economic, social and psychological implications (Aassve, Cottini, & Vitali, 2013; Forrest, 2013; Day, 2016; Mackie, 2016). Pooling resources by sharing domestic arrangements beyond student life has thus become a financially pragmatic option for young adults. Evidence suggests that financial necessity may be the catalyst for sharing becoming a socially attractive lifestyle (Heath & Cleaver, 2003).

Academia has failed to keep pace with the trend: researchers have generated a thin literature about shared housing among the young and very little effort has gone into understanding this household mode (Natalier, 2003a). Research is essentially confined to housing demographers (Steinfuhrer & Haase, 2009; Mulder, 2003) in Northern Europe. In the US, Goldscheider (e.g., Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1993) examined patterns of leaving the parental home, including shared housing as did British sociologists, Heath and Cleaver (2003). In Australia, Natalier (2003a; 2003b; 2004) studied gendered division of labour in these egalitarian establishments and ambiguous independence of young adults still partially economically dependent on parents, while

McNamara and Connell (2007) investigated whether shared housing was regarded as 'home'. In New Zealand, Williamson (2005; 2006) examined routine everyday operations of seven flats, focusing on the advantages of preparing meals and eating together. Apart from this and my previous research (Clark, 2011; Clark & Tuffin, 2015; Tuffin & Clark, 2016), the literature on flatting takes the form of university prospectus advice and practical guides to flatting, such as Earl's *Flatters' Survival Guide* (2013).

The little extant literature on shared housing tends to concentrate on immigrant and intergenerational households and residential sharing for the elderly (Hemmons, Hoch & Carp, 1996). Currently, the only substantial work dealing with young adult sharing is that of sociologists Heath and Cleaver (Heath, 1999; Heath, 2004a; Heath, 2004b; Heath, 2009; Heath & Cleaver, 2003; Heath & Kenyon, 2001; Kenyon & Heath, 2001), who built on the work of Kemp and Rugg (1998). Set against a broad backdrop of changing patterns of household formation of young adults in the English city of Southampton, topics covered were organisation of household space and time, labour division, privacy and intimacy, social interaction, mutual support, and household formation, evolution and disintegration (Heath & Cleaver, 2003). Consequently their work has been drawn on extensively by Williamson (2005; 2006) and myself.

Motivation for the research

The origins of this study lie in overhearing a conversation between two of my children in which they discussed the transparent and subtle ways in which their housemates discriminated against potential new flatmates. My youngest daughter remarked that her ostensibly very liberal, all post-graduate household had decided that they would only take in an English speaking person. My eldest daughter said her flatmates were decidedly not politically correct and had ruled out Asians. This overheard conversation has led to a deep fascination and abiding intellectual curiosity about shared housing among young people.

Following this conversation I investigated how young adults talk about choosing prospective flatmates in partial fulfilment for the requirements for an Honours degree (Clark, 2011). Surprisingly, there was no literature on the topic of housemate choice. In New Zealand law, shared residential accommodation is a notable exception to the 1993 Human Rights Act (Sections 53 and 54), which prevents discrimination on the grounds

of age, gender, race, religion, and sexual orientation (New Zealand Legislation: Acts, 2017). While discrimination may be legal, it runs contrary to the prevailing prescriptive norms condemning open expression of prejudice. Past bad experiences as well as a person's perceived negative effect on the flat dynamic were used to justify rejection. I found young adults preferred to flat with peers with a very similar background to themselves. Gender was spoken of as irrelevant but age similarity was important. Ethnicity was approached cautiously, with English speaking, highly acculturated flatmates preferred (Clark & Tuffin, 2015). Social drinking and soft drugs were acceptable providing that their use was recreational and not blatant and did not impact on the social dynamic and economic viability of the flat. Similarly mental illness was tolerable if unproblematic and not visibly noticeable (Tuffin & Clark, 2016).

The data from this project suggested promising trajectories for further research. For example, the 'flat dynamic' or 'culture' was frequently invoked as a rhetorical justification for assessing suitability of potential flatmates. Rather than explicit discrimination on the basis of age, race, unemployment, addiction and mental illness the language of rejection was carefully framed in terms of best fit with the existing flat dynamic. The concept 'flat dynamic' was never explained or defined but comprehension was taken as axiomatic.

Given the ubiquity of the lifestyle, shared housing remains a severely under researched topic. Combined economic and social forces have resulted in an increasingly recognised lengthier transition to adulthood among contemporary young adults with delayed marriage and parenthood, meaning young adults are flatting for longer than previous generations. The limited available literature suggested that a comprehensive overview of the intricate social practices involved in this complex form of domesticity is long overdue. Apart from an early study by Baum (1986), who identified factors contributing to successful communal living across all ages, the bulk of research concentrates on *why* young people share. More recently Mykyta (2012) observed that little is known about the social benefits and costs of this way of life. Heath (2009) proposed the need to research the relational foundations of these households and their meanings in transition to adulthood. Relational foundations refer to the interactions and connections people have with each other, which have the potential to sustain or undermine the quality of group dynamics (Dutton & Dukerich, 2006). In this intimate

setting relationships have the capacity for psychological enhancement of individuals but can also be fraught with challenges. While the literature on shared housing among the young provides some information on these issues many questions remain.

Scope of the study

The aim of this research is to substantiate and incrementally add to the limited extant literature on shared housing among young adults by investigating the social dynamics of this complex way of life, particularly from a social psychological and New Zealand perspective. I consider four broad areas, which are all inextricably intertwined.

- 1) How are desirable flatmates constructed? The current research goes beyond the flat entry threshold; whereas my previous study (Clark, 2011; Clark & Tuffin, 2015; Tuffin & Clark, 2016) examined who might be invited to join a flat, this study moves the focus to what happens within flats.
- 2) What are the social advantages of flatting and how are these advantages undermined by simple everyday housekeeping?
- 3) What are the causes and consequences of conflict in the close confines of domesticity? How is conflict managed?
- 4) How is the flat dynamic construed? The present study sets out to gain a greater understanding of what people mean when they refer to the flat dynamic. In what context does it become important? Is it something that is discussed and therefore similar to a set of rules for living together or is it more abstract and poorly defined?

In this thesis I will demonstrate that shared households offer unique and rich insight into the lives of young adults. This will be achieved by examining how shared householders accommodate living with non-kin, and manage uncertainty in achieving autonomous adulthood in challenging economic times. Simultaneously, the research significantly contributes to existing knowledge of small group dynamics.

Thesis structure

The thesis is presented in ten chapters prefaced by introductions to provide links to each other in a cohesive format. Chapters one to three provide essential background information and the research methodology. Six middle chapters detailing analysis are a series of papers, two published, three under review and a sixth manuscript about to be

submitted. Any differences in style such as a word spelled with a 'z' instead of 's' reflect journal preferences. While the research was essentially designed, implemented, transcribed, analysed and documented by myself, my supervisors greatly guided me by questioning my analysis and conclusions and making valuable suggestions for considerable improvements. For this reason they are included as co-authors on all journal articles pertaining to the study. Chapter 10 concludes the thesis.

Chapter 1 presents an overview of the available research on shared households and provides a detailed background to the current study.

Chapter 2 discusses how researchers to date have interpreted the flat dynamic and the merits of these models as well as a brief discussion of group dynamics.

Chapter 3 sets out the methodology employed and justification for using social constructionist discourse analysis.

Chapter 4 examines how ideal flatmates are constructed: 'Housemate desirability and understanding the social dynamics of shared living'. *Qualitative Psychology*, 1-15. Advance online publication: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/qap0000091>

Chapter 5 discusses preferences for sharing with couples or single flatmates: 'Shared housing among young adults: avoiding complications in domestic relationships'. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 1-17. Advance online publication: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2017.1316834>

Chapter 6 considers the question: 'Do household chores subvert the social psychological advantages of shared housing among young adults?' This paper has been submitted to *Social Forces* and is being reviewed.

Chapter 7 examines the effectiveness of rosters: 'Rosters: freedom, responsibility and co-operation in young adult shared households'. This manuscript has been submitted to *Emerging Adulthood* and is under review.

Chapter 8 deals with conflict: A paper entitled, 'Conflict sources, management and consequences in shared housing among young adults' has been submitted to the *New Zealand Journal of Psychology*.

Chapter 9 comprises the flagship of this study: 'The social dynamics of shared housing among young adults'. This will shortly be submitted for publication to *Small Group Research*.

Chapter 10 reiterates and summarises findings, contributions of the research to understanding shared households among young adults and directions for future research.

CHAPTER 1

The research context

Go flatting: NZ and Aust. (of young people) leave home to live in shared accommodation with peers etc.

The New Zealand Oxford Dictionary

Introduction

The chapter begins with a review of flatting in New Zealand, including the concept and history of this domestic arrangement among young adults. The trend is placed within the context of its popularity as a lifestyle in the Western world. This is followed by explanations as to why shared living is extending into the twenties and early thirties age groups. Discussion of an increasingly recognised extended transition passage to autonomous adulthood ensues. The broad economic and social factors underlying this lengthier transition are considered. The known positive and negative psychological aspects of flatting are then outlined. This leads to the speculation that housemates are families of choice and that intimacy is being redefined. The chapter concludes with a consideration of possible reasons why the topic of shared housing among young people has attracted little academic research with scant significance accorded the lifestyle.

The concept of flatting

To the uninitiated, the term ‘flat’ can be misleading, as the noun flat usually refers to several residences or apartments grouped together in one building (New Zealand Oxford Dictionary, 2006). The concept now incorporates a range of rental properties from studio flats to detached suburban houses or inner city villas modified into multiple flats (Williamson, 2006). The term now reflects a particular lifestyle, generally confined to a certain stage of life where shared resources are imperative but there are more factors underlying this way of life than merely an economical way of living (Williamson, 2006; May, 2014). According to Natalier (2003a), this type of household may be marginalised in the academic literature but for many in Australia it has a cultural heritage and iconic status in popular imagination. This is equally true for New Zealand, where flatting is a customary practice (Wolfe & Barnett, 2001) and clearly evidenced by repeated editions of the books *Edmonds’ food for flatters* (Cameron, 2003) and *More food for flatters* (Cameron, 2007).

Shared housing is a utilitarian system of co-residency where individuals share kitchen, bathroom, toilet and laundry facilities as well as overheads, such as rent, broadband,

electricity and sometimes food. There is usually a communal area with bedroom areas of privacy (Steinfurher & Haase, 2009). The flat household is generally comprised of non-kinship residents in which people are not related to one-another by blood, marriage, civil union, fostering or adoption (Statistics New Zealand, 2008). Flat households tend to consist primarily, but not exclusively, of highly mobile, young, single, childless people aged from late teens to early thirties. Typically flats are comprised of peer aged cohorts, frequently students, but they can also consist of a range of age groups, and backgrounds, full-time workers, married couples or solo parents (Heath & Cleaver, 2003). Flat households tend to be transitory establishments (Williamson, 2006). Shared housing is a social contract in which residents agree to share not only expenses but also everyday household chores (Mause, 2008).

The historical emergence of flatting in New Zealand

Flatting in New Zealand has become a character building rite of passage and a unique aspect of socialisation for young people making the transition from living in the family home to independence (Wolfe & Barnett, 2001). Until the 1950s leaving the parental home was traditionally associated with marriage. Where this was not the case young adults leaving home, usually for further education, generally lived in private, chaperoned boarding houses or segregated hostels (Cobb-Clark, 2008). Evidence of same-sex flatting in the fifties was found in *New Zealand Memories*.

Easy access to workplace and social life was the beginning of the flatting 'lifestyle' that today is an accepted way of life for young single adults. The difference between then and now, is that in the 1950s 'mixed' flatting was considered a scandal. Young women gathered together in their chosen flats while down the road there would often be a bachelor pad and a lot of to-ing and fro-ing would take place between the two (Ayres, 2014, p.14).

Mixed-gender flatting became more common among New Zealand students in the 1960s and despite strong objections from university authorities this household mode quickly became the norm for students. The new-found liberation afforded by this way of life, frowned upon by elders, was celebrated in JK Baxter's *A small Ode on Mixed flatting* (1967, n.p.).

By fencing the young from fornication!

Ah, Dr Williams, I agree

We need more walls at the Varsity;
The students who go double-flattening
With their she-cattening and tom-cattening
Won't ever get a pass in Latin;

The 1999 New Zealand film, *Scarfies* depicted the freedom from parental confines experienced in student flattening. More recently the ubiquitous culture of flattening in New Zealand was parodied in the 2014 film, *What we do in the Shadows*, where even vampires purportedly flat together.

Flattening has become entrenched as a culturally approved exit from the parental household and a key process in becoming an independent adult, to the extent that continuing to live with parents beyond the teens in New Zealand has negative connotations suggesting lack of independence (Pool, Baxendine, Cochrane, & Lindop, 2005; Williamson, 2006). Extensive evidence internationally indicates growing numbers of young adults returning home to live with their parents for financial reasons (Burn & Szoek, 2016; Fry, 2013; Stone, Berrington & Falkingham, 2011). Returning to the parental home both highlights and hides young people's housing problems (Rugg, 2002). While there is little research of this phenomenon in New Zealand, recent statistics indicate that since the turn of the century there has been a considerable increase in young adults remaining in or returning to the parental home (Statistics New Zealand, 2017).

Increasing popularity of shared housing in the Western world

Accommodation accounts for a significant amount of young people's budgets. Shared housing is often the only affordable option for young people on limited incomes and plays an extensive role in the lives of many young people (Kenyon & Heath, 2001; Christie, Munro & Rettig, 2002). In the UK, sharing is a common feature in early housing careers (Heath, 1999; Rugg, 2002; Carlsson, & Eriksson, 2015), a pattern that is reflected in Northern Europe (Steinfuhrer & Haase, 2009; Schwanitz & Mulder, 2015; Arundel & Ronald, 2016) and the US (Mykyta, 2012; May, 2014). In America there has been an 11.4% increase in the number of shared households since 2007 (May, 2014). In 2003 5.4% of occupied residences were shared housing. In Australia, the 2014 Rental Affordability Snapshot (Anglicare Australia, 2014) states that if you are

young and single then housing options are limited. Consequently, in Clarence Valley, Port Macquarie, a training programme has been successfully trialled to help people find and maintain shared accommodation. The programme, which is being extended to other areas, helps people find compatible housemates (Beaver, 2007).

The housing trend is reflected in New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, 2005), where the declining ability of young people to afford independent housing has resulted in shared living arrangements becoming an established social phenomenon (Brosnan, Coke & Loke, 2010; New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2012) and house sharing was predicted to rise along with house prices (Murphy, 2011). However, recent statistics indicate a slight drop (.58%) in shared households among young adults between 20 and 35 since 2017 (Statistics New Zealand, 2017) possibly due to the increase in young New Zealanders returning to the parental nest. Most demographers note that census data does not adequately cover such households, making comprehensive reliable statistics hard to come by: statistics frequently aggregate all forms of shared housing, making data misleading (Mause, 2008). Categories are ambiguous and it may mean that these need to be created to recognise particular characteristics (Rugg, 2002). Heath and Cleaver (2003) and Williamson (2006) maintain that there is a systematic underestimation of collaborative living, very likely due to its transient nature.

Shared households are currently increasingly common among young adults throughout their twenties, early thirties and often beyond as reported in media articles such as *'The not so young ones'* (Knight, 2002) and depicted in the TV comedies *Golden Girls* and *Hot in Cleveland*. Student shared accommodation often leaves much to be desired and is frequently substandard and insalubrious (Heath & Cleaver, 2003). Whereas the image of a can of baked beans and a broken couch pictorially evoke the student flatting lifestyle (Natalier, 2003a), post-student households are more sophisticated. The lifestyle has been popularised in TV shows such as *Friends*, *Big Bang Theory*, and *Super Fun Night*, which communicate the idea that sharing is fashionable and fun, and that the stereotype of dysfunctional shared living no longer applies (Heath & Cleaver, 2003). Housemates are portrayed as having intimate and supportive relationships with each other (McNamara & Connell, 2007).

The substance of these comedies is that the characters live a life of consumption and socialising but still conform to the dominating narratives of men being sexual predators and women being driven by the need to find a long-term mate. Thus the media reinforces shared housing as a transitional period, a stopgap measure before settling into the traditional valued role of marriage and reproduction (Natalier, 2003a). Reasons for the prolonged phase between adolescence and adulthood are considered next.

Protracted transitions to adulthood of contemporary youth

While childhood today ends earlier than previous understanding of age-graded cultural roles, the process of maturing to adulthood has undeniably lengthened (Côte & Bynner, 2008). Youth researchers propose that adulthood no longer begins when adolescence ends. The transitional phase is variously termed 'emerging adulthood' (Arnett, 2000), 'post adolescence' (du Bois-Reymond, 1998), 'young adulthood' (EGRIS, 2001) or 'frontier of adulthood' (Furstenburg, Rumbaut & Settersten, 2005). This protracted period frequently lasts throughout the twenties and even extends into the third decade. It is a period in which many personal, professional and emotional issues are in a state of flux and frequent change (Arnett, 2015; Heath, 2004b). Arnett (2000) maintains the period is characterised by five features: identity exploration; instability; self-focus; feelings of in-between; and possibilities. There is a greater autonomy and freedom, frequently and simultaneously accompanied by fear, anxiety and more risk than previous generations. These are not universal features but are more common during emerging adulthood than other periods (Arnett, 2015; Settersten, Ottusch & Schneider, 2015).

Furstenberg, Rumbaut and Settersten (2005) see parallels with this new pre-adult phase to the emergence and recognition of adolescence as a distinct life stage and the change from agricultural economies, where children were vital labour, to industrialisation. This shift occurred in the early 20th century when schooling in the Western world became the norm because children were not suited to employment in industry and industrial wages for men were sufficient to cover schooling for their children (Goldscheider & Waite, 1991). The altered pattern of a seemingly seamless transition from childhood to adulthood, characteristic of pre-industrial society, left many young people in the ambivalent state of being neither an adult nor a child. Hall (1904) coined the term adolescence to describe the period as a distinct life phase, a semi-autonomous state,

which enabled young people to be educated for longer, explore employment options and create a self-identity (Furstenburg, Rumbaut, & Settersten, 2005). Notably, Hall did postulate that adolescence could last up to the age of 25. In a similar manner, in the early 21st century, a unique transition stage is materialising that can largely be attributed to lengthier periods spent in higher education and more young adults entering post-secondary education and training to prepare for economic independence (Arnett, 2007).

Given the decline of availability of well-paid blue-collar work, typical of the post-war industrialised era, a middle-class lifestyle is no longer guaranteed with a high school education. Moreover, the demand for skilled labour has increased dramatically in the last half century, resulting in increased, lengthy periods of professional and technical training (Mortimer & Larson, 2002). Prolonged education, a necessity rather than a choice, has resulted not only in delaying entry into the full-time labour market but also deferral of marriage and parenthood. Socio-economic changes make old practices no longer functional and new norms become accepted. By the end of WWII, economic self-sufficiency, marriage and parenting occurred soon after the end of schooling. However, such early marriage is now the exception. The current marital age reflects earlier pre-world war trends. The difference is that in the past most single people lived with their parents until marriage (Goldscheider & Waite, 1991). Today, acceptance of premarital sex and co-habitation, and ready access to birth control has rendered early marriage less desirable (Arnett, 2007). Most significantly, transitioning to adulthood today involves a period of living independently (Settersten, Ottusch & Schneider, 2015).

The dominant theory in developmental psychology regarding young adults is incorporated in Erikson's (1966) eight stages, which proposed the adolescent phase and the quest for 'self-identity' begins with puberty and ends in the late teens. Early adulthood, in which lasting relationships and career commitments are made, starts in the late teens. Erikson (1968) acknowledged that there are significantly different cultural dimensions to adolescence. Research suggests that his theory may no longer represent a normative pattern: seriously settling into occupations, professions and partnerships is being postponed into the third decade for many, although significantly

different paths can be expected across cultures, circumstances and gender (Furlong, 2013). The timing sequence is diverse, less orderly and less predictable.

In most countries, the legal rights and responsibilities of adulthood, such as voting, drinking, and driving, are explicitly structured by chronological age although not without debate about how early they should be granted (Settersten, Ottusch, & Schneider, 2015). Socio-economic factors have altered, by almost a decade, the traditional markers of adulthood: finishing school; stable, full-time employment; economic self-sufficiency; marriage and parenting (Settersten, Ottusch, & Schneider, 2015). In New Zealand the median age of men who married for the first time in 2010 was 29.9 years: about seven years older than the median age of those who married for the first time in 1971. The median age of women who married for the first time has risen by a similar margin, from 20.8 years in 1971 to 28.2 years in 2010. These figures rose to 32.4 years for men and 30.4 years for women by 2013. In 1968 the median birth age for a first child for mothers was 23.39; this increased to 30 by 2011 (Saville-Smith & James, 2010; Statistics New Zealand, 2011; 2014). New Zealand figures are closely mirrored by similar statistics in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001; 2016). Heath (2009) cites comparable statistics in the United Kingdom. In the United States, young adults residing in independent living arrangements, such as sharing with a housemate, rose from 6% in 1968 to 27% in 2012, while the rate of marriage declined (Fry, 2013).

Consequently, some argue that this is not merely a transition phase but a permanent shift; a distinct period in the life course (Furstenberg, Rumbaut & Settersten, 2005; Arnett, 2000). They back this up with cognitive development theories, endorsed by advanced neuroimaging techniques, which indicate that executive functioning areas, such as the prefrontal cortex, do not mature until the mid-twenties (Gogtay et al, 2004). The frontal lobe plays an important role in judgment and, as a result, young people are prone to risky behaviour. However, some neuroscientists regard such theories as reductionist, arguing that the differing experiences, well-being and relationships young people have exert a powerful influence on development and decision-making processes (Furlong, 2013).

Social scientists in a variety of fields do not believe there is much to be gained by the use of the concept of a new developmental stage nor is there sufficient evidence to

warrant the claim (Côté & Bynner, 2008). I too am reluctant to endorse the argument that this represents a new developmental stage. Firstly, the current marital age reflects earlier pre-world war trends. Early marriage was a wartime and post WWII phenomenon (Côté & Bynner, 2008). Secondly, 'adulthood' is not a static concept and is subject to alteration depending on prevailing cultural and socio-economic factors (Heath & Cleaver, 2003; Settersen, Ottusch & Schneider, 2015). Societies differ in institutional arrangements of education, training institutions, labour market regulations and social assistance, which impact on life transitions (Furlong, 2013). Since Heath and Cleaver (2003) place their 'post-adolescent' phase within a specific class, a cultural elite of well-educated young people with high aspirations, it could well be argued any transition stage confined to one group of people cannot be regarded as a separate unilateral developmental stage. Thirdly, by labelling this as a distinct developmental period there is a risk that it could be used as an excuse for irresponsibility, as considered in the January 24th 2005 Time cover story entitled, 'They just won't grow up' (Grossman, 2005). Côté and Bynner (2008) maintain that this is not a unique stage but can simply be explained in terms of the economic, social and demographic factors youth face today. In addition they believe that advocates of a new life stage fail to take into account a substantial minority, generally those with limited financial means, who do follow traditional patterns of accelerated transition (Furlong, 2013). In future this delay may disappear rendering the emerging adulthood stage no more than a reflection of current cultural trends.

Nevertheless, sociologists have cautioned that the full socio-economic ramifications of this protracted period have yet to be understood (Furstenberg, Rumbaut & Settersten, 2005; Settersen, Ottusch & Schneider, 2015). As early as 1986, Waite, Goldscheider and Witsberger considered the possibility that the distinctly diverse passage to adulthood, free of family obligations and constraints, could considerably impact on later lives: co-habitation can provide the benefits of intimacy and economy with fewer expectations of asymmetric gender roles. They suggested that women, besides merely postponing marriage and maternity, could develop a taste for life unencumbered by the demands of husbands and children or fail to submit to the traditional assignment of household work. Heath (1999) believed that this observation was made with a hint of moral unease at the threat to normative heterosexual mores but later work by Goldscheider, Bernhardt and Lappegård (2015) would challenge this. However, Côté

(2002) notes that we are seeing a seismic shift in the aspirations of young women despite all the evidence that broad inequalities still persist. Giddens (1992) places this phenomenon within the sexual revolution with women not only expecting parity in public but in private roles as well. The higher the level of education of a woman the less likely she is to marry or have a family. Very often deferred marriage and parenting are a deliberate choice. Furthermore, there is evidence that many young people are now actively postponing marriage and parenthood precisely because they want to be ready for and do well in these roles. Marriage and parenthood culminate adulthood rather than start it (Settersten, Ottusch & Schneider, 2015).

While financial independence from parents, tied to psychological perceptions of independence and autonomy remain a significant marker in the transition to adulthood (Greene & Wheatley, 1992; Settersten, Ottusch & Schreiner, 2015) they are no longer central to a definition of adulthood (Arnett, 1997). Natalier (2007) speaks of an ambiguous dependency where young people are still partially reliant on parents financially, yet other measures such as living away from home, taking responsibility for actions, autonomous decision making, developing an adult relationship with parents and deciding on personal beliefs are important in advancing to adult status and empowerment (Arnett, 2006).

A singles century?

Far from the assumptions of research and popular literature of reluctant singlehood, such as *Bridget Jones's Diary* (Fielding, 1995), Heath and Cleaver (2003) found that many young people do not regard their single circumstance as unfortunate and are in no hurry to replicate the experiences of their parents, despite normative expectations. The mass divorces of post-world war generations may have much to do with many young people carefully considering marriage before they leap into commitments. There is a greater awareness of the personal costs and restraints associated with traditional households, which are not always idyllic. In addition, the heterosexual assumptions implicit in these norms are questioned (Weeks, Heaphy, & Donovan, 2001). Both men and women are reluctant to forgo their economic and individual independence and are less optimistic about the classic nuclear family. Coupldom is not rejected but its importance has declined: co-habitation and marriage are less attractive. However, the

retreat from marriage has been more extensively researched in women than men (Sassler & Goldscheider, 2004).

In November 2000 the British Observer newspaper published a supplement entitled *Welcome to the singles century*, which ironically entrenches marital status as a category of differentiation (Devos, De Groot & Schmidt, 2015). Being single, especially for women, no longer carries the stigma it used to incur. The indignity of single women, cruelly referred to as old maids, having to reside with parents or married siblings no longer applies (Goldscheider & Waite, 1991). The appeal of single independence is also reflected in the growing trend of transhabitation and living apart together (LAT); the latter frequently brought about by exogenous pressures such as being geographically separated by work but affording both intimacy and autonomy (Pasteels, Lyssens-Danneboom & Mortelmans). Transhabitation couples opt for a relationship without the potential conflict and responsibilities of co-habitation or marriage. Breakups are not complicated by financial and economic entanglement (Carter, Duncan, Stoilova & Phillips, 2016). Sex, emotional intimacy and support do not necessarily entail co-habitation or dependence. Consequently, young people do not regard their shared living arrangements solely as a transitional stopgap or a problem (Heath, 1999).

Lack of constraint or loss of traditional anchors?

It has been mooted that the complexity and protraction of passage to adulthood leads to greater uncertainty for young adults today than previous generations, who mostly followed a cultural blueprint of normative social markers. Sociology theorists, such as Beck (2007) and Giddens (1992), have stressed that people in post-industrialised societies have become increasingly individualised as a result of erosion of traditional structures as well as a decrease in the support systems of the Fordist or industrial society. In the past, governments and institutions softened the element of risk with social welfare and well-defined traditional roles in family and marriage. Late modernity is characterised by weakening of social institutions and traditions, leaving young adults to negotiate identities without a map in an unpredictable world. Beck and Giddens refer to this as 'risk society' with a greater range of outcomes for individuals becoming more apparent. In order to survive, young people need to make themselves their number one priority. Giddens regards detraditionalisation as a double-edged sword. Globalisation has brought people into contact with a large variety of cultural practices and a cultural

diffusion, providing new opportunities and lifestyle choices that are the core of self-identity. But collective, master narratives and social rituals have provided a sense of continuity and order, a basic psychological need and a way to anchor identities.

Rather than a move to finding one's true self, individualisation means there is a general imperative for young adults to navigate a life of their own by way of training, labour markets and geographical mobility. Very often this comes at the cost of commitment to family, relationships and friends (Williamson, 2006). Importantly, some groups are more able than others to draw on economic and social capital to take advantage of opportunities for success. In the process of relaxing norms and a range of choices, it becomes easier to blame the vulnerable for failure and exonerate society from denying them equal life opportunities. Broad social responsibility is demolished within discourses of neo-liberal citizenship founded on individual responsibility, rationality and the Protestant work ethic (Giddens, 1992; Tuffin, 2005; Beck, 2007). The assertion that success is simply a matter of hard work, virtue and meritocracy justifies structural inequality blamed on lack of effort. Insistence on individualism accomplishes this (DiAngelo, 2011; Hastie & Cosh, 2013). Such expectations, and often unwarranted blame, render young people, already marginalised economically, psychologically vulnerable.

Paradoxically, the discourse of universalism operates in a similar way to the discourse of individualism. Rather than asserting that all human beings are individuals and unique, universalism dictates that all humans are the same. This discourse implies that all people face the same realities where, for example, the advantages of being white or male are overlooked. While accountability or racial or gender disadvantage is eliminated, such discourses perpetuate a system in which the dominant culture's perspective is regarded as normal and ideal and denies and devalues the lived experience of many people (DiAngelo, 2011). Both individualism and universalism ignore the cumulative historical and social disadvantages of not being white or male and conceal the ways in which resources have been distributed and accumulated over generations to benefit or exclude.

Consequently, the assumed homogeneity of emerging adults needs to be interrogated. While most young people do adapt to the challenges of post-industrialist society,

pathways of the rich and the poor differ. Money maintains the upper hand and poverty prevents people reaching their potential. Although all young workers are exposed to the risk of unemployment, those who lack advanced education are easily replaced in the workforce and therefore are more at risk. Employers have come to prefer employees with credentials (Furlong, 2009).

In the 1960s, NEET status (not in employment, education or training), widely prevalent today, was unheard of. Young people, already positioned on the margins of society by structural obstacles such as cuts in welfare support and families unsupportive of higher education, or with few resources to support their children's aspirations, are set to be even more disadvantaged in acquiring an adequate living wage, reinforcing inequalities and economic polarisation (Furlong, 2009). For young women, NEET can result in early pregnancy and parenthood. However, disadvantaged groups may not necessarily take the fast track to adulthood (Stone, Berrington & Falkingham, 2011). Already on the road to social exclusion and stigmatization, the cost of being dispossessed too frequently converts to crime, compounded by drug and alcohol problems. These behaviours are defined as anti-social and dangerous and not viewed within the broader patterns of inequality. People are regarded as architects of their own fate and their circumstances are seldom seen as symptoms of inequality (Côté & Bynner, 2008).

Is flattening elitist?

While young adults are considered agents of their own destiny, the impact of broader social, economic and political structures must be taken into account (Mortimer & Larson, 2002). Despite the apparent freedom of contemporary young adults, there are diverse options available and coercive pressures have to be acknowledged. Life choices are not always personal: they are frequently dictated by those available in the particular social strata, culture and historical period in which people live. For example, in the UK, Heath and Cleaver (2003) found that people of colour were less likely to live in non-kin households. Similarly, in New Zealand, Williamson (2006) reported that Māori or Pacific Island young adults are significantly less likely to share households with unrelated individuals because of the strong cultural importance placed on family or whānau. Relying on family networks for accommodation in urban areas, where work

may be found, still figures in youth relocation among Pākehā (New Zealanders of European origin) but it is still far more common among Māori and Pacific Islanders.

Heath and Kenyon (2001) noted that sharing is a domestic arrangement particularly suited to young people strongly committed to the labour force. Flatting affords a professional standard of accommodation, which would be impossible on a single salary. Very often post-graduates, accustomed to shared living, continue flatting once they graduate (Ford, Rugg, & Burrows, 2002). Consequently, Heath and Cleaver (2003) maintain that this modern domestic arrangement is normative for a relatively affluent section of the population, in Britain, who gain qualifications, and has thus become an exclusionary lifestyle for the less well educated. McNamara and Connell (2007) have noted a similar trend in Australia, where group households are represented at the high end of the income scales with a significantly lower representation at the low end compared to Australian households overall. This was apparent in New Zealand research: older, non-student flatters indicated their preferences for intelligent, employed, 'professional' housemates who enjoy the finer things in life, such as 'nice wine and cheese' and eschew 'mince and vegies' (Clark & Tuffin, 2015). The evidence, therefore, suggests an element of elitism in shared households. Broad economic and social reasons for shared households are considered next.

Economic and social reasons for shared households

Lives both reflect and shape wider political and economic forces (Heath & Cleaver, 2003). While economic constraints are critical in understanding new household formations, they may also be the catalyst for transforming collaborative living into a desirable form of accommodation. Kenyon and Heath (2001) in the UK have found significant narratives of choice for this lifestyle. In the USA, Goldscheider noted that underlying the economic aspect is a growing feeling that companionship is good and privacy may be overrated (May, 2014). Young people are becoming a powerful force and symbol of change in society in adapting to rapidly changing political, social and economic factors: they are not merely recipients but active agents of these changes (Kenyon & Heath, 2001). Shared domestic living arrangements are one way of managing changes, and are therefore more important than a simple accommodation option.

Economic factors

Financial constraint is the dominant motivation for the prevalence and extended tenure of flatting for many young people. Carlsson and Eriksson (2015) have noted that shared housing is one of the few remaining viable accommodation options for young people in British cities. Heath and Cleaver (2003) maintain that ongoing British government policies within the fields of education, training, employment and housing, combined with deteriorating economic conditions and insecurity in the labour market, impacted significantly on young adults in contemporary society. Significantly, this was before the 2008 economic crisis and currently the outlook post-Brexit remains uncertain. The effects of public policy on the lives of young people is also evident in America (Wilson, Mixon & Stephenson, 2016), Australia (Natalier, 2003a; McNamara & Connell, 2007) and New Zealand (Cobb-Clark, 2008).

Cost of education and work training

Conditions faced by young adults today are very different to those of the baby boom generation. Work training, such as nursing, teaching and apprenticeships, in the past in New Zealand, was accompanied by a wage and often low-cost subsidised housing and a confident expectation of full-employment on training completion (Saville-Smith & James, 2010). Post-secondary education was relatively free, with student allowances for almost all students. In the 1980s New Zealand adopted a market based approach to tertiary education as part of an overall reaction to changing economic conditions. What was previously regarded as a socially elitist education system was replaced by a system of mass participation in higher education beginning in 1985. In 1989 the Labour Government introduced university tuition fees for all and financial assistance was strictly targeted. Student loans were introduced in 1992 and universities were permitted to set their own fees. These changes in policy combined with escalating and prolonged education costs have seen an unprecedented number of young people leaving tertiary institutions with huge debt (McLaughlin, 2003). Student loans are substantially mounting and graduates are taking longer to pay back the money they owe.

In 2005 the average student loan debt was \$15,600, rising to \$24,405 in 2014. This has been driven by increasing fees but even more so by restrictions on allowances, forcing more and more students to borrow to live from week to week (NZUSA, 2014). This situation is unparalleled in history; the magnitude of debt would have been more than adequate for a house deposit in past decades. McLaughlin (2003) argues that in the long

run, graduates are not adversely affected if they manage their debt well. Graduates may be able to command more human capital: abilities and skills of an individual acquired through investment in education and training with potentially increased salaries but in the short term their take-home pay is greatly reduced by having to pay off student loans, presently at the rate of 12% of gross salary (New Zealand Inland Revenue, 2017). The median loan repayment time for all borrowers who finished study in 2014 is expected to be 8.4 years (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2016). These costs make shared living considerably more appealing.

Housing unaffordability

Added to the financial pressures produced by student loan debt, significant problems with housing affordability and the extended housing price boom in New Zealand have made house buying for young people increasingly difficult (Eaqub & Eaqub, 2015). Many full-time jobs do not provide an adequate income for independent living or the confidence that at some time there might not be a return to the parental home (Heath & Cleaver, 2003). Between 1986 and 2006 the largest falls in home ownership rates were in the 25-39 age range and home ownership rates for young New Zealanders have declined 20% since 1990. Between 2009 and 2015 the proportion of first home buyer households below the National Affordability Benchmark remained relatively unchanged: in June 2015 it was 81% with renting consistently more affordable (Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment, 2017). There are now a generation of graduates who struggle to afford houses in the major New Zealand cities (Coleman, 2010). For many talented young people, moving to smaller towns in order to be able to buy a house means they may well not reach their professional potential, or even find suitable employment. While home ownership, believed to encourage self-reliance and good citizenship, has been central to New Zealand culture and socio-political stability, evidence points to home ownership among the younger age groups being less likely than ever. Many previous generations had the benefit of government home ownership loans from the State Advances Corporation (Morrison, 2008). Housing prices, post the 2008 global financial crisis have increased dramatically, credit access for housing has tightened and local council rates continue to rise (Day, 2016). Added to this, undersupply of housing, especially in the lower-priced market sector, puts pressure on the rental sector and can be expected to continue since the building industry remains focused on the middle and higher end of the housing market, geared towards nuclear

families. Together with positive net migration, these factors increase the cost and affordability of housing and ensure a lack of suitable housing for those on youth incomes (Saville-Smith & James, 2010; New Zealand Treasury, 2014).

Jones (2000) notes that since the housing market does not accommodate the needs of the young, they need to shape their needs to fit what is available. Flattening is an economically viable means of sharing resources, saving money and allowing young people to save for their own homes and more immediate aspirations, such as travel (Kenyon & Heath, 2001). In addition, young people with vocational aspirations need to be highly mobile, making renting and house sharing a pragmatic choice. However, transitions to independent living need to be better understood if government policies and housing provision are to offer youth a choice that is not based on the normative assumptions of household composition. Shared domesticity may not be a way of life suited to all, but, for some, living alone in a one-person household is not desirable. Radical new solutions to housing are needed in response to changing norms (Jones, 2000; Beer & Faulkner, 2011).

New Zealand is grouped with other neo-liberal nations, such as Australia and the United States, who share much in common with the UK and other North-Western European nations in housing consumption (Beer & Faulkner, 2011). The impact of the housing market on domestic arrangements is often neglected: co-residence becomes more likely when incomes cannot accommodate rising living costs (Stone, Berrington & Falkingham, 2011). Historically, Western marriage and childbearing have been associated with possessing sufficient resources to establish and sustain an independent household (Hughes, 2003). Marriage rates do rise and fall according to availability and cost of residential properties (Baker & Elizabeth, 2014). Morrison (2008) maintains that while marriage and the decision to start a family are still well established triggers for home ownership, falling home ownership rates among the young support the conclusion that younger households are cautiously delaying the transition from renting to owning and taking on responsibilities until later in life. Secure partnerships are necessary to guarantee two incomes. Economic uncertainty, the residue of the 2008 recession, still evident in 2016 (Lagarde 2016), leaves young adults feeling pessimistic and less financially secure, particularly with contemporary pressures on consumerism as indicators of success (Cobb-Clark, 2008).

Consumer debt

Although the trend of hire purchase increased rapidly post WWII, Baby Boomers were less likely to fall prey to credit card and retail debt as these were not as easily available to them (Best, 2009). The lives of contemporary young people are structured by consumerism, fuelled by the advertising media and this excessive materialistic force should not be underestimated (Côté, 2002). Consequently, today there are considerably high levels of debt, not just student loans, among young people who have become accustomed to living with the trappings of middle-class comforts and the latest technology (Saville-Smith & James, 2010). However, regular updating of technological knowledge and equipment in order to participate fully in social life and succeed at work is essential for young adults today (Mortimer & Larson, 2002). Maintaining such a lifestyle and consumption level is challenging on a single entry-level salary.

Competitive labour market

The changing patterns of household formation cannot be confined solely to economic necessity (Heath & Cleaver, 2003). The nature of the labour market, in which workers compete for employment and employees compete for workers, affects national trends and this is the driving force behind many changes in society (Cobb-Clark, 2008). There have been significant changes to the nature of labour markets in recent decades, which particularly impact youth, including the shift from manufacturing to a service economy, and decreased demand for unskilled workers (Nickell, 2001; Schmelzer, 2008). New communication technologies and the globalisation of the economy, with attendant growing business competition, pressurises businesses to reduce staff and costs resulting in reduced commitment to and protection of workers. Entire industries are exported to developing countries, where there are low wages and fewer human rights, with huge job losses in Western countries (Acar, 2009). Corporations have embraced the technological displacement of workers by computers and robots, making many people redundant and causing a downsizing of the workforce (Mortimer & Larson, 2002).

Governments in postindustrial societies that once regulated employment to ensure full time, well paid work, with workers protected from layoffs, now allow temporary, poorly paid jobs and permit employers to fire without restriction (Newman, 2012). A single career or job for life has been replaced by a proliferation of negotiated and

renegotiated contract work, temporary labour positions and part-time work leading to periods of non-employment and significant earning instability. Secure wages are no longer guaranteed and the influence of the trade unions has declined (Beer & Faulkner, 2011). Individual contracts have replaced collective agreements with fewer benefits, all aided and abetted by free-trade policies (Beck, 2007). Beck (2009) and Giddens (1994) have termed this ‘manufactured uncertainty’, which they believe may not be a temporary phenomenon. While this may serve the interests of businesses it leads to considerable financial instability and anxiety (Newman, 2012). These chronic, unpredictable, uncertain conditions are captured by Standing’s (2011) notion of a new class of ‘precariat’ people.

To succeed in the increasingly competitive and volatile labour market, and to achieve a stable position in the working world, young people require a high degree of geographic flexibility without being tied to a particular location (Dohmen, 2005). Transitional employment is characteristic of the early stages of establishing a career. In New Zealand, the under-thirties are the workers most likely to change jobs to gain better pay and training opportunities. Stable tenure levels tend only to increase with age as people become better paid (Boxall, Mackey & Rasmussen, 2003). This makes it very difficult for young people to put down roots and form attachments to places in which they live. Platonic friendships let alone couple relationships are harder to maintain. Lasting partnerships become increasingly difficult without compromise, sacrifice and considerable stress (Heath & Kenyon, 2001). When moving cities or countries, shared accommodation can offer access to a ready-made social life through flatmates (Earl, 2013). However, Heath (1999) suggests that by adhering to the idea that shared housing is essentially a product of economic constraint we lose sight of the fact this might not be the only precipitating factor.

Social factors

While the extended period of shared domestic arrangements among young adults can be accounted for by broader structural economic changes, a range of social factors have contributed to this phenomenon. Education levels among women continue to rise with increased participation in and commitment to the labour market, reducing reliance on husbands for economic security (Stirpe, & Zárraga-Oberty, 2017). Marriage is also no longer necessary for women’s legal and social status. Women’s life courses have been

more affected by increasing education than men's. Education has not only opened doors for women to many professions and civic life previously dominated by men but a career is seen as an attractive alternative or delay to early marriage and child rearing (Mortimer & Larson, 2002). Beck (2007) notes that conflict between men and women and changing expectations about their respective social roles frequently affect decisions made today. While relationships may be desirable they are more difficult to achieve (Heath, 1999).

The waning influence of religion and secularisation of society has resulted in changes in social conventions relating to sexual practices. Together with easily obtainable birth control methods and legalised abortion reducing unwanted pregnancies, marriage and even cohabitation, can be less attractive to women (Baker & Elizabeth, 2014). There are advantages to sexual freedom for young adults in their own domestic space without the demands of living with a partner even though most young adults eventually aspire to a couple household (Heath, 2009).

Because of New Zealand's relatively isolated geographical position, the big OE (Overseas Experience), an extended period of travel or working holiday, is a common rite of passage for young adults. In examining discourses of young New Zealanders planning to embark on their overseas experience, Haverig and Roberts (2011) found that they frequently construct the OE as an opportunity to access and demonstrate freedom and choice and this is intimately connected to transitioning to adulthood. Flatting offers a practical alternative to disposal or storage of a complete household of furniture and accoutrements before setting off and a socially viable way to meet new people in other countries. There are also other significant positive social and psychological benefits to be gained from flatting.

Social-psychological advantages of shared housing.

Housing circumstances factor largely in quality of life and can have significant effect on the health and well-being of individuals. Whereas a home can be a haven, which allows people to cope with the pressures of life, interpersonal tension within the domestic sphere can generate stress (Christie, Munroe & Rettig, 2002). Flatting can be an extremely positive experience, providing friendship, companionship, trust and mutual support. Flatmates provide a ready-made, easily accessed social life or family,

especially since employees often have unsociable work hours and face more and more encroachment on their time by work commitments (Hughes, 2003). It has been argued that changes in the labour market, for example, unpredictable shift work schedules in the medical and hospitality industry, make synchronising time off and meetings with friends difficult, despite new technologies making contact easier (Furlong, 2013). Hence, stable relationships can become harder to maintain.

Heath and Kenyon (2001) draw on Beck (1992) to argue that communal living is not only an adaptation to changes in society but a psychological imperative, an antidote to counter social isolation and loneliness and foster support networks. The intermediate transition period is a highly turbulent psycho-social period in young people's lives in terms of studying, housing, labour entry and partnership formation (Arnett, 2015). Flatmates, undergoing similar transitions are able to understand and support each other through the vicissitudes of daily life in a way that parents are unable to. Parents' experiences may be outdated and irrelevant to what their children have to negotiate and their well-intentioned advice may be counterproductive (Furlong, 2013). Collaborative living gives young people the confidence to operate without the immediate presence of their parents (Kemp & Rugg, 1998). Not only does flatting give young people a respite from being answerable to parents or spouses, it can also enhance adult competencies in domestic, social and emotional skills (Christie, Munro & Rettig, 2002).

Co-residing, often with strangers, requires getting used to their quirks, habits and schedules. Many young adults become adept at the intricacies of living together, negotiating and compromising and this has positive implications for learning to handle work and other relationships (Heath, 2009; Aassve, Cottini, & Vitali, 2013). Sharing accommodation with friends or strangers requires considerable social and communication skills with the need to operate in sometimes difficult, delicate or even hostile situations, navigate shared expenses and deal with landlords (Heath & Cleaver, 2003). Christie, Munro and Rettig (2002) have demonstrated that as flatters gain more experience, they become more competent in assessing the viability of particular rentals and develop an awareness of what constitutes good accommodation, with an eye to factors such as overcrowding, dampness and unnecessary heating costs. Flatting also provides the basis for meeting new people (friends of flatmates), romance and networking among peers.

Negative psychological aspects

Living with others can foster friction, intense hostility, antagonism and resentment resulting in stress with implications for mental health (Clark & Tuffin, 2015). Particular areas of conflict are failure to do a fair share of household work; noise; untidiness; eating other flatmate's food; unwelcome, often free-loading non-residential partners; and not acting with consideration (Heath & Cleaver, 2003). In order to work effectively a system of reciprocity and common commitment is essential for social cohesion and avoiding tension (Glick, 2011). This often means subsuming individual desires for the good of the collective (Mause, 2008). Living together does not mean that the desire for sociability will be met and in some cases the intimacy can be more than a person expects (Brown, 1992). Flatmates from hell (Birmingham, 2001) are often people who violate the physical and symbolic boundaries of privacy, not understanding the importance of these in an intimate association with others (Heath & Cleaver, 2003). In any group living, different habits, ways of doing things and expectations of privacy or interaction are inevitable (Brown, 1992). The clash of irreconcilable interests, loyalties and opinions represent fundamental differences translating into tensions and anxiety which can result in people being ostracised, asked to leave or leave of their own accord. If people are forced to move it can be expensive: there are moving costs, bond money, and usually rent in advance for some weeks is required in a new tenancy and choice of flats is limited to whatever is available (Morrison, 2008). These practical aspects can exacerbate emotional states. Nevertheless, traditional nuclear family homes are not always characterised by harmony and idyllic intimacy.

Families, home and intimacy

Families of choice

Despres (1994) suggests that functional shared accommodation operates as a surrogate 'family' of choice, providing a sanctuary of companionship, support and security with strong social and emotional attachments. Traditionally, the family has been seen as the foundation of society. The word 'family' has potent social, cultural, and symbolic connotations and is often employed to be extremely exclusionary. 'Family' denotes a kinship relationship by blood, adoption or marriage (Ellickson, 2006). Kinship ties are deeply rooted in Western societies but the boundaries of what constitutes 'family' is becoming increasingly fluid in complex ways with blurring between kin, non-kin and ex-

kin. In the past few decades ‘family’ has become a contested term as it has taken on a much broader egalitarian and diverse form than the customary association with heterosexual marriage (Weeks, Heaphy & Donovan, 2001). Consequently, there is a need for greater recognition of variations of families and an intellectual shift from the traditional concept of ‘family’ (Roseneil & Budgeon, 2004; Kearns, Hiscock, Ellaway, & Macintyre, 2000). Stacey (1996) coined the term ‘post–modern families’ to describe the diverse, elective, non-kin relationships based on friendship and commitments that characterise families of choice. Media recognition of these differing households is reflected in the American television comedy, *Modern Family*.

Whatever the family pattern there is a sense of belonging, commitment, and emotional support, and some form of shared responsibility is expected. Research has emphasised that supportive relationships are a key meaning of home but these have been largely understood and conflated with marriage and nuclear family relationships (McNamara & Connell, 2007). Even though the values and comfort associated with the family unit have often failed to materialise in traditional families, they have been adopted by families of choice, perhaps because conventional households do have intrinsic merits (Ellickson, 2006). Rising divorce rates, single parenting, cohabitation, deferred marriage and single–sex unions are all indicative of profound, irrevocable moral change and the emergence of increasingly flexible and fluid modes of intimacy. Nevertheless, the new interpretation of ‘family’ is the source of ongoing debate, moral outrage and political concern (and capital) about the crisis and breakdown in the fabric of society it is portended to represent (Weeks, Heaphy & Donovan, 2001).

Rozmarin (2009) argues that traditional families have been tools for enforcing children to conform, identify with, and embrace social order: in other words, disciplined children who will grow up to become ideal, unquestioning citizens. Anything else is regarded as abnormal and becomes a matter for shame and psychological intervention, designed to ensure the status quo. Numerous discourses operate to ensure this insidious indoctrination, and critical resistance is required to challenge the normativity of traditional families. The tyranny of these norms ensures that couple households are still regarded as the most desirable aspiration of domestic arrangements and the standard by which other living arrangements are measured and marginalised as temporary, unsatisfactory and lacking cultural endorsement (Heath, 2009). However, Ellickson

(2006) does point out that family based households have continued to predominate in the face of competition in widely different eras and across sociological environments.

A place to call home

The terms 'family' and 'home' have been virtually synonymously used with anything else being merely a house (Jones, 2000). McNamara and Connell's (2007) study sought to enlarge cultural and social understandings of 'home' by examining the extent to which shared houses replicate, or challenge the tradition of the 'family home'. In so doing, they consider the manner in which living in shared houses may be a significant and meaningful experience for occupants. In a similar vein Williamson (2006) believes that the impermanence of flatting households subverts their recognition as a home and family. Everyone has the right to a home that is commensurate with personal requirements but little attention has been paid to what these alternate households represent.

There is a need to re-evaluate and challenge what constitutes family and interrogate the meaning of home to different people as the conflation of home and the nuclear family is outdated. Just as predictable life paths have become more fractured, the meaning of home has become more fluid. Shared housing challenges the straightforward ideology of the nuclear family as the correct and only way to live. "In the midst of uncertainty and impermanence, in the absence of a decisive view of the future, and a definitive absence of family and ownership, 'home' nonetheless persists" (McNamara & Connell, 2007, p. 89). More research is needed to examine the possibility that young adults are seriously questioning traditional household compositions and becoming agents of change, resulting in greater shifts in attitudes to familial norms. Settling down may come to represent having a place to call home, sidelining indefinitely the domestic responsibilities associated with marriage and parenthood (Heath & Cleaver, 2003). Redefining home also means reassessing relationships (Jones, 2000).

The changing nature of intimacy

Acknowledgement of alternatives to the heterosexual nuclear family is a relatively recent phenomenon primarily associated with research on relationships and household patterns among lesbian and gay couples (Weeks, Heaphy & Donovan, 2001). With increasing recognition of the viability of once unacceptable or marginal types of relationships, greater understanding of new possibilities of intimacy is called for. Personal relationships today go beyond marriage and blood ties with commitments extending beyond the boundaries of the nuclear co-resident family. As Roseneil and Budgeon (2004) suggest, love, trust and care are not limited to families: they can characterise friendships and other social networks. Fragmentation of traditional families has meant a greater reliance on friendships as a source of security. Heath (2004a) has demonstrated that shared domestic living can create connections that are intimate, supportive and emotionally meaningful in a time when life-time employment, relationships and family living nearby are no longer guaranteed. Shared housing blurs the boundaries of public and private spaces between friends and promotes a high degree of intimacy and interdependence.

Heath and Cleaver (2003) posit that modern youth are transforming the boundaries of interpersonal relationships, looking to their friends rather than sexual partners or family to meet immediate needs for intimacy. While these modes of intimacies are recognised and reflected in many popular, but already dated television shows, such as *Friends*, *Will and Grace* and *Sex in the City*, heteronormative relationships remain institutionalised and society still operates as though traditional families predominate. Although it could be argued that these TV shows also promote this heteronormative way of life and contribute to their rise in popularity, the media appear to be far faster in feeling the pulse of change than social scientists. In the main, academia continues to privilege this traditional way of life and the assumption that marriage is the norm remains, with protective policy and legislation lagging behind irrevocable changes.

New forms of relationships are often derided, trivialized, and subordinated to conventional heterosexual relationships (Heath, 2004b), perhaps due to the threatening powers of new ways of life, which risk violating the dominant way of life. Natalier (2003a) concludes that living outside traditional heterosexual family structures, with new ways of relating to others and new ways of caring, may be producing conditions for social change. Giddens' (1992, p. 3) 'pure love' is not restricted to sexuality, with

intimacy described as ‘a transactional negotiation of personal ties by equals’, which can be descriptive of shared domestic arrangements among non-kin young adults. This does not rule out sexual relationships developing but requires new negotiations of boundaries. This transformation of intimacy was somewhat evident in my earlier research (Clark, 2011) where an otherwise articulate participant struggled to express her feelings:

Laura: it’s almost (.) like I guess it’s almost like (0.2)
like a boyfriend or girlfriend ((laughs))
in some respects because you have to like them on a personal level
because you are living with them and
you know you have a home together

The quality and intimacy of the relationship is of particular importance in the construction and meaning of the modern ‘family’. Once the teenage years are reached family loyalties decline to be replaced by group identity and social belonging (Rozmarin, 2009). Friends have consistently been demonstrated to be of the greatest importance in the lives of contemporary young adults and having shared a household with someone at some point in a life course goes beyond school friendships and increases the odds of being considered a family member (Wall & Gouveia, 2014). Roseneil and Budgeon (2004) have noted that there is a need for systematic research on the new forms of intimacy and those spearheading this social change. They argue the need to concentrate on intimacy and care, and the cultures associated with these practices outside traditional families, and not to fall into the trap of redefining families as this will limit our understanding. By the same token, challenges to the fundamental social nuclear family unit may account for lack of research into alternative households.

Why are shared living arrangements among young people under researched?

Those who have studied the domestic lifestyles of young adults have noted the lamentable lack of research on shared households (e.g. Heath & Cleaver, 2003; Williamson, 2006; Natalier, 2004; Clark & Tuffin, 2015; Gorman-Murray, 2015). Steinfuhrer and Haase (2009) have suggested that a lack of social and cultural acceptance of shared households, which challenges the traditional concept of home, family and intimacy, accounts for the curious oversight of research on the topic. Similarly, Ahrentzen (2003) notes that shared housing is regarded an inappropriate and unacceptable way of life by researchers and policy makers. The bulk of research on shared housing has been centered on residence sharing among immigrants, inter-

generational households and sharing among the elderly. Hemmons, Hoch and Carp (1996) extensively discuss the stigma against shared living arrangements, arguing that this lifestyle contradicts the American Dream of a single-family household. The supposed benefits of security, order and prosperity are aligned against the purported uncertainty, crime and poverty associated with shared residential living. The single family house ideal is beneficial to real estate agents, builders, public officials, home owners and predatory banks and therefore remains entrenched. This is exemplified in New Zealand by the undeniably partisan Westpac bank advertisement promoting home loans for disgruntled middle-aged house sharers (DDB New Zealand, 2012). Consequently, little is done to change the status quo.

The strong belief in the virtue of one-family, one-house means the benefits of shared housing remain hidden and largely ignored, despite the steady erosion of traditional families and declining ability to afford homes. As early as the mid-eighties it was clear to Baum (1986) that fewer people were living in traditional households and she argued for greater acceptance and encouragement of alternative households. Little provision is made to accommodate changing housing needs despite the evidence that shared housing is viable economically, socially and environmentally. For example, couples' counselling is common but flatmate counselling is unheard of. More flexibility is called for.

Heath and Cleaver (2003) maintain that in the UK there is no stigma attached to shared housing among contemporary young adults and the lifestyle is frequently associated with privilege and tertiary qualifications. They contend the limited research on the topic is due to an academic focus on deprived young people and a general neglect of research on the ordinary domestic lives of young adults. Consequently, very little is known about youthful domesticity. This approach is backed by Furlong (2013) who notes that there is always a high level of interest in young people when they are considered to be a problem, especially when these perceived problems are highly visible and challenge the prevailing culture, causing concern for those who hold power. Youth with alcohol and drug issues, who are deemed a risk to themselves, gain attention while youth in shared housing arrangements do not.

Miller (1999) notes that while the topic of shared living among young adults is a relatively neglected topic it no longer attracts the bad publicity and concern the true

communes of the 60s did. I would argue that there is a lack of research because shared housing among young people is viewed as transitional and therefore insignificant, with scant regard for the fertile psychological ground this area offers for studying interpersonal relationships, group functioning, prejudice and discrimination and the role flatting plays in the process of becoming an adult. In addition it is important to study young people as examination of their lives provides a unique view of social and economic forces of change and the reproduction of exclusion and advantage (Furlong, 2013). Further, flatting is intricately connected to wider social changes, external processes and systems of meaning (Williamson, 2006).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have addressed the history and rise in popularity of flatting in New Zealand in tandem with the English speaking Western world. I have located this within the context of changing economic and social conditions producing a lengthy transitional phase to adulthood as well as a change in the nature of intimacy and families. Socially, these include the rise of co-habitation, relaxation of sexual norms, legalised abortion and contraception and gender equality in education and employment often resulting in delayed marriage and child-bearing. Economic factors include lengthening of the education process, instability in the labour market, and lack of affordable housing. In addition, the possible reasons for the paucity of research on the topic of shared living arrangements among young adults were discussed. The next chapter forms the background to the areas of interest of this research. Specifically, how have others construed the flat dynamic?

CHAPTER 2

Literature review of house sharing dynamics

Whenever you remove any fence, always pause long enough to ask why it was put there in the first place.

Gilbert K. Chesterton: The thing

Introduction

This chapter begins with models employed by previous researchers on shared accommodation to explain the dynamics of shared housing. I then propose communitarianism, in which individualism and collectivism are balanced, as an alternative framework. This is followed by a review of the limited research explaining the practical dynamics of shared living and concludes with a brief review of research into small group dynamics.

Models for interpreting the dynamics of shared living arrangements

Since the demographic of shared housing among young adults has received limited attention from researchers, theories on the dynamic have had little time to evolve.

Communitas and liminality

Drawing on Cherlin's (1978) work in which he explored the difficulties and possibilities faced by stepfamilies, Natalier (2003a) discusses the lack of institutionalised guiding principles that flatters have to contend with. In nuclear families, well-established expectations of interactions between family members are generally accepted and provide some sense of stability in interrelationships. These roles can prevent potential conflicts and disagreements, making relationships easier to maintain. Cherlin (1978) claims that the more complex non-kin relationships can cause confusion and conflict due to a lack of conventional dictums, which shape people's behaviour. Natalier (2003a) argues that shared householders create their own meanings with counter cultural discourses, which they use to understand and manage their relationships: a different rather than incomplete institutionalisation that reflects Turner's (1974) theory of liminality and communitas. Liminality (a Latin derivative for threshold) refers to people in transition phases of identity, initially separated from one identity previously inhabited (e.g., the family teenager transitioning into adulthood). Turner theorised that this period is characterised by equality, lack of status or property ownership, minimisation or inversion of gender expectations, unselfishness, foolishness and camaraderie. Turner sees an association between a liminal state and communitas,

defined as a fellowship forged out of lack of socially defined roles, hierarchy and power relations. The equality and companionship of this marginal status results in rejection of mainstream norms. The freedom afforded by the lack of cultural and customary boundaries may provide insights that may or may not result in change to the status quo.

Natalier (2003a) sees peer-shared living as a site of *communitas*. She speculated that the lack of dominant discourses in shared living may provide the opportunity to develop alternative ways of relating to others. For example, given the lack of hierarchy, with no one defined as 'wife' or 'husband', the organisation of power enacted through these terms could be destabilised. Ostensibly, men are not able to reference their behaviour to ideological understandings of what it means to be a breadwinning husband in a household. However, Natalier (2004) found the Utopian ideal of egalitarianism of shared households is often compromised with the link between masculinity and housework not significantly altered: the nexus of power and gender is still enacted in shared households. Traditionally, men have employed various strategies to avoid housework, including claims of incompetence, time pressures, disinterest and outright refusal.

Neo-tribalism

Heath (2004b) sees the flat dynamic as a sense of shared identity, a 'communal ethic' based on a simple foundation of warmth and companionship. This is framed within Maffesoli's (1996) neo-tribal theory which advances the theory that friendships are beginning to take on a wider importance in comparison to couples' relationships. Neo-tribes are defined as groups of people who come together for a specific time and period at a particular place. The theory proposes that communal ethics are underpinned by proximity, shared space and ritual, with commitment to the ethic and the 'we' identity underlying group functioning. According to Maffesoli, (1996) the shared space in co-residence is of critical importance and is the focus and emotional glue of this lifestyle, whether it is cooking together, watching TV or discussing problems. Ritual is important because it promotes a sense of community, whether it is in the guise of parties, outings together or special breakfasts. At the core of neo-tribalism is a sense of belonging. Failure to take part in these rituals significantly affects acceptance or rejection. In order to belong it is necessary to adopt the group ethos. In a similar vein Williamson (2006)

reported that non-frequenting of public areas of a flat symbolises a lack of social cohesion, eventually contributing to alienation and moving out. However, Heath (2004b) cautions that the tribal nature of co-residence can easily slide into control, exclusion and ostracism.

The tragedy of the commune

At a more practical level and inspired by Hardin's (1968) seminal theory, the tragedy of the commons, Mause (2008) employed economic equations to demonstrate that individual rational behaviour does not function for the collective good in shared households. Hardin's theory proposed that individuals acting independently and rationally for personal gain do not act in the best interest of the group, frequently resulting in depleted resources for all. The individual may benefit by exploiting pooled resources but the group as a whole suffers. Cleverly entitled the tragedy of the commune, Mause asserts that communal living may not necessarily deteriorate into tragedy but careful management is required if conflict is to be successfully avoided. If every flatmate believes that others are free-riding and refuses to do chores then the subsequent chaos is likely to result in unwelcoming and unsanitary conditions. Alternatively, the flatmate, who charitably cleans up after others, without reciprocation, may be self-sacrificing and honest but also naïve.

The social dilemma inherent in commonly pooled resources is obvious. If all co-operate equally, then all benefit. Drawing on Hobbes (1960), Mause also questions whether co-operation can be maintained without an authoritarian leader while allowing that larger flats may be more able to collectively control a selfish or lazy flatmate. Ostrom, Walker and Gardner (1992) maintain that commitment and co-operation can be achieved without coercive authority: commonly pooled resources can be well organised with effective communication. Positive payoffs can be achieved for all by mutually agreed strategies.

I suggest that the models of *communitas* and liminality, neo-tribalism, and Mause's tragedy of the commune are all valuable conceptual frameworks. In addition, I propose that given the interdependence of housemates, 'communitarianism' may be a useful model.

Communitarianism

New Zealand has been identified as having a high distribution of individualism where self-reliance and freedom of choice are stressed (Hofstede, 1980; Schwartz, 1990). Individualism can be defined as a social pattern of loosely connected individuals who regard themselves as independent and are primarily motivated by their own preferences: priority is given to personal goals over those of others. In contrast collectivism emphasises the views, needs and goals of the group, in which individual rights are subsumed for the common good (Triandis, 1995). One of the fundamental principles of collectivism is the reciprocity of responsibilities and obligations, clearly essential to a well-functioning flat. Shared households are effectively complex collective situations with interdependence resulting from limited resources.

Communitarianism paradoxically combines the best attributes of individualism and collectivism. During the 1970s and 1980s, a group of political philosophers with an interest in community developed a theory, which came to be known as communitarianism, with a goal of defending and celebrating community life. By the 1990s, these ideas took root in sociology and were most commonly associated with Etzioni (1995) and Putnam (2000). The basic tenet is that a strong community life is of great value in human society. Firstly, there is the ontological view that individuals are intrinsically social beings, with a strong desire for community, which can be deeply satisfying or fulfilling when achieved (Buchanan, 1989). Secondly, there is the view that if humans are inherently social, then desirable benefits will accrue from strong communities as they assist in promoting social stability and cohesion and prevent social ills, such as alienation and anomie (Calder, 2004). It is also a forceful critique about the perceived hegemony of the liberal worldview, which holds that society consists, or should strive to consist, of an association of free individuals, governed by self-interest, detached from imposed duties and obligations and free to form their own aspirations and interpretations of the good life (Sage, 2012).

When Margaret Thatcher argued that, ‘there is no such thing as society, there are individual men and women’, she epitomised the neoliberal view of social life. However, Thatcher also claimed that in addition to individuals, ‘there are families’ and this is at the centre of the communitarian critique (as cited in Lomas, 1998, p.1184). On the one hand, we are all individuals: but we are individuals who belong to and are an

inseparable part of wider groups, such as the family, religion or nation. As Sandel (1982) noted, humans can only truly understand themselves as members of a family or community or nation or people. By emphasising the rights of the individual over and above any wider claims, community is devalued and undermined (Buchanan, 1989). The liberal response is that liberalism, by inherently championing the individual, protects the integrity of communities, while the communitarian believes that the liberal conception of the person as radically unattached, denigrates the collective attachments and notions of solidarity on which community life depends (Buchanan, 1989).

Communitarianism proposes that 'I' and 'we' are in constant tension. The competing ideologies of individual pleasure and communal needs should be balanced in all decision making. Self-interest needs to be integrated with a commitment to the community and recognition of individual responsibilities towards each other: equilibrium or pluralism rather than either pole predominating (Etzioni, 1995; Triandis, 1995). Deference to the group's needs is essential for a functional flat and this will become clear in much of the analysis. 'Between individuals, who champion autonomy, and social conservatives, who champion social order, lies communitarianism, which characterises a good society as one that achieves balance between social order and autonomy' (Etzioni, 1995, p.12). Although it is important that there be a private and protected sphere, communitarianism also assumes that no sharp distinction can be drawn between the public and private.

Callahan (2003) employs an ecological model to explain communitarianism. Ecologists carefully consider how any individual plant will flourish or affect other surrounding plants. When a new species is introduced into an ecosystem, the prime concern is not how well it will thrive individually, but its effect on other plants. Will it live harmoniously with them, even improving the group (as in the benefits of companion planting), and do no harm, or will it prove destructive? Triandis (1995) concludes that a balance between individualism and collectivism is optimal. No society can be purely individualistic or collectivist and the goals of self and group are compatible in interdependent situations. The larger the group, the more scope for individualism, while

smaller groups tend to be more close-knit and group oriented. In an increasingly impersonal and alienated society, the goal of small group co-operation evokes nostalgia of village cohesion but inevitably raises questions about exclusion (Bosshnan, 1996).

Natalier's (2003a) framework of liminality and *communitas* posits that there are no blueprints for shared housing with no established hierarchies to conduct relationships that have the potential to avert conflict. Lack of institutionalised guidelines raises the possibility for changing normative ideologies. Liminality suggests a transition phase, which neatly ties in with theories of an extended passage between adolescence and adulthood (e.g., Arnett, 2000). Heath's (2004b) neo-tribalism conceptual framework supports the notion of a circumscribed period by proposing that housemates are brought together for a limited time with a communal ethic promoting group functioning. The 'we' aspect stressing the warmth and support afforded by groups, highlights the growing importance of friendship as a source of intimacy as opposed to the traditional emphasis on relationships of couples. Mause's (2008) tragedy of the commune considers the rationality of individuals subsuming their own interests to that of the collective good without a leader, but believes a workable situation is possible if all subscribe to an agreed ideal. My proposal of communitarianism focuses on individuals as social beings and recommends finding a balance between the individual and group needs.

Clearly, all models are valid representations and there is potential to develop a broad conceptual framework for explaining the flat 'dynamic' integrating and fundamentally linking all four: liminality and *communitas*, neo-tribalism, tragedy of the commune, and communitarianism. While these models are useful interpretations, they do not cover the basics of how people go about living with non-kin members. What we do know about this is discussed in the next section.

Review of extant studies on the dynamics of peer-shared living

Heath (2004) notes that few studies have focused directly on the dynamics of peer - shared living and Mykyta (2012) observed that very little is known about the benefits and disadvantages of shared households. Baum's (1986) study in Australia of shared housing across age groups and Williamson's (2006) study in New Zealand are exceptions. Baum considered factors contributing to successful shared households in terms of conflict management, personalities and expectations of sharers, social interactions within the residence and the limitations of the physical design of houses intended for nuclear families. Williamson (2006) identified a lack of detailed description of how this domestic lifestyle operates and compiled a snapshot of seven flatting households exploring their day-to-day realities, with particular emphasis on the bonds of eating together.

Baum's (1986) research suggested that certain factors enhance chances of successful co-residence and functional, smoothly-running households. Motivation for sharing is a key factor. People who felt they were forced to share because they could not afford separate accommodation tended to be the most dissatisfied, seeing problems as insurmountable. Those committed to sharing appreciated the positive aspects, accepted conflict as inevitable and faced the challenges of conflict resolution.

Finances

Baum (1986) found bill payments were less of a problem than expected, because flatmates themselves anticipate such areas of concern and sort them out from the beginning. There are some financial issues that may be hard to forecast, such as fly-by-nighters, who depart stealthily leaving fellow flatmates with unpaid bills and an unoccupied room to fill. This can be alleviated by an up-front security deposit, in addition to what is required by the landlord, but it does add to the expense of house sharing (Mause, 2008).

Differences in income can create problems with those better-off unable to appreciate the fiscal constraints of the less affluent, such as getting upset at unnecessary electricity waste. The financial advantage of sharing may go a long way towards promoting tolerance for fellow housemates. Tolerance, patience and a predisposition or

willingness to understand others' points of view and compromise are essential to a functional flat.

Who will clean the toilet?

Collective research on shared housing has found domestic chores to be the major source of conflict (Baum, 1986; Heath & Kenyon, 2001; Williamson, 2006; Mause, 2008). Questions as to who will put out the refuse, wash the dishes or clean the toilet are vital in communal living (Mause, 2008). Much hinges on individuals' interpretations of what constitutes an acceptable standard of hygiene with bathrooms and kitchens particularly contentious areas. The chances of a slob and a fastidious person coming to a compromise are slim, and order in one household may seem like chaos in another. Very often the pattern is one of resentment building up to a major clean-up and then a gradual decline into a mess and a repeat pattern (Natalier, 2003a). Baum (1986) concluded that flats operating on a roster were more likely to be successful: resentment and guilt are based on the undeniable fact that someone is failing to complete assigned duties rather than generalised assertions that some are doing less than others. However, commitment is essential and some people loathe regimentation. Williamson (2006) concluded that a roster may seem like democracy to some but oppression to others, reputedly undermining personal responsibility, autonomy and independence, highlighting the contradiction inherent in flatting, where independence entails interdependence. Success is possible if all members are flexible, happy with the system adopted and problems are discussed and resolved before tensions become unmanageable.

The communal larder

Most flats share goods such as coffee, tea, milk, bread and toilet paper bought from a communal kitty. However, any deduction from these pooled resources, leaving less for others is always a potential problem. Many share preparation and cooking of evening meals, shop together for these, or rotate household shopping. But householders may have different tastes and there is no certainty that all will share shopping and cooking. Mause (2008) discusses the concept of 'the early bird catches the worm', in which some flatmates ruthlessly plunder limited resources leaving others hungry or forced to spend limited finances to sustain themselves. Others prepare all their own meals with their own stocks in separate (sometimes locked) cupboards, but housemates may

covertly loot a private stock or 'borrow' food without replacing it. Locked bedrooms with exclusive supplies and mutual distrust arising from many of these scenarios are not conducive to household success.

Communal dining

Food and eating is an integral part of daily life, especially in the domestic sphere. Williamson (2005) examined the importance of the everyday organisation (acquiring, preparing, cooking and washing up after meals) of flat food, in contributing to the maintenance or breakdown of social relationships within shared households. She quotes Sahlins' (1972, p. 215) view that the reciprocity, nurturing and exchange process of cooking for others is 'a delicate barometer... of social relations'. Arrangements about food can vary greatly from flat to flat. Williamson found that the greater the connection and intimacy between flatmates, the more likelihood there was of a shared food system. However, responsibility for food preparation can also promote antagonism.

Other common problems

Some householders may consume more electricity, hot water and broadband than others. Unlike food depletion this is less likely to be noticed until bills arrive and all housemates have to collectively bear the expense. Any attempts to police these matters may not be well received. Free-loading, parasitic friends or partners who use communal resources without contributing can also cause conflict. Noise, borrowing flatmates' belongings without asking, pets, the battle of the sexes, and children are among other issues that can result in dissention (Heath & Kenyon, 2001; Mause, 2008).

In Baum's (1986) study there were two situations in which several participants related difficulties. One was an uneven power balance, most commonly reported when one flatmate owned the house. An unacceptable assumption of authority was also found in long term residents, the furniture owners, or the sole leaseholder. Heath and Cleaver (2003) reported similar findings. Although not always the case, these are potential destabilisers. The second problem occurs when flatmates have different expectations of each other, not only by way of chores but the level of closeness and socialisation required.

Although the pitfalls are numerous, many live in successful shared households (Heath & Cleaver, 2003). People can learn from early experiences and the unintended consequences of their own interactions and they can subsequently improve overall decision making. Consequently, it makes sense to continue the search for potential factors that may ensure communal survival, while acknowledging that shared households vary and one set of rules may not necessarily work for individual households (Mause, 2008). A dysfunctional flat can have negative mental health implications for all, with emotional conflict in interpersonal relationships quite common (Ahrentzen, 2003). Where the Baum (1986), Ahrentzen (2003), and Williamson (2006) studies fall short is the failure to enlarge on the breakdown of interpersonal relationships, and how and why they occur, merely noting that when people cannot relate to each other, the inevitable outcome is moving out. These issues need to be interrogated if we are to understand more clearly the social dynamics of flatting.

Personalities

Flats work best when there are no major personality clashes. Participants in Baum's (1986) study agreed that you do not know someone until you live with them and choosing flatmates is not an exact science. Qualities such as appearance and voice are easy to establish but an applicant's true characteristics and (un-)willingness to cooperate are not immediately apparent. Miller (1999) suggested that it is the little things in daily life that can result in the biggest contention. Interpersonal relationships can change over time (Mause, 2008). Having the same basic moral, ethical and political values with common interests are conducive to an amicable household, as are similar ages and coming from similar backgrounds. Preferences for living with people very similar to themselves were conclusively evident in my earlier research (Clark & Tuffin, 2015). Essentially, small group dynamics pertain to house sharing but are intensified by the close proximity of living together.

Interpersonal relationships in groups

The need to belong is fundamental to human nature and is believed to be essential for optimal psychological functioning, identity construction and self-esteem (Brewer, 1991; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Rozmarin, 2009; Easterbrook & Vignoles, 2013). Maslow (1968) rated love and belonging in the middle of his hierarchy of needs, after basic

physiological needs and security. Considerable thought, emotion and behaviour are conditioned and exerted by the motive to belong. Giddens (1987) suggested that a sense of belonging was an important route to ontological security (a stable mental state gained from order, continuity and trust) in modern societies, but was also derived from sources other than the home, such as work or social group membership. Group membership is protective in threatening times.

Interpersonal intimacy research is commonly approached from a dyadic perspective and, until recently, relatively little was known about group relations outside of organizational research. The size of the group determines whether the group is relational (group of friends) based on interactions, interdependence, and intimacy, or collective (religious, political, ethnic groupings), where interaction between all group members is impossible and personal relationships are not required (Harb & Smith, 2008). Social psychological analysis of group relations and processes has historically been studied within the social identity theory tradition. Social identity refers to a person's sense of who they are, based on a self-definition of their distinctive category membership(s) (Tajfel, 1981, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Perceived membership in a social group is constructed through the cognitive process of self-categorisation or stereotyping of self and others. Social identity theory and self-categorization developed as a reaction to mainstream psychology's focus on the individual (Harb & Smith, 2008). Individuals are defined in terms of shared similarities with members of specific social categories and intergroup comparisons with other social categories ('us' versus 'them') (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987). Individuals typically adopt several social identities, for example wife, mother, librarian, New Zealander, etc. The consequent depersonalised perception based on group prototype, rather than the complex and multidimensional nature of humans, is related to self-perception as a group member and having an increased sense of group solidarity (Turner et al., 1987; Hogg, Cooper-Shaw & Holzworth, 1993). Not only are social categorisations evaluative but they also dictate normative behaviour, making the collective processes of social life possible (Deaux & Martin, 2003; Harb & Smith, 2008). Individual interpersonal attraction has long been considered a major influence on group cohesion but researchers are now confident that interpersonal and group based attractions are different dimensions. Hogg, Cooper-Shaw and Holzworth (1993) proposed that

social attraction differs from interpersonal attraction and is not related to group cohesiveness. However, group based depersonalised social attraction and interpersonal attraction can co-exist. Deaux and Martin (2003) claim that both operate in interpersonal groups.

Easterbrook and Vignoles (2013) proposed that the social identity perspective suggests that feelings of belonging in different types of groups arise from perceptions of intragroup similarity, prototypicality, and group homogeneity. Acceptance as a member of a group is based on the degree to which one is accepted and supported, with differing levels of inclusiveness (Harb & Smith, 2008). Consequently, identity can be affirmed or diminished. Those who feel included do not have a high need for assimilation, but for those who feel excluded, the need can be maximal (Brewer, 1991). Experiments jeopardizing participants' inclusion within groups indicate that intense efforts are made to reaffirm membership through heightened perceptions of group homogeneity, especially among those with a strong need to belong. Among the latter, impediments to belonging can result in negative outcomes, such as anxiety, jealousy, loneliness, and depression. Such negative effects as well as the frequently reported positive consequences on well-being of social group membership make understanding the generation of feelings of belonging important (Pickett, Bonner, & Coleman, 2002). Group liking is increased for those who have a positive attitude towards the group. The more prototypical a member is, the more s/he is liked and consequently this increases a sense of belonging.

Easterbrook and Vignoles (2013) suggest that although feelings of belonging can be gained from perceptions of group homogeneity and self prototypicality, these processes may be less applicable in different types of groups or social networks with different dynamics. Little attention has been devoted to investigating different types of groups. Barker (1991) has argued that there is a paucity of systematic investigation into behaviour dimensions in interpersonal intimacy issues in small groups. Feelings of belonging are more likely to derive from relationships among individual group members, than categorical perceptions of homogeneity and typicality. Intimate relationships with a degree of interdependence provide greater satisfaction than mere group membership (Easterbrook & Vignoles, 2013). Shared households represent a unique, complex and intimate small group matrix. Satisfying a feeling of belonging is twofold: 1) frequent,

pleasant interactions with a few other people; 2) such interactions must occur in a comparatively stable, co-operative and in an enduring context of concern for each other's welfare. Approval and some intimacy are prerequisites for the formation and maintenance of social bonding, but the formation of these takes time (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

In small groups, interpersonal relationships are a key issue but it is possible to identify common obstacles important to all group communication. Whereas organizational groups invariably centre around a leader (vertical), in flatting everyone is presumed to be on an equal footing (horizontal). Early work on group intimacy functioning, still currently valued, is that of Bennis and Shepard (1956). Drawing on Bion's (1948) conceptualisation of different personality characteristics operating subliminally in groups, they proposed that the functioning of any group is contingent upon the composition of individual personalities in a group with two different forms of personal orientation. One group is geared towards over-personal interaction while the other is more interested in counter-personal relations. Both approaches are tactics used to protect and bolster self-esteem. This theory preempts both Baum's (1986) and Brown's (1992) findings that desired levels of intimacy in shared households differ. Incompatible assumptions can result in a gridlock.

Barker (1991) argues that Bennis and Shepard (1956) rely too heavily on personality factors rather than behaviour dimensions, and neglect the interactive effect of personality issues and group processes, invoking Aristotle's (trans 1933) notion of *the whole is greater than the sum of its parts*. In addition, Bennis and Shepard (1956) fail to address questions of the norms defining boundaries for group intimacy. Barker (1991) regards boundaries as a product of initial preferences and group process. To this end, Barker distinguishes between two group processes. Primary group relationships are personal, with much face-to-face interaction, emotional displays, less self-interest, interdependence and collective orientation. These group members know a lot about and are interested in each other. Self-disclosure can contribute significantly to group functioning. Secondary groups are superficial, tend to show and expect less emotion and are more self-serving. Tying in with Hardin's (1968) theory of putting one's own interests above the collective, this suggests that primary groups are more likely to function effectively in shared accommodation.

Indeed, along with in-group similarity, one of the most common threads in the literature on functioning in any group environment is the disparate desire for personal affiliation or closeness. Flattering is a context in which the desire for warm social relationships can be satisfied. However, the extent to which this desire is met influences behaviour and attitudes towards others and shapes the complex interpersonal dynamics of the group. According to Chun and Choi (2014), group members with high affiliation needs avoid conflict as much as possible in an attempt to develop and maintain relationships with others, which very often serves as a neutral buffer in situations of friction. Strong positive connections can enhance human well-being but too much negative interaction can be alienating and undermine group functioning. Those with lower needs for affiliation are less anxious about tension and consideration for others. They can be regarded as rude and blunt in attitude and this can result in emotional clashes and intragroup conflict. Consequently a mutual awareness of other people's needs is beneficial to group harmony. Whereas open communication can be valuable it can also result in a negative spiral.

More recent studies, such as the meta-analysis of de Wit, Greer and Jehn (2012) of 118 group studies, identify three types of group conflicts. Relationship conflicts involve disagreements about interpersonal issues involving personality issues or differences in norms and values, such as what constitutes acceptable hygienic standards. This type of conflict can have harmful effects on groups through threats to individual self-concepts, increased anxiety and hostility and lack of trust. Under these circumstances conflict resolution is difficult to achieve. Task conflicts refer to problems with tasks performed but this friction is more easily managed, providing emotions do not gain the upper hand. Process conflicts often carry connotations of a personal nature, which could hinder group viability. For example, a group member may consider s/he is not respected or consider certain tasks, such as dish washing or toilet cleaning, beneath his/her dignity. All forms of conflict can reduce group morale and produce negative outcomes but can be reversed through effective resolution. Conflict resolution has better outcomes if directed specifically at overcoming a problem rather than emotional blaming of individuals: raw emotion seldom trounces argument and articulation. Co-operative resolution enhances group cohesion (Griffith, Connolly & Thiel, 2014).

Group cohesion has been defined as a positive bond, and as an engagement, attraction and/or attachment to the group as a whole. Studies in group psychological treatment have found that stronger group cohesion is also related to increased investment and commitment to the group and reduced attrition. Unfortunately, bonding in groups is often the result of targeting and victimising a particular member who is used as a scapegoat for the group's problems (Gallagher, Tasca, Ritchie, Balfour & Bissada, 2014).

Intimate relations in small groups are all subject to issues of power, practical necessity and needs (Barker, 1991). In shared accommodation caring is by no means guaranteed and in traditionally acknowledged intimacy, conflict and violence is not unknown. In groups where more than one individual seeks power, significant friction can result. Demanding personalities work better with submissive individuals (Chun & Choi, 2014). But how does dominance play a role in the intimate setting of shared living, where all members are presumed to be equal? As noted before, house owners, long-time flat residents or furniture owners can destabilise equality in some situations. In issues of power, existing flat membership often carries more power as these flatmates have been involved in establishing the routine and rules, and rules inevitably favour those who make them.

Conclusion

In this chapter three models for understanding group dynamics of shared living were discussed: Natalier (2003a) invokes Turner's (1974) theory of liminality and communitas; Heath (2004b) draws on Maffesoli's (1996) neo-tribal theory and Mause (2008) employs Hardin's tragedy of the commons. Whereas all are viable, I have proposed that communitarianism could greatly add to understanding the social dynamics of shared living. I then outlined the limited extant literature dealing with shared household dynamics and concluded with a brief discussion on small group dynamics. The following chapter is devoted to the methodology chosen for the current study.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

It is unfortunate that the practice of listening generally has no place in the formal training of scientists. In this absence science needlessly fails.

Haskell: The forest unseen

A man can only attain knowledge with the help of those who possess it.

George Gurdjieff: In Search of the miraculous by P.D. Ouspensky

Introduction

The aim of this study is to contribute to knowledge of shared household living among young adults by investigating the social dynamics of this lifestyle. In this chapter I will outline the methodology employed, beginning with the conceptual framework. In order to defend the methodology of discourse analysis it is necessary to understand social constructionism and the turn to language as a focus for social psychological research. Thereafter, the practical method of going about the study will be discussed in detail from the design of the study, through to the recruitment of participants, context, procedure, participants' details, and ethical considerations. Finally the analytic procedure is outlined.

Conceptual framework

The tenets of critical social psychology underpin this research, employing discourse analysis as a methodology, within the paradigm of social constructionism. In order to justify the research mode and objectives it is important to explain the underlying assumptions, values and philosophy that are made about the fundamental nature of knowledge (epistemology) and what constitutes reality (ontology) (Tuffin, 2005). Epistemology informs methodology and profoundly affects research design, data collection and analysis, and how research results are presented. The underlying epistemology needs to be embedded in all these stages (Crotty, 1998).

In an attempt to legitimise the discipline as a science, psychology adopted a quantitative empiricist approach to research: acquisition of knowledge is achieved by detached, neutral (value free) observation and experiments to test already held theories (hypotheses), where data can be measured. This method is underpinned by assumptions that knowledge is stable, does not change and the quest for absolute truth or reality

(Stainton Rogers, Stenner, Gleeson, & Stainton Rogers, 1995). The purpose of such knowledge is to generate general laws based on correlational explanations for human behaviour using statistical tests. These laws are used as a basis for predicting psychological phenomena (Greenwood, 1989).

Critics of traditional quantitative, empiricist research have argued that the subject content of psychology is vastly different to that of the physical sciences: epistemological assumptions underlying the study of natural sciences cannot be presumed to be true for the complexity of human psychological phenomena (Martin & Sugarman, 2001; Gough & Lyons, 2016). Consequently, qualitative researchers seek to describe and interpret aspects of human behaviour through the words of informants (Heath, 1997). Who can describe the complicated intimacy of shared residential living better than flatters themselves? By recognising the subjectivity and agency of participants with insider knowledge and by accepting a diversity of responses, the unanticipated can be heard (Marecek, 2003). Qualitative studies enable researchers to examine the maintenance of social practices and processes and identify impediments to facilitate change (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Qualitative researchers are frequently cognisant of the political power embedded in everyday language and seek creative ways to provide socially responsible knowledge (Gough & Lyons, 2016).

Social constructionism

Drawing on postmodernism, social constructionist epistemology questions the authority of empiricism and the notion that universal assumptions can be made and generalised across all humans (O'Connor & Hallam, 2000). The postmodernist approach views the self as a fluid, ongoing process with multiple selves continually constructed and articulated in changing relationships. Social constructionists endeavour to understand a world that is not ready made and stable over time, but which is malleable and constantly being constructed and mediated by language. This ontology proposes that the nature of reality or knowledge is a product or joint construction of shared cultural and historically contingent contextual meanings, usually in a particular geographic location that are constituted in the perpetual flow of social life and communicated through language (Coyle, 1995). Constructionist epistemology, therefore, regards knowledge as a social product with no single reality or truth (Burr, 2015).

However, this stance is subject to some criticism. Realists, critical of social constructionism, maintain that since this relativist notion accepts that every person constructs their own world, then all and every view is equally valid and there can be no objective moral standards. Edwards, Ashmore and Potter (1995) refute this accusation of moral poverty, termed the relativist dilemma, by arguing that reality is not independent of language. Physical objects, such as stones, do exist but acquire meaning through discourse: a stone can be a valuable diamond or an impediment in your shoe. Adhering exclusively to a particular view, such as the scientific research paradigm, does not warrant it being regarded as the only valid truth: it is impossible to acquire an objective, precise knowledge of the world (Potter, 1996; Gergen, 1999). Any account that claims to have the sole mandate on truth, explanation or interpretation is suspect as there are many viable, competing, alternative accounts (Edwards & Potter, 1992). Certainly there is a moral trajectory in considering who holds the power to determine the definitive truth and silence alternative forms of knowledge. Who judges what is a vice or a virtue, normal or deviant?

The other major criticism of social constructionism is its exclusive focus on language for meaning-making, without consideration of materiality and the recognition that bodies are discursive: non-verbal gestures and corporeal activities such as posture, facial expression, hesitations, pauses and tone of voice are obvious examples of paralinguistic semiotic devices which may modify illocutionary force (Holmes, 1984). Critics argue that if cognitive psychologists narrowed their scope to internal states and processes, then similarly social constructionists fail to pay enough attention to extra-textual forms of discourse (Shotter, 1993; Lyons & Cromby, 2010). Hook (2001) suggests that this overempowers language, without taking into consideration communication not expressed linguistically. Nevertheless, a good transcription does incorporate hesitations, pauses, change in tone and significant gestures.

Hook (2003) acknowledges that what qualifies as knowledge is seldom objective or neutral. Human subjectivity is fundamental to the exercise of political agendas of social control and disciplinary power, disguised in the apparently neutral language of science, and endorsed by professional specialists and experts. Each person lives within a milieu of socio-cultural relationships and their personal views will reflect the ideologies and institutional teachings of the period and place they inhabit (McGarty & Haslam, 1997).

Social practices are therefore constructed within constraining ideological perspectives. Ideology refers to the subjugating ways of thinking, behaviour, and beliefs in a culture, which are passed off as common sense by firmly entrenched power structures, and through which inequalities in society appear natural and incontestable, thus maintaining the status quo (Parker, 1992; Shelby, 2003). People at the apex of the social hierarchy have a vested interest in the reproduction of a world that favours them. Ideologies are often deeply rooted in discourses, making embedded inequitable power relations difficult to detect, challenge and dismantle (Billig, 1997; Fairclough, 2015). Personal narratives are repressed by the rhetoric of dominant narratives that often pathologise and problematise non-conformist behaviour.

Discourse analysis

Discursive psychologists regard language as the pivotal focus of inquiry and examine how people make sense of their world and themselves by employing hegemonic, pre-existing discourses that are available within their culture at a particular historical time (Coyle, 1995). All spoken and written material is construed as text, which can be subject to discourse analysis. 'Discourse' refers to patterns of coherent meanings, metaphors, images and statements that enable intersubjectivity between humans. Critical social psychologists reconceptualise social life as language use, moving the study of psychological processes from the endogenous mental interior into the field of linguistic practice and exogenous social interaction (Wetherell, 1996). There are a number of ways in which I could have researched shared households among young adults in New Zealand. Discourse analysis was chosen to examine talk about flatting as all experience and every human psychological phenomenon is integrated and interpreted in and through language. Human behaviour and social processes cannot be understood if separated from language (Harris, 1988).

Types of discourse analysis

Two main trends of discourse analysis can be distinguished. Discursive Psychology evolved from developments in linguistic philosophy, semiotics, ethnomethodology, conversation analysis, literary criticism and rhetorical work in psychology (Starks & Trinidad, 2007; Wiggins & Potter, 2008). This micro level approach is primarily concerned with discursive practices: ways in which speakers in everyday life construct meaning, reality, identity and responsibility, allowing fine grained analysis of the action

orientation of talk (e.g., Edwards & Potter, 1992). Through talk, humans give meaning to their lives and relationships, enact their identities, such as being polite, kind, intelligent, uncertain, unbiased, and so on. Language is thus viewed as active and a medium to accomplish practical tasks, such as accusing, judging, justifying, rejecting, praising and excusing, which are achieved in subtle and not-so-subtle, everyday talk (Weeks, Heaphy, & Donovan, 2001). Further, there are multiple ways of 'being' in the world at different times, depending on the place, purpose and circumstance: for example, student, Kiwi, brother, father, plumber, golfer etc. All of these fluid states of identity and the language associated with them are conducted according to cultural rules and conventions that determine who acts appropriately or normally (Gee, 2011). Gee uses the analogy of playing games and draws heavily on Wittgenstein's (1953) notion of language games as social practices involving tacit collective assumptions. If you do not conform and break the rules, you are either not playing the game correctly or are attempting to change the rules. Winners are those who gain acceptance and the losers are those who do not, with important social outcomes. Winners can also position others as winners or losers. The language we use directly affects the behaviour of others, just as their language influences us (Wittgenstein, 1953).

Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) affords a critical approach to investigating social psychological issues based on the philosophy of Foucault, Barthes and Derrida (Parker & Burman, 1993; Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008). Gee (2011) argues that all discourse analysis needs to be critical, given that all language is inherently political involving the potential for distribution of social goods. FDA focuses on the relationship between language, knowledge, power and resistance, and the ways in which certain versions of reality, society and identity are constructed (Faith, 1994; Willig, 2008). Concerns about domination and subordination, associated with the intellectual traditions of Marxism and Feminism, are drawn on. At a macro or Foucauldian level, the discourses available to us act as a conduit for, and maintenance of, cultural mores, ideologies and social practices and institutions of all kinds, limiting what we can think and say and setting boundaries for joint relations (Burr, 2015). This subjective approach analyses how the social production of knowledge, by various sources of power, is expressed and embedded in language, and consequently remains diffuse and invisible. By coincidence, the familialist discourse example that Parker (1992) employs is relevant to this research. This discourse assumes, as natural, normal and universal, relationships

operating within the heterosexual nuclear family and the standard against which all other ways of living should be measured. This does not mean that humans are simply carriers of extrinsic constraining factors without agency: wherever there is power, there is resistance (Faith, 1994; Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008). Both the discursive psychology and FDA approaches demonstrate that talk always represents more than its superficial content.

Discourse analysis must accomplish certain objectives (Wetherell, 1998; Gee, 2011):

- i) advance understanding and illuminate why and how language works as performing actions;
- ii) demonstrate skill in historical and cultural commentary;
- iii) contribute an understanding of important issues;
- iv) open up new lines of enquiry and possibilities for intervention.

Harmful social practices are legitimated through language, rendering us morally complicit with injustice unless we try to rectify this by spotlighting the source of problems and promoting possibilities for change (Gee, 2011). Since people have different access to different identities, which are enacted in and through language, the study of language is integrally connected to matters of equality and justice. Language is the site of struggles and resistance. For example, women, homosexuals and people of colour exist in a world dominated by teleological white, male, heterosexual discourses. People are disadvantaged by dominant discourses and ideologies that empower some and disempower others. These must be interrogated since the disadvantaged are least able to challenge the economic and political resources of the elite. Those in power have a vested interest in maintaining their influence and through language are able to justify their privileges in favour of individual circumstances or cultural explanations, whereby differences are linked to meritocracy, egalitarianism and the Protestant work ethic, rather than group membership (Augoustinos, Tuffin & Every, 2005; Verkuyten, 2005).

Hastie and Cosh (2013) remind us that conditions that constitute any potential accusations of discrimination are ambiguous, making them far from straightforward. For example, the practice/principle dilemma (Billig, et al., 1988; Wetherell & Potter, 1992; Wetherell, Steven & Potter, 1987) involves the co-articulation of competing discourses with the importance of broad principles being undermined by talk addressing the

practicalities of the situation. Wetherell, Stiven and Potter (1987) studied discussions about gender and employment opportunities and demonstrated how the principle of equal employment opportunities was diluted by the idea that the principle would be compromised by practical considerations such as the biological inevitability of women taking time-off for child-bearing.

Thus, discourse analysis offers the opportunity to understand the dynamics of power relations between groups and individuals, subjectivity, knowledge and social practice (Parker, 1992). At micro- and macro-levels, the cultural, political and economic ideologies and social conditioning that powerfully affect lives can be discerned, and can demonstrate how mundane talk is fundamentally linked to, constitutes, and maintains broader social processes. Discourses can either reproduce or challenge dominant ways of understanding the world and the status quo of social order (Parker, 1992). Discourse analysis opens up the possibility for change by identifying harmful linguistic practices (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). For example, discursive psychologists have demonstrated the central role of language in all forms of prejudice and maintenance of oppression, despite the decrease of overt discrimination (Collins & Clement, 2012; Augoustinos & Every, 2007; Tuffin & Clark, 2016). Language is employed to promote harmony or conflict in social situations, such as flating, and this has consequences. The purpose is not to focus on or blame individuals but to understand the frameworks of meanings that are reproduced in conversation (Burman, 1991). At the same time, discourses can also provide evidence of the complex processes of changing lifestyles that impact on and are potently influenced by young lives (Weeks, Heaphy, & Donovan, 2001).

Analytic approach

My analytic approach primarily draws on Potter and Wetherell's (1987) consideration of the function, variation and construction of talk. Examining the particular linguistic devices employed in the production of talk enables us to identify the interactional function that is being accomplished (Tuffin & Howard, 2001). How do speakers generate accounts that appear factual? What is taken for granted as factual? What social activity is achieved by the talk? What rhetorical strategies are used to undermine any likely criticism, disbelief or alternative versions? The function of discourse emphasises the action/outcome orientation of discourse. By examining the variation employed in talk, the function of the language used can be determined. Discourses will vary according to

the objective of the speaker. To understand what is being achieved by a particular discourse and how it is accomplished requires intense examination of text.

Discourses are not simply analysed in terms of their particular use in immediate contexts. FDA, as advocated in Parker's (1992) notion of power relations and resistance, was employed, where applicable. Ideologies operating in discourses are studied to determine a) the unstated assumptions as taken-for-granted common sense, and b) what is being challenged. For example, it has earlier been argued (Heaphy, Weeks, & Donovan, 2001) that the traditional notion of 'family', with all its connotations of being the right way to live, is being resisted by modern families of choice.

Davies and Harré's (1990) subject positioning was also considered in the analysis. This is the way people position themselves or reject imposed positions in talk as they consciously or unintentionally produce a persona in a particular conversation. The ways people position themselves, others, or are positioned by others have social purposes and regulatory functions with expectations about appropriate behaviour, which often legitimate the power of dominant groups. For example, young flatters often have to deal with landlords, and the relative position of power that the landlord has can make life difficult for responsible renters with legitimate grievances, especially given the stereotyping of students. Thus, discourses entail subject positions adopted by individuals, which entitle them or dictate what is expected from them (Davies & Harré, 1990). At a deeper underlying level, subject positioning is about the distribution of social goods in society: who is accorded money, status and power.

In this study, the technical tools of conversation analysis are harnessed as an analytic resource (Korobov, 2001): common rhetorical devices are identified and their function explained. For example, one common tactic is a disclaimer, in which a speaker pre-empts any negative perceptions that could be attributed to what is being said before any accusations, of, for example, unkindness or sexism, can be made. Typically, beginning with "I am not a sexist/racist but..." are disclaimers, which function as impression management strategies defensively employed, while nevertheless enabling viewpoints to be expressed (van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983; Augostinos & Every, 2007).

Whereas it may seem contradictory to eclectically combine different approaches, there are overlaps between the different types of discourse analysis as well as conversation analysis: they are complementary and can be adapted, modified, and synthesised for the research purpose. Parker (1992) maintains that every discourse analytic researcher needs to go through their own process to arrive at an appropriate method: sensitivity to language is more important than any definitive steps.

In the process of analysis, researchers must take responsibility for their subjective part in the construction of meaning. Consequently, discourse analysis involves being critically and reflexively self-aware of one's own bias, power and influence on the research process and interpretation of the data (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Rubin & Babbie, 2013). All investigators are deeply engaged in their research process, perhaps more so than they are conscious of or would care to admit (Billig, 1997). For this reason, Potter (1997) has long favoured a focus on naturalistic material for analysis. That is, data that is derived from natural settings that would have occurred entirely independently of the researcher, such as courtroom trials, doctor/patient interactions, calls to helplines, classroom talk, etc.

Potter and Hepburn (2005) contend that the question formulations, expectations, perceptions, attitudes and assumptions of the researcher are underestimated and pervasive in the interview research process. However, this could be equally argued for the analysis of naturalistic materials by a researcher. In addition, if discursive psychologists advocate that all talk is context contingent, the absence of the researcher from the immediate context leaves room for questions about the accuracy of analysis. The distinction between naturally occurring data and interviews is exaggerated and depends largely on the phenomena being studied, how it is to be studied and what the researcher intends to do with the data (Speer, 2002; ten Have, 2002). Imposing a particular viewpoint is tantamount to intellectual hegemony (Wetherell, 1998). Interview material is not necessarily invalidated or of less value, as data can be hugely insightful, beneficial and valuable, but it depends on how interviews are conducted. Wide, on-going debate among discursive psychologists and conversation analysts about non-neutral or artificially construed data from interviews and prioritisation of naturalistic data continues (Griffin, 2007).

Criticism and defence of discourse analysis

Not surprisingly, discourse analysis as a strategy of enquiry is not without criticism. Burman (1991) warns that radical approaches risk the reproduction of mistakes of traditional methods they critique: discourse analysis is subject to its own theoretical and conceptual problems. For example, although the analytic tools of discourse analysis can be used to interrogate political and social practices and reveal mechanisms of power, there is a danger that it allows researchers to proselytise their own non-neutral political agenda. However, this study was undertaken in the spirit of open inquiry with little preconceived notions as to the outcomes.

Denscombe (2007) points out that a discourse analyst's interpretation relies largely on the insights of the researcher, but it can be argued that by transparently incorporating the raw data into the analysis, readers can come to their own conclusions as to the interpretation. Those critical of discourse analysis in terms of the hegemonic empiricist validity, reliability and generalisability need to be reminded that such concepts are inconsistent with the nature of constructionist epistemology: discourse analysis looks at the structure, content, function and effect of language to provide insight (Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001).

Another recurring criticism of discourse analysis is that it lacks a systematic research methodology. There are many different approaches to discourse analysis (Gee & Handford, 2012). None can be argued to be uniquely wrong or right, and the boundaries between them are porous, with both similarities and differences. Wetherell, Taylor and Yates (2001) maintain that discourse analysis should be viewed as a field of research, rather than a discrete method, or a scholarly orientation (Locke, 2004). Although they have different focal points, all approaches share the common underlying philosophy that language does not neutrally reflect our world, identities or social relationships, but is actively instrumental in creating them (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Some discourse analysts, such as Parker (1992), argue that resorting to any standard formulaic method will result in a limited understanding of the multiplicity and complexity of meanings. What is essential is that the method is sensitive to hearing as much as possible from the participants (Korobov, 2001). Gee (2011) admits to borrowing and mixing others' theories and tools and changing them to suit his own needs as they are applied in

practice. Consequently, these are thought-provoking tools, to be adapted to the analyst's own purpose.

Nevertheless, to the novice, there are a somewhat bewildering range of different techniques within this broad field. All paradigms for eliciting information about human phenomena are epistemologically and evidentially questionable, but criticism is valuable as it evokes critical thinking, considered responses and awareness of pitfalls to be avoided (Burman, 1991).

It should be noted here that within discourse analysis not only are there different approaches to transcription detail and text analysis but terminology also varies. Potter and Wetherell (1987) use the term interpretative repertoires to refer to the detailed interpretative social constructive practices that go into building a discourse on a particular occasion using clusters of terms, metaphors and other figures of speech to perform a particular function. This notion of interpretive repertoires is similar to the notion of discursive resources being "recurrently used systems of terms used for characterizing and evaluating actions, events and other phenomena constituted through a limited range of terms used in particular stylistic and grammatical constructions" and are "often organized around specific metaphors and figures of speech (tropes)" (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 149). Parker (1992) has been criticised for simply using the terms discourses or repertoires. I prefer the simplicity of discourses, while acknowledging the complexity of how discourses are deployed.

Analytic procedure

Analysis of text is an extremely time consuming, labour intensive, continuous process with multiple readings of the transcripts being essential. This part of the research took many months before I was satisfied that I had done justice to the depth of the data, especially since an enormous amount of material was generated by the interviews. Once again there is no specific procedure for coding material. Initially I searched for recurring instances in the data and grouped text fragments according to specific subject content. For example, whether to flat with family or friends; to share meals or not; dealing with conflict; the attributes of desirable or undesirable flatmates, etc. Topics are very often a complex intertwined network, with discourses entailing and overlapping each other and very difficult to separate. A fellow student aptly refers to this process as trying to

disentangle a can of earthworms. For the purpose of analysis, it is often necessary to artificially separate tracts even if some fall within multiple categories.

A surprising number of aspects of shared housing were apparent in the talk: I have presented the dominant discourses. For the purposes of clarification, I listed all these categories separately and then searched for common themes, tropes, metaphors and words that appeared repeatedly. I colour coded each of these to facilitate concentration on one aspect at a time. Once this initial coding was organised, a start was made on analysing the language used. Every nuance needs to be examined, especially contradictions, irregularities and tensions in statements. From this lengthy process the final product is drawn. Essentially, it is a process of decontextualisation, where data is separated from the original context and then recontextualised or reintegrated around central discourses (Starks & Trinidad, 2007; Fairclough, 2015). During the process some early categories were discarded or integrated with others.

Method

Design and recruitment of participants:

Data for this study was obtained from semi-structured interviews with seven flat groups and 14 one-on-one interviews. Interviews offer unique and fertile potential for generating data, allowing for quasi-authentic, natural interaction and affording insight into how meanings are constructed (Krueger & Casey, 2009). The primary goal was to generate rich, complex accounts of how people describe their flatting experiences, which is impossible to produce from questionnaires. The object of interviewing flat members as a group was to allow for mutual support, synergy and building on each other's ideas in the co-construction of the shared experiences, or, conversely, to allow for disagreement and offering of alternative realities (Parker, 1992). However, interviewing people as a group has both positive and negative aspects. Whereas spontaneity can be enhanced, the major drawback is the potential for conforming and censoring. A group participant may adjust their outlook to that of the group or suppress their own perceptions (Carey & Smith, 1994).

Semi-structured interviews entail several key, open-ended questions that define the topic to be examined but also allow for the researcher to digress in order to explore an area that might not have been anticipated. Potentially, participants are able to influence the

agenda (Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008). For example, after initially hearing that a single person was averse to flatting with couples, I pursued this line of enquiry.

The original intention was to interview willing participants from these seven flat groups on an individual basis. It was believed that such individuals might be more forthcoming about tensions. Unfortunately, no group participants volunteered for an individual interview. However, a few city group interviews turned into individual interviews, when flatmates were indisposed at the time of the interview. In one case, the reason for this was obviously tension within the household. In addition, some participants approached were keen to take part in the study, but were only comfortable with a one-on-one interview and not in a group. These additional individual interviews yielded considerable material and for the most part were long and detailed. Such breadth was sometimes difficult to evoke in some flat group interviews. For this reason, the initial plan to hold two focus groups of people from different flatting households was abandoned.

Participants were required to be between the ages of 20 and 35, with at least one year's flatting experience and fluent in English. Participants were purposefully recruited by word of mouth. For example, on hearing of my interest in flatting, acquaintances often suggested I interview their flatting children or colleagues. Contact was made through the intermediary providing a phone number or e-mail address of an individual in a shared household. The research information sheet (see Appendix A) was e-mailed to the contact, who discussed it with flatmates, who would in turn decide if they wished to participate in a flat group interview. Frequently flats not keen to be interviewed did not respond to the initial e-mails or subsequent emails were not returned, signifying that participation was unlikely, and accordingly, I did not pursue these contacts. No one emailed to say that they did not want to participate.

Context

Three flat group interviews were conducted in a New Zealand city and four in a provincial North Island town. The motivation in this choice was to increase heterogeneity and also to assess if there were any differences in the flatting styles. The town interviews were conducted in the flatting households in the early evening. To facilitate the process and to thank participants, I provided a take-out meal of their choice. The difficulty of getting all flatmates together at the same time for an interview was

apparent from the many emails to and fro between the prime contact in the flat and myself before a specific date and time could be established. The data does indicate that city flatters tend to have very different schedules, making individual meals more practical than shared meals and group meetings difficult to set up. Consequently, city group interviews were conducted by Skype, which is an extremely effective and mutually safe way of conducting interviews, saving on time and travel costs. Having twice travelled a considerable distance to the city and at substantial cost with disappointing results, Skype was the ideal way of avoiding further costly failure. Nevertheless, even with this precaution, a further planned Skype group interview became an individual interview.

Flatmates in two student households, each with five flatmates, showed considerable initiative by setting up the interview so that everyone could be clearly seen on the screen. One negative to be considered with regard to Skype interviews is that I missed out on physically being in the household. Heath and Cleaver (2004) noted that the presence or absence of emotional closeness of housemates is reflected and intertwined with the spacial and material aspects of the household and can hint at important dimensions of the flatmates. For example, the communal area of an all-male, rural flat I visited was dominated by the biggest couch and TV screen I have ever seen, suggesting their use represented a major leisure pursuit.

Cinema vouchers were sent to Skype participants once interviews were concluded as a thank you for their time and input. Individual participants were also thanked with a cinema voucher and interviews were conducted in neutral settings of the participants' choice. These were either in their homes, by Skype or at a café of their choice. The latter recordings were more difficult to transcribe given the background noise, but the setting put participants at ease and was a great approximation of everyday interaction.

Procedure

All interviews commenced with my thanking participants for agreeing to take part in the research. The rights of participants were reiterated and all were asked if they had any further questions. If consent forms had not already been completed (see Group Form: Appendix B; Individual Form: Appendix C), then this was the next step before gaining some basic information about participants, such as age and occupations. Participants

were informed that once the transcripts were completed, these would be forwarded to them for verification as a true record of what had been said, with the opportunity to ask for some statements to be removed. The recorded interview began with a very general non-threatening question, “Why flat?”, before moving to more complex questions, detailed below. At the end of the interviews I made some general points about what had been discussed and sought clarification of some issues where I was uncertain. The opportunity to view the transcripts and request deletions and changes was subsequently repeated. Only two changes were required: on one occasion I had used the real name of a participant instead of a pseudonym and another participant confirmed that he wanted a particular sentence omitted. The Authority for Release of Transcripts (see Appendix D) was then signed and emailed or posted back to me. A summary of research findings was offered to participants before examination of the thesis (see Appendix F).

Interviews were audio recorded with group interviews videoed as well, since it can be difficult to discern who is talking in a group when transcribing. I transcribed all interviews using an annotated version of the Jeffersonian system (see Appendix E) as found in Wooffitt (1992).

Participants

In total 37 people were interviewed: 14 in individual interviews, and 23 in flat groups. Participants were Pākehā apart from two Māori and two who identify as mixed Māori/Pākehā. Twenty-two were female and 15 were males. All participants were between the ages of 20 and 35 with a mean age of 24. Interviews were conducted until it was deemed that no new information was emerging, indicating that saturation point had been reached. Given the lengthy process of interviews, transcription and analysis, any subsequent interviews would offer diminishing returns, would not enrich the analysis, and therefore would be counterproductive (Ritchie, Lewis & Elam, 2003). The merit of the approach using a relatively small sample lies in the richness of data that can be gained from in-depth discussions and analysis of the data, which was felt to be essential in understanding the dynamics of flatting (Starks & Trinidad, 2007).

Every effort was made to obtain a heterogeneous sample. The elitism of flatting suggested by Heath and Cleaver (2003), and substantiated in New Zealand by Clark and Tuffin (2015) was anticipated as being evident, making the notion of a heterogeneous

sample unrealistic. However, although many participants considered themselves professionals, one flat consisted of tradesmen and in another, all were in retail, with each working two jobs to make ends meet. In addition, some of the data from a previous study (Clark, 2011) was pertinent to the focus for this study and relevant material was included in the current dataset. In accordance with ethical procedures, fresh consent from previous participants was required to include excerpts from their transcripts. Where past participants could not be contacted, their data was not used. One past participant approached for fresh consent offered to be re-interviewed; hence Julie appears twice in the participant details below.

Participant details

| Flat | Location | Pseudonym | Gender | Age | Occupation | Ethnicity |
|------|----------|-----------|--------|-----|-----------------------|-----------|
| 1 | Town | Donna | Female | 20 | Retail | Pākehā |
| | | Kat | Female | 20 | Retail | Māori |
| | | Ngaire | Female | 21 | Retail | Māori |
| 2 | Town | Tamsin | Female | 23 | Personal Assistant | Pākehā |
| | | Meg | Female | 27 | Retail | Pākehā |
| | | Annie | Female | 24 | Midwife | Pākehā |
| | | Claire | Female | 23 | Student | Pākehā |
| 3 | City | Sam | Male | 28 | Administrator | Pākehā* |
| | | Maree | Female | 32 | Community Educator | Pākehā |
| 4 | Town | Ben | Male | 24 | Builder | Pākehā |
| | | Jeff | Male | 28 | Builder | Pākehā |

| | | | | | | |
|---|------|--------|--------|----|-----------------|----------|
| 5 | Town | Susie | Female | 28 | Physiotherapist | Pākehā** |
| | | Mike | Male | 32 | Policeman | Pākehā |
| 6 | City | Noah | Male | 20 | Student | Pākehā |
| | | Jason | Male | 20 | Student | Pākehā |
| | | Owen | Male | 20 | Student | Pākehā |
| | | Miles | Male | 20 | Student | Pākehā |
| | | Aiden | Male | 21 | Student | Pākehā |
| 7 | City | Mathew | Male | 20 | Student | Pākehā |
| | | Amy | Female | 20 | Student | Pākehā |
| | | Emma | Female | 20 | Student | Pākehā |
| | | Greg | Male | 20 | Student | Pākehā |
| | | Paul | Male | 20 | Student | Pākehā |

Individuals

| | | | | | |
|------|--------|--------|----|------------------|-----------------|
| City | Lucy | Female | 34 | Project manager | Pākehā |
| | Max | Male | 25 | Chef | Māori/ Pākehā |
| | Phoebe | Female | 34 | Office Temp | British |
| | Chloe | Female | 21 | Student | Pākehā |
| | Pia | Female | 22 | Postgrad Student | Pākehā |
| | Julie | Female | 31 | Counsellor | British/ Pākehā |
| | Jody | Female | 21 | Student | Māori/ Pākehā |
| | Toni | Female | 20 | Student | Pākehā |
| | Amber | Female | 29 | Researcher | British |
| Town | Lisa | Female | 35 | Call Centre | British |

Honours Participants

| | | | | | |
|------|------|------|----|---------------|--------|
| City | Sean | Male | 21 | Film Industry | Pākehā |
| | Dom | Male | 25 | Army | Pākehā |

| | | | | | |
|------|-------|--------|----|----------------|-------------------|
| | Laura | Female | 30 | Policy Analyst | Pākehā |
| | Julie | Female | 26 | Counsellor | British/Pākehā*** |
| Town | Mary | Female | 30 | Journalist | Pākehā |

* Maree and Sam are a couple. The third flatmate (male) was present during the interview but chose not to participate.

** Susie and Mike are a married couple. The third flatmate (male) arrived during the interview but chose not to participate.

*** Julie was interviewed for both projects.

Interviews

The interviews were in-depth and semi-structured. Data was solicited, when necessary, through pre-determined, open-ended questions listed below. While some participants automatically segued from one area of the research interest to another after the initial question, others needed prompting to continue the discussion with further questions. Discussion was not always limited to the questions and sometimes reflected the participants' particular concerns and realities. Interview times varied between 25 and 75 minutes as some participants spoke at great length.

Questions

- 1) Why flat?
- 2) What are the social advantages of flatting?
- 3) What, in your experience, makes a flat function well?
- 4) How would you describe an ideal flatmate?
- 5) What characteristics do you associate with less than ideal flatmates?
- 6) How do you deal with conflict in your flat?
- 7) How would you explain the flat dynamic? Does the flat dynamic change when new people arrive?

Ethical considerations

All principles of the Massey University Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations involving Human Participants (2013) were adhered to. Prior to the

interviews ethical consent was sought and granted. This project was reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 15/05. This ensured that participants were fully advised of the purpose of the research, its anticipated benefits and their rights regarding the study. Voluntary written consent was obtained from participants who were assured of their right to withdraw from the research process at any time, within 6 weeks of completion of the interview. Participants were informed that they could refuse to answer any questions or ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time. Groups were reminded of the confidentiality of what emerged in discussions and required a different consent form than individual interviews (see Appendix B). Every measure has been taken to ensure sensitivity and privacy, such as using pseudonyms and storing data securely. Particular care is essential when using sound and image recordings. No physical or mental harm to participants was anticipated or indeed detected by the interviews themselves. Authority for the release of transcripts was obtained from participants (see Appendix D).

The safety of both the participants and researcher is important. Whereas I anticipated no danger to myself, steps were taken to curtail any potential problems. For example, I texted my husband the address on entering a flat for interviewing, with the understanding that if I had not texted him after an established time, he should contact me to be sure that all was well. There was a possibility that participants could become upset in the interviews. To this end, information sheets with addresses of places to seek help or follow-up support were offered at the end of a session.

Two individual interviewees became distressed when discussing past bad experiences. One participant frequently alluded to having had a traumatic experience, which compromised her relationship with her flatmate. Once the recorder was turned off, she spoke openly of this and explained how her flatmate was most unsupportive, suggesting that the participant was responsible for her own victimisation. The participant was in counselling at the time. The other upset participant detailed a downward spiral into a life of constant drinking with a P-smoking and violent flatmate. This participant refused to seek counselling (although she had been in counselling at an earlier stage) as she believed herself responsible for her own problems. I dealt with both as best I could by producing tissues and offering something non-alcoholic to drink and asking the second participant if she would like the interview not to be used in the study. She was adamant

that she wanted her story told so that others could learn from her experience of moving in with strangers. Not surprisingly, these were long interviews. It is interesting to note how frequently participants will wait for the recorder to be switched-off before they describe a particularly stressful experience.

Transcription

Transcribing is a lengthy and extremely time-consuming process. I regard transcription as an integral part of the analytic process as it allows intimate familiarity with the fine nuances of the talk, such as audible sounds that are not words, pauses, intonation and pitch. For this reason, I recorded and transcribed all interviews using an annotated Jeffersonian system as found in Wooffitt (1992) (see Appendix G). Such detail may not, perhaps, always be necessary but since transcription is a long process, it made sense to include as much detail as possible to work with.

Some recordings were more difficult to transcribe than others, particularly with background noise, such as coffee machines in cafés. Participants talking over each other in group interviews can be a problem as well as discerning who is speaking in a group interview. Although the video recordings did assist in these instances, there were times when participants spoke to each other rather than to me, making it difficult to establish whose mouth was moving. To address these problems I repeatedly reviewed videos and audio tapes until I was satisfied that I had an accurate transcription. In some instances it was necessary to note that what was being said was inaudible.

Reflections and reflexivity

Research itself is a social act and qualitative analysis is inherently subjective (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Material is not collected in a vacuum, however hard we may try not to contaminate the data (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008). Rationality, imagination and insight are the most important analytical skills. But rationality is a complex concept: reason cannot be distinctly separated from emotions, just as some cognitive assessment forms part of our emotions. Emotions can be useful signals for insight and sensitivity into how wider society penetrates our lives and the way we interact and influence each other. Personal skills, knowledge of moral traditions, theories, arguments, self-knowledge, and the ability to see the extent to which our analysis reflects the influence of the class and intellectual culture to which we belong are also salient (Callahan, 2003). It was important

for me to be cognisant of these influences throughout the research process and the consequences of my particular contribution to academic reality.

As a participant myself in the interviews, what was my effect? Being in my sixties, my age may have influenced the way in which young people related to me, but I endeavoured to mitigate this by dressing casually and stressing that the success of my research depended on their kindly sharing their experiences of flattening. My accent also sets me apart. This may have been beneficial as people have no idea how long I have lived here so are inclined to spell out details to me, which they might not do with a fellow New Zealander. Perhaps, because I have never flattered myself, participants did not assume that I was familiar with their way of life and again went into detail that they might not have included, had they thought I was an experienced flatterer. I often contemplated whether my lack of first-hand knowledge was a drawback, but I have concluded that in some respects this was advantageous as I had no particular axe to grind, which I might have had, if I had had any unpleasant flattening experiences.

I grew up in apartheid South Africa in a booming post-WWII economic environment. My young adult student years were spent in a university residence with cleaning staff and three cooked meals a day, paid for by tax payers. I majored in history, classical life and thought, and protesting against the government. Once I graduated, I was able to afford to live in an apartment on my own and never entertained the possibility that I might not be employed in any position I applied for. Intensely aware that I have had access to a very privileged life denied to many in my country of birth, I have the greatest admiration for how young adults cope today.

Language has always fascinated me. Although I did not appreciate it at the time, being bi-lingual was a prerequisite to advance through the education system in South Africa, right up to the second undergraduate year. The facility to move from one language to another with little pause cannot be underestimated. The effortless choice of employing a more appropriate word in another language when one's own language does not provide the exact meaning has always interested me. Unfortunately, I had lived half a century before I embarked on an incredible, life changing, second academic journey with some linguistic papers. I remember the excitement with which I read Wittgenstein's "The limits of my language are the limits of my world" (1922, p. 5) because it made complete

sense. This coupled soon after with an introduction to Foucault's (Faith, 1994) philosophy of the relationship between discourses, knowledge, power and resistance radically revised my outlook on life. I began to question and be far more critical of the accepted wisdom and knowledge of my Western culture and era.

My own convictions and the way in which I see the world had to be examined when dealing with the data. Since I am a committed feminist, I had to be careful not to assume sexism at work in some of the discourses. Being a long-standing vegetarian, I also needed to sit poker faced through a tirade against vegetarians in one flat interview, but also endeavour not to let this negatively impinge on analysing their talk. And to make my writing acceptable, I employ pervasive, common academic discourses and rhetorical conventions by emulating the language of seasoned academics. In so doing, I needed to question how my academic training influences my thought processes and also the particular reality I construct.

Data Presentation

Like quantitative researchers, discourse analysts engage in developing categories and classifying data, but in contrast, it is assembled in a very different way. Rather than quantifying results, recursive discourses are identified and discussed. There are ongoing debates as to how the data should be presented. Researchers usually present a selection of extracts from a huge amount of data, as length precludes using all but the most interesting and representative, which is the approach I have followed. Wetherell (1998) has questioned the validity of researchers deciding what is relevant and the fragmentation of data compromising neutrality or openness, yet documenting the huge amount of data is simply not possible. However, it is essential to stress that there are a number of plausible ways to interpret a text (Gee, 2008).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the philosophical assumptions underlying the ontology and epistemology of my chosen methodology of social constructionist discourse analysis within the tenets of critical psychology. I have defended my choice of methodology by advocating that the best way of understanding the dynamics of shared living is to listen intently to the views and experience of those living the lifestyle. I have outlined the practical details and problems of conducting the research and steps taken to remedy the

process. In accordance with the methodology, I have reflected on my own interest, involvement and effect on the research process.

Analysis and discussion comprise the next six chapters, presented in the form of papers for publication. Of necessity, this involves a significant amount of repetition, especially with regard to methodology and literature reviews. Since many of the references cited are the same, references for the papers are not reproduced at the end of each paper but rather incorporated into the final reference list for the thesis. Any slight differences in style, for example, the use of 'z' instead of 's' in analyzed, reflect publication requirements. The papers deal with aspects of house sharing pertinent to social dynamics and build cumulatively on each other. The penultimate chapter looks specifically at how participants defined and understood the concept of the flat dynamic.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

CHAPTER 4

Construction of desirable flatmates

Happiness is not a matter of intensity but of balance, order, rhythm and harmony.

Thomas Merton: No man is an island

Introduction

Chapter 4 examines the ways in which participants discursively constructed ideal flatmates, revealing the complexity of intimate domestic social dynamics and paradoxical tensions that need to be balanced for functional flatting. The paper that constitutes the chapter has been published and is presently available on-line:

Clark, V., Tuffin K., Frewin, K., & Bowker, N. 2017. Housemate desirability and understanding the social dynamics of shared living. *Qualitative Psychology*. Advance online publication <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/qap0000091>

Housemate desirability and understanding the social dynamics of shared living

Abstract

Shared living among young adults is an increasingly widespread way of life in the Western world, yet surprisingly little is known about this lifestyle. The rationale for this research was to increase understanding of the social dynamics of these non-kin households. Data was obtained from interviews with experienced New Zealand house sharers aged 20 to 35. Detailed discourse analysis is presented of housemate desirability with 3 key discourses involved. First, ideal co-residents are acutely aware of the necessity for a fine balance between being sufficiently sociable with each other, while simultaneously respecting the necessity of individual privacy and independence. Second, those with similar lifestyles, life stages, values, and expectations of each other are more conducive to compatibility. Third, mutual trust and feeling comfortable with housemates is imperative. The current research provides a window into contemporary lives of young adults and contributes to a broader knowledge of how non-familial relationships can work successfully or fail in the intimate confines of domesticity.

Key words: housemates, shared housing, young adults, social dynamics, discourse analysis

Shared housing among young adults in the Western world is an increasingly pervasive lifestyle. Occupants are typically single, childless, unrelated young adults sharing amenities such as a kitchen, bathroom, communal area, and laundry with bedrooms as private domains. Rent, power, broadband, and sometimes food expenses are shared. Growth in this domestic arrangement has been recorded in the United States (Mykyta, 2012), United Kingdom (Carlsson & Eriksson, 2015; Clapham, Mackie, Orford, Thomas & Buckley, 2012) and other European countries (Arundel & Ronald, 2016; Schwanitz and Mulder, 2015). In New Zealand and Australia shared living arrangements or “flatting” among young adults is an established social phenomenon and was projected to increase (Murphy, 2011).

Internationally, housing demographers are voicing rising concern about young people’s housing problems (Day, 2016). Unaffordable accommodation, exacerbated by housing shortages and lingering uncertainty from the 2008 global financial crisis, plus costly tertiary education and student debt leave young people with uncertain trajectories to stable independent living (Mackie, 2016). Combining domestic resources is a pragmatic way of coping with challenging financial circumstances and has arguably made a virtue of necessity, with shared domestic arrangements becoming a socially attractive lifestyle (Heath & Cleaver, 2003). Housemates can offer a readymade social life with companionship and friendship operating as a supportive surrogate family. However, interpersonal conflict in the intimacy of co-residence can also result in hostility and anxiety with negative mental health implications (Heath, 2004a).

Despite the proliferation of shared households, academic literature on the topic is severely limited. European research is confined to household demographers, who concentrate on why people share (Schwanitz & Mulder, 2015). The most comprehensive research to date is sociologists Heath and Cleaver’s (2003) United Kingdom study of diverse living arrangements among single young adults. In the United States, peer co-residence has been reviewed in research on patterns of leaving the parental home (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1993). In an early Australian study, Baum (1986) promoted alternative living arrangements as viable lifestyles and isolated factors accounting for functional shared domesticity from youth through to old age. More recently, Natalier (2003a; 2003b; 2004) examined gendered division of labor in flatting and McNamara and Connell (2007) investigated flats as “home” for young Australians.

In New Zealand, Williamson (2005) explored the importance of food shopping, preparing, and sharing meals in flatting relationships. Clark and Tuffin's (2015, 2016) investigation into the unexamined area of selection or rejection of potential housemates in New Zealand added to the literature. A number of preferred demographic and lifestyle criteria for prospective flatmates were identified indicating that young adults preferred to flat with peers very similar to themselves. Whereas gender was not regarded as relevant, age similarity was important. Ethnicity was approached circumspectly, with English-speaking, highly acculturated flatmates preferred (Clark & Tuffin, 2015). Social drinking and soft drugs were acceptable providing use was recreational and not blatant and did not impact on the social dynamic and economic sustainability of the flat. Similarly, mental illness was tolerated if unproblematic and not highly visible (Tuffin & Clark, 2016).

The current research goes beyond the flat entry threshold: whereas Tuffin and Clark (2015, 2016) have looked at who might be invited to join a flat, this study moves the focus to what happens within flats, particularly how desirable flatmates are constructed. This area is not unrelated to housemate selection, which is based on speculation as to what and who might work. Desirability is based on the experience of what has worked and what is required to make the complexity of shared living successful for those involved. Contrary to other areas of life, such as the workplace, there are no blueprints with set rules for this environment yet young adults manage to live together by implementing their own rules. The lack of current research and increasing popularity of shared housing makes further research into this unregulated domestic social intimacy vital.

Research Paradigm

The tenets of critical social psychology underpin this research with a constructionist epistemology that highlights the possibility of multiple understandings, challenges the existence of immutable truths, and defines knowledge as provisional and negotiable (Tuffin, 2005). Constructionism proposes that knowledge is a joint construction of shared cultural and historically contingent contextual meanings, constituted in the ongoing flow of social life and inextricably located in, and communicated through, language (Coyle, 1995). Each person lives within a milieu of sociocultural relationships

and their personal views reflect the ideologies of the time and particular communities they inhabit (McGarty & Haslam, 1997).

Critical social psychologists reconceptualise social life as language use, moving the study of psychological processes from the mental interior to linguistic practices and social interactions (Wetherell, 1996). Our theoretical orientation is that language does not neutrally mirror reality but is critically involved in creating it. Discourse analysis is one methodology by which social constructionists conduct social inquiry. Most simply defined as the close study of language use, discourse analysis incorporates a diversity of analytical practices (Taylor, 2001). The methodology involves being critically and reflexively self-aware of one's own bias, power, and influence on the research process and interpretation of the data (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Analyzing talk can produce fine-grained insight and rich understanding of lived experiences and how these are constructed (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). By recognizing the subjectivity and agency of participants with insider knowledge and accepting a diversity of responses, the unanticipated can be heard (Marecek, 2003). Discourses provide evidence of the complex processes of changing socioeconomic environments that shape and potentially influence our lives (Futch Ehrlich, 2016; Weeks, Heaphy, & Donovan, 2001).

Method

Participants were aged between 20 and 35, currently flatting and fluent in English. At least one year's flatting experience was a criterion, not necessarily with the present flatmates. Participants were recruited by word of mouth, for example, on hearing of the flatting research project, acquaintances would suggest interviewing their flatting friends, children, or colleagues. Contact was made through the intermediary providing a phone number or e-mail. Participants were informed that the research aimed to examine how people talk about their flatting experiences.

Data was obtained from semi-structured, in-depth interviews with seven flat groups and 14 one-on-one interviews. In total there were 37 participants, 23 of whom were interviewed in a group format with others who shared their flat. Some participants approached expressed a disinclination to be interviewed with housemates but were happy to speak of their experiences on their own, hence individual interviews. To increase

heterogeneity three flat group interviews were conducted in a large metropolitan New Zealand city and four in a smaller township.

Interviews were audio recorded with flat group interviews also videoed due to difficulty discerning who is talking when transcribing group discussions. An annotated version of Jeffersonian notation (Wooffitt, 1992) was used for transcriptions. Participants were Pākehā (of European descent), apart from two Māori, and two identifying as Māori/Pākehā. Twenty-two were female and 15 were male, with the mean age of 24. Apart from 14 students, all were employed full-time. The study conformed to ethical requirements of informed consent and confidentiality with pseudonyms used to protect participants' identity. Approval was gained from the Massey University Ethics Committee.

The analytic approach required multiple readings of the data transcribed by the lead author, who searched for discursive patterns with little preconception of what these would be (Jahoda, 2013). Commonly recurring discourses were identified, color coded, and the most representative examples were thoroughly analyzed and tentatively labeled. At this point the coauthors became involved by discussing their understandings of the data analyzed by the first author. With much discussion consensus was reached as to organizing and naming discourses. In the process many extracts initially analyzed were discarded as extraneous or repetitive.

The study incorporates both micro-analysis of everyday talk in the Potter, Wetherell, and Edwards's tradition (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987) and macro-analysis (Parker, 1992). The former facilitates exploration of knowledge, meaning, and identity construction through language use and the functional orientation of language such as blaming, judging, praising, and excusing. Macro-analysis enables identification of dominant ideologies that shape our understanding of the world and ourselves (Tuffin, 2005). "Discourse" refers to patterns of coherent statements that construct meaning (Parker, 1992). Discourse is discussed in terms of the dynamic, rhetorical functions of justifying and explaining points of view.

Analysis

The analytic approach was inductive, whereby key patterns were identified in the data. Three key discourses were drawn on to construct desirability. For conceptual clarification, discourses are named, *separate but connected*, *similar versus different*, and *the fundamental prerequisites of comfort and trust* but they are interrelated and overlap in intricate ways. In analyzing data it is necessary to separate discourses: a process of decontextualization, where data is separated from the original context and then reintegrated around a central discourse (Fairclough, 2015). Extracts are illustrative rather than exhaustive of the available data.

Separate and Connected

Separate but connected was a pervasive, apparently paradoxical discourse which concerns flatmates being connected without compromising the need for independence and individual privacy. How these tensions are managed requires careful judgment.

Sociable but not in your face.

The following extracts touch on the importance of individual space but also the need for sociability and friendship.

147 Mary: and do things socially as well
148 someone who can become a friend
149 but also someone
150 who's happy to have their own space
151 and to (.) and to give me my own space (.) as well

91 =Annie: I think it's important to be with (.) you know
92 to know when people need their space as well
93 even though you're living together
94 and you're friends
95 doesn't mean you need to be
96 in each other's face all the time

One formulation of the need for sociable interaction invariably led to a counter formulation of the necessity for "space". We read this as incorporating both territorial (bedroom) and psychological space (Nartova-Bochaver, 2006). Both extracts emphasize the possibility of friendship. Annie begins her statement with "I think" (91), a subjective qualifier signifying that she is presenting a personal opinion without being too dogmatic. Employing the subjective also means that outside substantiation of a point of view is not required to authenticate the claim (Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995). "In each other's face"

is a metonym: a recognizable rhetorical device, in which a part (face) is used to represent the whole (body). The effect suggests being claustrophobically close and disrespecting one's need for personal space. Julie employs the same terminology.

326 Julie: at uni (.) she was really clingy
327 and really needy (.) and that would
328 that would (.) cause a lot of issues
329 with the whole flat (.) because she::
330 yeah (.) she was quite (.) loud
331 but I think low self esteem
332 but really (.) sort of in your face
333 and that (.) that was
334 that would cause some issues

These excerpts vividly support the assertion that people draw upon common tropes and metaphors (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Julie refers to the consequences of not understanding personal boundaries, as resulting in unelaborated “issues” (328, 334) which are undesirable. The “whole flat” (329) indicates consensual validation. Frequently participants try to find a psychological reason for a housemate's unacceptable behavior. In this case the problem is attributed to “low self-esteem” (331). “Clingy” (326) is a term often associated with a small distressed child and implies an over reliance and dependence on others. The necessity for independence forms the basis of the second strand of the *separate but connected* discourse.

The independence imperative.

Despite a complex blend of interdependence necessary in shared households independence and privacy were prevalent factors.

228 Mike: No (.) it's hard to explain but
229 I do not know (.) someone that
230 can do their own thing
231 but still do stuff (.) with you (.) or
232 Susie: Yeah (.) that isn't dependent on you
233 Mike: Yeah (.) not (.) not dependent at all

Beginning with “it's hard to explain but” (228) and “I don't know” Mike struggles to articulate two opposing social options, indicating that the topic involves some complexity. The ideal level of dependence is one dimension of the wider notion of balance between the individual and social aspects of shared living. The degree of independence is negotiated between Mike and Susie and made explicit by Mike's “not

dependent at all” (233). “At all” is an extreme case formulation, a rhetorical device used to stress the emphatic nature of the conclusion (Pomerantz, 1986).

People differ in their need for independence and space but the magnitude of this also differs from time to time. A nuanced approach to socializing was evident in talk regarding sensitivity to emotional states. Phoebe spoke of going through a bad patch with little understanding from a flatmate.

234 Phoebe: I was just wanting to hole myself up
235 in my bedroom and :: just
236 you know read books and
237 watch films and stuff (.) for a few weeks
238 and she commented on it
239 and made it into quite a big (.) deal
240 she (.) as though it was affecting her
241 and (.) so I think some people are
242 that much more sensitive (.) to
243 things like that (.) or (.) or expect
244 some people either expect to be best friends
245 with you (.) if you are living together
246 or some people do not try at all and think
247 you should lead separate lives
248 and so I think it’s striking the balance
249 between (0.3) sociable >you know<
250 friendly but also independent

We have no details of the event that precipitated Phoebe’s need for withdrawal (234 – 237). The flatmate reducing Phoebe’s problems to her own grievance compounds the stress. In constructing a particular version of these events and positioning herself as the victim, and the flatmate as unsympathetic, the listener is strategically steered into actively sympathizing with Phoebe’s plight. It is not clear whether Phoebe is suggesting that the flatmate is not sensitive, or is super sensitive but speculation that some people are more sensitive than others serves to underscore the flatmate’s lack of empathy (241–243). In contemplating differing needs of individuals for closeness in shared households (243–247), Phoebe concludes that “striking the balance” (248) between “sociable” (249) and “friendly but also independent” (250) is the ideal resolution. This is one strand of a broad discourse regarding the need for a fine equilibrium to maintain the fragile fabric of flat relationships. Independence needs to be weighed against sociability and this is further complicated by differing expectations.

In addition, acute sensitivity to variable emotional states, such as the quiet recovery period needed by Phoebe, is beneficial to maintaining harmony as noted by Flat 6:

182 Owen: Um (.) we can:: like read each other's
183 moods quite well (.) um ((Noah nods))
184 which helps us (.) avoid conflict
185 if one of us is in a bad mood
186 then it's really easy for us
187 to just (.) not bother them

Reading emotions impacts on assessment of how sociable or independent a person is likely to be at a given time. In this example a bad mood leads to the decision to temporarily suspend assumptions of sociability. Such perception is considered conducive to conflict aversion (184).

Two strands in the *separate but connected* discourse stress the importance of a fine balance between sociability and connection for individuals who share physical and psychological space without compromising privacy and independence. The second major discourse is also considered in terms of contrasts.

Similar Versus Different

At the heart of the second discourse is the importance of flatmates sharing various homogenous features such as age, interests, values, and lifestyles. In addition, having the same expectations of each other with regard to living together was emphasized. Flat 5 ascribe a past functional flat to having the same interests and upbringing and reflect on differences that could make flat relationships difficult:

385 Susie: you know (.) all kinda had the same
386 upbringing (.) or you know (.) or like
387 Mike: Mmm
388 Susie: You know we had
389 Mike: =We had a lot of the same interests
390 Susie: Interests 'nd (.) kind of (.) yeah
391 I think (.) it would be hard if someone was
392 Mike: Completely
393 Susie: Completely foreign
394 or something (.) you know (.) like
395 Mike: Or completely opposite
396 Susie: =From a foreign country (.) or
397 you know (.) or
398 Mike: Or like completely opposite '(a)nd (.)'(a)nd
399 Susie: In values (.) or

Mike and Susie agree that compatibility is synonymous with similarity in upbringing, interests and values. Problems are anticipated with someone foreign (396) or completely opposite (395, 397). Extreme case formulation, “completely” is employed four times (392, 393, 395, 298) to convey the difficulty of living with someone very different. How these differences would impact flat viability are not enlarged upon but taken for granted as negative. Cultural differences and variation in values are suggested as examples detrimental to domestic accord. Subscribing to similar values and morals was deemed significant:

891 =Julie: That’s what I’m saying about values
892 that’s what I find it really grates me
893 if they’re (.) they’re not
894 do not have the same values
895 like with my flatmate I’ve got now
896 I think (.) the things that she’s done
897 I would never do that to someone?
898 I just (.) but that’s me and my morals
899 and my values

Julie speaks of the frustration of living with someone who does not share the same morals and values: “it really grates me” (892). By Julie’s standards her present flatmate is so different that outrage and fundamental incompatibility is implied, all of which suggests that something very negative had been inflicted by the flatmate on Julie or someone else Julie is aware of (896–897). Victimhood is claimed due to differing values and morals (898–899). Compatibility was considered to be fostered by parallel life stages.

Lucy, an extremely experienced flatter, invokes age difference as one reason why a younger flatmate did not fit in.

144 Lucy: (.) and was (0.1) yeah (.) yeah it was just a boy?
145 he was in a different space
146 he was um (.) we had asked
147 when we were looking for people
148 we were (.) we had asked for
149 um folks in their thirties?
150 and who had done . . . a bit of travel?
151 and ::lived (.) and um:: >you know he
152 that was on our ad and
153 when he came on you know
154 he said that was his experience

155 and then after he had been in the house
156 for about two or three weeks he said,
157 “Ah actually I’m not in my thirties
158 and (.) haven’t done that much travel”
159 and he was like 10 years younger than us
160 and it was like ahh (.) and that’s the obvious
161 it was kind of like (.) wow there’s a reason
162 why we want those things (.) because::
163 we’re not in the same space

Deceit in applying to live in a flat does not inspire trust. Specific criteria requested in advertising for a flatmate, “in their thirties” (149), someone who had traveled (150) and “lived” (151) form a tripartite list, signifying a generalized complete list of desirable attributes (Jefferson, 1991). “You know” (151) assumes the listener supports the proposition. Some weeks later the deception is revealed. The vagueness of “two or three weeks” (156) is contrasted with immediately following direct speech (157–158). Vagueness is difficult to undermine, while simultaneous use of direct speech lends credence to an account (Edwards & Potter, 1992). The combination accomplishes important work of inferring compromised trust. The disdain with which the unsuitable flatmate is regarded is evident in the depersonalizing use of “it was just a boy” (144) rather than “he.” The characterization of inexperience and immaturity does not accord adult status. Age and travel experience becomes a code for other entities, represented abstractly as “space,” but implying experience, worldliness, and a cosmopolitan lifestyle.

Differences in lifestyle, linked to age and values, underscore the importance of similarity and tolerance. Postgraduate Pia speaks of no longer appreciating an undergraduate lifestyle.

213 Pia: But I’m just so over that (.) at the moment
214 I’m just kinda ugh like (.) I do not want to live
215 with gross people who’re like drinking
216 every weekend and absolutely wasted
217 and the house is like
218 and the house is in a mess
219 cause they do not know how to tidy up
220 and things like that

The description of undergraduate student flats is rather radical with the use of two extreme case formulations, “every weekend” and “absolutely wasted”, in one line

(216). “And things like that” is nonspecific and rhetorically known as a generalized list completer (Jefferson, 1991) which works to suggest that untidiness and partying are examples from a wider list of behavior Pia is no longer willing to tolerate. Noteworthy is that the characteristics “gross” (215) and unable “to tidy up” (219) are assigned to faults within people themselves rather than a developmental stage. Nevertheless, a distinct progression from undergraduate revelry and somewhat insalubrious conditions to a more sedate and comparatively luxurious lifestyle was evident in much talk, for example discretionary dollars to accommodate a more sophisticated palate than student food.

Corresponding lifestyles and leisure activities can reduce potential conflict and promote socializing.

65 Jody: so either like the same type of movies
66 or maybe TV shows?
67 so that’s something you can do together with
68 um (.) it kinda helps if (.) you’ve got the same
69 kinda lifestyle? so like you know
70 if your boyfriends are staying up
71 till 11 o’clock at night watching TV shows
72 or whatever (.) cause I found
73 when you do (.) have different kind of lifestyles
74 that’s when there’s more conflict
75 in past flats? (.) so yeah

Jody explains that similar tastes improve socializing (65-66). Watching TV shows or movies together increases the social glue of the flat, while disparate tastes make it difficult or impossible to agree on entertainment, diminishing the scope for “something you can do together,” (67) highlighting the importance of sociability. Keeping different hours (70 –71) was touched on frequently, with varying degrees of concern: on average similar sleeping patterns were preferred. In stating that differences underlie (73) and may also signal the potential for conflict (74) Jody authenticates her opinion with personal experience, “cause I found” (72) “in past flats” (75).

Accord is easier if flatmates have common expectations of each other.

37 Maree: I guess um (.) good like (.) communication
38 in terms of expectations around (.) um
39 what you (.) want to do in terms of
40 like either (.) um chores
41 or um entertainment (.) or friends

42 like just having a common understanding
43 of what's OK and what's not?

In an otherwise unregulated environment similarities and commonality of expectations are all important. Effective communication is essential for navigating “expectations” (38), defined as “having a common understanding of what's OK and what's not” (42–43). Maree employs a tripartite list (chores, entertainment, and friends) to effectively demonstrate the importance of similar expectations. “Entertainment” and “friends” (41) were discussed both positively and negatively. Having friends for dinner, with everyone involved, was spoken of with enjoyment. Inviting strangers to impromptu parties was regarded as putting the flat and possessions at unnecessary risk and presumably defying common expectations.

Clearly, similarities in terms of upbringing, values, ages, leisure activities, and expectations are considered optimal in promoting harmony in shared households. This was summed up by Julie: “We want them to (.) be kind of (.) a lot like us.” Differences can be detrimental. Baum (1986) noted that money was less of an issue than expected as the potential for this to cause problems can be preempted by careful management. The need to trust and feel comfortable with flatmates forms the basis of the third discourse.

The Fundamental Prerequisites of Comfort and Trust

The final discourse constructing desirability hinges on the interrelated aspects of comfort and trust. Comfort in shared spaces is psychologically critical despite unavoidable personal differences. A common aspect threaded through this discourse was the need to feel comfortable in one's own home. Maree's draws on the similarities discourse as contributing to comfortable relationships.

427 Maree: Um you might also (.) have (.) the same
428 everything (.) like political views (.) or
429 um taste in food (.) and that sort of thing
430 cause all of these things I think if they're not there
431 then those relationships can be that little harder
432 to (.) just be comfortable around people
433 in such close (.) quarters

This explanation incorporates a tripartite list of “political views” (428), “taste in food,” and “that sort of thing” (429). A final vague reference is often used to complete the

trifecta when a third appropriate example does not come to mind to signify a complete list (Jefferson, 1991). The intent is clear, relationships (431) when living in “close quarters” (433) are more difficult to sustain if there are differences. Too many disparities result in discomfort and tension. Various other dimensions of similarity employed to construct flatmates who are easier to live with suggest that the degree of comfort is closely tied to the degree of similarity. The importance of similarity in choice of flatmates has been demonstrated by Clark and Tuffin (2015).

While political and culinary compatibility can contribute to comfort levels, Maree next builds a picture of discomfort extending to the spacial dynamics of sharing.

216 Maree: it can affect you psychologically negatively
217 cause um (.) you come home
218 and you do not feel comfortable in your own home (.) um
219 and it can mean that you just (.) hide in your room
220 and you do not go into the shared spaces
221 and um (.) that’s not nice feeling (.) at all (.) um

Communal areas are shared spaces and are contrasted with the privacy of the bedroom area, which is cast as a hiding place (219), a private refuge from the aversion associated with the shared spaces (220). Shared spaces are important for socializing and are often regarded as the heart of the house. So, avoiding them is psychologically not what Maree seeks since this negates the positive psychological advantages of companionship afforded by shared living. Not feeling comfortable (218) has negative psychological consequences (216). Significantly, Maree twice refers to shared households as “home” (217, 218). Hiding in private domains (219) to evade discomfort suggests tensions and refuge from conflict or threat.

Lucy speaks of a flatmate making communal areas uncomfortable spaces.

135 Lucy: And:: it just didn’t (.) work
136 it . . . felt uncomfortable coming in here
137 didn’t feel like it was my own space
138 and Dave had the same experience ‘nd
139 because he:: (.) just was a bit socially awkward?
140 and (.) um (.) not respectful of (0.1)
141 of conversations we were having and
142 and “kind of just unaware”

The “unaware” (142) flatmate made housemates feel uncomfortable and was eventually asked to leave. The interview was conducted in the flat communal lounge, hence the reference to “in here” (136). The choice of the words “my own space” (137) stresses the need for communal areas to be enjoyed by all but also implies an unacceptable degree of discomfort. This assertion is supported through an external source, “and Dave had the same experience” (138). Employing independent validation lends credence to the experience (Edwards & Potter, 1992). The very softly said “kind of just unaware” (142) suggests a lack of sensitivity to others. A fundamental prerequisite for feeling comfortable with others is trust.

The essential element of total trust.

Trust in shared housing extends to many areas, including feeling safe at home and relying on flatmates to adequately secure the premises. Mike spoke of the paramount importance of trust.

529 Mike: I think you just need to be able to trust them
530 that’s probably one of the other biggest things
531 that you need (.) is to be able to trust (.) someone
532 you might as well
533 then °you wouldn’t be able to live together°

The pivotal role of trust is clearly evident in the use of the maximizer “biggest” (530). Mike does not finish “you might as well” (532) but quietly concludes that living together is impossible if trust is lacking (533–534).

Lisa spoke of a growing wariness of flatmates who could not be trusted.

316 Lisa: Because (.) you couldn’t trust
317 you couldn’t trust to leave money lying around
318 cause it got taken again (.) and then

This was not merely a case of carelessly leaving money around, tempting theft, but part of a narrative explaining that communal money allocated to fund incidental expenditure was regularly raided by unprincipled flatmates. Such actions breed distrust and distress. Trust supposes that flatmates will respect private boundaries. Defining and defending boundaries and dealing with breaches was evident.

370 Lisa: and I thought (.) enough is enough
371 you walk in (.) now I know that we are:: friends
372 but you are you are crossing boundaries
373 by now thinking you:: are:: allowed to

374 randomly walk into everybody's room
375 VC: Yes
376 Lisa: =So I knocked that on the head
377 I kept my door closed after that
378 if he knocked (.) I'd answer it (.) um
379 but it was (.) I had to nip it in the bud
380 and Helen started locking her door?

This infringement of private space leads to the powerful phrase “enough is enough” (370) suggesting a line has been crossed and the limits of tolerance reached: the time has come to respond unequivocally to reestablish the boundary. Reported thought or internal dialogue is frequently silent criticism of someone and employed to convey a considered response and rational account of what took place. Thoughts are voiced in direct speech, while everything else is in the past tense, allowing the speaker to shift between past and present and bringing the experience into the present (Barnes & Moss, 2007). Escalation of “crossing boundaries” (372) is swiftly preempted by Lisa (379). Friendship does not extend to *carte blanche* run of bedrooms. Knocking before entering bedrooms clarifies boundaries. The all-inclusive “everybody's room” (374), signifies that privacy is a common expectation, not a personal preference, demonstrating that breaching boundaries within the flat compromises fundamental trust, essential in sharing with others. “And Helen started locking her door” (380) is an independent validation, which serves to enhance the veracity of Lisa's statements (Edwards & Potter, 1992). It also indexes the degree to which trust had been compromised. On a broader scale, the need to lock a bedroom signals a serious breakdown in the trust expected from those one shares with.

Julie's account of a flatmate overstepping boundaries is more sinister:

77 Julie: I heard him come home really drunk
78 and then (.) I sort of went back to sleep
79 and then he was like,
80 “Ah did you (.) did you hear me
81 coming into your room last night”
82 it was me and all boys
83 and I just said to (.) the other guys
84 cause I'd bin there
85 living there for quite a while
86 and I just said, “He's got to go
87 I don't feel comfortable

Julie sets the scene in the vulnerable twilight world between sleep and awakening. (78). She is confident the flatmate was “really drunk” (77). The inclusion of the adverb

“really” not only boosts the elocutionary impact of the statement but is also an extreme case formulation used to legitimize a claim and signifies the speaker’s investment in the point being made (Pomerantz, 1986). The use of direct speech, “Ah did you hear me coming into your room last night” (80–81), lends authenticity to the account. The inferential implications of his intent are suggestive, leaving Julie feeling uncomfortable (87). Earlier on Julie had referred to the flatmate as “creepy.” “He’s got to go” (86) has the same potency as Lisa’s “enough is enough” (370): both flatmates irretrievably crossed a threshold. The negative psychological stress brought on by such episodes is clear: intrusion into flatmates’ private space is taboo, highlighting the notion of trust, personal security and safety.

Discussion

There are many ways in which the social dynamics of shared housing among young adults could be researched. Considering how little is known about the topic, a good starting point was to listen to those who have lived experience of this domestic way of life. Interviews offer unique and fertile potential for generating data, allowing for quasi-authentic natural interaction and affording insight into how meanings are constructed (Krueger & Casey, 2009). The primary goal was to generate rich, complex accounts of how people talked about their flatting experiences. Discourse analysis affords the opportunity to dig deep down into details, frequently unanticipated: for example, the complex ubiquity of paradoxes in constructing desirable flatmates and participants’ acute awareness of such anomalies. In addition, attitudes, judgments, evaluations, and subtle social penalties are infused in talk as well as the unspoken hierarchies and codes that police our daily lives and the taken-for-granted notions of what is good and what is wrong (Fairclough, 2015). This was demonstrated by the Western ideal of the right to privacy, independence, and autonomy.

The object of interviewing flat members as a group was to allow for mutual support, synergy, and building on each other’s ideas in the co-construction of shared living or conversely, disagreement and offering of alternative realities (Parker, 1992). However, interviewing people as a group had both positive and negative aspects. Whereas spontaneity was enhanced, the major drawback was potential for conforming and censoring. A group participant may adjust their outlook to that of the group or suppress their own perceptions (Carey & Smith, 1994). In essence, adapting to those who

preferred being interviewed as individuals proved to be highly beneficial to the study. Whereas the group interviews were valuable, individual interviews frequently provided more in-depth insight. This could be accounted for by constraint to express feelings or discord when other flatmates were present, or reservation about dominating a group interview with lengthy narratives.

Constructions of desirability were organized around three central discourses and were frequently explained in narratives of past bad experiences. The first discourse was the apparently contradictory but pervasively articulated notion of separate but connected. One aspect of the discourse was the necessity of constrained sociability, signifying an awareness of a critical balance between being adequately sociable while also appreciating others' right to their own space. Socializing includes doing things together, cementing flat cohesion, and promoting connectedness. Intrusiveness has the opposite effect. Failure to appreciate the need for privacy violates rights, leading to discord in relationships (Choudry & Vinayachandra, 2015). What counts as private is not an inherently human condition but a societal decision (Callahan, 2003). In shared households personal and private boundaries need to be carefully negotiated and respected.

Barker (1991) distinguishes between two group processes. Primary group relationships involve much face-to-face interaction, emotional displays, less self-interest, interdependence, and collective orientation. These group members know a lot about and, are interested in, each other. Self-disclosure can contribute significantly to group functioning. Secondary groups are superficial, tend to show and expect less emotion and are more self-serving. Both primary and secondary groups are reflected in Phoebe noting that some flatmates expect you to be best friends while others think you should lead separate lives. The current research supports available literature, which proposes that differences in the degree of closeness expected from housemates can undermine relationships (Baum, 1986; Brown, 1992; Heath, 2004a).

While the above discussion of the separate but connected discourse involves analysis at the micro level, cultural components constitute the macro level: the fundamental right to privacy and autonomy inherent in Western ideology is embedded in the discourse. Such tenets are widely regarded as self-evident without any need for legitimization

(Antaki, 1994). Mediated through language, the established social order is unconsciously reproduced, maintained, and perpetuated, creating preferences and implicitly shaping behavior (Lu & Gilmour, 2004). The micro-macro interface of cultural doctrines implicit in constructing desirability demonstrates the complex dynamic of interpersonal relationships (Fetzer, 2011).

Whereas private space in the Western world is deemed to be essential for subjective wellbeing, it is the antithesis of collective cultures where individual rights are superseded by the goals of the group. Ideally, shared households need to incorporate both tenets for functional co-residence. Heath (2004a) notes that in the intimacy of shared households there is a blur between the usual Western demarcation of public and private spaces. Homes are places where non-family members are usually invited guests, who seldom venture beyond lounge and toilet areas. However, our research demonstrates that bedrooms are usually individual zones of privacy and autonomy. This is one way of incorporating the ideals of both collectivism and individualism: a balance between the two poles can result in a workable shared household, offering the opportunity for caring and collaboration. Individualism erodes closeness and cooperation (Gergen, 1999). Focus on the individual reflects a longstanding irony within social psychology where the importance of social relationships is undermined (Parker, 1992). Complex systems are always more than a sum of their parts (Tuffin, 2005).

In addition to maintaining a fine balance between intrusiveness and sociability, hypersensitivity to the emotional barometers of flatmates is beneficial to group harmony. According to the privacy regulation framework (Altman, 1975), individuals actively seek out either social contact or solitude, depending upon their immediate inclinations. Participants claimed problems can be prevented by awareness of flatmates' moods.

A second aspect of the separate but connected discourse entails another macro element of Western doctrine: the independence imperative. Independence is valued and associated with autonomy, choice, competency, freedom, and rights (Lehmann & Sanders, 2014). Participants never questioned prioritizing independence. Whereas independence was spoken of positively, few directly commented on mutual reliance on

flatmates, which was implicit in much of the talk of the benefits of flatting: for example, regarding flatmates as “family” or a foundation. Interdependence is embedded in the concept of sharing day-to-day domesticity even if limited to organizing chores. However, flatmates who are too independent or too dependent can create a problematic disconnection.

There are tensions between the need for privacy, sociability, and independence, which need to be navigated with care, delicacy, and respect. This includes engaging and disengaging from social interaction with appropriate timing and frequency. The right balance promotes positive relationships and lessens the likelihood of conflict and relationship breakdown. Sound interpersonal actions are central to successful co-residence and maintaining harmony. This discourse provides partial insight into what constitutes “flat dynamics” with desirable flatmates contributing to the success and functionality of the flat.

The second discourse, *similar versus different*, is grounded in aspects which make flatmates more, or less, easy to relate to. Overwhelming consensus was for living with people who are very similar. The old adage “birds of a feather flock together” succinctly describes this discourse. This is consistent with previous research suggesting that people preferred flatmates who were not dissimilar in age, ethnicity, and culture. Gender was not a factor we sought to examine in this study since it featured minimally in a wider consideration of flatmate preference (Clark & Tuffin, 2015). A combination of students and professionals living together was also rejected as unworkable. In the current study differences go beyond simple grounds for exclusion. The same background, interests, values, and morals and so forth are regarded as essential in ensuring the wheels of coexistence are well oiled. Arguably, these matters can be traced to the broad exclusionary criteria, such as different ethnicities, ages, and lifestyles stated in the earlier study (Clark & Tuffin, 2015).

The importance of housemates having the same expectations of each other represents a prominent aspect of this discourse. This recognizes that people have different assumptions about house sharing, such as the degree of closeness envisaged and measures of cleanliness and tidiness required. However, expectations about keeping a clean and tidy environment have to be realistic and flexible: conflict is bound to arise if

a meticulous flatmate dictates that the flat should be immaculate at all times. This clearly supports Heath's (2004a) findings that in households where expectations do not coincide, problems are likely to develop. Effective communication skills are essential to convey expectations and maintain an effectively functioning flat. This research endorses the literature that relationships are easier to sustain when people share the same values and beliefs (Arnett, 2015). In addition, the preference for similarity reinforces the literature on personal attractiveness (Myers, 2008). Reciprocal connectedness, social support, and trust are frequently provided most effectively by those who share similar backgrounds (Furlong, 2013).

The third discourse revolves around the *fundamental prerequisites for comfort and trust*. Participants spoke of the psychological importance of their homes as sanctuaries with a need to feel comfortable and safe in both communal and private areas despite inevitable personal differences. Disproportionate appropriation or abuse of communal space makes it difficult for others to be comfortable and feel fully at home. Many take for granted that homes are stable places of security, regeneration, and rest. To not feel at ease in one's own home may result in physical and psychological stress (Mallett, 2004). New Zealand law recognizes the right to feel comfortable within the close confines of domesticity. Residential shared accommodation is a notable exception to the 1993 Human Rights Act (See sections 53 and 54), which prevents discrimination on the grounds of age, gender, race, religion, psychiatric illness, psychological impairment, and sexual orientation (New Zealand Legislation Acts, 2017). Freedom of choice over who we live with has been enshrined in the law in some countries, but can have legal implications in others. In the United States, for example, rejected applicants have been awarded compensatory damages, prompting Messerly (2008) to argue that the intimacy of shared living renders discrimination in the choice of flatmates a fundamental right. Tuffin and Clark (2016) demonstrated exclusion of potential flatmates with visible signs of mental illness or addictions. Although discrimination was not largely evident in the current study, the emphasis on feeling comfortable does lend insight into why people might discriminate. Also integral to feeling comfortable in such an intimate domestic setting is trust.

Given the close proximity of people in shared living, the greater the trust the more comfortable and successful interpersonal relationships are likely to be. Whereas the

expectation is that flatmates will behave co-operatively, co-residence offers a number of possibilities for opportunists, such as shirking household duties and pilfering personal property and food (Ellickson, 2006). Possible threats to fundamental trust include the economically unscrupulous, flat security, and fearing for personal safety. The research demonstrates that bedrooms are inviolate with uninvited intrusion signifying serious offense and a risk to personal privacy and safety with negative psychological consequences. The data also supports Heath and Cleaver's (2003) findings that undesirable flatmates were frequently those who breach physical and symbolic boundaries. Such actions compromise trust, which must be preserved if the flat is to remain a place which represents safety, relaxation, and freedom from threats to security and well-being.

Conclusion

Three discourses compose a complex construction of desirability. In the first discourse, desirable flatmates are constructed as understanding the necessity for a delicate balance between being sufficiently sociable but independent with sensitivity to flatmates' need for personal space, privacy, and moods. The second discourse formulates ideal flatmates as people similar to each other in a variety of ways with the essential prerequisite of having the same expectations of each other. The third discourse is built around the importance of feeling comfortable with flatmates and the imperative for mutual trust. All discourses involve a degree of evaluation in which people are positioned as desirable and acceptable or not. Moralities are rooted in talk and inevitably entangled with hegemonic, taken-for-granted, culturally defined mores, which moderate behavior. Haidt (2001) notes that anyone who fails to adhere to these virtues or behaves in a way that is deemed disrespectful of them is liable to be criticized, punished in some way, or ostracized. Shared housing may be an unregulated area with few written rules, but the unwritten codes are important. These are fundamental to the successful dynamics of shared living with breaches of protocol placing continued stay in the flat at risk.

A limitation of the present study is a lack of enquiry into the negative psychological effects of being asked to leave a flat. This needs to be addressed in future research as well as the impact of shared living on later domestic arrangements. For example, participants who aspired to living on their own found the existence lonely and returned

to flatting. Would this be true of couples used to having others around, especially if partners' work hours did not coincide? Traditionally the bulk of housework has been the culturally sanctioned role for women. Has exposure to non-genderized, egalitarian expectations of house chores in shared living contributed to a decline in these mores?

In any group interpersonal relationships are key. The current research contributes to a broader knowledge of small group functioning as well as a window into contemporary lives of young adults. Much of the literature on shared housing among young adults is complemented by this study. By examining how desirable and less-than-desirable housemates are constructed in New Zealand we have not only expanded understanding of shared housing among young adults but also provided insight into how non-familial relationships within the hothouse intimacy of domesticity can work successfully and how they can fail.

CHAPTER 5

Avoiding complications in domestic relationships

It is easier to forgive an enemy than to forgive a friend

William Blake: The poetical works

Introduction

The focus of this chapter is on motivation and justifications for carefully considering the existing relationship status of flatmates, which can contribute to harmony or negatively impact household dynamics. The question of whether to flat with couples or singles / friends or strangers underscores the complexity of communal living. Again discussions involve competing tensions, suggesting that there are no absolutes: what works for one person or household may not necessarily translate to success for others. In addition, talk demonstrates that young people are acutely aware of what can enhance or detract from domestic harmony.

The basis of this chapter is a paper published by *Journal of Youth Studies*: Clark, V., Tuffin, K., Frewin, K., & Bowker, N. (2017). Shared housing among young adults: avoiding complications in domestic relationships. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 1-17.
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Shared housing among young adults: avoiding complications in domestic relationships.

Abstract

One pathway by which young adults in the Western world are navigating housing difficulties is to pragmatically share costs by living or flatting with peers. The current study sought to add to the limited literature on this lifestyle through the application of discursive psychology to understanding the social dynamics of relationships in the intimacy of these households. Data was drawn from interviews with experienced New Zealand house sharers aged 20 to 35. Analysis is presented of two spontaneous discourses, which emerged, both dealing with competing tensions on the merits of living with couples or single people and friends or strangers. Whereas couples are not averse to sharing with other couples, single people tend to elect to share with

unattached individuals. Favouring friends as housemates was the norm among town dwellers, while city folk were more open to flatting with strangers. Talk was driven by the unquestioned value associated with having a working living arrangement, demonstrating the acute awareness young adults have of potential problems that can destabilise or sustain domestic harmony. Valuable insight is provided into the complexity of shared housing relationships as well as contemporary young adulthood.

Key words: young adults shared housing group dynamics

Shared housing or flatting, in which a group of unrelated people share costs by living together features largely as a way of life among contemporary young adults in the Western world. In the UK, increasing numbers of individuals opt to live with peers at some point post adolescence (Carlsson & Eriksson, 2015). Demographic growth of this lifestyle is evident in European countries (Schwanitz & Mulder, 2015), the United States (Mykyta, 2012) and projected to increase in Australia and New Zealand (Murphy, 2011). Communal areas, such as lounge, kitchen, laundry and bathrooms are generally shared with bedrooms as private domains. Typically, but not universally, young house sharers are childless and unmarried (Williamson, 2005).

Academic research has failed to keep pace with this growing phenomenon. Many questions remain about important social dimensions, interpersonal relationships, relational foundations and domestic familiarity involved in this complex domesticity (Heath & Cleaver, 2003; Mykyta, 2012; Clark & Tuffin, 2015). The current study, undertaken in New Zealand, was exploratory with the focus on the social dynamics involved in shared living. Interactions, connections and power differentials have the potential to sustain or undermine the quality of any group dynamic (Dutton & Dukerich, 2006). The focus of this paper is on two interrelated common discourses, which impact household dynamics: whether to flat with single people or couples; friends or strangers. These dichotomous discourses arose spontaneously in interviews and clearly were issues of concern to participants. They provide unique insight into understanding lived experiences and how shared housing is navigated in young adulthood.

The relevance of shared housing has been overlooked and assumed to be a short term transition between leaving the parental home and setting up of an independent home, without consideration that young adults might enjoy a life free of constraints from parents or partners (Heath, 2009). In addition, such households add to increasing recognition of the viability of once unacceptable or marginal types of relationships and greater understanding of new possibilities of non-kin intimacy. Heath and Cleaver (2003) posit that youth are transforming the boundaries of interpersonal relationships, looking to their friends rather than sexual partners or family to meet immediate needs for intimacy. Friends have consistently been demonstrated to be of the greatest importance in the lives of contemporary young adults and having shared domesticity with someone at some point in a life course goes beyond school friendships and increases the odds of being considered a family member (Wall & Gouveia, 2014). Roseneil and Budgeon (2004) have noted that there is a need for systematic research on the new forms of intimacy outside traditional families and those spearheading this social change. The quality and intimacy of relationships is important in the construction and meaning of the modern 'family'. Acknowledgement of alternatives to the heterosexual nuclear family is a relatively recent phenomenon primarily associated with research on relationships and household patterns among lesbian and gay couples. Contemporary personal relationships extend beyond the boundaries of the nuclear co-resident family (Weeks, Heaphy & Donovan, 2001). Natalier (2003a) concluded that living outside traditional heterosexual family structures, with new ways of caring and relating to others, may be producing conditions for social change. Giddens (1992:3) characterises intimacy as 'a transactional negotiation of personal ties by equals' which is salient in the context of shared domestic arrangements among non-kin young adults.

Background to the study

Literature on shared living tends to concentrate on intergenerational, immigrant and shared living for the aged (Hemmons, Hoch & Carp, 1996) with surprisingly little research on young adults. To date the most comprehensive work is that of British sociologists Heath and Cleaver (2003) as part of a broader study of the domestic arrangements of single young adults in England, which built on Kemp and Rugg's (1998) earlier work. European housing demographers have investigated why young adults share (Mulder, 2003; Steinfurher & Haase, 2009) and American sociologists (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1993) examined patterns of leaving the parental home

and shared housing. Australian studies include Natalier (2003a; 2003b; 2007), who analysed gendered housework in shared households and the ambiguous independence of flatters still partially economically dependent on parents; McNamara and Connell (2007) who investigated flats as 'home'; and Baum (1986) who promoted the economic, social and environmental viability of this alternative housing through all ages. In New Zealand Williamson (2005) examined food preparation and meal sharing in flats, and more recently selection or rejection of potential housemates was investigated: (Clark & Tuffin, 2015; Tuffin & Clark, 2016).

Previously almost exclusively confined to indigent student housing, flatting offers pragmatic, affordable accommodation for young adults facing financially challenging circumstances in their late twenties, early thirties and even beyond (Heath & Cleaver, 2003). Internationally, concern has been raised about young adults' difficulties with housing (Day, 2016). Formidable obstacles in accessing social housing means the most vulnerable may end up experiencing homelessness. Sharing in the private rental sector is one housing pathway (Clapham, Mackie, Orford, Thomas & Buckley, 2012). Extensive evidence indicates growing numbers of young adults returning home to live with their parents for financial reasons (Gordon & Shaffer, 2004; Fry, 2013; Burn & Szoek, 2016). While census statistics indicate this trend in New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, 2017), there is little academic research on the phenomenon, where remaining in the parental home has been linked to suggestions of lack of independence (Pool, Baxendine, Cochrane & Lindop, 2005; Williamson, 2006). Flatting in New Zealand is regarded as a character building rite of passage and a unique aspect of socialisation for young adults (Wolfe & Barnett, 2001).

Internationally, there are significant problems with affordability and inadequate supply of housing, especially in the rental market, with increases in rent costs expected to continue (Day, 2016). In addition, the 2008 recession resulted in competitive labour markets with lingering global economic uncertainty evident (Lagarde 2016). Many full-time jobs do not provide an adequate income for independent living and weakening social welfare no longer softens hardship (Beck, 2007; McNamara & Connell, 2007). Further monetary constraints for young adults can be linked to increased post-secondary education, escalating tertiary education costs and student loan debt.

Linear pathways to traditionally defined Western adult roles such as economic autonomy, marriage and parenthood are no longer clear cut (Furlong, 2013). Socially, feminisation of the workforce, freely available birth control, appeal of the single life and travel have further been used to account for change (Arnett, 2007). An extended transitional stage bridging adolescence and adulthood, variously termed 'emerging adulthood' (Arnett, 2000), 'post adolescence' (Heath & Cleaver, 2003), or 'frontier of adulthood' (Furstenburg, Rumbaut & Settersten, 2005) is increasingly recognised. However, it is important to recognise population heterogeneity and different structural components that characterise transitions to adulthood, including those leading to traditional (i.e. early marriage), but now marginalised, adult statuses (Côté & Bynner, 2008; Arnett, 2015). Post-graduates accustomed to shared living as students continue to do so once they graduate. Costly student loans, in the long run, translate into human capital. Consequently, research into shared housing reflects mainstream rather than the economically or socially marginalised young adults.

As living social microcosms, shared households are an important area for research in their own right but also add to a more comprehensive understanding of the extended transitional phase since this domestic lifestyle is a considerable component of contemporary young adult life. In addition, unique insight is provided into social and economic forces of change. Flatting is therefore significant beyond a simple accommodation option (Kenyon & Heath, 2001). The fundamentals of communal living arrangements and what sharing entails need to be carefully considered. For flats to function effectively as hospitable environments, the collective good and interdependence has to be carefully balanced against individual self-interest (Mause, 2008).

The complexity of the topic rightfully deserves examination and accordingly the current study sought to explore one aspect of relationships by examining talk about preferences for flatting with single people or couples and whether it is better to share with friends or strangers. How do pre-existing relationships impact interpersonal dynamics? Living with singles or couples will undoubtedly have different effects on flat viability. Electing to live with friends or anticipating the friendship of strangers can be an integral part of the social motivation to flat. While the attraction of creating a home with friends is understandable why do some favour flatting with unknown

people? Disparate positions available within these discourses were often in the form of lengthy narratives justifying preferences, based on past experience.

Research paradigm and method

Discourse analysis, underpinned by a social constructionist epistemology, based on the tenets of critical social psychology was chosen as appropriate for this study. Who better can describe the complicated intimacy of shared residential living than flatters themselves? By examining a diversity of responses, the unanticipated can be heard (Marecek, 2003). Social constructionism endeavours to understand a world that is not stable but malleable and perpetually constructed through social interaction, mediated through language. Knowledge and reality are thus contingent on the values and beliefs of particular cultures at a particular historical time (Coyle, 1995). Discourse analysis involves a range of techniques but can be simply understood as close attention to language beyond the sentence (Taylor, 2001). Critical social psychologists regard social life as linguistic practice, thereby shifting the study of psychological processes from mental interiors into the field of social interaction and language (Wetherell, 1996).

Through talk people give meaning to their lives and relationships, enact their identities and position themselves and others as polite, kind, intelligent, uncertain, unbiased and so on (Weeks, Heaphy & Donovan, 2001). Language is action orientated and employed to accuse, judge, inform, justify, reject or praise (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Discourse analysis offers the opportunity to understand the dynamics of interpersonal relationships and the ways participants invoke common discourses to achieve their objectives. Discourses can be defined as shared systems of meanings drawn on to communicate (Parker, 1992). Discourses can also provide evidence of the complex processes of changing lifestyles that impact on and are influenced by young lives (Weeks, Heaphy & Donovan, 2001).

Participants

Participants were fluent in English, aged 20 to 35 years and had flatted for at least one year. Participants were purposefully recruited by word of mouth. In total 37 people were interviewed, 14 in individual interviews, and 23 in seven flat groups ranging in size from two to five flatmates. Participants were Pākehā (of European descent) apart from two Māori and two identifying as Māori/Pākehā. Fifteen were males and 22

females with a mean age of 24. Apart from 14 students all were employed full-time. Three flat group interviews were conducted in a large New Zealand city and four in a smaller town. The motivation for this choice was to increase heterogeneity and also to assess if there were any differences in the flatting styles.

The study underwent Massey University ethical peer review and met the ethical requirements of informed consent, confidentiality with pseudonyms employed to preserve anonymity. Semi-structured, in depth interviews were conducted using questions such as “Why flat?” These were designed to function as triggers to initiate discussion. Interviews were audio recorded with group interviews videoed as well since it can be difficult to discern who is talking in a group when transcribing. All interviews were transcribed using an annotated version of Jeffersonian notation (Wooffitt, 1992).

Analysis

Analysis requires multiple readings of the data searching for discursive patterns and variations. Two recurrent discourses that emerged from the data were the merits of flatting with singles opposed to couples and friends versus strangers. Discourses are discussed in terms of their dynamic, rhetorical functions of justifying preferences. Excerpts used as examples best represent commonly recurring threads of discourses.

The importance and intimacy of relationships in shared housing is tentatively but sensitively captured by an otherwise articulate participant:

82 Laura: it's almost (.) like I guess it's almost like (0.2)
83 like a boyfriend or girlfriend ((laughs))
84 in some respects because (.) you have
85 to like them on a personal level
86 because you are living with them and
87 you know you have a home together

Laura struggles to voice her thoughts and the laughter could signify embarrassment at the analogy of ‘boyfriend or girlfriend’ (83). Nevertheless the statement does illuminate the closeness and compatibility necessary for successful co-residence. Significantly, the flat is regarded as ‘a home together’ (87) and not as she earlier stated ‘a random collection of people who (.) have a room in the house (67-68). Consequently, careful consideration is given to what might work or fail in interpersonal household relationships.

Singles versus couples

Several common potential problems for singles sharing with couples emerged with single participants frequently expressing antipathy for flatting with couples. Phoebe, having previously flatted as part of a couple, justifies her preference for unattached flatmates.

403 Phoebe: but I think that you do end up (.) kinda
404 living in your bedroom a lot more?
405 when you're a couple? (.) um
406 potentially (.) because I think that
407 you know you have that person to
408 converse with and be with
409 whereas if you're on your own
410 you're more likely to seek someone else
411 to (.) hang out with so you're more likely
412 to kind of go in search and sit in the living room

Favouring single flatmates hinges on their social availability. Speaking from personal experience Phoebe observes that couples tend to retreat to their bedrooms (404), have each other for companionship (408) so are less likely to seek out company (410) or frequent communal areas (412). This limits flat socialising for single flatmates. One single person living with a couple is particularly unsatisfactory.

336 Pia: like cause Emma was just like
337 oh my gosh like (.) I never lived with
338 someone else apart from just a couple
339 like it was apparently horrible
340 and then like (.) they all hated just like
341 living two people and one couple
342 cause like Emma and Kylie
343 they're like best friends (.) as well
344 so it was just real weird dynamics I think

Pia refers to two friends, Emma and Kylie (343) sharing a flat with Kylie's boyfriend. Active voicing is used in Emma's description of the experience (337,338). Reported speech functions to establish the account as factual (Edwards and Potter, 1992). The reversion to reporting the situation rather than the active voice is prefixed with 'apparently' (339), which assigns the responsibility for the source of the assertion to Emma. With 'so it was just real weird dynamics I think' (344) Pia offers a reason for the flatting situation being 'horrible' (339) and 'hated' (340). 'They all hated' signals that it was not domestic bliss for either the single friend or the couple and is an extreme case formulation. The latter is a rhetorical device in which something is stressed to

make a particular point especially if the speaker has reason to believe that the listener might doubt the veracity of the assertion (Edwards, 2000). There are a number of possibilities for triangles being unworkable. As Phoebe mentioned, couples tend not to socialise quite as much but the situation is complicated by the girls being 'best friends' (342-343) meaning that the boyfriend could also feel excluded. Pressure on the girl in the couple to spend time with both the boyfriend and the girlfriend possibly leaves little time for herself.

Tensions within couple relationships can negatively impact flatmates.

444 Pia: if people explain their side of the story
445 for me it's quite easy for me ta (.) not be swayed
446 but kind of see where (.) they're coming from?
447 and I find that (.) quite difficult
448 to kind of take a side between two people
449 who are really good friends with me?

Pia appreciates that there are multiple truths in any event depending on which angle is being defended. Clearly, getting embroiled in a couple's problems is not ideal especially where it is difficult to avoid one or the other when living with both. Rationally, remaining neutral should not jeopardise a good friendship with either but this stance requires some fortitude. Pia spoke about her flatmate being perpetually suspicious that her partner and Pia secretly fancied each other, jealousy further adding to the complex dynamics.

Sean spoke of a couple's problems upsetting flat relationships.

321 Sean: things got a bit messy between them (.) two of them
322 and some were friends with one
323 some were friends with the other

This suggests that as some flatmates were friends with one member of the couple (322) and some with the other (323) the propensity for taking sides was more likely, contributing to division in the flat. These tensions possibly explain Chloe's proviso that couples need to be in a stable relationship.

148 Chloe: ((laughs)) I'm (.) we're (.) I'm in a couple
149 I'm living with my boyfriend in the flat
150 and (.) um (.) no one seems to have an issue
151 with it (.) but (.) I wouldn't mind living with
152 another couple yeah (.) that would be alright
153 as long as they (.) um oh you know they're stable

154 in a stable relationship (.) yeah

Chloe is confident that she would not object to living with another couple (151,152). 'No one seems to have an issue' (150) implies acceptance by the other flatmates of Chloe's couple relationship within the flatting household (149). The qualifier that a couple should be 'in a stable relationship' (155) appears a reasonable requirement but excludes the possibility of romance turning sour. It also attributes stability to Chloe's relationship.

A further significant disadvantage of flatting with couples, noted by couples themselves, is the potential for couples to join forces against other flatmates. This speaks to the unique and changed dynamic that couples bring to shared living.

554 Tim: I could convince Maree of something
555 then we've got two votes and Mark has one
556 and that (.) that's not necessarily a fair way to
557 you know to think about things um
558 it is also nice to kind of
559 have someone on your side (.) I
560 I think there is some strength in that
561 and for a larger flat (.) if there
556 if there is conflict (.) um (.) you
563 can kind of feel that you have someone to back you up
564 if there is an issue that perhaps
565 you might not have (.) raised otherwise

Tim notes that the odds could be stacked against a single person living with a couple because of the possibility of outvoting a single individual (554-555). By acknowledging the unfairness of thinking this way he demonstrates an awareness of a fundamental democratic principle and sees this as potentially threatened by the dynamics of couples in flats (556,557). Such consideration mitigates his following statements that it is good to have someone to back you up (559) on an issue which might not otherwise be broached (564, 565). This is specifically in the context of a larger flat where, if in the event of tension, there is no guarantee of support from another person. Tim speaks of the 'strength' (560) accorded by a united front but there is the potential for abuse of power.

As a single woman, Julie is adamant that she will not flat with a couple:

368 Julie: but yeah (.) I won't (.) I still won't

369 live with couples because (.) I think
370 yeah (.) they cause (.) they cause
371 a lot of the issues (.) and I mean

Julie has flatted for well over a decade: from experience she maintains that couples can cause issues (369-371). These bring to mind the range of possible drawbacks already discussed. She endeavours to explain a couple's capacity for misuse of power.

400 Julie: I guess it just really depends on
401 their personality (.) like if (.) they're
402 really lazy or:: something like that
403 I think that that would be (.) °an issue°
404 like (.) if (.) and then they sort of
405 back each other up when they're
406 both as messy (.) or (.) um disrespectful
407 and then they'll be like >you know<
408 we did the dishes last week
409 or something like that
410 do you know what I mean
411 so they'll always back each other up
412 but they won't sort of go into bat for you

Julie attributes abuse of strength afforded by partnerships to some couples sharing what she considers fundamental personality flaws, like being lazy (402), messy (406) or disrespectful (406). Such detrimental qualities were frequently used to describe undesirable flatmates and the three negative traits were often banded together in concordant clusters. 'We did the dishes last week' (408) may mean that the couple undertook the dishwashing for the previous week and considered themselves exempt for the present week. Another interpretation is that in taking weekly turns the single person is expected to take on the duty for the full week on her own, while the couple shared the chore. Any interpretation leaves the single person(s) at a disadvantage. While, 'or something like that' (409) is vague, followed up with 'do you know what I mean' assumes that the listener can envisage further means of exploitation. 'They'll always back each other up' (411) is an extreme case formulation to get the message across that, given their personalities, the possibility of one of the dyad supporting another flatmate is fairly remote (412).

Whereas couples were not averse to flatting with other couples, given certain qualifications, single people invariably preferred sharing with unattached individuals. Sociability is likely to be compromised by flatting with a couple as they have each other to interact with. The attraction of flatting with a ready-made social life at home,

alleviating loneliness, is a predominant reason for choosing to flat, and arguably, on a par with economic necessity (Despres, 1994). Particularly unappealing was a single flatmate living with a couple. However, when the single flatmate was male the combination was not acknowledged as problematic, suggesting that the gender of the single flatmate impacts on a triangular relationship.

A further disadvantage is the likelihood of being caught up in a couple's relationship problems. Remaining neutral and uninvolved may be expedient but can be stressful. If sides are taken a split can occur. The caveat of flatting with a couple in a stable relationship sounds feasible but ongoing romantic bliss is not assured. Whereas single people can retreat to their bedrooms, couples invariably share a room, which may exacerbate any problems in their relationship. For couples a single attractive flatmate can be cause for jealousy. In addition, two single flatmates starting a relationship was reported as upsetting established equilibrium in interpersonal domestic relationships.

One aspect highlighted by both couples and singles was the potential for a couple to exert disproportionate power in the flat. While couples felt there was strength in numbers in times of conflict, singles felt the unequal power balance intimidating and unfair. However, it was acknowledged that this depended on the attributes of the couple themselves and couples did recognise that combining their vote to defeat single flatmates is counterproductive to good flat relationships. A second discourse involving pre-existing relationships was whether to flat with friends or strangers.

Sharing with friends versus living with strangers

Undergraduates typically move in with friends they have met in their first year of study. Kemp and Rugg (1998) suggest sharing with strangers can be a source of anxiety for young adults. Apprehension at moving in with unknown people was evident:

706 Julie: Like I was really scared when I went
707 um (.) flatting with randoms (.) so
708 I only used to flat with people I knew
709 and then (.) when I started doing it
710 I thought to myself if this
711 doesn't work out (.) I can
712 just sort of move out

'Randoms' (707) was commonly used to describe flatmates who were initially unfamiliar. 'Randoms' occasionally served another function: to refer to flatmates who did not belong to an inner core of flatmates thereby unsettling the egalitarian notion of shared households. Anxiety surrounding the unknown was often qualified by the self-assurance that flatting affords the opportunity to move out if the situation becomes untenable as evident in Julie's talk (712). This highlights the transitory nature of flatting.

Town based Donna advocates living with friends.

- 14 Donna: =yeah and when you do it with friends as well
15 cause you go (.) it's not complete strangers
16 so you don't have to be awkward 'n
17 VC: Oh yes yes
18 Donna: And everyone can talk to each other
19 how you normally would talk to each other

Donna ascribes the awkwardness of flatting with strangers to not being able to talk 'normally' with people who are not friends. This suggests fairly personal exchanges from which strangers would be excluded. 'Friends' (14) is juxtaposed with 'complete strangers' (15). The latter is an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986), in which something is stressed to make the particular point, in this case the contrasting social and conversational expectations. The intent of the exaggeration may be elucidated by examining the next excerpt from Flat 4, who reside in the same town.

- 101 Ben: Yeah I been pretty lucky with:: flatmates
102 all kinda been mates
103 Jeff: Yeah over here you don't really move in
104 with anyone you don't know
105 especially in((town name))
106 it's such a small place ((laughs))

'I been pretty lucky with:: flatmates' (101) was a sentiment voiced by many participants. Luck is externally attributed but could equally be attributed to the speaker being a good housemate. 'Lucky' covers a range of possibilities, not expanded upon but qualified to some extent by Ben stating that all of his flatmates have been friends (102), inferring that such good fortune may not be as guaranteed living with strangers. A broad interpretation of this is that it means an absence of trouble and problematic flatmates. Jeff explains that by living in a small town you are not likely to move in with

anyone you don't know (103-104) hence, Donna's emphasis on 'complete' strangers as the chances are that you would know, or know of, other people of a similar age in the small community.

Lisa, new to the town, with limited networking resources, detailed a distressing experience of moving in with strangers and concluded that given the intense psychological stress the circumstances induced she will never again flat with strangers.

1015 Lisa: Because I will never (.) ever (.) ever
1016 move in with a bunch of strangers
1017 never (.) I (.) will not do it
1018 I would rather grow poor thanks (.) I'm just so
1019 so there is my six month tale of how it was
1020 what started as a bed of roses
1021 has ended up in (.) thorns basically

1027 you can imagine what I was like
1028 by the end of it (.) and why I wanted out
1029 I just couldn't handle it (.) my sanity was slipping

The extreme case formulation 'never (.) ever (.) ever' (1015) serves to intensify the statement, 'I will not do it' (1017) and removes any suggestion of future compromise. 'I would rather grow poor' (1018) refers to earlier explanations of being forced by economic necessity to share with strangers. 'A bed of roses' (1020) and 'thorns' (1021) are conventional metaphors conveying a great deal in brief phrases and often used in emotional situations (Cameron, 2012). The timing precision of six months (1019) lends credence to the veracity of the account. The psychological consequences for Lisa were severe and posed a threat to her mental health (1029). The only solution was to move out.

Lisa was not the only one to report disturbing experiences. Clearly, moving in with unknown people involves risk yet some participants professed an inclination for flatting with strangers and justified their preference.

346 Julie: Yeah (.) I actually prefer
347 flatting with strangers cause you get you get ta
348 make new friends with them
349 but if you live with friends
350 like sometimes it can ruin a friendship?

Making new friends through flatting (349) was frequently stated and often co-articulated with broadening of social networks through meeting friends of flatmates. Ruining friendships by sharing households (351) was commonly cited for avoiding flatting with friends, while others felt friendships deepened. Julie precedes her statement with ‘sometimes’ (350) implying this represents a risk rather than a certainty. Nevertheless, there are conflicting tensions in the two stances which contradict each other.

Sean argues the case for living with friends.

272 Sean: But yeah rule number one
273 was don't flat with friends
274 because apparently you know
275 it destroys social relationships
276 um (0.1) we didn't find that so much
277 specially not last year (.) last year?

Flatting environments are unregulated with no set blueprints for behaviour. Consequently young adults instigate and experiment with their own procedures. Unwritten rules were spoken of by other participants and give credence to Fairclough's (2015) assertion that people actively create a world bound by rules in everyday practices, which are maintained through language. Sean prioritises the rule about not flatting with friends (272) only to repudiate it (276). Making this rule number one strengthens the power of his challenge. We are forewarned that he is sceptical by the use of ‘apparently’ (274), signifying his doubt that flatting with friends destroys social relationships (275). The use of ‘we’ instead of ‘I’ attributes the veracity of his rationale to external sources, while the stress on ‘we didn't find that so much’ (276) is a prosodic device used to strengthen the elocutionary force of a statement (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008). Paradoxically, this certainty is contradicted by ‘so much’ (276) indicating there were some problems.

Significantly, Sean is a city dweller. There was a distinct divide between town and city preferences: town folk predominantly favoured flatting with friends or at least people they knew, whereas city dwellers were more open to living with strangers. Although Sean questions the rule about never flatting with friends his acknowledgement of this supports a general trend that city flatters are more prone to flatting with strangers. Sean explains why strangers might be preferred:

278 Sean: I know some people (.) um like to flat with strangers
279 because they feel that because they're disconnected
280 because they don't have some sort of social relationship with them
281 they don't have any reservations about telling them to do their dishes
282 or ta or to do the washing
283 or I want to be left alone after 10 o'clock
284 whereas friends (.) it can be a bit harder to kind of (.) negotiate
285 and communicate that through to them

Whereas the majority of participants relished the social connection with flatmates, with the proviso that flatmates respect a need for personal space and privacy, Sean speaks of some individuals deliberately remaining emotionally detached (279). In this way relationships can be maintained on a level uncomplicated by friendship ties, which can confound the functional aspects of living with others. 'I know some people' (278) authenticates Sean's statements. Established social relationships (280) can compromise the need to manage simple housekeeping and the business of sharing with others: communicating and negotiating (284,285) potential domains of conflict can be difficult. Sean uses a tripartite list, rhetorically employed to signify a complete list (Jefferson, 1991), which reinforces possible areas of tension.

Phoebe provides more insight into the benefits of living with strangers:

24 Phoebe: just because you're friends with someone
25 doesn't necessarily mean you gonna flat well
26 with them (.) um and I've found that
27 actually the best um flatmates I've had
28 are people (.) who I didn't know before?
29 and so (.) you don't have any uh expectations?
30 to live with (.) so you're taking it all on face value
31 and then you kind of learn (.) what they're like
32 in a (.) you know (.) in a home environment first
33 and then (.) you know how to interact with them then
34 and then friendship may or may not build from there?
35 so I think it is better to do it that way round
36 um (0.2) whereas if you've known someone
37 for a while I think you kind of expect
38 them (.) to behave in a certain way
39 and sometimes it can be:: very different in reality?

Phoebe makes five valid points as to why strangers make the best flatmates (27, 28). Firstly, friends do not necessarily make good flatmates (24, 25). Secondly, you have no preconceived expectations of strangers (29, 30) compared to the expectations formed of flatmates one already knows (36-38). Thirdly, you get to know them in a home

environment first and learn how to interact with them in a domestic situation: as Sean stated you can communicate your expectations before friendship gets in the way (33). Fourthly, there is a possibility of friendship growing from the daily contact (34). Lastly, the reality of living with friends may not match assumptions about their domestic behaviour (39). This relates to the common understanding that you don't get to know someone fully until you have lived with them.

The pro-flating with friends talk included aspects such as fear of flating with strangers, having an established comfortable intimacy precluding awkwardness, and risks associated with the unknown. In the pro-stranger talk reasons cited were friendships compromised by co-habitation, difficulty navigating ground rules with friends, and the prospect of gaining new friends. Town flatters preferred sharing with friends, while city folk were more likely to flat with strangers.

Discussion

The current research suggests that permutations of interpersonal relationships in the intimate setting of co-residence are carefully considered by young adults, demonstrating an acute awareness of potential problems, which may destabilise the domestic environment. Previous research has demonstrated that discrimination of potential flatmates on the grounds of age, lifestyle, ethnicity, mental illness and addiction may be a necessity to ensure comfort in the intimacy of domesticity (Clark & Tuffin, 2015, Tuffin & Clark, 2016; Clark, Tuffin, Frewin & Bowker, 2017a). The current research also considers preferences but is framed around the question of relationships among and between flatmates: whether it is better to flat with couples or single individuals, friends or strangers. The necessity for flatters to consider these additional aspects, which can sustain or undermine relationships, underscores the psychosocial convolutions of shared living. Particular preferences are inevitably based on past experiences and entail complex justifications.

Perhaps due to a proliferation of horror stories about 'flatmates from hell' (e.g. Birmingham, 2001), low expectations prompted contented participants to consider themselves the beneficiaries of good fortune, with chance or 'luck' a symbol for a viable household. The current research found that the majority of flats were spoken of

as pleasant, welcoming environments and sanctuaries regarded as home, painting a much more positive outlook than negative stories would have us believe.

However, Heath and Cleaver (2003) distinguish between two different types of share-houses: those characterised by friendships and ‘stranger houses’ where residents do not know each other or share leisure time together at home. Such anonymous households were briefly acknowledged by participants in the present study, generally associated with flatting outside of Australasia and unfavourably compared with those where in-house socialising is expected, providing independence and privacy is not compromised (Clark et al, 2017a).

Although McNamara and Connell (2007) have noted that shared housing was perceived to relieve some of the pressure of living as a de facto couple, to our knowledge preferences for living with single individuals or couples has not featured in the literature. This adds a distinct new element to what is known about young shared households. The data strongly indicates that seasoned single flatters unanimously avoid sharing with couples as sociability is curtailed and the prospect of becoming involved in couples’ problems is almost unavoidable. In addition couples have superior numbers in any decision making, rendering a single person vulnerable.

The weight of numbers raises the possibility of inequality in a supposedly egalitarian situation, where all are expected to contribute and benefit equally. A further consideration pertaining to the democratic notion of peer-shared housing is the potential for marginalising a ‘random’ individual brought into flat with a group of friends for purely financial reasons. Power can also be exercised by longer term residents or those owning most of the chattels. However, it is important to consider that power can be used to achieve both good and bad outcomes (Fairclough, 2015).

The contradictory positions of preference for living with friends and the desire to avoid compromising existing friendships underpins the critical importance of friendship in the lives of young adults. Fragmentation of traditional families has meant a greater significance and reliance on friendship as a source of security (Smart, Davies, Heaphy & Mason, 2012). Love, trust and care are not limited to families: they can characterise friendships and other social networks (Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004). Heath (2004a)

has demonstrated that shared domestic living can create connections that are intimate, supportive and emotionally meaningful in a time when life-time employment, relationships and family living nearby are no longer guaranteed. Shared housing blurs the boundaries of public and private spaces and promotes a high degree of intimacy and interdependence and bonding creates a home environment achieving a quasi-family quality (McNamara and Connell 2007; Gorman-Murray, 2015). This study demonstrates that while existing friendships can either disintegrate or deepen with sharing, friendship can develop and accelerate from living with strangers.

In the UK, Kemp and Rugg (1998) found that young adults preferred to flat with friends, arguing that living with strangers can involve insecurity, risk, and loneliness. Whereas this was evident in the current study, a more complex picture has emerged, with some choosing to avoid combining domestic arrangements with friendships. Where there is friendship there is already trust and communication, both important in functional flats, but good friends do not always translate to good housemates and sharing a household poses a potential threat to friendship. As Heath and Cleaver (2003) note, a friend who turns out to be a lazy flatmate can be seen as a betrayal of friendship.

In this study favouring friends as flatmates was the norm among town flatters, where everyone tends to be acquainted. City folk were more open to flatting with strangers, possibly because flexibility and mobility are important for young people, attuned and responsive to the employment market (Clapham et al, 2014). This endorses Heath and Cleaver's (2003) metropolitan study findings that house sharing is one way of making friends when moving to a new city. Whereas some friendships do not survive the strain of shared domesticity this is not universal. Although Kemp and Rugg (1998) found that people prefer to flat with friends they noted that expectations of flatmates were more important than preferences. Common expectations as to the degree of cleanliness, tidiness or closeness expected were a dominant explanation for functional flats and arguably expectations are easier to communicate to strangers. However, there are hazards to moving in with strangers, which can impact negatively on psychological well-being. Others upheld the contestable urban wisdom, never flat with friends. The contradictory dimensions to the discourse speak to the complexities involved, where even generalised rules like not mixing friendship with domestic sharing have a range of exceptions to rules. What does not (often) work and what can compromise household

and friendship dynamics may ultimately rest on the specifics of which friends and which flats.

What the two discourses have in common is the assumption that there is always the prospect of choice in deciding who to flat with. Kemp and Rugg (1998) observed that autonomy and agency can be exerted by control over who to live with. Rationally and according to practical advice on flatting (Earl, 2013), the answer is to choose flatmates wisely but careful selection of flatmates is frequently subverted by the economic expediency of taking in, or moving in with any person(s) available at short notice. This study has demonstrated that involuntary flatting with strangers, dictated by financial necessity refutes the supposition that choice is always an option. And errors of judgement in selecting flatmates are always possible. Living with someone provides a more complete picture of who they are. There are also difficulties associated with leaving a household when interpersonal relationships deteriorate. The presumption is that individuals may be free to come and go in this unregulated environment if the household is not a good fit for them but remaining is often the easier option. More effort is required to find new accommodation, physically move possessions and find the necessary money for added expenses, such as rent in advance and bond, while settling existing bills.

Young adulthood can be a tumultuous period of multiple life changes, such as gaining qualifications, early relationship formation, and forging career paths (Arnett, 2000). Many young New Zealanders are making the best of a lifestyle primarily motivated by economic challenge. By appreciating the social benefits and carefully navigating the hazards of shared domestic living, which has few traditional markers, they show an acute understanding of the domestic dynamics, which impact the quality of their lives. As noted earlier, in many other Western countries boomerang children returning to live with parents is extensively documented. Evidence of this trend in New Zealand is emerging but not reflected in academic research: investigation is needed to establish how prevalent this is in Aotearoa as a means of coping with housing difficulties and financial hardship.

Conclusion

Two discourses, both dealing with competing tensions emerged in talk about house sharing: whether to flat with single individuals or couples, friends or strangers. Single people tend to elect to share with unattached peers. Unlike British findings (Kemp & Rugg, 1998; Heath & Cleaver, 2003), where friends were found to be preferred flatmates, clear cut trends are less evident in New Zealand. Both discourses take into account the relationship status of potential flatmates, moving the level of complexity in house sharing beyond a simple consideration of sharing costs, chores and communal areas. The analysis suggests that sharing involves not merely considerations about who one might share with, but takes the agenda into areas that consider pre-existing social relationships and their potential impact on shared living arrangements that work.

Interpersonal relationships in the intimacy of domesticity are at best complicated and at worst highly conflictual and fraught with challenges. Relationships have the capacity for increased well-being of individuals or, when things go wrong, negative psychological implications. The current research indicates that group dynamics can be enhanced or confounded by pre-existing affinities. Precisely for these reasons individuals elect to avoid additional complications in households where there are no established blueprints for relationships. Unwritten rules are disputed by some and upheld as immutable truths by others. This demonstrates that the art of convivial flatting is complex with differing ideas as to what constitutes a good model. Certainly one size does not fit all. There are no certainties. What appeals to some is anathema to others. More importantly, participants were aware of the issues associated with the various options: talk was driven by the unquestioned value associated with having a working living arrangement. As with previous research, talk was pivoted on stories of bad experiences and what to avoid.

The necessity for selecting flatmates wisely has been offered as sound advice for avoiding problems but it is often difficult to select the best person. Such considerations involve individual characteristics, which are often not that visible at the outset. Errors can be made and even with the best forethought flatmates can turn out to be incompatible. In addition, choice is a luxury sometimes denied if a room needs to be rapidly found or filled for financial reasons. The current research leads to a broader understanding of shared housing beyond the New Zealand context and adds to our

knowledge of this age by suggesting that young adults demonstrate a sophisticated awareness of the importance of interpersonal issues in shared housing.

CHAPTER 6

Do household chores subvert the social advantages of flatting?

Few tasks are more like the torture of Sisyphus than housework, with its endless repetition: the clean becomes soiled, the soiled is made clean, over and over, day after day.

Simone de Beauvoir: *The second sex*

Introduction

By focusing on the economic reasons for flatting it is easy to lose sight of the social advantages of flatting, which have been documented (Despres, 1994; Heath & Kenyon, 2001; Ahrentzen, 2003; Hughes, 2003). The data employed in this chapter adds to our appreciation of the positive interpersonal aspects of house sharing and considers whether these social resources are undermined by equal sharing of essential quotidian household tasks. This manuscript has been submitted to *Social Forces* and is under review.

Do household chores subvert the social psychological advantages of shared housing among young adults?

Abstract

Many young adults in the Western world are pragmatically adapting to housing unaffordability by sharing accommodation with peers. Far from the traditional stigma associated with such households, the social benefits of the lifestyle are valued. The rationale for the current study was to add to the limited literature on the topic and gain greater understanding of the social dynamics of shared housing. Data was drawn from interviews with 39 young adults including 7 flat groups and 14 individuals between the ages of 20 and 35, currently sharing. Employing discourse analysis we examine, in depth, how the social psychological advantages of shared living are constructed and how these benefits can be compromised by the mundane necessity of everyday chores. The positives of companionship, friendship, mutual support and increased skills and self-reliance are tempered with the potential for upset through lack of equal co-operation.

Key words: Shared housing young adults discourse analysis social advantages
household chores

Economic imperative features high on the list of reasons why young adults in the Western world share living arrangements (Heath & Cleaver, 2003; Mulder, 2003; Steinfurher & Haase, 2009). Financial independence is increasingly difficult for young adults and a major constraint in the transition to residential autonomy (Mykyta, 2012). Sharing costs, such as rent, power and internet along with the amenities of kitchen, bathroom and laundry, with bedrooms as private territory, is a practical means of reducing expenses while enjoying an acceptable standard of accommodation (Ahrentzen, 2003). Whereas shared domestic living arrangements are one way of managing economic challenges, the lifestyle represents more than a simple financial option, since it is intricately connected to politics, economics and wider social changes (Williamson 2006). It is important to study young people as examination of their lives provides a unique view of social and economic forces of change: when old practices are no longer viable new norms are established (Heath & Cleaver, 2003; Furlong, 2013).

Significant problems with affordability and inadequate supply of housing, especially in the rental and lower priced housing market, add to housing difficulties experienced by young adults globally. Contingent increases in rent costs are expected to continue (Day, 2016), and lingering economic uncertainty from the 2007 Global Financial Crisis and 2008-2012 Recession has resulted in extremely competitive labour markets (Lagarde 2016). With a decline in real earnings many full-time jobs do not provide an adequate income for independent living. Weakening social welfare is less effective in softening hardship (Beck, 2007; McNamara & Connell, 2007). Further monetary constraints for young adults can be linked to increased post-secondary education, escalating tertiary education costs and student loan debt (Gicheva, 2016). These factors render young adults financially and psychologically vulnerable (Aassve, Cottini, & Vitali, 2013).

The growing pervasiveness of shared living can also be attributed to social changes, such as relaxed sexual mores, women becoming increasingly career-orientated, enjoyment of single life, and the lure of travel before settling into long term commitments (Arnett, 2000). Typically, but not consistently, shared dwellings among young adults (also known as group living or flatting) consist of two or more non-related, often highly mobile, childless, unmarried people (Williamson, 2006). Peer co-residence is not only economically pragmatic but socially appealing (Kemp & Rugg, 1998; Heath & Cleaver, 2003). Increases in this household demographic have been documented in the United States (Mykyta, 2012),

United Kingdom (Carlsson & Eriksson, 2015) and other European countries (Arundel & Ronald, 2015). In New Zealand and Australia ‘flatting’ is an established social phenomenon and regarded as a rite of passage (Wolfe & Barnett, 2001; Natalier, 2004).

Comprehensive exploration of the social dynamics of post adolescence group living is lacking. The bulk of research on shared-housing has centered on residential sharing among the elderly, immigrants, and inter-generational households (Hemmons, Hoch & Carp, 1996). The hegemonic belief in the virtue of the traditional one-family, one-house model means the dynamics and benefits of alternative housing remain largely ignored despite the steady erosion of traditional family structures and declining housing affordability (Baum, 1986). Much of the research on shared housing among young adults has been confined to European housing demographers (Mulder, 2003; Steinfurher & Haase, 2009), who focus on why young people flat. In Australia Natalier (2003), concluded that gendered divisions of household labour still persist in shared housing, while McNamara and Connell (2007) investigated flats as ‘home’. In America Goldscheider and Waite (1991) examined living arrangements of young adults leaving the parental home. Similarly, in Britain, Heath and Cleaver (2003) considered accommodation options for single young adults. In New Zealand Williamson (2006) explored the advantages of cooking and sharing meals together while Clark and Tuffin considered the issues associated with housemate selection and found that potential desirable flatmates were constructed as very similar in terms of age, life style and ethnicity (Clark & Tuffin, 2015) and overtly free from mental and addiction problems (Tuffin & Clark, 2016).

The literature suggests that relationships in this intimate setting can present challenges but also have the capacity for psychological enhancement. Flatting can be an extremely positive experience, providing friendship, companionship, trust and mutual support with flatmates providing a ready-made, easily accessible social life (Hughes, 2003). While such advantages can be posited, Mykyta (2012) notes that little is actually known about the social benefits and costs of this way of life. Clark and Tuffin (2015) argued that research needs to consider the dynamics of flatting more carefully. In their study, selection of flatmates was often justified on the grounds of excluding those who might disrupt the “dynamic”, which became a rhetorical commonplace about which little is known. The current study sought to build on the existing literature and broaden understanding of the complex equation of benefits and costs of living in close confines with non-family members. What contributes to

successful co-residence and what can sabotage relationships? Since various social benefits have been suggested (Kemp & Rugg, 1998; Heath & Cleaver, 2003), verifying these by listening to those who have lived this way of life was one method of confirmation and adding to our understanding. Specifically, employing discourse analysis, we examine how young adults talk about the social-psychological advantages of flatting and how these can be undermined by everyday household chores.

Method

The methodology of discourse analysis adopted for this study, within the paradigm of social constructionist epistemology, is based on the tenets of critical social psychology (Tuffin 2005). Rather than accrediting psychological processes to the mental interior, critical social psychologists understand social life as language practice (Wetherell, 1996). Social constructionists argue that experience is constructed in and through language and social interaction: knowledge and reality are negotiable, depending on the values and beliefs of specific cultures at a particular historical time (Coyle, 1995). Discourse analysts employ a variety of techniques, all of which involve close scrutiny of language (Taylor, 2001).

Language is never neutral but employed for particular ends (Burr, 2015). Through talk humans construct their lives, relationships and identities, positioning themselves and others as kind, intelligent, belligerent etc., while simultaneously performing actions, such as blaming, judging, defending or flattering (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Language structures our daily lives, influencing our explanations and arguments, with little consideration given to deeply embedded assumptions in dominating discourses and who they ultimately serve (Fairclough, 2015). Discourses can be defined as shared systems of meaning, whereby humans communicate and organise social reality (Parker, 1992). Discourse analysis affords the opportunity to explore how people achieve their objectives by drawing on common discourses.

Participants

Participants were purposefully recruited by word of mouth. For example, friends, family, acquaintances and colleagues on hearing of the research would offer to approach house sharers they knew and supplied contact details. Participants were aged 20 to 35 years, fluent in English and had flatting for at least a year, not necessarily in their present households. Seven flat groups were jointly interviewed, with a total of 23 participants. In addition 14

participants were interviewed individually. In total 37 people were interviewed, at which stage it was deemed that data saturation had been reached. The merit of the approach using a relatively small sample lies in the richness of data that can be gained from in-depth discussions and analysis of the data (Starks & Trinidad, 2007).

Participants were predominantly Pākehā (of European descent), two were Māori and two identified as Māori/Pākehā. 15 were male and 22 female, with a mean age of 24. Apart from 14 students, all were employed full-time. Three flat group interviews were conducted in a large New Zealand city and four in a smaller town in order to increase heterogeneity. Semi-structured, in depth interviews were conducted using open-ended questions, such as, “Why flat?”. These were designed to function as triggers to initiate discussion but also allow for the researcher to digress in order to explore an area that might not have been anticipated (Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008). Interviews were audio recorded with group interviews videoed in order to assist with identification of speakers for transcription purposes. All interviews were transcribed using an annotated version of Jeffersonian notation (Wooffitt, 1992).

Analysis

Analysis was inductive: this entailed multiple readings of the data searching for common discourses into why and how young adults are living as they are. Convergent data represents a shared perspective of lived experiences of flatters and a common understanding of the world (Geertz, 1983). The challenge is to identify salient discourses and their constituents. Discourses are not found in distinct categories but are scattered throughout texts and named to facilitate conception. One discourse inevitably entails others: in a complex mosaic, they merge, echo, assimilate and can contradict each other (Fairclough, 2015). All excerpts employed as examples are considered most representative of common discourses. Several discourses of positive social-psychological advantages of shared housing emerged: *companionship, friendship, mutual support* and *increased social skills and self-reliance*. However, while there are significant positives there remains the possibility that they can be compromised by the mundane reality of everyday chores.

Companionship

Social and economic reasons for sharing could be separated into two distinct discourses but the two were invariably co-articulated.

- 1 VC: Why do you flat
2 Phoebe: Even if I was in the position to have my own place
3 I think I'd still want (.) to flat
4 because of the (.) social aspect of it
5 you know (.) the being able to come home (0.2)
6 have a chat with someone about your crappy day ((laughs))
7 VC: Oh yes
8 Phoebe: Um (.) yeah that social aspect I think I'd miss
9 because I have lived on my own
10 in the UK (.) for a little while
11 and um (.) yeah it's quite lonely
12 um if you're if you're on your own in the
13 in your own place (.) and you (.) yeah (0.2)
14 it depends (.) even if you have a
15 an active social life (.) it can still be nice
16 to have (.) that (.) someone to hang out with

The economic necessity of sharing is acknowledged (2), and contrasted with the social benefits which are privileged, arguably making them more important (4). Significantly, Phoebe maintains that given the financial means to live on her own she would prefer to flat considering the social gains. “You know”, (5) is a discourse marker in which the speaker tries to confirm the listener’s comprehension (Laserna, Seih & Pennebaker, 2014). Being unsure whether this is the case Phoebe expands upon the social aspect of flatting: ready-made companionship and being able to share everyday vicissitudes of life (6). Even with “an active social life” (15) having company at home is beneficial. The social benefits of communal living (5, 6 and 16) are powerfully contrasted with living alone (11), which is cast as a poorer outcome.

By definition companionship implies alleviation of loneliness and isolation.

- 97 Sam: As people (.) as humans (.) we
98 like to have company (.) um
99 so it (.) is nice to be able to sit down
100 and share a space with (.) people (.) who
101 you know (.) you can actually talk to (.) yeah

Sam attributes the need for company as a fundamental human condition (97, 98). People “you can actually talk to” (101) is open to alternative meanings. It could refer to having articulate, rather than monosyllabic flatmates or it could be the assumption, given that this

century has seen increasingly electronic socialising, that face-to-face interaction remains valued and sought after. A further interpretive possibility is that “talk to” implies someone who is willing to listen. All interpretations speak to the advantages of having others in one’s life: sharing a household can go toward fulfilling this need.

Friendship

Relatedly, the discourse of making friends and networking through flatting consistently surfaced:

- 26 Jason: Like we’re all probably
27 I’d say like (.) are closest mates
28 since like (.) being in the flat together
29 Owen: Yeah and you get to meet everyone else’s friends
30 VC: Oh yeah
31 Aiden: It’s more (.) it’s definitely more sociable
32 than being (.) you know
33 if you had a room (.) round (.) by yourself

This all-male household is very positive about their flat, with Jason feeling that they have become the closest of friends (27). This endorses social psychological theory that proximity fosters friendship (Festinger, Schachter & Back, 1950). Aiden contrasts sociability of flatting positively with solo living (31-33). Owen makes (29) an important point about the opportunity to extend wider social networks through flatmates. Julie echoes this point below:

- 24 Julie: And so (.) we’d get to know
25 everyone else’s friends
26 and I’ve got some (.) some
27 of the best friends I have today
28 from flatting with randoms
29 so it does have its social benefits
30 especially if you’re in like a
31 if move to a city
32 where you don’t know anyone
33 which is often what’s happened with me

“Randoms” (28) was a term frequently employed to indicate previously unknown flatmates and is particularly effective in condensing unspecified information into one word. It sometimes served another purpose: to refer to those not included in an inner core of flatmates. For example, Pia stated “we’ve also got (.) this other random person” (736) suggesting that there can be insiders and outsiders in shared households possibly compromising parity. Strangers thrown together in group living developing into good

friends was often noted. Julie employs an extreme case formulation, “best” (27) to indicate the measure of friendship, which serves to bolster the assertion and persuade the listener of the veracity of the statement. Extreme case formulations are powerful rhetorical devices used by speakers when they want to influence the conclusions of listeners (Pomerantz, 1986). “Especially” (30) strengthens the force of the proposition that the social advantages of shared accommodation are likely to be stronger in places where you have no established acquaintances (30, 32). Again this opens up the possibility of piggy-backing off existing social networks, which become available through flatmates and this networking is particularly important to those who are new to town. These observations are authenticated by personal experience (33): lived reality serves to legitimise the claim (Potter, 1996).

The following extract speaks to the social advantages of shared living and explains how friendship develops through spatial proximity:

383 Sam: But it is like you're (.) you're flat family
384 type of thing because you:: spend
385 you can spend a lot of time
386 with your flatmates (.) they're (.) you can
387 you get to know (.) and understand how
388 your flatmates are feeling (.) um
389 you hear about their crappy days at work
390 you hear about (.) any troubles that they're having
391 you hear about (.) their good and bad things
392 that are going on in their lives so you get (.) uh
393 >you know< a flat (.) a good flatmate
394 can end up being a really good friend

Flatmates being considered “family” (383) was frequently alluded to. Situationally you are likely to spend intensive time with flatmates (385-386) and consequently share everyday events, much like family interactions. A good deal of time spent together can involve knowledge and understanding of intimate aspects of others’ lives where feelings and emotions are shared. The interpersonal interactions involved in disclosures, whereby a “good” flatmate is willing to share personal stories (and we assume reciprocity), advance sharing a roof to sharing friendship (393-394). To reinforce this progression Sam makes use of a rhetorical device (anaphora), where a sequence of words is repeated at the beginning of a sentence or clause, which persuasively appeals to the emotions of the listener (Holmes, 1984). “You hear about” repeated three times also forms a tripartite list which signifies list completion (Jefferson, 1991).

Friendship and bonding are enhanced, maintained and strengthened by group outings and rituals and add credence to our understanding that the significance of flatting goes beyond merely sharing accommodation.

204 Toni: So we've kind of arranged
205 >you know< on Mondays
206 and get together (.) after work (.) whatever
207 and play games (.) for a couple of hours
208 and that's quite good
209 cause (.) you know (.) we can come together
210 and then we can talk about
211 what needs to be done
212 and then for the rest of the week
213 if we need (.) we can just do our own thing

Specific week nights were often stipulated in explaining rituals. It is clear that the Monday night ritual of game playing (205) is a social get-together but also facilitates discussion about what needs to be done in the household (210-211) in a congenial way. The final line (213) indicates that the need for independence is respected, with "if we need" indicating that socialising is not necessarily restricted to Monday nights.

The degree of fraternising between flatmates both within and outside the house varies from flat to flat. Flat 2 regard themselves as high on the continuum of socialising, suggesting that sharing a common roof opens up all kinds of positive possibilities.

408 Tamsin: Like we (.) we do stuff::
409 out at like on the weekends
410 we go away on weekend trips together
411 and stuff (.) you know it's not
412 just living together (.) we actually (.) do
413 live our lives together (.) °as well°

Going on weekend trips together (410) typifies a highly positive outcome in terms of developing social relationships and ultimately friendships, and implies particularly close relationships with an interesting level of social intensity compared with simply sharing common areas of the residence. This is substantiated by the assertion "it's not just living together (.) we actually (.) do live our lives together (.) as well" (411-413). This degree of psychological intimacy potentially elevates the status of flatmates to something more psychologically meaningful and less transactional. Such companionship, friendship and bonds are a natural precursor to another common discourse, the psychological support afforded by flatmates.

Mutual support

Companionship and support have different effects on psychological well-being. Companionship is aligned with experiencing pleasure and increases the quality of life regardless of the level of stress, whereas support contributes to psychological health by reducing the adverse effects of stress (Rook, 1987). The psychologically positive perception of mutual support as a protective mechanism against stress was evident with the ability to come home and “vent” (81) or “rant” about a difficult day commonly expressed.

74 Maree: you can come home
75 and actually talk to each other
76 in the evening (.) it's not just
77 yeah not just sharing a house
78 actually having that communication
79 so:: and that's nice cause
80 sometimes you just want to come home
81 and (.) vent about your day at work
82 to somebody in person (.) um

Maree draws on a frequent discourse, also clearly evident in Tamsin's talk above, that flatting is not merely co-existence (77) but affords significant connectedness; “you can actually talk to each other” (75) echoes Sam, above, (101) verbatim. Venting (81) is one way of coping with everyday stressors. Shared physical presence (82) facilitates the opportunity to talk over the problems or pleasures of daily life and mobilise social support.

Chloe reflects that solo living lacks the social advantages of communal living:

23 Chloe: Um yup (.) if um (.) someone has a problem
24 or you just want to hang out with someone
25 you just go into (.) knock on the door
26 go sit down (.) and have a chat (.) yeah
27 if you were living by yourself >I don't know<
28 it would get a bit lonely ((laughs)) yeah

Chloe's observations incorporate a number of common benefits cited in earlier excerpts: having flatmates to hang out with (24); someone to talk to (26); and the prospect of loneliness when living on one's own (27, 28). “Knock on the door” underscores the sanctity of private space (25) but also implies that, at least with some flatmates, it is acceptable to seek entry into a bedroom for company or to share a worry. The extract speaks to the positives of sharing, not just the space but the more intimate psychological aspects of living with others and enriching the texture of everyday life by offering mutual support.

Flat 7, endorsed this while acknowledging social boundaries.

213 Mathew: =I guess there is always someone around to watch TV
214 and quite close that you can talk to
215 but also that recognition that you're
216 quite entitled to sit in your room for two days
217 and just like really be by yourself (.) which ((Girls laugh))
218 Emma: =We wouldn't let you do that
219 we would check up on you

Again common threads permeate Mathew's talk, such as having someone talk to (214). This could be interpreted as having someone on hand or someone emotionally close to talk to. Emma interrupts his sentence to assert that the housemates would check up on Mathew if he spent too long a period in his room (219-220), indicating concern for the well-being of flatmates. In addition, recognising that it would be unusual for Mathew to spend that length of time in his room suggests some awareness of patterns of others.

Emma also expressed the security she felt was afforded by her flatmates.

210 Emma: It feels like you're a family ((laughter))
259 Emma: It's like a (.) it's like a foundation in your life

The nature of the "family (210) implies blood and emotional ties and ideally a major source of practical and psychological support for its members, along with care and protection. "Foundation" is a persuasively potent structural metaphor and signifies a solid core on which everything else is built. From this we infer that Emma is articulating the firm basis gained from her flatmates to withstand the ups and downs of life, suggesting feelings of fundamental trust, comfort, protection and support. Such relational connections offer optimal conditions for well-being and clearly indicate the psychological importance of good flatmates for emotional security. Moving from the positivity of companionship and support, negotiating and managing sometimes difficult situations successfully in shared households requires some skill.

Increased social skills and self-reliance

A third discourse involved enhancement of social, personal and practical skills promoting self-reliance. Younger participants noted that living in close quarters with others improved interpersonal skills.

226 Justin: But (.) presumably you would be better
227 at handling social situations
228 if you are constantly (.) essentially in one

229 even if it's very minimal

By employing the word “presumably” Justin is not taking personal ownership for the tentative proposal, not based on clear evidence, that flating experience better equips a person in social situations (227). The impersonal “you” intensifies distancing from the proposition as his own (226,228). An objective stance is often considered more credible (Edwards & Potter, 1992). The statement is justified by observing that shared domesticity is “essentially” (228) a perpetual social situation (227). The insertion of “even if it's very minimal” (229) is used to convince listeners of the validity of the statement but also demonstrates a definite stake in the claim.

The necessity for effective communication, which contributes considerably to any social interaction, was a pervasive observation in talk of dealing with flatmates. Improvement in communication skills and tolerance was a common dimension to the enhanced social skills discourse.

116 Jody: I think you kinda (.) you learn
117 to communicate (.) with people
118 and you also kind of learn to be
119 a bit more tolerant?
120 so like (.) I've had friends who have just
121 gone from living at home
122 to moving in with their partner?
123 and so (.) I think (.) they::
124 might not learn the tolerance

Like Justin, Jody uses the impersonal “you” (116) preceded by “kinda”, which attenuates the force of the claim that flating promotes better communication and tolerance. Epistemic uncertainty, “kind of learn” (118) is also evident and is often used when speakers are unsure whether the listener may or may not agree with them (Gee, 2008). The ambivalence is further evident in the use of “bit” and the rise in tone of voice (119). This is followed by speculation that acquiring increased tolerance could be lacking for those who have never flatted.

While Jody's observations would be difficult to challenge, veteran flatters paradoxically professed that their levels of tolerance decreased the longer they flatted.

99 Phoebe: It's like (.) um (.) yeah you do definitely
100 see a change as you get older
101 that um (.) yeah the longer people
102 have been flating and the older they are

103 the:: the less tolerant you probably are
104 of (.) of those little things (.) but (.) yeah
105 I think that's why it is important to make sure
106 you flat with someone who's of a similar age
107 or life stage um (.) yeah cause then yeah
108 and you're more likely to be on the same page

Unlike the tentative statements from younger participants, “You do definitely see a change as you get older” (99-100) is a categorical statement leaving no room for dispute. The use of the third person “you” (99, 100, 103) and “they” (102) implies that this is not merely a personal opinion or experience but an objective assessment. The claim is also legitimised by the older age membership category, a resource implying experience and authority on the topic (Psathas, 2003). The unequivocal stance is later softened to “probably” (103) and qualified by “those little things” (104). The “little things” are not specified, however Phoebe had previously spoken of a younger flatmate failing to secure the premises before going out and contravening the accepted individual shower routine times. A common discourse of preference for living with people of similar age (106), life stage and outlook (107) is expertly drawn on to both make a point and justify exclusion on the grounds of age (Clark & Tuffin, 2015). The importance of being “on the same page” (108) was a phrase regularly used by participants, suggesting that this can be achieved by greater communication and tolerance. For seasoned flatters the tension between tolerance and impatience can be resolved by living with those well versed in the vicissitudes of co-residence.

Julie feels that flating becomes both easier and harder with age.

631 Julie: Yeah (.) so I think it does get easier
632 the older you get (.) um
633 and the more (.) that you do it
634 but I think at the same time
635 you kinda get over living with people

Julie's earlier explanation about why flating becomes easier, was the longer you flat the more direct you become about communicating expectations of flatmates. This supports younger participants' assertions that communication skills improve. Older flatters suggested they helped delineate boundaries: “what is OK and what is not OK”. While statements of increasing and decreasing tolerance appear contradictory they are compatible. Discourses of experienced participants indicate that there comes a time when flating becomes less attractive (635).

Running an efficient household requires some skill (Goldscheider & Waite, 1991). Mathew's pride in graduating from hotdogs to more complex dishes suggests an improvement in practical capabilities.

339 Mathew: =And sort of I think we hold up
340 at cooking as well
341 if we think back to like the
342 first two weeks that we were all here
343 I think we've definitely improved in our (.) yeah
361 essentially like hotdogs and that
362 to what I cook now
363 there's definitely significant improvement

This household takes turns in cooking for each other. By using "we" rather than 'I' Mathew assigns collective agency implying the meals of the first two weeks left a lot to be desired. The intervening talk between these excerpts was taken up by banter about Mathew's early cooking attempts. Cooking is a useful skill and denotes confidence gained in self-reliance.

This was borne out by Pia.

57 Pia: Um (.) I think it (.) it (.) kind of
58 grounds you a lot more
59 in what you're able to do for yourself

Both of the above texts begin with "I think": a semantic device, which fulfils a number of functions. In this case the speakers voice opinions without trying to appear too dogmatic (Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995). Uncertainty is further diminished by "kind of" (57). Earlier Pia spoke of adjusting to being away from home with the mutual support of flatmates in her first year. Now in her fifth year of studies the statement implies that flatting is the foundation (58) of her present self-sufficiency, independence and resourcefulness (59).

These discourses confirm a number of positive social-psychological benefits to shared living: companionship, friendship, mutual support and acquiring social and practical skills, which contribute to self-reliance. Contrastively, not all talk dealt with social advantages of flatting since sharing involves responsibilities, such as equal contribution to household chores. The simple necessities of, "Who will take out the rubbish or clean the toilet?" can destabilise relationships, which can swiftly fall apart.

The challenge of communal co-operation with household chores

Contravening contractual obligations corrode the positive attributes offered by flatting. Lucy felt she was at a stage where she could afford an apartment on her own but preferred the space and social aspects flatting affords. Nevertheless, she spoke of the challenges of shared household living:

121 Lucy: in saying that (.) you still have those challenges of::
122 living in a shared housing situation where (.)
123 things (.) are (.) not everyone's sort of on the same (.) thought
124 not everyone's as considerate (.) as:: others so::
125 there can be conflict (.) because (.) you know
126 someone doesn't (.) pull their weight ((laughs))

“Not everyone's sort of on the same thought”, another version of being “on the same page” (123) in conjunction with “challenges” signifies differences that are difficult to circumnavigate. Lucy clarifies by adding that while some individuals are considerate others are less thoughtful (124) and this can involve conflict (125). Specifically, an inconsiderate person is constructed as failing to “pull their weight”, an idiomatic rhetorical device conveying something other than the literal meaning (Drew & Holt, 1989) and frequently used by participants to describe someone failing to make a sufficient or equal contribution to housework (126). The challenge lies in trying to get recalcitrant flatmates to co-operate but this not always successful.

In particular the single most dominant contributor to dissatisfaction with housemates was neglecting dishes.

135 Sam: And she would agree that that was her mess
136 that she (.) was meant to clean it but
137 but wouldn't ? (.) and (.) so (.) I
138 in the end we had no (.) we had no plates
139 because we were (.) dumb
140 and (.) you know (.) these are the rules
141 this is what happens
142 you have to clean up after yourself
143 and none of us were willing to just
144 become her (.) housecleaners
145 and clean up after her? (.) so
146 I uh:: took all (.) all of the dirty dishes
147 that she had left for the month
148 on the kitchen bench
149 and put them on her bed ((VC laughs))
150 she didn't make her bed

Sam talks of the frustration of a flatmate who acknowledges she is in the wrong but does nothing to rectify the situation. “In the end we had no plates” (138) suggests that her dirty dishes were left for her to do until the supply of clean plates had been exhausted. Sam puts this down to collective “dumbness” (139) for letting the non-compliant flatmate get away with violation of the rules (140-142). Understandably, no one was willing to clean up after the errant flatmate (143-144). The detail of dirty dishes “left for the month” (147) and not making her bed (150) adds substance to the characterisation of the flatmate as problematic. Although the account is humorous with the resulting dishes moved to her private space the exasperation is apparent.

Such vexation in the intimacy of domesticity can impact interpersonal relationships.

215 Annie: I think that’s the kind of thing in flats
216 that gets like like that
217 like if someone doesn’t do something
218 it gets like you start getting annoyed with them
219 cause they like in your face all the time

“Like in your face all the time” (219) stresses that the intimacy of living in close proximity with flatmates exacerbates tensions. The term suggests that annoying actions (218) or lack of action by flatmates are difficult to ignore and particularly provocative as housemates are difficult to avoid. Whereas proximity can foster closeness (Festinger, Schachter, & Back, 1950), the opposite is equally true: propinquity increases the chances of people becoming enemies (Ebbesen, Kjos & Konečni, 1976). Significantly it is the failure “to do something” (217) that is cause for displeasure, highlighting the frustration of living with those who do not co-operate but reap the benefit of others’ labour.

Flat 6 discuss the negative aspects of living with someone, who does not take equal responsibility for housework.

152 Jason: Yeah we had a flatmate last year
153 he isn’t with us this year
154 and um (.) he was quite lazy?
155 and (.) I guess it was quite stressful
156 um (.) us coming to grips with
157 thinking about how
158 we were going to tell him
159 that we didn’t want to flat with him
160 next year?
161 like that was (.) pretty stressful
162 Noah: ((Nods)) Yeah as (.) it’s quite stressful

163 when someone doesn't pull their weight
164 and you're kinda (.) you're like
165 pissed off with him (.) and::
166 Jason: And we don't want to make it
167 uncomfortable for one another

Participants frequently employed past unpleasant experiences (152-153) as a means of illustrating a point, particularly in group interviews, where airing grievances against current flatmates was understandably avoided. The anxiety associated with raising concerns is evident and there was consent that dealing with the problem was stressful (155, 161,162). There is recognition that voicing dissatisfaction can make other flatmates uncomfortable (167). Feeling comfortable in a flat is deemed a necessity for amicable sharing (Clark, Tuffin, Frewin & Bowker, 2017a). The term “pissed off” (165) conveys considerable anger at someone failing to “pull their weight” (163). In addition, anticipation of having to tell somebody they have been rejected is never an easy conversation to have (156-161).

It has been mooted that the more sociability and communication among flatmates the easier it is to deal with division of labour and potential discord (Heath & Cleaver, 2003) but there are those who consistently fail to conform to expectations of reciprocity. The primary site of interpersonal tension identified is housework (Baum, 1986; Heath & Cleaver, 2003; Natalier, 2003a). Additionally, unnecessary noise, questionable hygiene, pilfering of food, overstaying partners, excessive consumption of hot water and electricity and general inconsiderateness can sabotage flat relationships (Heath & Kenyon, 2001). Diligent flatmates enhance flat functioning but good natures can be exploited by the unscrupulous, who do not adhere to the communal ethic.

Discussion

In explaining why they chose to flat, participants invariably cited both economic and social reasons. This supports Heath and Cleaver's (2003) findings that along with financial pragmatism, shared housing is also an appealing social lifestyle. Despres (1994) proposed that sharing can be more valued for the social benefits than economic expediency. The current study did not seek to establish which was more important but rather sought to provide a close examination of the social advantages of sharing thereby adding to the literature reporting psychological benefits of sharing households (see for example Heath &

Cleaver, 2003). Substantive discourses of companionship, friendship, social support and self-reliance demonstrate the benefits of flatting.

Companionship is more than a buffer against loneliness; it has positive psychological effects providing pleasurable social interaction, humour and fun, adding to contentment, regardless of stress levels (Rook, 1987). Comprehensive research indicates social isolation as a predictor of negative psychological outcomes (Cacioppo & Hawkey, 2009). Not only do shared households combat loneliness but the intimacy of domesticity can lead to the formation and maintenance of significant friendships and extended social networks. While flatting with friends can intensify relationships, living together can sometimes end a friendship. The old adage that you don't know someone until you have lived with them is perhaps apt. If the most potent predictor of friendship is proximity and people who live close to each other are more likely to become friends (Festinger, Schachler & Back, 1950) then the intimacy of household sharing would amplify this possibility, particularly since living with someone enables more than a superficial appreciation of a person's strengths and weaknesses. An added advantage to making friends through flatting is meeting friends of flatmates, extending networking to a wider circle. Mobility is an advantage for young people in finding work and career aspirations. Heath and Cleaver (2003) noted that when moving cities or countries, shared accommodation can offer access to a ready-made social life through flatmates, alleviating loneliness, offering friendship and fostering social networks. The current study supports this assertion. One aspect of the friendship discourse was the enjoyment of combined activities and rituals cementing bonds and supporting Maffesoli's (1996) view of their importance as emotional glue that binds groups together. The extent of socialising both within the house and externally differs among flats but some form of socialising is typically expected (Clark et al, 2017a).

Companionship and mutual support are both components of friendship. In a complementary way companionship and support are equally but differently psychologically advantageous. While companionship contributes to pleasure, support is aimed at problem alleviation, is protective and contributes to resilience and coping methods (Cacioppo & Hawkey, 2009). Support facilitates adaptation and ameliorates stress, reducing threats to well-being and restoring equilibrium. Emotional, informational, and instrumental assistance are the most frequently quoted functions of social support. Emotional support is associated with caring, valuing, understanding and encouragement. Informational support is helping

people out with facts or advice that may help solve problems and possible courses of action. Instrumental support refers to material assistance with practical problems (Thoits, 1986). In flatting these can be readily available, in-house resources.

The intermediate transition from adolescence to adulthood is a highly turbulent psychosocial period with many challenges, including resisting peer pressure to engage in risky behaviour, labour entry, career establishment, partnership formation, and finding a place to live outside the family home. These transitions are often characterised by identity exploration, instability, self-focus, uncertainty and awareness of future possibilities (Arnett, 2000). Flatmates, going through the same adjustments are able to understand and support each other. Social support is a psychological resource: a protective mechanism in adapting to stressful situations, which are predictors of negative psychological outcomes such as anxiety, depression, hopelessness, suicidal thought and physical illness (Lourel, Hartmann, Closon, Mauda & Petric-Tatu, 2013). Even the perception of available support can be an antidote against stress (Bolger, Zuckerman & Kessler, 2000). Ahrentzen (2003) refers to these advantages as sharing of emotional resources. According to Kellas, Horstman, Willer and Carr (2015) discussing difficulties not only helps individuals make sense of and gain control of their lives but there are also positive psychological outcomes including increased feelings of well-being, optimism and higher self-esteem and decreased rates of depression (Franco & Levitt, 1998). In addition, being able to share and understand everyday trials and triumphs with others promotes closeness and bonding in relationships (Buhrmester & Prager, 1995).

Learning new skills and experiences was a further discourse comprising several dimensions. Firstly, navigating everyday encounters with flatmates, and developing compromise, thereby increasing social skills is an important advantage in other spheres of life. Sharing domesticity increases communication and negotiating skills, both highly valued in the workplace (La Valle, O'Regan & Jackson, 2000), with positive implications for other relationships (Heath, 2009). Effective communication, which contributes considerably to any social interaction, was extensively recognised as a necessity in dealing with relational terrains among flatmates. Whereas young participants felt their tolerance for others improved, experienced flatmates maintained that forbearance needs to be qualified. Experience helps sharpen the limits of what is acceptable from flatmates. Participants acknowledged that through flatting they gained practical coping skills, such as cooking.

Competency in domestic, social and emotional spheres add considerably to tools of survival and contribute to a feeling of self-reliance, confidence and control over life.

Participants frequently referred to housemates as 'family'. Such families are defined by sharing domesticity rather than blood relationships. The current research endorses findings (Despres, 1994; Heath 2004a) that functional communal accommodation can operate as a surrogate family, with strong emotional and social attachments, affording a sense of security, belonging and support in a time when life-time employment, relationships and family living nearby are no longer guaranteed. Love, trust and care are not limited to relatives: they can characterise friendships and other social networks. Fragmentation of traditional families has meant a greater reliance on friendships as a source of security (Roseneil & Budgeon, 2004). Living with someone at some point in life increases the chances of being considered a family member (Wall & Gouveia, 2014). By using the word 'family' for flat households young people are challenging traditional normative concepts about family, intimacy and the right way to live, providing conditions for change and the potential to destabilise hegemonic cultural scripts.

Nevertheless, the positive social aspects of shared living can be subverted by domestic conflicts, often involving the day-to-day demands of housework. If all participate equally, then all benefit (Mause, 2008). One person failing to do tasks can result in others losing motivation to perform their tasks or an excuse to withdraw labour, leading to a collective decline in standards. Those who consistently fail to contribute are a source of tension. Stress arises not only from conscientious housemates having to do extra work but also from the prospect of confronting the offender or the anticipation of asking the flatmate to move out or regrouping without the uncooperative individual. Tolerance may be a valuable asset gained from flatting but does not extend to routinely cleaning up after others. Experience teaches "what is OK and what's not OK". Dismantling an established household to regroup or asking someone to move out has added complications. For young people already economically compromised moving entails financial costs, adding to the stress. Asking someone to move out means finding a replacement with no guarantee that the new flatmate will be a good fit for the flat dynamic (Clark & Tuffin, 2015).

Given that participants who had experimented living on their own later returned to flatting because of loneliness, the social advantages are clearly important. This corroborates

findings that home sharers' experiences were mostly positive and minimally frustrating with housemates frequently avoiding letting their vexation lead to direct conflict (Despres, 1994; Natalier, 2003a; Heath & Cleaver, 2003). Essentially flats are hospitable environments regarded as home, painting a much more positive outlook than Birmingham's (2001) documentation of 'flatmates from hell'.

There are several limitations to the current study. One factor to be taken into account is that we asked those currently sharing about the benefits and these advantages may not be endorsed by intensely private individuals, who choose to live alone. People who have found house sharing unsatisfactory will have sought an alternative form of accommodation, thereby excluding them from the study. Inclusion of those ill-disposed to sharing might paint a bleaker picture. Future research could concentrate on those who have found the lifestyle unpleasant. The current research indicates that there comes a time when flatting loses its appeal. At what point does this occur and why? Whereas we touched on this it was not the focus of the study but could be the basis of future research. In addition, housework is not the only cause of deteriorating interpersonal relationships. Negative psychological aspects and consequences to co-residence need to be interrogated if we are to have a more comprehensive understanding of the complexity of group living.

Conclusion

Young adults in the Western world have adapted to economic constraint by sharing accommodation and combining resources. Far from traditional stigma associated with these households this lifestyle is valued for social benefits. Three decades ago the need for detailed data across a broad spectrum of the population who share was called for in order to understand the social advantages and costs involved (Baum, 1986; Edwards, Jones & Edwards, 1986). Insufficient research has emerged in the interim. By analysing talk of the lived experiences of young flatters this study supplements existing literature on the social psychological gains of this lifestyle in a New Zealand context. It also contributes to a wider understanding of small group dynamics and the effect of and social forces on contemporary young adults. Whereas lack of equal co-operation in everyday household chores is cause for frustration, young adults endeavour to avoid allowing these to develop into outright conflict. The social psychological positives of companionship, friendship, mutual support and increased skills and self-reliance are tempered with the potential for upset through someone who has indeed come from the shadows of the flatmate from hell.

CHAPTER 7

Household rosters

Freedom makes a huge requirement of every human being. With freedom comes responsibility. For the person who is unwilling to grow up, the person who does not want to carry his own weight, this is a frightening prospect.

Eleanor Roosevelt: You learn by living

Introduction

Whereas the journal article on whether to flat with couples or singles, friends or strangers (Chapter 5) could have been briefly incorporated into the paper on desirable Flatmates, this dilemma arose frequently, was spoken of in much depth and was obviously of particular concern to participants, and thus was worthy of a paper on its own. In much the same way, the topic of rosters could have been succinctly amalgamated with household chores subverting the social advantages of sharing. Yet the considerable discussion about the merits or disadvantages of rosters made a deeper examination of the subject, which was closely aligned with the concept of freedom, an important comprehensive contribution to the study of household dynamics. The following paper has been submitted to *Emerging Adulthood* and is under review.

Rosters: freedom, responsibility and co-operation in young adult shared households.

Abstract

The rationale for this study was to contribute to understanding the social dynamics of shared housing among young New Zealand adults. Sharing is an informal socio-economic contract, in which financially challenged individuals pragmatically divide household costs and duties. Whereas monetary contributions can be monitored, physical labour is more difficult to assess with housework cited as a major source of conflict. Discursive psychology was employed to analyse talk of the lived experiences of house sharers aged 20 to 35. While rosters have been mooted as the safest way to overcome problems of housework division, this research indicates that young adults are resistant to rules and formal rosters, which compromise autonomy and are considered ineffective. Freedom is maintained by adopting organic rules, which provide structure. With responsibility and co-operation, households are orderly on their own terms. No

particular formula guarantees success. Positive payoffs can be achieved for all by communication and mutually agreed upon strategies.

Key words: Shared housing housework rosters young adults

Sharing households, or flatting, with peers is regarded as an inevitable part of growing up for young adults in New Zealand (Wolfe & Barnett, 2001) and Australia (Natalier, 2003). Peer co-residence is also popular in the UK (Kemp & Rugg, 1998), northern Europe (Schwanitz & Mulder, 2015) and the United States, (Mykyta, 2012). Given the economic challenges young adults face today, alternative accommodation options are not always available. Shared housing is often the only viable way of dealing with financial constraints but also increasingly valued for the social benefits (Heath & Cleaver, 2003). In addition to equal contribution to household expenses, reciprocity of domestic duties is usually the norm. Whereas monetary payments can be methodically calculated, labour contributions are harder to monitor and easier for opportunists to elude. Housework is acknowledged as the major source of discord in shared housing (Baum, 1986; Natalier, 2004). Consequently, economic and social advantages and group cohesion can be threatened by housekeeping logistics.

Primarily, house-sharing young adults are single, childless, unrelated and range in age from late teens to early thirties. Rent, power, and often other amenities like broadband and pay TV are shared, as are communal areas, such as kitchens, bathrooms and laundry with bedrooms as private domains (Heath & Cleaver, 2003). Flats afford the basic needs of shelter, warmth and sustenance, in addition to possibly improving quality of life (Baum, 1986). The larger the flat, generally the better economy of scale but bigger establishments can result in more interpersonal difficulties (Williamson, 2006). Given that shared housing is popular among young adults surprisingly little research has been conducted on the topic (Natalier, 2003; Tuffin & Clark, 2016).

Whereas there is comprehensive coverage of economic reasons for flatting (Day, 2016), no in-depth, detailed research is available as to how this living arrangement operates in practice (Mykyta, 2012). One explanation for this oversight is the lack of social and cultural acceptance of shared households, which challenge the traditional concept of home, family and intimacy (Ahrentzen, 2003; Steinfuhrer & Haase, 2009). In places

like Britain, America, Australia and New Zealand, where a culture of owner-occupation prevails, stigma can be attached to shared living arrangements (Hemmons, Hoch, & Carp, 1996). Consequently the economic, social and environmental benefits of shared housing remain largely overlooked despite the steady decline of nuclear families and increasing unaffordability of homes (Baum, 1986).

While the topic of shared living among young adults is neglected it no longer attracts the moral outrage of the 1960s' communes (Miller, 1999). Heath & Cleaver (2003) note that there is little stigma attached to house sharing among contemporary young adults and is frequently associated with tertiary qualifications and relatively privileged trajectories. Paucity of research on the ordinary domestic spheres of young adults may be due to an academic focus on deprived young people (Furlong, 2013). As a result very little is known about youthful peer-group living. Since flatting among young people is often short-term and transitional, it could be argued that this is the reason for lack of recognition of the rich psychological ground this area offers for researching interpersonal relationships, group functioning, prejudice and discrimination and the developmental relevance of shared living. In addition, studying such living arrangements provides unique insight into the social and economic processes of change (Furlong, 2013; Williamson, 2006).

Economic challenges for young adults are not limited to rising house prices and inadequate housing supply (Day, 2016) but also an extremely competitive labour market with lingering international economic insecurity following the 2008 global financial crisis (Lagarde 2016). Frequently, full-time wages do not provide sufficient income for independent living (Heath & Cleaver, 2003). Further monetary constraints can be linked to increased mass post-secondary education, escalating tertiary education costs with a general reduction in government financial support and consequent student loan debt (Cobb-Clark, 2008). Socially, relaxation of sexual norms outside of legalised sanction and freely available birth control has contributed to postponed marriage and parenting with greater emphasis placed on education, career development and travel (Arnett, 2006). In New Zealand the median age of men who married for the first time in 2010 was 29.9 years: about seven years older than those who married for the first time in 1971. The median age of women who married for the first time has similarly risen from 20.8 years in 1971 to 28.2 years in 2010. In 1968 the median birth age for a first

child for mothers was 23.39; this increased to 30 by 2011 (Saville-Smith & James, 2010; Statistics New Zealand, 2011). This protracted transition to traditional markers of adulthood, such as employment, marriage and parenting is increasingly acknowledged as 'emerging adulthood' (Arnett, 2015).

The current study focuses on how young people manage everyday domestic praxis with non-family members. What works and what is less successful? Who takes out the rubbish or cleans the toilet? In essence shared households are egalitarian with no clear blueprint or institutionalised ideological guiding principles, which shape behaviour (Natalier, 2003). Rosters have been mooted as an effective means of dealing with household chores (Baum, 1986). Employing discourse analysis we detail how young people talk about the challenges of organising domestic responsibilities to keep the arrangement working and workable.

Research paradigm and method

The tenets of critical psychology underpin the current research method employing discourse analysis within a social constructionist epistemology. Critical social psychologists reconceptualise social life as language use, moving the study of psychological processes from the mental interior to linguistic practices and social interactions (Wetherell, 1996). Constructionists argue that knowledge, truth and reality are not stable entities but products of social interaction and discursive practices, never independent of culture and historical context. Thus, language constitutes the world rather than describing it (Schwandt, 1994). Although there are many approaches to discourse analysis, all involve close study of language use beyond literal meaning. Discourse operates to establish social identity but also ideologically to maintain and perpetuate the status quo (Taylor, 2001). Through language people position themselves as polite, kind, intelligent, unbiased and so on. Language is never neutral but achieves functional actions, such as blaming, accusing, justifying, complimenting etc. (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). 'Discourse' refers to patterns of coherent statements that construct meaning and is examined in terms of the dynamic, rhetorical functions of justifying and explaining points of view (Parker, 1992).

Participants were aged between 20 and 35, fluent in English and currently flatting, with at least a year's experience of shared living. Participants were purposefully recruited by

word of mouth and informed that the research aimed to examine how people talk about their flatting experiences. Data was obtained from semi-structured, in-depth interviews with seven flat groups and fourteen one-on-one interviews. Participants were Pākehā (of European descent), apart from two Māori, and two identifying as Māori/ Pākehā. 22 were female and 15 were male, with the mean age of 24. Apart from 14 students, all were employed full-time.

Open-ended questions, such as, ‘What do you think makes a flat function well?’ were asked to stimulate discussion. To increase heterogeneity three flat group interviews were conducted in a large metropolitan city and four in a smaller township. Interviews were audio recorded with group interviews also videoed due to difficulty discerning who is talking when transcribing group discussions. An annotated version of Jeffersonian notation (Wooffitt, 1992) was used for transcriptions. The study conformed to ethical requirements of informed consent and confidentiality with pseudonyms used to protect participants’ identity. Approval was gained from Massey University Ethics Committee.

Analysis

Analysis involved repeated reading of the data, looking for recurring patterns with little preconceived notion of what these would be. Allowing participants to explain their social actions as intelligible and meaningful affords insight into people’s lived experiences. All participants had experimented with rosters and offered various justifications to substantiate attitudes. Extracts employed from participants’ talk best exemplify common threads within the discourse.

Rosters do not work

The predominant discourse is that chore rosters do not work. In asserting that rosters are ineffective, alternative suggestions for what does work were invariably invoked. One argument was that people are more disposed to co-operation if they can utilise their strengths and preferences.

280 Mike: mmm (.) We tried a roster
281 just for a little bit (.) hey
282 ‘nd it didn’t really work
283 Susie: yeah (.) no (.) cause (.) like
284 Mike likes cooking (.) so (.) yeah

285 you'd mainly cook (.) and then
286 other people would clean up
287 really that's how it worked
288 and then other people would prefer
289 to clean up than cook (.) so (.) yeah

Participants invariably had tried rosters before concluding that they did not work (282). "Just for a little bit" (281) implies that it did not take long to discover the futility of rosters. "Didn't really work" (282) suggests there may be some merit in the idea but people are more likely to do chores they prefer doing (284); building on this is more effective than a roster. In Mike and Susie's experience flatmates were happy to clean up (286), presumably do the dishes, while Mike is partial to cooking (284). "Really that's how it worked" (287) acknowledges the functional aspect of this type of arrangement. Communal goals can be achieved by making use of particular skills and predilections.

Lucy speaks of "a great flattening experience".

259 Lucy: we:: didn't have uh:: (.) kind of a cleaning roster
260 we kind of just (.) all (.) did stuff
261 and kind of slipped into
262 the areas that we liked doing?
263 and it all kind of worked (.) um (0.1)

Cleaning rosters are not necessary when flatmates collaborate and are at liberty to do what they enjoy (262). "Kind of" is repeated four times signalling some vagueness about how this fortuitous situation came about without any regulation.

When stringent rosters were introduced very often the precise intention was to encourage recalcitrant flatmates to share responsibilities. Nevertheless, some flatmates remain seemingly unaware of exploiting the time, energy and goodwill of others. When asked about a very visible roster in her flat Lucy spoke of trying to motivate an uncooperative flatmate.

390 Lucy: I set it up when we had the
391 the previous flatmate
392 and who was the other male
393 flatmate (.) cause I:: I was like I
394 I (.) do not want to be the person
395 running round cleaning this place?
396 we're all equally in this together
397 and (.) so I set it up (.) so

398 it's all organised and there's no questions
399 who's doing what (.) you know there's (.)
400 I've had some experiences where "Ah I didn't (.)
401 I thought someone else did it so I didn't ah (.)
402 but ah" and (.) >you know< fly under the radar
403 don't lift a finger for three months

454 it was an interesting (.) uh it was an experiment
455 that didn't work but um (.)° yeah°

Hypothetically, flatting is an egalitarian arrangement (396). Understandably, Lucy is averse to being solely responsible for housework, which is implied by "the person running round cleaning this place" (394-395). Prior experience has taught Lucy that some individuals attempt to avoid housework without attracting notice (402). Idioms, such as "fly under the radar" are rhetorically effective and meant to be interpreted figuratively not literally (Drew & Holt, 1989). The suggestion that an absolute lack of contribution (403) can remain undetected for months (403) is as unlikely as the excuses given for inactivity (401). Exaggeration is employed rhetorically to make a point rather than for accuracy (Edwards & Potter, 1992). Rationally a roster should leave no room for uncertainty about duties (398-399). Ultimately, Lucy concluded that the experiment with a roster was unsuccessful (454-455). The inference is that those who ignore chores are as likely to ignore rosters or misunderstand whose responsibility is involved even when the roster makes this clear.

A strong thread in the discourse of rosters not being viable was that young adults resist replicating the demands of the parental home.

188 Sean: a part of flatting I guess is about freedom
200 and:: the last thing you want to do
201 when you come into a flat (.)
202 when you are twenty years old (.) >twenty one years old<
203 is being told (.) you know
204 this is when you have to do your jobs
205 this is when you have to (0.1) cook

A recurring justification for flatting was escaping the demands and confines of the parental home. The attraction of freedom (188) and anticipation of a life unfettered by structures and rules (194) has strong appeal. Consequently moving into an establishment where there are too many dictates, obligations and claims on time is

unacceptable. “The last thing you want to do” (200) is an extreme case formulation, a potent rhetorical resource designed to persuasively legitimise claims in a fairly dramatic way (Pomerantz, 1986). The repetition of “have to” (204, 205) emphasises the onerous, obligatory nature of expectations. In addition, participants were wary of surveillance by other flatmates:

371 Sean: and this was turning into a state
372 where we were spying on other people
373 and it was terrible um

Sean uses “we” (371) indicating that he was as complicit as others in tracking others’ misdemeanors. Simultaneously, he acknowledges that it was unacceptable (373).

For this reason Flat 2 do not subscribe to rosters:

475 Annie: as I said before (.) I think
476 freedom is very important
477 we’ve moved out of home
478 we don’t live with our parents
479 and stuff so (.) It’s good to feel like
480 you’ve got some control

494 Annie: we’ve already got our jobs and shit
495 we don’t need other (.) stuff to
496 you know we want to come home
497 and actually be able to relax and not feel
498 and not have all these duties

Annie echoes Sean’s sentiments about the importance of freedom (476) and invokes the sense of control and self-determination flattening affords (480). The implication is that living with parents is rule bound with restricted autonomy, whereas flattening offers liberty. “All these duties” is an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986), implying that there could be a multitude of tasks to be tackled with the imposition of rosters, seriously curtailing relaxation. The use of “shit” in conjunction with employment (494) suggests the stress and personal restrictions associated with work. Home is a place for destressing (497), not a place to be burdened with yet more rules and labour.

Closely aligned with the appeal of freedom is the contention that life does not subscribe to routine and schedules.

483 Sam: whereas >you know< for me
484 life doesn’t fit to a schedule

485 it might be that on my scheduled night
486 a Wednesday I would rather be out
487 doing something else
488 and I would not want to be at home
489 cooking (.) dinner (.) for flatmates (.) so

Participants often qualified justifications for opinions as personal preferences (483), allowing for the possibility that others might not share their views. This averts suggestions of dogmatism, while still managing to make a point. In this case, Sam is adamant that he does not want to be tied to a roster which is inflexible as there might be more attractive alternatives (486-489).

Tamsin contrasted the difference between flattering with peers and living with a mother who expected housework to be executed every Sunday:

510 Tamsin: if I was (.) hungover
511 or (.) out doing (.) whatever I wanted
512 she'd get really angry (.) at me?
513 and I just (.) that's the fact
514 like you know (.) we don't have that here
515 it's not like ahh you have to
516 do the bathrooms this week
517 if the bathrooms don't get done
518 well (.) they just don't get done
519 they not ever:: completely (.) disgusting
520 it's just that sometimes (.) you know
521 we (.) you have to factor in life

Considerable discursive work is accomplished in foregrounding the draconian unreasonableness of the mother prioritising housework over coping with hangovers (510) and social life (511). “Really angry” (512) signifies the degree of emotionality involved and accompanied by “the fact” (513) preempts any suggestion of exaggeration. The mother’s inflexibility is an illustrative case of chores and the regularity with which they could be completed (515-516) contrasted with a more flexible approach, which tolerates some slippage. This is supported by the reassurance that unacceptable standards (519) are avoided. “Completely disgusting” (519) is an extreme case formulation, employed as a disclaimer to forestall any suggestion that conditions deteriorate to the insalubrious. Disclaimers are designed to pre-empt any potential judgments (van Dijk & Kintch, 1983). “You have to factor in life” takes into account the vagaries of life and justification for relaxed attitudes to chores, thereby building a counterpoint to parental inflexibility (521).

An ad hoc approach emerged as a common way of coping with the demands of housework, without exerting pressure on housemates.

133 VC: and do you have rosters
134 Chloe: um I tried that?
135 but it's better just to um (.) say
136 uh "We'll do the inside work"
137 like two of us and the other two
138 will do the outside work
139 and then when it needs doing
140 whoever didn't do it last (.) does it °yeah°
141 but that way you don't
142 no one feels pressured to (.) oh this is
143 I have to get it done now (.) yeah
144 and that sort of works out a bit better

Chloe's reply suggests that she may have experienced some difficulty getting flatmates to co-operate. "I tried that" (134) implies attempts to find a solution to a problem. Since rosters failed, a more workable alternative is a spoken agreement. The excerpt also demonstrates that some form of yard work (138) is also required. The word 'flat' may conjure up apartment living, which the original meaning of the word, but the term flatting often includes houses with gardens, which need to be maintained to some extent. "No one feels pressured" (142) reinforces the antipathy to stress inducing structures and deadlines (143). "Sort of works a bit better" (144) implies that there are still issues with fulfilling responsibilities and completing mundane chores.

Mental rosters and collective action appear to alleviate rigid requirements.

198 Noah: we tried to make a roster
199 at the start of the year
200 and it would sort of say so-and-so
201 cleans the bathroom this day
202 the kitchen (.) um
203 does the vacuuming this day
204 but it (.) we (.) it didn't really work with
205 we:: (.) um find it easier to just all ::
206 >I don't know<
207 keep like a mental roster
208 and we:: all just go through
209 and all clean up at the same time 'nd

236 Owen: I don't even think it (the roster) lasted one week ((laughter))
237 Noah: yeah because like someone
238 couldn't be home or something
239 or if someone didn't get round to it

240 like it's just kind of easy
241 if we just all do the same thing 'nd

262 Jason: you can't really (.) duck out then
263 then if you do (.) then like
264 it's a big deal (.) but like
265 Noah: Yeah
266 Miles: ((Nods)) It's quite obvious
267 that you're not helping

Once again experience indicates that rosters do not work in practice (204, 236) given the exigencies of life (237-238). Mental or spoken rosters were believed to be superior to the tyranny of written rosters (207) with a communal tackling of chores preferable (205, 209, 241). "Or if someone didn't get round to it" (239) could be a genuine reason for not doing a task but it could also hint at indolence. Life is easier (240) if chores are done collectively and there is more likelihood of noticing the constant absence of a particular person (267).

Aiden, from the same flat, notes another limitation of rosters:

250 Aiden: and I guess when one person's you know
251 doesn't do their job of the week
252 everyone else kind of (.) slacks off

If rosters are not adhered to by one person there is the propensity for others to use this as an excuse to reduce their efforts. Even the most conscientious are likely to withdraw labour if others defect. "Everyone else" (252) is an extreme case formulation designed to signify the repercussions of one person's (250) abdication of responsibility, which can subvert the domestic process. Inherent in these examples is the subtle surveillance of other flatmates' contributions: a policing of others to ascertain if they are doing their duties. If others do not measure up then there is sufficient cause to abstain or only partially complete duties. One participant referred to this mutual impact on co-operation as a broken window effect. Kelling and Wilson's (1982) Broken Window Thesis states that if violation of norms are not obstructed the disorder will spread.

If rosters are used they need to be flexible

A less prominent discourse was that if rosters are employed there is a need for flexibility. This discourse is closely aligned with the notion that life does not operate on a schedule, allowances must be made for other demands.

- 371 Greg: we have pretty loose rosters though
372 Mathew: =yeah yeah
373 Justin: =it's always sort of
374 Mathew: generally it's (.) we have (.) sort of
375 rosters in place there's like expectations
376 of the flat (.) like
377 if it's a Tuesday then I'll be cooking
378 and then we have like various
379 like a chore wheel essentially
380 but it's always (.) I have found yeah
381 Justin: it's flexible

Flat 7 have “loose” (371) or “sort of rosters in place” (375) suggesting malleable duty rosters. Essentially, the chore wheel (379) is fluid with everyone included in these expectations while flexibility acknowledges that life does not run to schedule and exceptions need to be made with some swapping of duties to accommodate preferences and the unexpected.

Participants invariably noted that the effectiveness of rosters is limited without dialogue:

- 52 Sam: once you're (.) living in shared spaces like that
53 you have to (.) communicate
54 otherwise (.) things can go horribly (.) um
55 and (.) but then there's only so much like
56 that a roster on the fridge can actually achieve

The ability to communicate effectively was frequently cited as essential for functional shared households (52-53). Lacking this facility increases the potential for misunderstanding, tension and conflict (54). “Horribly” invokes unpleasantness, particularly unsettling in homes, which should represent a sanctuary of relaxation and destressing from the everyday ups and downs of life (Mallett, 2004). Rosters do not guarantee chores will be performed to an acceptable standard (56). Conflict can result from different ideas as to what constitutes cleanliness and discussions can clarify common expectations regarding satisfactory criteria.

These examples demonstrate that while theoretically rosters can be useful, practically they are neither feasible nor desirable. The dominant discourse is that rosters are flawed. Reasons cited were that people are more likely to commit to chores they enjoy or prefer doing, which runs contrary to the notion of simple rotation of tasks, where over time everyone does all the different domestic chores. The imposition of rosters was a reaction to parental structures: having left these confines, participants were keen to be free of them. A second, less common discourse is that if rosters are employed they need to be flexible. In essence rosters are limited in what they can achieve. A high level of communication and co-operation is essential if the day-to-day operation of the household is to function. Nevertheless, some individuals are adept at ignoring or evading communal responsibilities. Dealing with the avoidant can be challenging. Rosters implemented precisely to curtail such behaviour invariably had no positive effect. Furthermore, rosters not adhered to by one housemate grants others permission to follow suit.

Discussion

In a seminal study on shared housing, in which she tried to isolate factors contributing to successful co-residence, Baum (1986, p.202) concluded that rosters were the 'safest' means of coping with household chores: resentment and guilt are based on someone failing to complete assigned duties rather than generalised accusations that some are doing less than others. Nevertheless, Baum's findings indicated that some flats operated well on an ad hoc system without rosters but commitment is essential. In addition, Baum (1986) identified that some people were averse to rosters as they loathe regimentation. In a study of eleven mixed gender households Natalier (2004) found only one successfully operated a roster. Williamson (2006) similarly noted that a roster may seem like egalitarianism to some but authoritarianism to others, supposedly undermining personal responsibility, autonomy and independence, highlighting a paradox in flatting where independence involves interdependence (Clark, Tuffin, Frewin & Bowker, 2017). Success is possible if all members are flexible, happy with the system adopted and problems are discussed and resolved before tensions become unmanageable. This requires considerable tact and communication skills.

The current research challenges Baum's (1986) assertion that rosters are a safe solution to managing household chores, determining individual contribution and circumventing

deviance. The dominant discourse is that rosters do not work and are anathema to young adults seeking freedom and independence. One of the revelations of the study is that participants demonstrated a resistance to written and formal rotational rosters but in order to prevent a slide into domestic chaos they observe a more flexible organic set of rules based on preferences, strengths and chipping in when someone else is clearly working toward tidying or cleaning communal areas.

A useful source of understanding how these unwritten rules operate is analogous to Marsh, Rosser and Harré's (1978) study of soccer fan hooliganism in which they proposed that the ritual encounters between soccer fan groups are in themselves self-regulating systems. The apparently chaotic and violent, anomic actions are essentially rule bound, highly structured and ordered. In the same informal way, participants seem to prefer to operate their households. Both groups require a detailed social knowledge of what is appropriate or correct intragroup behaviour, which dictates normative behaviour, rendering the collective process possible.

In addition to curtailing freedom, rosters are regarded as stress inducing and do not "factor in life", for example, being pressured into doing chores when exams or deadlines loom or out of town visitors arrive unexpectedly. Participants felt that life itself does not conform to schedules. Being tied down to duties when more seductive opportunities arise is counterproductive to freedom. In practice rosters are fragile, susceptible to subversion by more pressing or attractive issues. A second, less robust discourse to emerge was that if rosters are employed then flexibility is imperative. A high degree of communication is essential for imparting expectations of acceptable standards of cleanliness and tidiness as there is only so much a roster can achieve.

Literature on the effectiveness of rosters is scarce. In a case study on workstation duty rostering in a hospital department, findings were similar to this research: many systems put into place do not last due to disruption by unexpected events. Furthermore, fairness and preferences for certain duties with a flexible honour system played an important role for practical implementation and reductions of violations (Fügener, Brunner, & Podtschaskeb, 2015). In the current study, when people took on tasks they enjoyed there was no evidence of precise offsetting of difficulty or time consumption of one chore against another. Freedom is not the same thing as absence of accountability:

freedom from the perceived tyranny of rosters was achieved with responsibility and co-operation.

In shared housing there are inherent moral dimensions to reciprocity of labour and sacrifice of time and energy. If all co-operate equally and fairly then all benefit. Fairness, as advocated by the hospital study (Fügener, Brunner, & Podtschaskeb, 2015) needs to be encouraged to prevent social loafing (Williamson, 2006). Social loafing can be defined as a tendency to reduce effort because the nature of tasks makes it difficult for others to evaluate individual performance (Latané, Williams & Harkins, 1979). Karau and Williams (1997) suggested the likelihood of social loafing increases if people feel the task is unimportant. A common excuse reported by participants critical of slackers is that the culprits considered an assigned task was not essential (as in clean enough) or even the erroneous claim that someone else had already attended to the chore. In this way, responsibility can be circumvented and this reinforces the importance of common expectations about tidiness and cleanliness.

Free riding occurs when an individual is able to obtain some benefit from the group without contributing a fair share because others will absorb their slack (Ostrom, Walker & Gardner, 1994). Those who do not help with domestic duties reap the rewards of a clean home. For those who do comply there is the threat of the sucker effect. According to Orbell and Dawes (1981), in order to avoid being a sucker some individuals will reduce or withhold their contribution to the collective good when they believe that another member is free riding. This was evident in this study, where flatmates used others' slacking off as justification for withholding individual effort: lack of incentive to do duties if one flatmate failed to do so triggered non-compliance in others. If left unchecked, this can result in a downward spiral with negative prognosis for the group. Early preventions of minor norm violations will avert further breaches (Miles & Klein, 2002). In discussing the Broken Window Thesis Keuschnigg and Wolbring, (2015) suggest that self-interest is a key driver in human behaviour, which is only constrained by laws and rules. Such behavioural constraints can take the form of unwritten principals in specific environments but are nevertheless binding and not mere guidelines.

Inspired by Hardin's (1968) seminal theory, the tragedy of the common, Mause (2008) employed economic equations to demonstrate that in shared households individual rational behaviour does not function for the collective good. Hardin's theory proposed that individuals acting independently for personal gain do not act in the best interest of the group, frequently resulting in depleted collective resources. In the cleverly entitled, tragedy of the commune, Mause states that shared households may not degenerate into tragedy but considerable management is required. If every flatmate believes that others are free-riding and refuses to do chores then the resulting dirt and disorder is bound to result in inhospitable and insalubrious surroundings. Alternatively, the ideal flatmate, who cleans up after others, without reciprocation, may be altruistic and honest but also naïve. In the long run opportunism will be paid for when the flat destructs or a non-compliant individual is asked to leave (Mause, 2008).

Social facilitation studies have shown that people are more productive when others are present (Zajonc, 1965). Shirkers are more easily identified if all flatmates clean together at the same time, as advocated by participants in this study. This is evident in talk of other flatmates joining in a clean-up when one individual starts the process. In this way authoritarian coercion is anonymous and control generalised, while claims and counterclaims which deplete the collective good are minimised. The practical solution, according to Douglas (1991), is to make every member a watchdog and use co-operation to do the rest. As Douglas maintains people will say monitoring for fairness is not the intention. Surveillance of others' input was clearly evident but there was an aversion to overt policing.

To eliminate the dilemma of free riding and social loafing, it is important to make group members feel that their contributions are essential for the group's success. The extent to which group members identify with their group also determines communal work for the collective good. In university residences Keuschnigg and Wolbring (2015) found that perceived social cohesion of inhabitants encouraged compliance. Promoting a sense of group cohesiveness or group identity will reduce shirking. If solidarity weakens, individuals can destroy the collective enterprise. However, some individuals place more value on being part of a group than others and those more committed to the group demonstrate a greater interest in solving problems (Duffy & Shaw, 2000). When individuals derive a sense of self and identity from their membership, labour and

sacrifice are more likely (Chen & Lawson, 1996). If the extent of co-operation depends on group cohesion then it follows that close relationships are more likely to foster collaboration.

Clearly, living with those failing to do chores presents challenges. It was evident that systems of dealing with housework were continually being reformed, becoming more restrictive with continued breaches but loosening if people could be trusted to co-operate without coercion. Such patterns of change usually survive only long enough to attend to the current needs of its members (Douglas, 1991). Since flats are frequently transitory establishments, group dynamics are continually changing; when a housemate is replaced it takes time to reform as a workable unit and for a workable homeostasis to be reached.

Both Baum (1986) and Natalier (2003) posited that the lack of a cultural blueprint for who does what in housework, as in traditional households, means that evading tension on ideological grounds is not possible. The mantle of responsibility for housework cannot be sidestepped on customary grounds in egalitarian establishments. This research contributes to our understanding of how non-familial young adult households operate with little in the way of prototypes to guide expectations. The literature on rosters tends to concentrate on the practical side of electronically generating rosters with little discussion as to whether these systems are effective. More research could be conducted into rosters as a limited tool for getting fundamental chores done. While the current study suggests that rosters are not inviolate, the roster and its more organic alternative inform us how young people organize the practicalities of collective living.

Conclusion

Reciprocity in household work is the norm in shared households, with egalitarian expectations of labour division. Unlike traditional familial households, where cultural expectations have to a large extent dictated who does what, there are often no set rules in shared flats. Baum (1986) claims rosters are the safest way of overcoming problems with equitable division of household chores. The current study suggests young people regard formal rosters as impinging on autonomy and are resistant to written rules. Freedom is maintained by adopting organic rules, which do provide structure. With responsibility and co-operation households are orderly on their own terms. No

particular formula for housekeeping guarantees success. Communication was recognised as the best way to circumvent housekeeping problems and positive payoffs can be achieved by mutually agreed upon strategies. If a common understanding cannot be achieved then the prognosis is poor.

CHAPTER 8

Conflict

Rational discussion is useful only when there is a significant base of shared assumptions

Noam Chomsky: The responsibility of intellectuals

Introduction

Household chores have been identified as a major source of problems in shared housing (Baum, 1986; Heath & Cleaver, 2003; Natalier, 2004; Williamson, 2006; Mause, 2008). The two preceding chapters examined the potential for conflict over contribution to housework, how these can sabotage the social advantages of co-residence, and the effectiveness of rosters for circumventing problems. This chapter builds on these themes by including other areas of contention, how differences are managed and the negative repercussions of unresolvable problems. This manuscript has been submitted to the *New Zealand Journal of Psychology* and is under review.

Conflict sources, management and consequences in shared housing among young adults

Abstract

Due to housing unaffordability shared residence among young adults is an increasingly popular way of life in the Western world. To date research on the topic is surprisingly modest. While the lifestyle is economically and socially attractive, navigating inevitable tension in interpersonal relationships in the intimacy of domesticity can present challenges. Applying discourse analysis the current qualitative study examines how young New Zealanders aged 20 to 35 talk about the sources, management and consequences of conflict in shared homes. While moving out or eviction in the face of irreconcilable differences is always an option, young adults actively endeavour to avoid or resolve problems amicably. The study provides insight into the complexity and social dynamics of these non-kin household relationships.

Key words: shared housing conflict interpersonal relationships

Shared housing or flatting among young adults is a socio-economic contract in which householders agree to split costs and housework (Mause, 2008). While the arrangement can evolve into strong social bonds of companionship, trust and mutual support, the social glue necessary to sustain successful communal living can be corroded by conflict (Heath & Cleaver, 2003). In close domestic confines there is always the possibility for disagreement, misunderstanding and offence with potential for tension to become magnified (Toegel & Barsoux, 2016).

Literature on shared housing among young adults is modest. Heath and Cleaver (2003) and Mykyta (2012) have called for a closer inspection of the interpersonal relationships of this way of life. The current research on the social dynamics of flatting among young New Zealanders investigated how the sources, management and consequences of conflict are discursively constructed. Conflict can be defined as incompatibilities between people resulting from continuous inconsistencies in opinions and interests, promoting negative reactions (Curseu, Boros & Oerlemans, 2012).

Backdrop to the study

Globally, contemporary youth are experiencing growing housing difficulties. Rather than a short stop gap before marriage, peer co-residence now features as a way of life from late teens to early thirties in the Western world (Day, 2016). Shared living involves communal areas, such as lounge, kitchen and bathroom with bedrooms remaining private. Rent, electricity, broadband amenities and the cost of necessities, such as cleaning products, are divided. Food can be a communal larder or individually purchased. Characteristically, households are comprised of unmarried, childless non-family individuals, who are highly mobile (Williamson, 2005). Growth in this household demographic has been recorded in the UK (Carlsson & Eriksson, 2015), Europe (Schwanitz & Mulder, 2015) and the United States (Mykyta, 2012). In Australia and New Zealand, sharing has become a cultural and social institution (Murphy, 2011; Wolfe & Barnett, 2001).

Research has tended to concentrate on immigrant, intergenerational or shared living for the aged (Hemmons, Hoch & Carpe, 1996), where egalitarianism can be compromised by unequal power positions. For example, house owners may have more influence in decision making. To date the most comprehensive study on young peer households is

that of British sociologists, Heath and Cleaver (2003), who considered sharing as part of a broader study on housing pathways for single young adults. Similarly, in America Goldscheider and Goldscheider (1999) studied shared households as an accommodation option after leaving the parental home. In Europe, the topic is essentially confined to demographers, who focus on why young people share (Steinfurther & Haase, 2009; Mulder, 2003). In Australia Baum (1986) sought to isolate factors contributing to successful co-residence across all ages. Natalier (2003) examined gendered division of labour in young shared households, while McNamara and Connell (2007) found that young Australians consider their flat 'home'. In New Zealand Williamson (2005) compiled a snapshot of how seven flats operated on a daily basis with emphasis on food preparation and communal meals and Clark and Tuffin (Clark & Tuffin, 2015; Tuffin & Clark, 2016) investigated flatmate selection, suggesting young adults prefer to live with others who resemble them closely in age, life stage and ethnicity. While gender was unimportant, unemployment, addiction and mental illness were causes for concern.

Literature consensus indicates household chores are the primary source of conflict (Baum, 1986; Mause, 2008). However, Natalier (2003) and Heath and Cleaver (2003) contend that conflict over housework may say more about the unequal allocation of domestic work in traditional households, while also a convenient way of highlighting the dysfunctional nature of shared accommodation. There are no hierarchical gender role ideologies in flatting: the patriarchal default system does not apply. According to Natalier (2003), in traditional households a domestically indolent husband represents a familiar cultural script but in flatting a loafing housemate can be a target for complaint, if not eviction.

Baum (1986) found motivation to share impacted relationships. Those who felt forced to share, through economic necessity, tended to focus on difficulties and were less willing to compromise, while those committed to the lifestyle regarded interpersonal conflict as an inevitable challenge. In addition, problems arose from different standards of cleanliness, tidiness and hygiene. If the status quo is acceptable to all then conflict is minimised. Dissatisfaction is virtually unavoidable between the slovenly and the clean and tidy. Surprisingly, there was little concern about bills or rent as such problems are anticipated, discussed and dealt with early. Income differences can be problematic.

This was apparent in Clark and Tuffin's (2015) research, where students were regarded as incompatible with professionals given the latter's greater discretionary income. Pragmatically, rent levels generally ensure roughly similar incomes. Baum (1986) identified two factors that significantly impact successful co-residence. The first was a power imbalance, for example if the house or furniture is owned by one of the inhabitants. Secondly, when differences in expectations exist among housemates by way of cleanliness and the degree of intimacy expected. Research also indicates varying degrees of tension over lack of personal hygiene, untidiness, noise, borrowing housemates' belongings without permission and eating other people's food without replacing it. Heath and Cleaver (2003) maintain that tensions normally subside without affecting relationships, suggesting people develop some level of tolerance for conflict. In order to maintain working relationships the ability to shrug off difficulties is important (Baum, 1986; Heath & Cleaver, 2003).

The rationale for the current research was to build on what is known about house sharing among young adults. Since conflict is an inevitable part of human interaction, examining the sources, management and consequences of conflict in the intimate environment of domesticity is integral to understanding interpersonal relationships in these households.

Research paradigm and method

The tenets of critical social psychology underpin this study employing social constructionist discourse analysis (Tuffin, 2005). Constructionist epistemology challenges the veracity of absolute truths, highlights the possibility of multiple understandings, and considers knowledge provisional and negotiable. For constructionists, knowledge is not a neutral reflection of reality but historically, culturally and contextually contingent. Constructionist enquiry aims to demonstrate how people jointly create a coherent social reality by using shared meanings, with understandings inextricably grounded in, maintained and mediated through language (Coyle, 1995). Thus language structures social reality, generally in a way that serves the interest of the speaker. Critical social psychologists reconceptualise social life as the product of interaction thus promoting language use over the psychological (Wetherell, 1996).

Discourse analysis involves close scrutiny of language and incorporates a range of analytic methods (Edwards & Potter, 1992). Discursive methods are applied to understanding social practices such as managing the interactional function of talk through various rhetorical devices, where words are assembled to construct a particular version of the world or events. Discourse is the primary means through which we accomplish social actions, such as explaining, blaming, excusing, justifying, complimenting or warding off actual or potential counter-arguments. Thus discourse analysis affords the opportunity to delve deep into details, foregrounding participants' experiences and gain a rich understanding of lived experiences (Starks & Trinidad, 2007).

Participation inclusion was restricted to those with more than a year's flatting experience, currently house sharing, fluent in English and between the ages of 20 and 35. Participants were purposefully recruited by word of mouth. In total 37 people were interviewed, 14 in individual interviews, and 23 in seven flat groups. Participants were Pākehā (of European descent) apart from two Māori and two identifying as Māori/Pākehā. Fifteen were males and 22 females with a mean age of 24. Apart from 14 students all were employed full-time. To increase heterogeneity three flat group interviews were conducted in a large New Zealand city and four in a smaller town. The merit of the approach using a relatively small sample lies in the richness of data that can be gained from in-depth discussions and analysis of the data (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Semi-structured, interviews were conducted using questions, such as "How do you deal with conflict?". Interviews were audio recorded with group interviews videoed in order to assist with identification of speakers for transcription purposes. All interviews were transcribed using an annotated version of the Jeffersonian notation (Wooffitt, 1992). Interviews, transcription and initial analysis were conducted by the lead author.

Analysis

Analysis is a lengthy, iterative process requiring multiple readings of the data identifying recurring discourses, which intertwine, overlap and contradict each other in complex ways (Fairclough, 2015). For conceptual clarification discourses are named. Extracts employed are those most representative of key discourses. Analysis is

structured in three sections dealing with the sources, management and consequences of interpersonal conflict.

Sources of conflict

Commonly identified potential sources of conflict, which can erupt into unpleasantness in the intimate confines of households include different standards of cleanliness and tidiness, misuse of resources and miserliness, bill payments and housework.

Different expectations of cleanliness and tidiness

One key discourse in constructing desirable flatmates was the importance of convergent notions of what constitutes acceptable standards. Whereas the necessity for flatmates to be reasonably clean and tidy was frequently expressed, flatmates who were too meticulous, demanding virtual perfection were unpopular. This often led to conditions that were untenable.

310 Lucy: so I (.) I like living in a clean and tidy space
311 but I wouldn't consider myself to be like::
312 obsessive about it
313 I like places spaces that are lived in
314 and she:: came across more and more (.) like that
315 um (.) we >you know< like we had to (.) uh
316 I:: had had dinner one night
317 cleaned my dishes
318 and left them (.) in the drying rack
319 just to dry while I was watching TV
320 and (.) I:: went to bed and::
321 left them there to dry
322 and then I got (.) told pretty quickly that::
323 actually in this house? they::
324 you dry the dishes
325 and put them away

Beginning with a disclaimer of liking “a clean and tidy space” (310) without being obsessive (312), Lucy deflects any presumption of questionable personal sanitation standards. Disclaimers are designed to pre-empt any potential assignment of negative attributes to the speaker, effectively an impression management strategy (Pomerantz, 1986). A “lived in” domestic space (313) is preferable to pathological tidiness (312). The flatmate is constructed as increasingly obsessive (314). Lucy uses an example of dishes left to dry while she watches TV, modified to being left overnight (320-321), which provokes a negative reaction (322-325). “Actually in this house” (323) conveys

patronising admonition while positioning Lucy as someone unfamiliar with the house rules. The message is that the exacting expectation is the flat ethos, making challenge difficult. Feeling comfortable with flatmates was a dominant discourse in constructing desirable flatmates (Clark, Tuffin, Frewin & Bowker, 2017). For Lucy this level of comfort was not achieved and she subsequently moved out.

Phoebe also spoke of clashes resulting from different standards.

43 Phoebe: it's:: (.) you just might clash
44 or have a very different idea of
45 you know (.) what clean means
46 or ((laughs)) um (.) yeah
47 or also (.) some people are::
48 much more easy going than others (.) so
49 some people get very um angry and frustrated
50 if you (.) don't just put away a teacup

56 I think um if you're flatting (.) long-term
57 you need to be OK (.) with the occasional
58 teacup or glass being left out
59 cause otherwise you will end up
60 being really stressed out °all the time° yeah

Having “a different idea about what clean means” (44-45) was euphemistically utilised by participants to denigrate either those with hygienically questionable standards (Clark & Tuffin, 2015) or the overly zealous. Easy going people are positioned as less likely to get “very angry and frustrated” (49) with negative implications for the opposite. Phoebe positions herself as easy-going (48) as she articulates needing to be OK with the odd item being left out and qualifies this by identifying that doing so maintains one's own wellbeing (57-60). Not putting away a teacup (50) is hyperbole, representing a minimal breach, employed more for rhetorical effect than accuracy (Edwards & Potter, 1992). The use of exaggeration serves to underscore unreasonable reactions. The extreme case formulation (Potter, 1996) “all the time” is an overstatement to legitimise claims. It is evident from both of the above examples that untenable expectations can lead to discomfort and stress. The capacity to be clean and tidy without being excessively so contributes to a wider discourse of a fine balance required for successful shared living (Clark et al, 2017a).

For Jody minor violations have the potential to become contagious.

96 Jody: Um (0.2) personally I don't mind if
97 people um (.) like messy
98 but I suppose in the communal space
99 like the kitchen and the lounge
100 that's where I you know
101 like if I leave a mess there
102 then it's kind of the broken window effect
103 so one person leaves their glass
104 and then the next thing you know
105 the next day there's now a plate and a glass
106 and a knife and a fork
107 and another glass (.) so yeah

“Personally I don't mind if people [are] like messy” informs us that Jody herself is not obsessively tidy. This is followed by the ubiquitous “but” (98) of the classic disclaimer (Pomerantz, 1986). A strikingly similar example to the above excerpts regarding leaving out items is employed: “so one person leaves out their glass” (103). The infectious aspect of how this can escalate is cleverly explained (104-107). Kelling and Wilson's (1982) Broken Window Thesis suggests norm violation is promoted by physical and social disarray thereby potentially spreading disorder. They concluded that early prevention averts further violations. The events Jody describe support her disclaimer about not being messy in communal spaces as the alternative is untenable.

The plight of a person appreciating a clean environment but having little control over the laxness of others is equally likely to cause distress.

227 Pia: I:: (.) so there was about six of us
228 six or seven of us? um in the same flat?
229 and like it was (.) like it
230 just got absolutely disgusting (.) like
231 and I just hated it just because like
232 I don't know I just like things clean
233 because it's their spaces and I can't like
234 it was not my place to mother them
235 to tell them to clean up after themselves

If numbers are stacked against a single fastidious flatmate then effectively dealing with the problem is unlikely as the influence of one flatmate is limited. “Absolutely disgusting” (230) is an extreme case formulation, a potent rhetorical resource used to influence listeners' conclusions (Pomerantz, 1986). “It was not my place” (234) acknowledges that it is not the duty of a single, tidy person to adopt a parental role.

“Mother them” reflects powerful cultural ideologies, and one of the benefits of flattening is to escape the demands of parents, hence no one would be keen to be cast in the role of mother. The message Pia conveys is that flatmates are responsible for cleaning up their mess with the need to respect shared spaces and the rights of others who use those spaces. Another element of contention is lack of consideration for private and communal resources.

Misuse of resources and miserliness

Misuse of resources can take many forms, from exhausting hot shower water to consuming flatmates’ food.

59 Donna: We had a (.) pretty crap (.) flatmate that moved in
60 that we didn’t really know::
61 and so (.) um (.) there was a bit of conflict with him
62 but (.) he ended up moving out?
63 because (.) he was just very immature
64 and so (.) we were paying for the food
65 because he was doing his own grocery shop
66 and he would keep eating our food (.)
67 and using our stuff
68 and so we said, (.) “Look
69 you either buy the groceries? (.)
70 or you stop eating our food”
71 >and he said, “Well then I’ll just move out”<

Donna attributes the flatmate being “pretty crap” (59) to not really knowing him beforehand (60). The “bit of conflict” (61) is an understatement considering the consequence (62, 71). Rather than diminishing problems, understatements are rhetorical devices designed to have the opposite effect (Harris, 2013). Donna offers an explanation for the behaviour, ascribing it to immaturity (63). Although the ultimatum was to stop consuming others’ food (70) the free-riding flatmate moved out when challenged (71). Active voicing (68-70) authenticates the account (Edwards & Potter, 1992).

Flatmates’ freeloading partners are a further source of contention.

237 Julie: When (.) you know (.) you’re a student
238 and money’s such an iss::ue and people
239 are showering at your house
240 and you are paying for it
241 and they’re not
242 and he would also eat our food

Impecunious students are particularly susceptible to depletion of scarce resources (237-238). Two breaches of resources, hot water and food are mentioned, with issues of costs involved and the injustice of this. While limited budgets foster economic prudence, penny pinching is not appreciated. Mary spoke facetiously of petty behaviour, demonstrating that tolerance for dealing with minor infringements of food ownership is necessary for sustained interpersonal relationships.

247 Mary: But I'm pretty laid back
248 um I'm not worried (.) if someone
249 eats my apples or uses my butter
250 and that sort of thing
251 I've never been one of those
252 VC: Ah yes
253 Mary: I've never been one of those flatmates
254 who draws a line on the olive oil ((laughter))

Mary is unperturbed (247) about flatmates using her supplies. Humour is employed effectively to stress her relaxed attitude with the example of “drawing a line on the olive oil” (254). While humour can be entertaining it also plays an important role in creating identity, comradery, unity and social consensus (Rose, 2007). In this case Mary uses humour to present an easy-going, tolerant, generous self-identity, not given to pettiness while skillfully criticising those who resort to such measures. While at odds with displeasure at flatmates eating others' food, this extract also reaffirms the pervasive broad discourse that a fine balance is required in flatting: frugality may be necessary but miserliness is unattractive. Whereas consumable resources in co-residence may be easily accessed, money tends to be less collectively available but is of vital importance to successful shared living.

Bill payments

According to Baum (1986) non-payment of bills is less a cause of conflict than would be expected since this aspect is anticipated, with caveats in place to prevent problems.

283 Sam: because (.) students don't have a lot of money
284 and having people who
285 and set up automatic payments
286 to make sure that their (.) rent went
287 and bills went through
288 that's a good place to start
289 knowing that you will still have a place to live in
290 in three weeks' time

291 and the landlord's not going to (.) come
292 kicking down your door
293 and ask where the money is

Automatic payments (285) help avoiding conflict over rent payment. People need assurance they will have accommodation for the near future (289-290). "Kicking down your door" (292) is an exaggeration but highlights a threat that is to be avoided. Automatic payments are "a good place to start" but not foolproof (288).

84 Chloe: I don't know why
85 but some people you know when they
86 money comes into it
87 they don't want to pay a bill
88 or you know (.) not on time or (.) um
89 not not prepared to (.) put their
90 their share into the (.) the cleaning or something
91 you know (.) they don't want to do their part
92 but it's definitely been the breakdown of it

Ostensibly Chloe finds it hard to comprehend why some housemates are not prepared to meet their communal obligations (84). Potter (1996) notes it would be erroneous to view "I don't know why" (84) as disinterest but rather as a mask of stake inoculation in which the speaker attends to the possibility of a counter explanation. Chloe suggests that relationship breakdowns (92) are due to lack of willingness to contribute to combined expenses (87) or agreed timing of payments (88). This violation of expectations threatens the cohesion and ultimately the viability of shared living as does failure to participate in household chores (90-91).

Failure to contribute sufficiently to household work

Extant studies found failure to participate fairly in household tasks a prime cause of conflict (Baum, 1986; Heath & Cleaver, 2003; Mause, 2008). This research endorses these findings.

124 Lucy: not everyone's as considerate (.) as:: others so::
125 there can be conflict (.) because (.) you know
126 someone doesn't (.) pull their weight ((laughs))
127 VC: Yeah
128 Lucy: doesn't contribute to the house so::
129 um there (.) it can be challenging to::
130 uh try and get that person on board and
131 along::side the other (.) folks

132 >and sometimes it doesn't work< and it's like

Consideration for others (124) was a prominent discourse regarding desirable flatmates (Clark et al, 2017). A person failing to “pull their weight”, which we read as doing a fair share, was a commonly cited idiom when discussing conflict (126). Idioms are established formulaic expressions in language use and useful rhetorical devices, which convey an extensive range of information in few words to those proficient in the language. In addition, without specific information their content is difficult to challenge (Drew & Holt, 1989). “Try and get that person on board” (130) in the colloquial sense evokes the need for participation and joining in. This notion is reinforced with “along::side the other folks” (131). The challenge lies in trying to get some people to co-operate (130) but this is not always successful.

Sources of conflict identified are differences in expectations, misuse of resources and miserliness, bill payments and failure to contribute sufficiently to household chores. Next we consider how conflicts are dealt with.

Managing conflict

Two competing aspects dominated when discussing dealing with conflict. Whereas most participants agreed that communication and talking over problems at flat meetings was the best means of resolution, many preferred to avoid conflict.

Communal meetings and talking through problems

Flat 6 maintained that they were competent at dealing with conflict:

- 43 Miles: Talk it out
44 Noah: Yeah
45 Miles: Just no really (.) secrets
46 we sort of all just sit down
47 and talk about it
48 Noah: We're real good with conflict
49 like if (.) if we ever (.) like our flat meeting
50 if we ever need to bring something up
51 we just do it round dinner
52 'nd (.) we haven't had any fights
53 or anything (.) so no it's fine

“No secrets” (45) implies openness. “If you need to bring something up” suggests the policy of transparency is accepted and expected and provides a mechanism for dealing with issues associated with shared living. Discussing challenges over dinner (51) or

other flat gatherings is less confrontational than convening a specific meeting (50). Noah concludes that no altercations have evolved (52) indicating that the policy of open communication is successful.

Flat meetings can be effective but resolution is not guaranteed.

106 Sam: communication is good (.) like
107 you know (.) like hold flat meetings
108 and uh:: I've been in flats where things have (.) been
109 a bit unsteady (.) and (.) yeah so (.) if everyone
110 gathers around the kitchen table and puts
111 kind of as much as they want to out there
112 and say "I don't like that this is happening"
113 or "I would like this to change" (.) um
114 that is (.) your kind of (.) best case scenario
115 um (.) which has worked in the past
116 other times that hasn't

Like most participants, Sam stresses the need for communication (106). He refers to past experiences where "things have been a bit unsteady" (109) suggesting possible tensions. In this way problems can be alluded to without allocation of blame to any individual, including the speaker. In contrast "the kitchen table" (110) is specific, adding to the plausibility of statements as does the use of active voice (112-113) (Edwards & Potter, 1992). If "everyone gathers around" (109-110) there is a possibility of working through issues (115). Nevertheless, Sam notes that while some outcomes, "best case scenario" (114) are ideal, others are not (116). Although sorting out problems through communication and group meetings was the dominant discourse another discourse was avoidance.

Avoidance

The avoidance discourse takes two forms. The first strategy is pre-emption of problems by consideration, tolerance and sensitivity to the nuances of flatmates' moods, knowing when to be particularly circumspect in interaction or defer contentious or adversarial discussions. Flat 2 spoke of the importance of sensitivity to what may annoy or upset others.

132 Annie: =I think we try to avoid conflict
133 a lot of the time mmm ((general sounds of agreement))
134 I think we're forgiving about
135 each other's um (.) personalities as well
136 Meg: Yeah (.) we know what each person does

137 and what (.) you know what (.) their things are
138 that gets them annoyed
139 or stuff like that
140 so we kind of (.) I don't know
141 like make allowances or::
142 Claire: =Yeah yeah you kind of know
143 yeah like that would annoy Annie
144 or whatever (.) so yeah
145 Tamsin: You just become
146 a little more considerate you know (.) like (0.3)

This all-female flat considered themselves good friends and this interpersonal level may explain why they are willing to demonstrate such consideration for each other. Annie's statement that they endeavour to avoid conflict (132) is qualified by "a lot of the time" (133) suggesting that there are occasional unavoidable tensions. Being sensitive to housemates' idiosyncrasies and moods (135-137) was a common discourse in talking about preventing problems in advance. Participants frequently acknowledged their own pet peeves, suggesting that a minor irritation to one person can be a major source of annoyance to another and a potential source of conflict. It is important to be aware of what disgruntles others. Meg and Claire encapsulate this by talking about making allowances (141) for others and abstaining from acting in a way that is vexatious (143-146). Tamsin adds the ubiquitously pervasive term "consideration" to the complex nexus of negotiating everyday interactions in the intense confines of domesticity (145). The pre-emptory nature of considerate actions and skillfully decoding emotions promotes accord and reduces the likelihood of interpersonal conflict.

A second approach to managing conflict is to gloss over problems, circumventing issues. Many find confrontation, even in a most congenial way, too stressful and in the interest of maintaining harmony some preferred to avoid dealing with issues. Chloe spoke of a flatmate who refused to discuss problems.

30 Chloe: Um (.) we usually (.) get everyone
31 to write their opinion (.) down
32 and then (.) you know (.) you have
33 letters backwards and forwards
34 and conversations
35 and sit down till it's all (.) um thought out
36 we had one flatmate that um
37 if he had a problem
38 he just would shut his door

39 and not talk to you
40 and that got
41 he left after a quick time ((laughs)) but yeah
42 usually just talking (.) talking it out °yeah°

The household had an interesting initial way of communicating problems by letter (30-34), very different from leaving deterrent notes around. Chloe advocates thinking through or talking problems out (35, 42). That this is not always the solution is evident from “usually” (42). Not talking (39) and shutting people out is not (38) conducive to the practice of thinking through or talking problems out. Line 40 is not completed but follows a refusal to communicate which concludes with the avoidant flatmate leaving (41).

Maree justified not directly addressing problems.

197 Maree: I'm:: more likely to just try and
198 skirt around (.) skirt around them
199 um (.) than address them directly
200 which (.) can sometimes they resolve themselves
201 because people move out
202 because flatting is a (.) not always a permanent situation
203 so it (.) sometimes (.) you might put up with things
204 because it's only going to last
205 X (.) number of months more
206 or (.) you know someone's on their way out
207 so might (.) just let some things slide

“Skirt around” is an idiom conveying avoidance (198). “Sometimes they resolve themselves” (200) is simply explained by the possibility of someone moving out but could also refer to a tension dissipating with time. Maree maintains that given the transience of most flats (202) the odds of the source of the problem moving out are good. The inclination to “let some things slide” (207) or “put up with things” (203) is increased if you know someone is leaving (206). Arguably, a person who knows they are departing is less likely to be collaborative if confronted. This is a passive approach to managing conflict and carries with it a rationalisation that many sources of conflict resolve themselves if one is patient and adopts a long term perspective.

Both discussion and avoidance of problems as a means of managing conflict recognise the consequences of escalating tension for group well-being and household survival.

Consequences of conflict

Two commonly occurring discourses arose when discussing conflict consequences: negative psychological implications and moving out.

Negative psychological implications

The consequences of avoiding discussion of problems were spoken of by Flat 7.

- 265 Justin: =If there's something (.) that (.) like
266 really frustrates you about living with people
267 and it's never brought up
268 and you don't communicate properly
269 it can be really bad
270 it can be like you're always in a bad mood
271 um (.) and that sort of thing
272 but then as soon as (.) the conflict is resolved
273 it like (.) levels out (.) so just it's sort of
274 it's sort of another layer of things
275 to keep on top of (.) um
276 to keep yourself like (.) yeah feeling good
277 Mathew: Yeah
278 Justin: Yeah like if you don't like
279 if you don't like where you're living
280 it's bad (.) then it's not (.) it's not good

Failure to communicate (268) problems increases frustration and negatively affects moods (270). Effective communication is deemed paramount in communal living as well as an effective means of solving problems. "It can be really bad" (269) clearly indicates the destructive impact of unresolved issues. Once conflict is settled equilibrium returns (273). The toll household tension takes, in addition to everyday stressors, is evident in Justin's frank admission of trying to keep on top of things. "To keep yourself like (.) feeling good" (276) indicate that unresolved issues can undermine a positive outlook, especially since homes should be an important refuge from everyday stress (Mallett, 2004). Tense households are often an incentive to move out.

Moving out

The predominant consequence of unresolved or on-going conflict is to regroup in another flat without the offender, make home life uncomfortable for the source of the conflict, ask the person to move out, or depart oneself.

- 239 Sam: I guess (.) for me where conflict has got (.) too bad
240 and I guess that's one advantage of flatting
241 is that (.) if things do get too bad
242 you'll just say "Well I'll move out"

243 and you can (.) you can walk away from
244 whatever arrangement you have
245 you (.) talk to the landlord and other flatmates
246 and (.) you just call it a day
247 and you move elsewhere (.) um

Sam notes that an advantage of flatting (240) is the capacity to move out (242,) when conflict becomes unbearable (239, 241). “You can walk away” (243) “and you just call it a day” (246) suggests that such action is unproblematic. “Arrangements” (244) would refer to length of notice specified by flat rules, finding replacement flatmates or tenancy conditions. However, relocating can be costly, financially and emotionally: alternative accommodation needs to be found with no assurance that the next situation will be any better. In addition, extra money is required for rent in advance, bond money and moving costs. For the person holding the lease it is especially difficult to move. These negative consequences speak to the importance of managing conflict before it escalates into the untenable.

Discussion

Sources of conflict

Four discourses were apparent in discussing sources of conflict. Different expectations of standards of cleanliness can be difficult to resolve. Participants spoke of the stress of living with an obsessively clean and tidy housemate. The counter aspect to this discourse was living with slothful housemates but also the necessity not to let a flatmate get away with being lazy. The Broken Window effect (Kelling & Wilson, 1982) was evoked to explain that overlooking violation of expectations can be used as an excuse for others not to co-operate or the flat can deteriorate to the point where no-one cares or takes responsibility for housework.

Whereas the extant literature does discuss different understandings of cleanliness and hygiene (Baum, 1986; Heath & Cleaver, 2003), this research also provides insight into the difficulty of living with flatmates with excessive or extremely high standards. One reason for obsessiveness being a recurring complaint is the possibility of self defence. Nobody likes to feel less than adequate sanitation wise. A good response is to position others as overly fastidious, effectively downplaying responsibility for one’s own implied imperfections. This is achieved through various rhetorical devices such as exaggeration or extreme case formulation. A prerequisite of a desirable flatmate is that

they do not make others uncomfortable (Clark et al, 2017). Unrealistic or unsustainable demands can be perceived as interpersonal rejection (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007). Flatting is a context in which the desire for warm social relationships can be satisfied. The extent to which this desire is met influences behaviour and attitudes towards others and shapes the complex interpersonal dynamics of the group.

The necessity for flatmates to have similar expectations in a number of spheres was commonly drawn on when constructing desirable flatmates (Clark et al, 2017). The tension and stress that can arise from an imbalance is evident. This was part of a pervasive and broader discourse of a need for a fine balance in many aspects of flatting. Treading a delicate path between acceptable and objectionable behaviour requires discerning interpersonal skills and sensitivities crucial for successful shared living.

A second discourse involved misuse of resources and miserliness. Misusing resources focused on areas where flatmates demonstrated lack of consideration for equal sharing of communal commodities, such as food, hot water and electricity. A particular source of conflict arose in flats that did not share food, where an individual consistently consumed others' food without replacing it. In most student and many professional flats, residents are financially challenged and through necessity practice economic austerity. Scarce resources being a source of conflict is well documented (Deutsch, 2014). Visiting partners or friends' use of meagre supplies can create tension. Whereas students can be particularly cash strapped, young professionals aspire to better standards but can still resent others taking advantage of them. Conversely, miserliness, such as drawing lines on containers is not appreciated. The subtle balance between frugality and meanness once again demonstrates the careful equilibrium required for successful co-residence.

Baum (1986) noted that money was less of an issue in flatting than expected as the potential for this to cause problems is anticipated and can be pre-empted with careful planning. This is reflected in the extract where automatic payments are suggested as an effective method to ensure accommodation security. That this is not an infallible method is evident in complaints about the reluctance of some people to pay their bills or meet remittance deadlines. Penalties for late payment, such as overdue fines or electricity being cut off can affect all, hence the need to feel confidence and trust that

housemates will meet their financial obligations. Failure to do so causes stress and anxiety for those who do comply.

Extant research overwhelmingly indicates that everyday household chores are the major source of tension leading to conflict in communal living (Baum, 1986; Heath & Cleaver, 2003; Kemp & Rugg, 1998; Mause, 2008; Natalier, 2003). Failure to contribute sufficiently to household chores featured largely as a cause of discontent in the current research. Increased tension has the potential to undermine the fragile basis on which shared living operates, through frayed interpersonal relationships and trust essential for continued communal living. How are these threats to relational harmony managed?

Managing conflict

Two discourses emerged with regard to managing conflict. The first involves communal meetings to openly discuss remedying discontent. The second discourse of avoidance comprised one positive and one seemingly negative strategy. Averting tension by consideration, tact and sensitivity to housemates' emotional states is preventative. Reciprocal awareness of other's needs is beneficial to group harmony, providing all exhibit mutual respect. A second evasive aspect, motivated by aversion to confrontational behaviour and/or the transitional nature of such households, was to avoid discussing problems. Such unresolved conflict can increase stress and distrust and become increasingly malignant if the source of dissatisfaction is recurring (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007). Withholding complaints can maintain harmony but can also erode relationship satisfaction and ultimately result in withdrawal from household socialising. Since communal association provides the glue that holds households together (Heath & Cleaver, 2003), prognosis for the living arrangement under these circumstances is not positive.

According to Chun and Choi, (2014), group members with high affiliation needs attempt to develop and maintain relationships by avoiding conflict as much as possible, which very often serves as a neutral buffer in friction situations. Those with lower affiliation needs are less anxious about tension and consideration for others. Often regarded as rude and blunt, their attitudes can result in emotional clashes and intragroup conflict. Whereas open communication can be valuable if complaints are delivered with

tact, diplomacy, fairness and politeness, a negative spiral can result if badly handled (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007).

Meta-analysis of 118 group studies identifies three types of group conflicts (de Wit, Greer & Jehn, 2012). Relationship conflicts involve interpersonal disagreements about personality issues or differences in norms and values. Both issues were raised by participants. Perceived incompatibility due to various dissimilarities is destructive in any conflict situation (Toegel & Barsoux, 2016). This type of friction can have harmful effects on groups through threats to individual self-concepts, increased anxiety, negative emotions, hostility and lack of trust, particularly if it is persistent over a significant amount of time. Such destructive conflict has a relatively low probability of resolution since it is emotion driven, negatively impacting the communication process as it very often includes personal attacks. Prognosis for dealing with conflict is more positive if the group has similar values, with high levels of trust and respect (Jehn & Mannix, 2001). In both the talk of choice of flatmates and describing ideal flatmates (Clark & Tuffin, 2015; Clark et al, 2017) participants spoke of the desire to live with people who resembled themselves in a variety of ways, such as similar age, values, morals and backgrounds. In participants' talk of conflict, it became clear that young people develop an acute awareness of what might compromise domestic harmony and actively seek to prevent potential problems by careful selection of flatmates.

The second type of group conflict, task conflict (de Wit, Greer & Jehn, 2012), refers to problems with tasks performed, such as housework. This tension is more easily constructively managed by focusing on overcoming differences to achieve a common objective, providing emotions do not gain the upper hand. Unfortunately, task driven conflict frequently turns into emotion based conflict, exacerbating tension and making dealing with problems more difficult. A third conflict type, process conflict, produces a consistently negative effect. Often of a personal nature, this can hinder group viability. For example, a group member may consider s/he is not respected or consider certain tasks, such as dish washing or toilet cleaning beneath his/her dignity (de Wit, Greer & Jehn, 2012).

Resolution has better outcomes if directed specifically at overcoming problems rather than emotional blaming, yet rational argument seldom overcomes emotion, which is an

integral part of conflict (Bodtker & Jameson, 2001). Collaborative resolution with respectful, honest debate and mutually agreed solutions enhances group cohesion and relating to others (Deutsch, 2014; Griffith, Connolly & Thiel, 2014). For young adults negotiation skills learned through constructive collaboration and co-operative strategies to deal with problems have positive implications for interpersonal interactions in the workplace and relationships in general (La Valle, O'Regan & Jackson, 2000). Strong positive connections can enhance human well-being and deepen relationships while too much negative interaction can be alienating, reduce morale and undermine team work (Chun & Choi, 2014; Curseu et al 2012).

In the literature avoidance of conflict is regarded as a negative coping strategy but may serve as an important stress reduction function (Cohen, 2004). Reducing the possibility of tension by pre-emptive means is highly positive, providing the exercise is reciprocal. Sensitivity to moods and avoiding ways of communicating that create unnecessary, unresolvable conflicts is positive. While the discourse of avoidance and delay, such as skirting around issues, was common this is not always maladaptive and can preserve relationships (Afifi, Caughlin & Afifi, 2007). Nevertheless, extensive avoidance by neglecting to deal with problems can be counterproductive and result in personal and relational stress (Gottman, 1994). In essence, effective conflict management requires the ability to paradoxically be confrontational and avoidant (Roloff & Ifert, 2000), with sensitivity to the context and when it's best to adopt different strategies. Clearly if a troublesome flatmate is leaving shortly it's best to simply wait it out. Productively dealing with problems gives insight into how conflict can be managed in close confines.

Goffman (1971) proposed that all social actions are subject to moral evaluation. Whether behaviour is considered appropriate, bad, harmful or ill-judged is a subjective judgement, depending on culture and pre-established values (Chiu & Hackett, 2017). Very often conflict is rooted in issues of fairness (Jones, 2000). Failure of flatmates to contribute to housework or eating others' food is hard to justify. Usually, some form of atonement or suitable penance is demanded by the offended (Drew, Hepburn, Margutti & Galatolo, 2016): the flatmate who ate others' food without paying for it ultimately paid the price by moving out. However, what is considered correct in one flat may not

be so in another. Rules are seldom formalised but are dynamic, negotiable contracts, which operate to maintain relationships and regulate sources of conflict.

Consequences of conflict

Two discourses regarding the consequences of conflict were identified. The first involved the negative psychological implications of unresolved conflict. Young adulthood is an exciting period of possibilities but also a turbulent life stage with multiple challenges, such as resisting risky peer pressure, gaining qualifications, career choice and forming early couple relationships (Arnett, 2000). Unresolved household tension adds to these trials. Although conflict can be reversed through effective resolution, it can produce negative outcomes, such as detrimental psychological and physiological consequences (Cohen, 2004; Laurel, Hartmann, Closen, Mauda, & Petric-Tatu, 2013).

The second discourse is to move in the face of intractable conflict. This can take the form of a decision to move out, request that someone move out or make life so uncomfortable that a person feels compelled to move: in flatting jargon this is referred to as 'jump' or 'push' (Earl, 2013). Others simply regroup as a household in a new location without the perceived problematic agent. However, exits can be costly in many ways. Economically, there are moving expenses, bonds and rent to be paid in advance. The complexity becomes more involved if the person leaving has the lease on the property. Emotionally there is the loss of social capital and anxiety. In a competitive rental market finding new accommodation can be difficult with no guarantee that the new household will be more satisfactory. However, the negative psychological consequences of remaining in an unhappy situation frequently make moving out the only option.

Practical implications suggest that careful selection of flatmates by way of similarities and expectations reduce possibilities for tension. Such care can be subverted by the necessity of finding someone promptly to cover expenses and the simple fact that it is difficult to predict how relationships will work in the close confines of sharing a household. The seemingly healthy mechanism for dealing with tension is to manage this by mature discussion and resolution, rather than moving to another flat. Very often leaving a tense or uncomfortable household is regarded as the only solution to a

problem. Certainly, the option of ‘jumping’ would be preferable to being ‘pushed’ (Earl, 2013) out of a household but this could entail jumping from the frying pan into the fire.

The current study is not without limitations. For example, one aspect is that in promoting a positive self-image, participants would seldom admit to responsibility for initiating tension. In addition, more in-depth research is needed into the negative psychological aspects of house sharing: traumatic experiences are likely to result in individuals seeking alternative types of accommodation. The criteria of interviewing only those currently flatting excluded those most affected. Based on this limitation future research could concentrate on those who prefer not to share households.

Conclusion

While many positive advantages, both economic and social, can be gained from residing with peers, interpersonal relationships can be challenging. Clearly, participants were not unfamiliar with household conflict but managed to ensure it was minimally disruptive to their generally successful construction of shared living. However, sometimes the decision to move out is seen as the only solution. And this highlights the fact that the management of conflict takes place against a background where arrangements are often loose and transitory: with no ideological blueprints for co-residence rules evolve organically.

The current study strengthens the literature on shared housing among young adults by adding a deeper relational understanding of the sources, management and consequences of conflict. By providing insights into the complexity of shared households, it contributes a window into contemporary life of young adults as well as group processes. The unique contribution lies in analysing how participants construct their experiences, the active and passive ways of navigating conflict in flatting relationships and how the negative effects on well-being can be circumvented. It also affords a more sophisticated appreciation of the structure and complex social dynamics of these domestic microsystems.

CHAPTER 9

The social dynamics of shared living

Home is not where you live but where they understand you

Christian Morgenstern: Stages

Introduction

The previous chapter explored the causes, management and consequences of conflict in shared living. While household chores have been identified as the prime source of conflict, other key areas of contention were discussed. The theme of balance emerged in talk about conflict indicating that equilibrium in a number of spheres of communal living is necessary if harmony is to prevail. For example, extremes of being too clean and tidy or too slovenly, or overly parsimonious or profligate were cited as potential threats to peace. The same necessity for a fine balance consistently surfaced as central when constructing successful or dysfunctional dynamics. Whereas the content of the analysis chapters preceding this chapter all contribute significantly to understanding the social dynamics and interpersonal relationships of flatting, the focus of this section looks directly at young adult conception and construction of the dynamic. The intention is to submit this as a paper to *Small Group Research*

The social dynamics of shared housing among young adults

Abstract

In tandem with dramatic social changes, shared housing has become an economically pragmatic and popular lifestyle among young adults in the Western world. Little research has focused exclusively on the dynamics of group living. The current New Zealand study sought to investigate the social dynamics of young adults sharing a household. Data was drawn from interviews with 37 young adults between the ages of 20 and 35, currently sharing. Discourse analysis was employed to examine how the dynamics of shared living were constructed. The relationship between the physical environment and human relationships is discussed before considering four complex psychological components routinely raised by participants in discussing dynamics. The first simply defined household dynamics as how sharing works. Secondly, in order for households to function effectively a fine balance is required across many spheres of communal living. Thirdly, every household dynamic is unique but subject to flux.

Finally, effective dynamics are more likely if inhabitants are a good fit with each other by way of similar expectations, lifestyle and life stages.

Key words: shared housing young adults social dynamics

Global concern is mounting over housing difficulties young people are facing (Forrest, 2013; Mackie, 2016). Unaffordable and insufficient housing, particularly in the lower priced property and rental markets, with concomitant escalating rent costs, has radical economic, social and psychological implications for young adults (Aassve, Cottini, & Vitali, 2013). Shared residential accommodation is a financially, socially and environmentally pragmatic way of dealing with economic constraint, especially since accommodation accounts for a significant portion of budgets (Baum, 1986). Consequently, peer co-residence, also known as group living or flatting, is becoming increasingly common among young adults in Western countries such as America (Mykyta, 2012), Britain (Carlsson & Eriksson, 2015), and northern Europe (Arundel & Ronald, 2016). In Australia and New Zealand flatting has become a culturally embedded social norm (Murphy, 2011). Currently, young adults are flatting into their late twenties, early thirties and beyond (Aassve, Cottini, & Vitali, 2013).

Financial challenges are not restricted to soaring house prices. In the post 2008 global recession economic climate uncertainty is still manifest, resulting in extremely competitive and volatile labour markets, with rising levels of precarious contract or casual work (Forrest, 2013; Lagarde, 2016). Secure wages are no longer guaranteed. In addition, a decline in real earnings frequently renders full-time employment wages insufficient for independent living. Further monetary constraints for young adults can be linked to higher rates of post-secondary education, escalating tertiary education costs and student loan debt (Cobb-Clark, 2008).

The attraction of shared accommodation can be framed against a backdrop of dramatic social change. Women have become entrenched in the workforce, building careers with vocational objectives before settling down to long-term commitments. While marriage and family formation are still key predictors of homeownership, acceptance of premarital sex and co-habitation, and ready access to birth control has rendered early marriage less popular (Arnett, 2015). This century has been dubbed the Singles

Century (Observer Life Magazine, 2000), which ironically entrenches marital status as a category of differentiation (Devos, De Groot & Schmidt, 2015). In addition, extensive international travel has become a common and sought-after experience for many young people before settling into committed relationships and responsibilities: shared accommodation facilitates saving for these aspirations (Kenyon & Heath, 2001).

Typically, but not exclusively, shared households are inhabited by young, unmarried, childless, non-kin, peer aged cohorts, who share common areas such as lounge, kitchen, bathroom and laundry (Heath & Cleaver, 2003). Bedrooms are usually private areas of retreat (Clark, Tuffin, Frewin & Bowker, 2017a). Expenses, such as rent, utilities, broadband, pay TV and everyday necessities, for example, dish washing liquid are shared. Some households purchase food and eat evening meals together, while others do so individually (Williamson, 2005). Essentially, flatting is a social contract with housemates expected to contribute equally to expenses and day-to-day housekeeping (Mause, 2008). But housing constitutes much more than rent and costs: 'home' is of psychological and emotional importance and plays a pivotal role in the process of transitioning from the parental home to independent living (Forrest, 2013).

It is important to note that an indigent life for young individuals has different trajectories: for some poverty can be restricted to student years but not so for the unskilled worker or single parent, with limited possibilities for asset gathering and home ownership. Access to cushioning parental resources also differs. Heath and Kenyon (2001) noted that shared housing is well suited to young people strongly committed to the labour market. Very often post-graduates accustomed to shared living as students continue to do so once they graduate and the lifestyle has thus become exclusionary for the less well educated. McNamara and Connell (2007) have noted a similar trend in Australia where group households are represented at the high end of the income scales with a significantly lower representation at the low end, compared to Australian households overall. Research into shared housing, therefore, tends to represent mainstream rather than economically or socially marginalised young adults.

Given the ubiquity of shared housing among the young, research on the topic is surprisingly limited. In the United States Goldscheider and Goldscheider (1999) and Mykyta (2012) studied patterns of leaving the parental home, including shared

housing, as did Heath and Cleaver (2003) in the United Kingdom. European research tends to concentrate on why young people share (Steinfuhrer & Haase, 2009; Schwanitz & Mulder, 2015; Arundel & Ronald, 2016). In Australia, Natalier (2003) investigated gender roles in young egalitarian households and McNamara and Connell (2007) found young adults considered their shared housing 'home'. In New Zealand, Williamson (2005) explored the benefits of sharing meals in flats and Clark and Tuffin examined selection and rejection of potential flatmates: those of similar age and ethnicity were preferable, while gender was not considered important (Clark & Tuffin, 2015). Drug and alcohol use was acceptable but not addiction, and mental illness was tolerated providing symptoms were invisible and unproblematic (Tuffin & Clark, 2016).

Clark and Tuffin (2015) found that the 'flat dynamic' or 'culture' was frequently invoked as a rhetorical justification for assessing suitability of potential flatmates. Rather than explicit discrimination on the basis of age, race, addiction and mental illness the language of rejection was carefully framed in terms of best fit with the existing flat dynamic. The concept was never fully explained but comprehension was taken as axiomatic. Lewin (1997), the seminal theorist on group study, adopted the word 'dynamics' to describe group processes, activities, operations and reactions to change. Heath (2009) noted that with the exception of Baum (1986), little research has focused exclusively on the dynamics of group living. Williamson (2006) identified a lack of detailed description of how non-kin young adult domestic groups operate and more recently Mykyta (2012) called for a need to understand how this way of life works in practice. The rationale for the current study was to determine what constitutes the often cited but little understood 'flat dynamic' and to gain a deeper understanding of the social dynamics of shared housing among young adults.

Research paradigm and method

A social constructionist epistemology employing discourse analysis rooted in the tenets of critical psychology was adopted for this study. Constructionists propose that our understanding of reality and knowledge is a co-operative enterprise, negotiated and constructed in communal interchange, contextually and historically situated and inextricably transmitted through language (Coyle, 1995). Constructionist enquiry seeks to make explicit the processes by which people describe, explain or account for the

world and themselves. This directs our attention to the social, moral and political institutions that shape our taken-for-granted assumptions. Descriptions and explanations are never neutral; all achieve actions such as blaming, praising or justifying (Gergen, 1985). Discourse is defined as language use in everyday text and talk. Discourse analysis is the close scrutiny of language using a variety of analytic methods and affords rich, in-depth probing, with sensitivity to nuances and contradictions, and openness to the unanticipated (Taylor, 2001; Marecek, 2003). Based on constructionist assumptions critical psychologists have moved the psychological processes from an ontological endogenous base of cognitive processes to an exogenous perspective, essentially moving the psychological from the mind into the sphere of social discourse (Gergen 1985).

Participants were purposefully recruited by word of mouth, aged between 20 and 35, fluent in English and had at least one year's flatting experience. Fourteen people were interviewed individually and 23 in seven flat groups ranging in size from two to five flatmates. In total 37 people were interviewed. Fifteen were males and 22 females with a mean age of 24. Participants were Pākehā (of European descent), two Māori, and two identifying as Māori/Pākehā. Apart from 14 students all were employed full-time. Three flat group interviews were conducted in a large New Zealand city and four in a smaller town. The motivation for this choice was to increase heterogeneity.

Semi-structured, in depth interviews were conducted using open ended questions, such as "why flat?", designed to trigger discussion. Open-ended questions are useful in understanding lived experiences of informants without prejudging dimensions under study (Schein, 1990). Interviews were audio recorded with group interviews videoed as well since it can be difficult to discern who is talking in a group when transcribing. All interviews were transcribed using an annotated version of Jeffersonian notation (Wooffitt, 1992). The study underwent Massey University ethical peer review and met the requirements of informed consent, confidentiality with pseudonyms employed to preserve anonymity.

Analysis

Analysis involves systematic, repeated reading of transcripts, identifying common discourses and their components, and building a corpus of suitable exemplary extracts.

Extracts employed for discussion are far from exhaustive of remarkably uniform tracts of data. Not all reflect the same dimensions and they overlap or intersect in complex ways. Because discourses are invariably intertwined, part of the analysis involves unravelling commonalities, reintegrating them around a central discourse and illustrating them to provide a greater understanding of the topic (Fairclough, 2015). While much of the data emerged from responses to the question, “How would you explain the flat dynamic?” insight was often embedded in other areas of discussion. Some participants responded to the question by simply defining the concept, while others interpreted the flat dynamic broadly, endeavouring to explain what the flat dynamic entails and what works. The effect of the physical building on household dynamics was frequently broached spontaneously. Apart from physical considerations, four distinct complex psychological dimensions to the dynamics discourse were identified.

The impact of the building on dynamics

Conflicting positions were adopted in this component of the dynamics discourse, with participants noting how the building impacted relationships.

295 Greg: but then we have a flat that
296 doesn't have a very big living room
297 but pretty big rooms
298 so we sort of it's (.) encouraged by the flat
299 to stay in our rooms

In a group of five student housemates, in-house socialising was limited by a small communal living room unable to accommodate them all at the same time (296). This is an important consideration given the frequent emphasis placed on social interaction among housemates (Clark et al, 2017a). The physical limitations influenced the balance of time they were able to spend interacting and hence more private time was part of this flat dynamic, imposed by the physical configuration of the flat.

Mary stipulates some provisos about the state of the house after which the housemates become all-important.

304 Mary: it's the people that are the most important thing there
305 and really when it comes down to it
306 and if the house isn't grotty (.) uh
307 and if the room isn't a cupboard
308 and then it's all down to the flatmates

Although the disposition of housemates ultimately defines a successful household (304, 308) there are limitations to what is acceptable in housing. The colloquial “grotty” (306) implies unacceptable standards, which are not specified but may include faulty plumbing, inadequate heating and ventilation. Sub-par housing is clearly undesirable and to be avoided. Likewise a bedroom being “a cupboard” (307) is used to describe a private domain too small for comfort. Mary talks about the relationship between the physicality of the flat and the people with the former providing important preconditions after which the successful development of a flat dynamic depends on the people themselves.

Lisa felt the building in which she once flatted impaired the dynamic in a sinister way.

1129 Lisa: I don't know if it was anything to do with that place
1130 I don't believe it's haunted (.) don't get me wrong
1131 I do believe it's ((indistinct – evil?)) but it wasn't haunted
1132 it was just a place that seemed to feed negativity
1133 in the end um and we all took it out on each other

The possibility that the building itself caused tension among housemates (1133) is introduced with “I don't know” while rejecting the notion that it was haunted (1130-1131). According to Wooffitt (1992) invoking the paranormal is often accompanied by an initial statement of doubt (1129). The problems arose from the sensation of the place feeding negativity, which is linked to evil but possesses a vague ontology. However, this is claimed to be involved in a dysfunctional dynamic where the residents engaged in negative interactions. The responsibility for this is shared evenly (1133) which avoids accusations and blaming other than pointing to the apparent environmental malevolence.

In contrast, others believed that functional dynamics were symptomatic of good housemates irrespective of the building.

462 Phoebe: the house can be falling down
463 but if your other housemates are (.) fun (.) to live with
464 then you can kind of look past it
465 VC: oh yes
466 Phoebe: =which you need to be able to do
467 in (city suburb) (.) because all the houses are falling down ((laughter))

Living in a house in a state of disrepair can almost be overlooked (464) if flatmates are “fun to live with” (463). Flatmates associated with fun contribute positively to the flat dynamic, so much so they assist with being able to ignore the condition of a house. Phoebe’s equanimity suggests that despite the state of the house causing some concern (464), it is mitigated by others in the suburb being subject to similarly unsatisfactory housing. Moving from physical considerations, four distinct complex psychological components in the dynamics discourse were identified.

How flatting works

The flat dynamic was frequently regarded as synonymous with functionality. Toni uses her current flat as a benchmark of a successful dynamic.

- 185 VC: = how would you describe the concept of the flat dynamic
186 Toni: so by that would you just mean
187 how everything kind of fits together
188 and how it works
189 VC: yes
190 Toni: so my current (.) dynamic
191 VC: yeah
192 Toni: well I think as I said earlier (.) just
193 everyone gets along (.) you know
194 we understand that :: (0.2) you know
195 we have to do certain things
196 to help keep the place look (.) going
197 yeah (.) so as I said (.) cleaning (.) everything
198 we all know we need to do these things

“How it works” (188) and “how everything kind of fits together” (187) speaks to the state of interactional dynamics by evoking the metaphor of interlocking pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. The image of “fits” is powerful and conveys the aspiration of relationships working perfectly but also the real possibility of someone not fitting in. A good fit is a valued member of the collective but there are many ways in which someone can fall short. Toni reiterates that interpersonal relationships in her flat are convivial (193), where everyone gets along and infers a lack of friction, dispute and conflict. This is attributed to a common understanding (194) of the importance of contributing to chores (198). “Certain things” (195) have to be accomplished but cleaning is particularly singled out (197), since household chores are likely to be a source of potential conflict (Baum, 1986; Heath & Cleaver, 2003).

A second aspect of the discourse was predominant and pervasive throughout transcripts. A balance across a number of spheres was considered optimal for functional shared households.

A workable balance

Various dimensions comprise this aspect. Maintaining a fragile balance between the social and the private, the excessively tidy or messy and balanced routines were considered essential to functional flatting.

Balancing the social and the private

- 249 Lucy: It's having the same expectations about what::
250 flatting (.) or what it means (.) to live in the same house
251 and (.) for the most part for me (.) home
252 I've had some great flatting experiences and (.) um
- 267 um (.) we were all:: (.) quite fun people so::
268 enjoyed having people around
269 found it social (.) for drinks (.) and all
270 of our kind of groups of friends melded together
271 and it was really cool 'nd
272 um (.) we are all still friends now
273 which is (.) which is awesome
274 but it just (.) it comes down to
275 I guess personality
276 and (.) you know what works (.) you can
277 we had the right balance of::
278 having our own lives::
279 and (.) doing things that we enjoy
280 and then coming out being social with each other

Ideal flatmates were frequently constructed as having similar expectations from flatting (249-250) by way of cleanliness, tidiness and sociability. Lucy ascribes “great flatting experiences” (252) to common expectations of each other (249), later describing such an experience. Lucy regards shared housing as “home” (251), which is qualified by “for the most part” (251). This suggests some ambivalence and raises the possibility that not all her flats were regarded with the same affection. Positive aspects, such as fun (267), friendship (270) and socialising are linked to “personality” (275) and ultimately impact on “what works” (276), substantiating the functional aspects of the “dynamic”. The level of sociability evokes the image of one big extended group of happy young people who lived together and enjoyed each other's company. Friendships wrought through living together have endured (272). The pervasive discourse of “balance”

(277) is then drawn on to describe what is successful. In this case it is the “right balance” between being sociable with housemates but also entitlement to “having our own lives” (278). Lucy talks of “coming out” and being social (280), which we interpret as emerging from the private bedroom domain. The ability to respect the fine balance between public sociability and the right to independence and privacy has previously been identified as important in the construction of desirable flatmates (Clark et al, 2017a)

Like Lucy, Sam draws on expectations and personalities to construct the dynamics of flatting.

437 Sam: uh my previous flatmate was
438 he is (.) was very very introverted? um
439 and being around large groups of people
440 for him could be quite stressful
441 whereas I quite like to be out
442 or have people over
443 and it (.) can make things more difficult
444 um (.) but then it's also down to me
445 and to him (.) to understand that I can't
446 have people over every night
447 it's just not fair (.) and also that
448 I can (.) or should be able
449 to have people over
450 because that's how flatting works (.) I
451 you know you have to accept (.) both sides
452 it's about (.) uh finding balance
453 between each other's expectations (.) yeah

Sam speaks of living with a very introverted flatmate (438) while positioning himself as extroverted (441-442). Divergent preferences for levels of sociability can be an impediment (443) but can be overcome by “finding balance” (452) in expectations (453) and a reciprocal understanding and appreciation of differing needs and fairness (447). This contrasts with Lucy's interpretation of having the “same expectations”. When expectations align accommodating the needs of the others diminishes but when differences exist it is necessary to “accept both sides” (451). In order to work this requires engagement in a delicate balance (452) of give and take by negotiation and compromise. “Because that's how flatting works” (450) is a categorical statement about accepting differences and finding a workable balance (452).

Balance between excessively tidy or messy

Another aspect of balancing is a mutually acceptable standard of cleanliness and tidiness.

- 222 VC: can you:: explain what the flat dynamic is
223 Jeff: that would just be your common interests hey
224 wouldn't it (.) and not being too
225 like both of us aren't (.) messy people
226 but we're not anal clean people either you know
227 like if you had a real clean freak
228 you you'd feel a bit out of it
229 and if you lived with a real messy person
230 as well (.) you'd tell them to clean up
231 Ben: yeah I suppose it's just a balance (.) hey

Jeff begins by interpreting the flat dynamic as “common interest” (223), which was an aspect frequently mentioned as contributing to an effective household. The tentative suggestion is followed by Jeff adding that the dynamic can be compromised by those whose ideals of cleanliness and tidiness are too high, or too low. “You’d feel a bit out of it” (228) implies alienation. “Anal clean people” (226) and “real clean freak” (227) are pejorative suggesting abnormality and unacceptability. “Anal” has negative connotations associated with the Freudian concept of arrested development, compulsive order, tidiness, precision and perfection seeking (Freud, 2010). A common understanding of the concept is assumed and rests on the assumption of excessive cleanliness or tidiness. “Messy” people are similarly regarded as a liability (229) but are more easily accommodated (230). Jeff positions himself and Ben as well adjusted, neither messy (225) nor obsessively clean, with Ben concluding that a balance between the two poles is optimal. Positioning others as obsessive deflects any suggestion of the speaker being less than hygienic.

Sean also speaks of a necessary equilibrium:

- 217 Sean: there was actually a point um last year (0.5)
218 when I; thought it went a bit too far ? (.) um
219 uh one of our flatmates was even (.) was was quite
220 quite anal (.) on these sorts of things
221 started putting up notes around the: around the house
222 notes on the fridge saying remember to shut the fridge door
223 notes on the (.) cupboard and stuff you know uh I
224 I think I used the words
225 Nazi state a bit out of context
226 but it it wasn't a very uh it didn't go down very well um

227 yeah because again I I quite like having uh
228 I quite like the idea of being able to live in a flat
229 without being told what to do um
230 VC: = yes
231 Sean: = um of course it does it does
232 there is an equilibrium there I think that needs to be had

Sean's opening statement sets the tone for what is to follow: we are forewarned that the ensuing talk deals with dissatisfaction and dissent (217-218). Initial sentences often signal the content of what is to come (van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983) and are also vital to the listener's framework (Wooffitt, 1992). Like Jeff, Sean employs the term "anal" to refer to undesirable behaviour (220), taking for granted the listener's interpretation of the term. The example of post-it notes left in communal areas justifies the accusation of anal. "Remember to shut the fridge door" (222) implies a totally unwarranted and futile instruction. The three sites of the notes, "notes around the house" (221), "notes on the fridge" (222) and "notes on the cupboards" (223) form a tripartite list, which is a rhetorical device used to legitimise claims by signifying a complete inventory and thereby influence a listener's conclusions (Pomerantz, 1986). In this case the impression of innumerable, superfluous notes attached to various surfaces is conveyed.

"I think I used the word Nazi state a bit out of context" (224-225) indirectly informs us that Sean had strongly objected verbally to others about this disagreeable practice. Sean acknowledges that "Nazi state" (225) is perhaps not a suitable analogy but it does underscore the unstated presumption of a shared understanding we have of terms and their implications. "It didn't go down very well" (226) is ambiguous: it could refer to Sean's strong reaction to the notes or the notes themselves not being appreciated. The former is more probable as Sean continues justifying his stance by stating that he does not enjoy being told what to do (229). "Again" (227) refers to an earlier statement about flattening representing freedom from the demands and rules of the parental home. Sean too concludes that there needs to be an equilibrium or balance of expectations for successful co-habitation (232). "Being able to live in a flat without being told what to do" (228-229) reinforces resistance to bossy flatmates and rigid rules. Functional dynamics are contingent upon accepting the need to consider others without being treated like mindless children who need notes to remind them of their domestic responsibilities and also agreement about routines.

Balanced routines

Timing ablutions acceptable to all constitutes an important feature of workable co-habitation.

147 Phoebe: ((laughs)) it's a very delicate balance
148 it's worked quite nicely so far (.) cause um
149 Robyn gets up first (.) and then has a shower
150 and then I get up and have a shower
151 and then Maia gets up and has a shower
152 so we (.) it's quite good in that we all have
153 very staggered (.) like morning routines
154 so that works really well

Shared households are often humble establishments with a single shared bathroom. Flatmates oblivious to others' time management strategies can create tension. A respected order of routine, such as staggered shower times (150-154) can contribute to harmonious living. As Phoebe notes, in the weekday morning rush (153) a delicate balance is required (147) if all are to complete their ablutions. Flatmates failing to adhere to established routines were often a source of discontent. Generally, new flatmates are required to fit in with existing timetables.

Balance is easily destabilised

Interpersonal relationships in the intimacy of domesticity can be fragile with the need for a good "fit" of flatmates and a delicate balance between sociability, tidiness and domestic routines. This is also demonstrated by the recognition that two flatmates starting a relationship can destabilise the delicate balance.

526 Lisa: um (.) so we started sleeping together
527 um which offset the balance again in the house

We are not informed how the "balance" (527) was offset by "sleeping together" (526) but this was part of a lengthy narrative of how a seemingly successful flat dynamic rapidly deteriorated. Single participants stated preferences for flatting with other singles rather than couples due to couples not socialising sufficiently or couples exerting undue power by virtue of numbers: the latter could undoubtedly affect the equilibrium (Clark, Tuffin, Frewin & Bowker, 2017b). This brings us to the next closely aligned components of the discourse: each flat dynamic is unique and subject to change.

Dynamics are unique and subject to change

332 Claire: I think it just sort of develops on its own
333 and it changes with time:: without any
334 anybody (.) putting it into place
335 it just sort of happens
336 depending on what's going on
337 in certain people's lives

Claire observes that the dynamic of a flat develops of its own accord (332), without any formal structures (334) "Putting it into place" may touch on the lack of cultural and ideological blueprints defining this way of life. Why dynamics change according to events in residents' lives (337) was not enlarged upon but is consistent with the reflection that "balance" can be easily destabilised, such as when two flatmates become a couple. And this speaks to the dynamic as being organic and an evolving entity that entails not just sharing accommodation but also the close domestic and interpersonal relationships required for a successful flat dynamic.

Jody interprets the flat dynamic as a function of interpersonal relationships.

135 so our dynamic's kind of like
136 kind of like siblings (.) like we kind of like
137 we take the piss out of each other
138 and the boys play fight
139 and you know that
140 so I guess like (.) each flat
141 would have a different (.) dynamic per se?
142 and I think (.) yeah
143 it's obviously very interesting
144 trying to find someone who fits into that
145 dynamic (.) kind of thing

Like many participants, Jody described her present flat dynamic. Successful flats were frequently conflated with home and family. Family prototypes were often employed analogically to describe relationships, for example flat mother or matriarch were terms used to indicate housemates who were particularly caring or controlling, demonstrating how potent and entrenched the family ideology is. In a similar vein flatmates were sometimes described as siblings (134-136) with attendant, but playful teasing and fighting (137-8) or squabbling, suggesting differences but familial acceptance and mutual affection. Jody observes that each flat would have a different dynamic (141) and recruiting a new housemate requires finding a replacement who is a good "fit" (144) for

the dynamic. The term ‘fit’ emerged frequently in discussing house dynamics and comprises a further element of the complex discourse on dynamics.

The right fit

A good fit was often constructed in terms of similarities across a wide spectrum among flatmates.

196 Julie: in my last flat there was (.) five bedrooms
197 so people are constantly
198 I think I lived with 30 people (.) over
199 three and a half years
200 um (.) so (.) the dynamic of the flat
201 you want to find someone
202 who’s quite similar to you
203 and my judge (.) my judge
204 of character is normally quite good::
205 so:: you want someone
206 that’s going to fit into the group
207 and when someone doesn’t really fit in
208 it’s not long before they move out
209 cause they kinda get the (.) vibe

263 Julie: so (.) I think if you have everyone
264 that’s on the same page (.) it’s
265 the whole dynamic of the flat’s
266 a lot better

Thirty people estimated to pass through a five bedroomed flat in three and a half years (198-199) amounts to a turnover of almost ten people annually. “So people are constantly” (197) is not completed but the intent of continual change is understood. This accentuates the transience of this demographic but also validates Julie’s experience and warrant to speak on the topic (Edwards & Potter, 1992). Julie constructs herself as a “good judge of character” (203-204) and attributes successful dynamics to selecting housemates who will fit in with the existing dynamic. Achieving this is more likely if housemates are similar (202). Idioms, such as “on the same page” (264) are useful in speech as they briefly convey a lot of information and are hard to challenge without specific facts (Drew & Holt, 1989). Equivalent phrases, such as “the same mindset” consistently emerged to describe ideal flatmates, suggesting that good interpersonal relationships are more likely to flourish in a climate of similar backgrounds and outlooks, including values and morals. Dissimilar people are likely to move out (208). “Vibe” (209) was a term that routinely surfaced, in some cases

employed almost synonymously with “dynamic”. In this case there is an implication of an unsuitable person feeling uncomfortable and perhaps becoming aware of being a poor “fit”. The transience of flatmates renders every household dynamic unique and readily subject to change.

In summary, the first component of the discourse examined the effect of the physical building on household dynamics. There were four components to psychological dimensions of the discourse. The flat dynamic was concisely defined as “how flatting works”. The predominant feature in discussing a workable dynamic was the necessity for striking the right balance in a number of different areas. These included similar expectations of sociability and tidiness and a balance of routines. A further discourse was that every house dynamic is unique and subject to change. A fourth discourse was the concept of housemates being a good fit with each other. Further discourses identified, such as household numbers impacting the dynamic, were not frequently observed and have not been discussed.

Discussion

The data suggests household dynamics involves a range of dimensions. One of the components is that the structure of the physical building influences interpersonal relationships and hence the dynamics, which operate within the flat. Housing is usually built with nuclear families in mind and may be unsuitable for shared households (Baum, 1986; Jones, 2000) or badly adapted and designed to make the most money for landlords rather than comfort for occupants (Williamson, 2006). Young adults need to shape their needs to fit what is available. Certainly, lack of adequate communal space impacts shared activities, as in the example provided. Christie, Munroe and Rettig (2002) found that students recognised that over-crowding and lack of social space were particular problems and learnt to be more discerning in any subsequent moves. In addition poor conditions impaired their ability to study and, particularly when cramped, could lead to stress or depression. While student housing is often substandard and insalubrious, Heath and Cleaver (2003) have noted a definite progression of standards and sophistication in post-student housing. While it is possible to overcome environmental limitations, given the right mix and dynamic, this does not mean they are easily discounted in terms of overall housing dissatisfaction, and we must be open

to the possibility of such limitations impacting negatively on the interpersonal dynamics when these are strained for other reasons.

The notion of negative energy causing deteriorating relationships may have been an unusual way of describing an establishment not suitable for communal living. Correlation between buildings and bad dynamics could be bi-directional with unsuccessful interpersonal relationships conveniently attributed to physical space rather than the personal. Given the increase in this socially attractive, economically and environmentally viable domestic demographic, awareness needs to be raised for a radical increase in alternative house designs to suitably accommodate non-nuclear families (Jones, 2000). However, transitions to independent living need to be better understood if government policies are to offer youth housing not predicated on the normative assumptions of household composition (Beer and Faulkner, 2011).

Whereas the effect of the physical environment on household dynamics is important to understand, so too are the psychological aspects, which are more complex. “Flat dynamic” refers to how shared households operate and function. For some, this was simply “how flatting works”. Potential problems and possible threats to harmony required for people to live together successfully were carefully formulated as requiring a series of balances. Essentially this is walking a fine line between two alternatives, evoking a metaphor of funambulism: the art of tightrope walking, where you have to lean to one side and then the other to remain balanced and avoid falling. In the case of sharing the delicate movements and adjustments are psychological rather than physical with the ever present risk of disrupting the delicate domestic dynamics. Greene, Derlega and Mathews (2006) see a comparison of tightrope walking with interpersonal relationships, suggesting the need for continual maintenance and repair of tensions. Living collectively in close confines on a daily basis could compound the need for constant monitoring and compromising to sustain relationships as any group risks interpersonal conflict. Human groups are not the sum of independent individuals but complex systems of interdependent characters constantly adjusting to the actions and reactions of others (Lewin, 1997; Forsyth, 2014). Consequently it could be argued that the abstract concept of “dynamic” focuses on the holistic aspect of group interaction (Schein, 1990). For flats to function effectively as welcoming environments, the collective good and interdependence of communal living needs to be carefully balanced

against self-interest (Mause, 2008): an essential emotional trade off or there are no winners.

In the intimacy of shared housing, sociability needs to be balanced with a sense of privacy and independence. A workable balance contributes to positive relationships and harmony and requires careful navigation, tact and interpersonal sensitivity to other's emotional states (Clark et al, 2017a). Daily housekeeping requires equilibrium between clean and tidy and overly demanding expectations. Baum (1986) and Williamson (2006) have observed that much hinges on individual's interpretations of what constitutes an acceptable standard of hygiene with bathrooms and kitchens especially contentious areas. Order in one household may seem like chaos in another. The current study identified expectations regarding excessive cleanliness and tidiness as particularly difficult to contend with. Common assumptions in groups resulting in similar patterns of perceiving the world and behaving provide meaning, stability, comfort and reduction in anxiety (Schein, 1990) underscoring the emphasis participants placed on having similar expectations with respect to fundamental aspects of domestic life. A workable system extends to ablutions where flatmates understand the necessity of everyone adhering to mutually agreed routines. Successfully achieving this entails a fine balance, especially in the morning rush.

The emphasis on balance complements theoretical perspectives in diverse psychological fields, where the concept of equilibrium plays an important role. Pertinent to this study, Lewin (1997) adapted the physics' force field theory of electromagnetism to social psychology. This theory proposed that whenever driving forces exceed restraining forces the status quo or equilibrium will change. Change results in a new level of equilibrium that resists further change. Lewin associated this with the power of the psychological individual force field and the strength field of the group the individual belongs to. In Lewin's conception a change in one member of the group can influence all other individuals in the group and the group as a whole. Certainly, adjustment is required when a new individual is introduced to the household. The more successful adjust to existing conditions rather than unsettling current dynamics.

Parson's (1961) social stability theory suggests groups always seek to maintain equilibrium by expelling ideas and individuals who disagree with popular opinion. This suppresses tension, helps keep society in balance and promotes harmonious coexistence. A lack of social stability can cause revolution and unrest in the group. Although founded on much larger social groups, the theory nevertheless holds true for shared households, where someone who does not conform to or "fit" into the group ethos is likely to be ousted or move out. In essence all social systems tend toward some kind of equilibrium, in attempt to reduce dissonance and promote alignment.

Parsons was an early subscriber to systems theory, which emphasises connectedness, relatedness, wholeness and the interaction within and between parts of the whole (von Bertalanffy 1975.) Sustainability of a group can be achieved if individuals comprehend that people do not live in isolation but both constitute and affect group dynamics. Applied to the complexity of group interaction the theory proposes that groups are not static but are constantly changing and seek to maintain dynamic equilibrium among members through a complex series of adjustments and processes in order to remain viable (Forsyth, 2014). Participants were conscious of intermittent flux in their households. By acknowledging their interconnectedness and the need to maintain a fine balance across a number of household interactions young adults demonstrate an applied understanding of social processes.

A further psychological component of the dynamics discourse pertains to the right fit for housemates in a cohesive, compatible whole. The metaphor of a jigsaw puzzle with complex interlocking pieces is apt and robustly supports previous findings: since shared households are frequently transient establishments, new arrivals are often chosen on their perceived best fit with the existing dynamic (Clark & Tuffin, 2015). Desirable flatmates are invariably constructed in terms of similarities in age, background, ethnicity, likes, morals and values (Clark & Tuffin, 2015; Clark et al, 2017a). Perhaps in the hope that similarity will reduce the need for unsettling changes the housemate selection process essentially attempts to reproduce and perpetuate the existing dynamics if these are functional and successful.

The necessity for the right fit complements the understandable psychological dimension that the dynamics of individual flats are unique, and subject to change. The

introduction of a new person to a group can affect established interpersonal relationships, and alter the dynamics but may also produce positive effects (Cini, 2001). Adaptation can be stressful for both newcomers to a group and existing members alike. A state of uncertainty can continue until new members are assimilated, acculturated and homeostasis is established. In addition, cohesion and commitment to the group can ebb and flow according to what is happening in individual's lives (Forsyth, 2014). For example, flatmates pairing up as a couple will alter the status quo, especially since single people are frequently averse to flatting with couples (Clark et al, 2017b). Stresses and strains can be accommodated or initial synergy can be replaced by conflict. According to Schein (1990) some groups will have no overarching culture because they have no common history or have frequent turnover of members. Certainly, many shared households are transitory but living in close confines may accelerate the need for social integration, especially given the daily need to prepare food, wash, clean and interact with others.

In understanding the dynamics of shared housing what becomes apparent is that there is no set of rules for how a flat should function. Shared households are essentially unregulated, egalitarian establishments with no institutional frameworks. In traditional homes gendered division of household labour is waning, but the gender revolution is still incomplete with structured roles persisting (Bianchi et al, 2012). For young people a lack of formal rules is attractive: they do not wish to replicate the rules and constraints represented by parental homes. This is reflected in aversion to controlling flatmates. However, in any group there are often implicit, consensual standards that are defined and negotiated over time with conflict created by those who violate expected norms (Forsyth, 2014). The negative psychological impact of living in dysfunctional shared households needs investigation: by recruiting participants currently flatting those sworn to eschewing this way of life from bad experiences lack voice. Participants in this research generally viewed their flats as hospitable places of sanctuary and security.

Conclusion

The current study contributes a richer understanding to a growing body of research on the complexity of this popular youthful domestic way of life. To date very little has been written about the dynamics of these households: the research paradigm adopted

allows for a descriptive depth to the concept of household dynamics in consultation with stakeholders. Flat dynamic can be defined as the property of holistic household interaction. We now know that for utilitarian shared living to work, a workable balance is required to avoid tension in many areas from socialising to ablution routines. Functional households are those where people are perceived to be a good fit with each other. Dynamics differ from house to house and are seldom stable entities but subject to change, largely due to often itinerant populations but also day-to-day changes in inhabitants' lives. Clearly, focus on housing that favours traditional family's requirements needs investigation since the physical building impacts dynamics of shared living. In addition, shared households offer a unique microcosm of complex social systems and are fertile ground in which to study group dynamics, intrapersonal relationships, conflict aversion and broad social and economic forces of change.

CHAPTER 10

Conclusion

A man can only attain knowledge with the help of those who possess it.
George Gurdjieff: In Search of the miraculous by P.D. Ouspensky

Introduction

The previous chapter concluded the analytic chapters and addressed the fundamental aim of the research: to understand how the social dynamics of shared housing is constructed. While acknowledging that the physical building impacts household relationships, the dynamic was simply defined as 'how flatting works'. The dominant aspect to the dynamics discourse was the necessity for a workable balance in many spheres of domestic interaction. Another component was that individuals, who are a good fit together, i.e., similar in many ways, are considered more conducive to harmonious dynamics. Two further aspects to the discourse were that dynamics differ from household to household and are subject to flux according to what is transpiring in the lives of flatmates or the arrival or departure of a resident. A more complex definition of dynamics suggests that the dynamic is a property of holistic household interaction.

The rationale for this study was to build on the limited extant understanding of young adult shared households by researching the social dynamics of relationships within the close confines of non-kin domesticity. The study sought to discursively analyse how experienced house sharers talk about going about the everyday business of living together. Constructions of different aspects of this way of life, limitations of the study and suggestions for further research have been covered in six analysis chapters, presented in the form of journal articles. The final chapter briefly summarises these major findings, their contribution to the literature and discusses the suitability of the methodology. The thesis concludes by reiterating shortcomings of the research and recommendations for future studies.

To gain insight into the social dynamics of flatting, the following areas were explored: the construction of desirable flatmates; the social advantages of flatting; sources, management and consequences of conflict; and the concept of the flat dynamic. In addition, two aspects worthy of attention emerged: whether to flat with couples or

singles, friends or strangers, and the viability of rosters. These topics were covered in chapters four to nine.

The ideal flatmate

Desirable housemates were constructed in three complex discourses. Firstly, ideal flatmates are those who understand the necessity for a fine balance between being sufficiently sociable but independent, with an acute sensitivity to flatmates' moods and need for privacy, both physical and emotional. The fine balance between being simultaneously separate but connected is part of a predominant discourse threaded throughout texts of an equilibrium, essential in a number of spheres to facilitate functional flatting; hence the thesis title, 'Striking the balance', which is a direct quote from a participant. Secondly, desirable flatmates are formulated as similar to each other in a variety of different ways, with concordant expectations of each other. Thirdly, participants expressed the paramount importance of feeling comfortable with each other and the need for mutual trust.

While discrimination was not largely evident in the current study, constructing the ideal flatmate in terms of similarities between housemates by way of values, outlooks, culture and morality has increased our understanding as to why individuals might discriminate against prospective flatmates unlike themselves (Clark & Tuffin, 2015; Tuffin & Clark, 2016). New Zealand law defends the choice to discriminate when living in close confines with others: residential shared accommodation is a notable exception to the 1993 Human Rights Act (Sections 53 and 54, New Zealand Legislation: Acts, 2017), which prevents discrimination on the grounds of age, gender, race, religion, and sexual orientation. The necessity for the same homogenous values and beliefs endorses the literature that relationships are easier to sustain under these conditions (Arnett, 2015). Problems are less likely to arise with similar expectations of cleanliness, tidiness and hygiene: this supports earlier findings (Baum, 1986; Heath 2004a). Similarities are also more conducive to feelings of comfort and mutual trust, essential if a home is to be a place of safety, security and relaxation.

Avoiding complications

In considering the pros and cons of sharing with couples or singles, friends or strangers and potential problems, which may destabilise the domestic environment, young adults

demonstrate considerable perspicacity of the permutations of interpersonal relationships. Whereas couples were not averse to flatting with other couples, single people invariably preferred sharing with unattached individuals, largely due to sociability being compromised by flatting with a couple. The attraction of flatting with a ready-made social life at home, alleviating loneliness, is a predominant reason for choosing to flat (Despres, 1994). Further disadvantages are the likelihood of being caught up in a couple's relationship problems and the potential for a couple to exert disproportionate power in the flat.

Those in favour of flatting with friends cited fear of flatting with strangers, having an established comfortable intimacy precluding awkwardness, and risks associated with the unknown, as justification for their preference. In the pro-stranger talk, reasons proffered were friendships put at risk by co-habitation, difficulty negotiating ground rules with friends, and the prospect of gaining new friends. Townsfolk preferred flatting with friends, while city flatters were more likely to move in with strangers. Both discourses take into account pre-existing social relationship statuses and their potential impact on shared living arrangements. This surpasses a simple consideration of sharing costs, chores and communal areas, and underscores the level of complexity of co-residence.

Social psychological advantages

Whereas the dominant motivation for house sharing is economic, Despres (1994) and Goldscheider (May, 2014) maintain that sharing may be more valued for the social benefits than economic necessity. My research supports this proposal since participants invariably co-articulated economic expediency with the social psychological positives of companionship, friendship, mutual support and increased skills and self-reliance. However, these benefits can be undermined by lack of equal co-operation in mundane household chores. Valid communication achieving consensus, which could be categorised as a social benefit, was regarded as the best way to circumvent housekeeping problems (indeed any problems) and outright conflict. A final resort is to move out, request someone to move out, or regroup in a new location without the unco-operative individual. The presumption is that individuals may be free to come and go in this unregulated environment if the household is not suitable, but leaving is far from simple. Considerable effort is required to find new accommodation, physically move

possessions and find the necessary money for expenses, such as rent in advance and bond money, while settling existing bills.

Rosters

Baum's (1986) study of alternative households suggested that rosters are the safest way of overcoming problems with equitable division of household chores. The dominant discourse in the current study is that rosters do not work and are anathema to young adults seeking freedom and independence. In addition, rosters are regarded as stress inducing, when more pressing issues need attention. Participants felt that life itself does not conform to schedules and being constrained by duties, when more appealing pastimes arise, is counterproductive to autonomy. In practice, rosters are fragile and prone to sabotage by more pressing or attractive claims on time. A somewhat less robust discourse to emerge was that if rosters are employed, then flexibility is imperative. A sense of freedom is possible with reciprocal co-operation and responsibility. Given the lack of traditionally assigned household roles, organic informal rules are adopted to suit individual flats. Chores based on preferences, strengths and chipping in when someone else is clearly working toward tidying or cleaning communal areas were preferable. In addition, participants invoked the Broken Window Thesis (Kelling & Wilson, 1982) to explain that early prevention of minor norm violations can avert further breaches and prevent a descent into domestic chaos. No particular formula for successful housekeeping is guaranteed but positive payoffs can be achieved by mutually agreeable strategies. If everyone contributes, everyone gains but some individuals are never going to comply with the ethos. If a common understanding and consensus cannot be achieved, then the outlook is poor.

Conflict

Five discourses arose pertaining to sources of conflict. Different expectations regarding cleanliness and tidiness, especially those demanding overly obsessive, high standards were cause for discontent. Misuse of individual or communal resources and excessive frugality were also conducive to conflict. Money is a potential source of conflict but problems can be pre-empted by early interventions, such as setting up automatic payments. Finally, housework is universally acknowledged as a prime source of discord (Baum, 1986; Heath & Cleaver, 2003; Natalier, 2003; Mause; 2008).

Two discourses were drawn on regarding management of conflict. The first was the positive rational tactic of holding communal meetings to openly discuss problems. The second discourse of avoidance had two components. Evading tension by consideration, tact and sensitivity to housemates' emotional states is preventative, providing such respect is mutual. A second evasive aspect, motivated by aversion to confrontational behaviour and/or the transitional nature of such households, was to avoid discussing problems. While this strategy is not always maladaptive and can contribute to harmony, it can be detrimental to relationship satisfaction and ultimately result in withdrawal from household socialising with negative implications for survival of the household.

Two common discourses on the consequences of conflict were identified. The first was the detrimental psychological and physiological ramifications of unresolved conflict. The second common coping mechanism adopted was to move out, ask someone to leave, make life so uncomfortable for someone that they leave, or regroup in a new location without the source of conflict.

Social dynamics

The issues summarised above are all integral to the social dynamics of shared housing and contribute to our understanding of how flats work, and how folk manage to get along within the confines of close domesticity. All discourses overlap, are interconnected and intertwine to a greater or lesser degree but were separated to facilitate insight. How did participants construct the household 'dynamic'? One thread to the dynamics discourse was the physical limitations of buildings built for nuclear families. Domestic buildings can exert some influence on interpersonal relationships, for example lack of adequate communal space restricting socialising. Given the right mix of housemates, it is possible to overlook sub-par buildings and amenities, but this does not mean they do not affect overall accommodation satisfaction. This study supports calls for raising awareness for alternative house designs suited to non-nuclear families (Jones, 2000; Beer & Faulkner, 2011).

The household dynamic was simply defined as 'how flatting works'. Potential problems and possible threats to harmony required for people to live together amicably were formulated as a balance required in many spheres of interpersonal relationships. Factors requiring counterbalancing between tensions included independence and

privacy versus in-house socialising; tidiness and cleanliness without unrealistic expectations; and individual self-interest contrasted with the collective good. Bathroom routines also need to be balanced so that everyone gets a fair time for ablutions as well as sufficient hot water. Balance extends to operating between a fine line of frugality and miserliness when discretionary income is scarce.

The necessity for a flatmate to be the right fit within the dynamic for social cohesion was a further psychological component to the dynamics discourse, which reflects the construction of ideal flatmates as being similar to other flatmates in a number of ways. Homogeneity is increased by discarding people who do not fit and, by implication, retaining individuals who do. A final dimension was recognition that the dynamic is never static but constantly changing, depending on occurrences in the lives of housemates and individuals departing or the introduction of new members to the matrix.

Possible future papers to be written from the data

The data from the study is dense and extensive: analysis has revealed much more that could be written about sharing, but given the understandable limitation on the length of theses, key issues have been addressed. For example, sharing and preparing of meals or not, which has been explored by Williamson (2005), could be the subject of another paper. My findings suggest that town people are more likely to share meals on a regular basis, whereas city folk are more conscious and accepting of alternative diets and schedules. In addition, the data, like that of McNamara and Connell (2007), could substantiate the misrepresented reality that only traditional heterosexual nuclear families can be regarded as families. The present research has established that young people flatting together in New Zealand are part of the cutting edge of change, where focus on the importance of platonic friendship support in everyday life de-emphasises that intimacy is confined to couples' relationships. At the same time, gender stereotyping was evident with mothers regarded as nagging and ultimately responsible for housework, demonstrating how traditional ideologies are embedded in everyday talk and subsequently difficult to resist. With considerable data supporting these observations, there is scope to write articles on these topics in the future.

Did the research design address the aims of the study?

The primary objective of this research was to gain a greater understanding of the social dynamics of shared living. Considering the complex data accumulated from the research there is no doubt that the aims of the study were met. The approach was inductive in that it was data driven rather than results tailored to fit pre-existing ideas or theories. Participants were able to discuss the topic in their own words, free of constraints. Had I, for example, used questionnaires, I would not have acquired the depth of detail or discerned complex conflicting tensions in discourses. Nor would the leitmotif of balance have clearly emerged as a way of explaining apparent paradoxes, with the finding of equilibrium across a number of spheres being essential for flat functionality.

However, there were times when I questioned whether the methodology chosen was the correct choice and whether thematic analysis would have been more appropriate. Careful consideration has led me to reflect that by employing discourse analysis I was able to closely examine what participants were saying, which allows readers some speculation as to whether my interpretation is correct. The data clearly demonstrated that people draw on hegemonic, culturally available discourses and commonly used rhetorical devices. For example, words, phrases and idioms, such as 'in your face', 'pull their weight', 'randoms' and 'balance', commonly occurred. Western ideologies, such as gender roles and the necessity for privacy and independence were evident in talk. While the Jeffersonian (Wooffitt, 1992) notation may not have been entirely necessary, the detail provided does add to fine grained analysis. For example, underlined words denoting emphasis were often indicative of an emotional stake in the topic under discussion.

Since flatting is an established way of life for young New Zealanders, people hearing of my research frequently regale me with stories of their flatting experiences. These overwhelmingly confirm my findings and the observation that people inevitably draw on the same discourses. Positive feedback from one participant was that he found the interview therapeutic, supporting Rossetto's (2014) claims that the value of qualitative interviews goes beyond the research context. But has the research added to the existing literature?

Contribution to extant literature

From analysis discussions, it becomes clear that the current study supports much of the extant research. Manifestly, the data endorses findings (Baum, 1986; Ahrentzen, 2003; Heath & Cleaver, 2003; May, 2014) that shared housing is a viable way of life, not valued solely for economic reasons, and is patently, environmentally responsible. The social advantages outweigh the negative aspects, providing problems are dealt with intelligently and openly. However, participants strongly maintained that some individuals were not suited to the flatting lifestyle. These included the overly obsessive, controlling and those who failed to understand the necessity of mutual respect, consideration, co-operation and reciprocation.

The significant contribution of this study is that the complexity of interpersonal relationships in the domestic domain is accentuated. Nothing is clear cut. For example, whereas Kemp and Rugg (1998) maintain that people prefer to flat with friends, this research negates that as an immutable truth: some prefer to live with strangers. Baum (1986) suggested that rosters were the most effective means of dealing with household chores, whereas my participants demonstrated an aversion to rosters, believing less constraining systems, where people have choice were more effective. Differences in expectations of what constitutes clean and tidy highlighted that excessively demanding obsessive, perfectionists are more difficult to contend with than those less fastidious.

All observations demonstrate that the art of maintaining convivial flatting relationships is extremely complex with differing ideas as to what works and what does not. Certainly, the solution in one flat may not succeed in another. Nothing is conclusively correct or erroneous and what appeals to some may be unpalatable to others. Providing there is general consensus as to how a household should operate, harmony can be achieved with consideration, communication, mutual respect and reciprocity. Talk was driven by the fundamental value associated with having a working living arrangement. Importantly, participants were aware of the problems associated with various choices. Opinions and justifications were often predicated on stories of good and bad experiences, what to avoid and what had worked in the past. Clearly, as noted by Christie, Munro and Rettig (2002), participants profited from accumulated familiarity with this way of life. This was evident in long-term flatters reluctant to flat with those coming straight from the parental home. In addition, town and city flatters differed in

preferences: city people were more likely to flat with strangers and less likely to eat together, while the opposite was true for townsfolk.

Natalier (2003), operating within the tradition of Turner's (1974) liminality and *communitas*, noted that there are no cultural blueprints for shared living: housemates create their own meanings, which are employed to understand and manage relationships. The current study found that even oral codes, such as *never flat with a friend* or *never date a flatmate* are disputed by some and endorsed by others. In discussing order without law, Ellickson (1994) has argued that people tend to govern themselves and co-operate to mutual advantage by development of informal rules that evolve without a central co-ordinator, with communication being key. The apparent disorganised approach to flatting was equated with a study, *The rules of disorder* (Marsh, Rosser & Harré, 1978), about soccer fan hooliganism. The researchers proposed that the apparently violent, chaotic and anomic actions of soccer fans are essentially rule bound, highly structured and ordered with different social dictates to those that dominate society as a whole. In the same informal way, housemates manage to live together by implementing their own rules. Both groups require a detailed social knowledge of what is appropriate or correct intragroup behaviour, which renders the collective process possible (Harb & Smith, 2008). Those lacking knowledge of the unwritten ritualistic ethos tend not to be accepted.

Rituals are an important part of Maffesoli's (1996) notion of neo-tribalism, proposed by Heath and Cleaver (2003) as an appropriate framework for understanding shared households. Certainly, rituals, such as games evenings and pancake Sundays, were evident in my data, supporting Maffesoli's observation that such occasions are the glue that binds groups together. The theory proposes that communal ethics are underpinned by proximity, shared space and ritual, with commitment to the ethos and 'we' underlying group functioning. Mause's (2008) the tragedy of the commune demonstrated that rational individual behaviour does not auger well for the collective good in shared households. The validity of these frameworks for comprehending shared households raises the question of whether my proposal, namely, communitarianism, is an appropriate model to add to the matrix?

Communitarianism acknowledges that 'I' and 'we' are in constant conflict. Competing tensions between individual pleasure and communal requirements need to be carefully balanced. The rational pursuit of self-interest tempered through language, tolerance and consideration, with recognition of individual responsibilities towards each other and altruistic commitment to community, need to be integrated. Thus, communitarianism proposes equilibrium between individualism and collectivism rather than domination of either extreme (Etzioni, 1993; Triandis, 1995). Given the pervasive discourse of balance required for functional households, I believe that communitarianism could be advanced as an appropriate model for shared housing. In addition, the notion that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts (Aristotle, 1933; Lewin, 1997; Tuffin, 2005) is integral to the theory and this complements findings that the flat dynamic can be defined as a property of holistic household interaction. There is scope for the four frameworks of liminality and communitas, neo-tribalism, the tragedy of the commune, and communitarianism to be developed into a comprehensive model for house sharing. This brings us to further recommendations for future research to build on this work, and shortcomings of the study.

Limitations of the study and suggested trajectories for future research

Suggested foundations for future research have been discussed at the end of each analysis chapter but will be briefly reviewed here. The current study has not adequately interrogated the negative psychological implications of dysfunctional flatting. Researchers (Bossehnan, 1996; Heath & Cleaver, 2003; Gallagher et al, 2014) have raised the issue of inclusion, inevitably raising the question of exclusion. There was some evidence for exclusion and bullying in my data but it was not sufficient to warrant in-depth discussion. This is one avenue that needs to be explored if we are to gain an adequate understanding of intragroup relationships in non-kin households. For example, how does it feel to be ostracised, used as a scapegoat for flatting problems or to be asked to leave? In restricting interviews to those individuals currently house sharing, voices of those who have had such bad past experiences, that they prefer not to flat, remain silent. These voices are more likely to provide detail on disadvantages and negative psychological aspects. Inclusion of those ill-disposed to flatting may also reveal a darker side to sharing, including 'flatmates from hell' (Birmingham, 2001).

How does shared living impact on later domestic arrangements? Participants who experienced living on their own found the existence lonely and returned to flatting. Would this be true of couples used to having others around, especially if a partner's work hours did not coincide? Traditionally, the bulk of housework has been the culturally sanctioned role for women. In Australia, Natalier (2003a) noted that the male privilege of avoiding mundane housework remains entrenched, even in shared housing. Exposure to non-genderised, egalitarian expectations of household chores could contribute to a decline in its convention operating within coupledness. To what extent is this diminishing male privilege of housework avoidance? In this New Zealand study, participants did note that some males were adept at shirking responsibilities, but this was often accompanied by observations that other male flatmates were zealous housecleaners.

Participants spoke of a time when flatting begins to lose its appeal. At what stage does this occur and why? Some participants mentioned aspirations to home ownership and traditional coupledness in the long run, but these may not be the prime motivating factors for finally eschewing flatting.

The feasibility of rosters working as a way of ensuring equal responsibility for housework was questioned with suggestions that individuals prefer to help out in tasks they are comfortable doing. This supports scarce extant research on the topic of rosters (Fügener, et al, 2015). Certainly, I have observed striking similarities in non-compliance with the duty roster of my service club: while most members are acutely conscientious, others remain oblivious and unapologetic for consistently ignoring the ethics of reciprocity. There is scope to study this phenomenon in more depth.

Shared housing is one housing pathway to independence. Boomerang children or young adults returning to the parental home for affordable accommodation is extensively documented in other Western countries (e.g., Gordon & Shaffer, 2004; Fry, 2013; Burn & Szoek, 2016). New Zealand census statistics have recorded a substantial increase (>20%) between 2000 and 2013 in young adults between 20 and 35 living with parents (Statistics New Zealand, 2017). Whereas this could be due to substantial immigration increases, where living with parents is culturally expected, the rise in statistics is more likely to be associated with current extreme house prices (Eaqub & Eaqub, 2015).

Research into boomerang children, in Aotearoa, is severely lacking and should be addressed.

Transitions to independent living in New Zealand need to be better understood if government policies and housing provision are to offer youth a choice that is not reliant on normative assumptions of households. The negative effect on interpersonal relationships of physical buildings intended for nuclear families, noted by Baum as early as 1986, was evident in this study. Given the increase in alternative household composition, awareness needs to be raised for potential, radical new design solutions to suitably accommodate non-traditional families (Jones, 2000; Beer & Faulkner, 2011).

While significantly adding to understanding the complexity of shared households among young adults, this research contributes to other areas of social psychological interest and human psychology. Easterbrook and Vignoles (2013) have noted that group processes and dynamics may vary according to types of groups and little attention has been devoted to investigating different group types. Barker (1991) has argued that there is a paucity of systematic investigation into behaviour dimensions in interpersonal intimacy issues in small groups. This research contributes substantial insight into small group dynamics within the context of the domestic intimacy of house sharing.

In addition, examining the domestic life of young adults adds considerably to comprehending transitions to adulthood in rapidly changing times. Traditional markers of adulthood, such as completion of training and education, stable employment, marriage and parenthood, may be deferred with house sharing no longer a short transition gap, but a much lengthier accommodation option. I am inclined to agree with Arnett (2006) that there are new ways of understanding coming of age: house sharing young adults are independent in different ways to previous generations and do take responsibility for their own decisions. By adapting to broad political, economic and social forces, they are not merely recipients but actively spearheading change (Heath & Cleaver, 2003). Old practices are no longer viable and new norms are established. Shared domestic living arrangements are one way of surviving or thriving through changes, and therefore are far more significant than a simple accommodation option.

Clearly, young New Zealanders are making the best of a lifestyle motivated primarily by economic challenge. This study suggests that individuals are typically content and happy within their shared homes. Flats are not merely regarded as a roof overhead, but havens of sanctuary in which to unwind, while appreciating the support and ready-made social life available. By carefully navigating the hazards of shared domestic living, which have few traditional markers, young adults demonstrate an acute understanding of the domestic dynamics, which impact the quality of their lives. Given the popularity of shared housing among young adults in the Western world, issues raised in this research are relevant beyond the New Zealand context.

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APPENDICES

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Appendix A



MASSEY UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
TE KURA PŪKENGĀ TANGATA

INFORMATION SHEET

A study on the social aspects of flatting among young adults in New Zealand

Researcher's Introduction

I am a PhD student at Massey University and I live in Whakatane. I am researching how young people in New Zealand manage living in flatting households.

Project Description and Invitation

This is the first comprehensive academic research on this subject in New Zealand. The study will examine the way people talk about their experiences of flatting. How do non-family members go about the everyday business of living together? Obviously there are economic benefits but what are the psychological benefits? Are there any negative aspects of flatting? What are the characteristics of an ideal flatmate and less than ideal flatmates? These are some of the issues I am interested in exploring.

If you are currently flatting, and between the ages of 20 and 35, this study offers an opportunity to share your experiences of flatting, so I can begin to understand the social dynamics of shared domestic living. I am interested in interviewing flatting households as a group but it is not essential to have the entire group attend the interview. Focus groups of individuals from different flats are also planned. Individual follow-up interviews with willing participants will be welcome. Because the study is based on people's talk, all interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed to facilitate analysis. In addition group interviews will be videoed, as well as transcribed, so that discerning who is talking is clear for analysis.

Participant Identification and Recruitment

You can volunteer to participate in this study if you are currently flatting with non-family members, fluent in English and between the ages of 20 and 35.

Participants will be recruited by word of mouth. Most people know somebody who flats and flatters, in turn, will know others in the same position. I'm seeking to interview 3 flatting

households and one focus group in Wellington and the same number in Whakatane, with follow-up individual interviews for those willing to talk to me individually.

Benefits of participating in the research

Flat group interviews are likely to take place in the evening and outside work hours at a time convenient for flat members. Diet appropriate (e.g. vegetarian, gluten free) take-out meals will be provided. Refreshments (non-alcoholic drinks only) will be available at focus groups.

By sharing your experiences and providing an insider perspective you will make a valuable contribution to the understanding of this domestic social living arrangement. While no harm or discomfort to participants is anticipated, every effort will be made to ensure that participants do not feel threatened or uncomfortable during interviews. However, a list of appropriate health services will be handed out at the conclusion of the interview should the interview/focus group prove upsetting to you and you require a professional to talk to.

Project procedures

Interviews will be conducted at a time suitable to participants. Group discussions will be conducted in flatting households and limited to one and a half hours. Focus group interviews will take place in a neutral setting and likewise limited to one and a half hours. Individual interview should take no longer than an hour and can be done by Skype. Once interviews are transcribed I will invite you to read over what has been said in case you wish for anything to be modified or deleted. You will only be able to edit your own contribution to the discussion. Written consent forms will be required to be signed by all participants

What will happen to the information that you provide?

- All information you provide will be kept confidential between the researcher and the project's university supervisors only.
- Your name will be changed to a pseudonym for final publication.
- A summary of findings will be offered to all participants.
- Recordings will be disposed of once the research is complete.
- Aspects of the study may be published in peer-reviewed academic journals that focus on disciplines such as psychology and sociology.
- The researcher may also present findings at social psychology conferences.

Participant's Rights

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study (within 6 weeks of completion of the interview);
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used.
- be offered a summary report detailing the projects findings, before examination of the thesis;
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during individual interviews.

Project Contacts

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This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 15/05. If you have any concerns about the conduct of the research, please contact Dr Brian Finch, Acting Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 350 5799, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz

Appendix B



MASSEY UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
TE KURA PŪKENGA TANGATA

A study of the social aspects of flatting among young adults in New Zealand.

GROUP PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me.
My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree to the interview being video and sound recorded

I agree not to disclose anything discussed in the group.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature:

Date:

**Full Name -
printed**

Te Kunenga
ki Pūrehuroa

Massey University School of Psychology – Te Kura Hinengaro Tangata

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Appendix C



MASSEY UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
TE KURA PŪKENGĀ TANGATA

A study of the social aspects of flapping among young adults in New Zealand.

INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me.
My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree to the interview being video and sound recorded

I agree not to disclose anything discussed in the group.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature:

Date:

**Full Name
printed**

.....
.....

Appendix D



MASSEY UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
TE KURA PŪKENGĀ TANGATA

A study on the social aspects of flatting among young adults in New Zealand

AUTHORITY FOR THE RELEASE OF TRANSCRIPTS

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to read and amend the transcript of the interview(s) conducted with me.

I agree that the edited transcript and extracts from this may be used in reports and publications arising from the research.

Signature:

Date:

**Full Name -
printed**

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ki Pūrehuroa**

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Appendix E

Transcription notation

| | |
|------------|---|
| (.) | A dot within brackets indicates a time gap of less than two tenths of a second. |
| (0.5) | A number within a bracket represents a time gap in tenths of a second. |
| = | This indicates overlapping talk. |
| (()) | Signifies non-verbal activity, which is described within the brackets. |
| :: | Colons indicate a stretching out of the preceding letter or sound. The more colons the greater the extension of the sound. |
| () | Empty brackets indicate the recording is unclear. |
| ° | The degree symbol represents a fall in tone. |
| ? | A question mark signifies a rise in inflection. |
| <u>Yes</u> | Underlined words stress an emphasis by the speaker. |
| CAPITALS | Indicate speech louder than other utterances. |
| > < | Signifies talk notably faster than encircling speech. |

Appendix F



Striking the balance: The social dynamics of shared household living among young adults in New Zealand.

A brief summary of research results for participants

The aim of this study was to add to the limited research on shared households among young adults by exploring the social dynamics of relationships within the close confines of non-family living arrangements. To this end I examined how those currently flatting talked about the everyday business of living together. In total there were 37 participants, 23 of whom were interviewed in a group format with others who shared their flat, and 14 whom were interviewed individually. The average age was 24, with 22 females and 15 males.

Data obtained was extensive with the following areas considered in the thesis:

- Who make desirable flatmates?
- Preferences for flatting with friends or strangers, couples or singles.
- Whether the social advantages of flatting are undermined by household chores
- The effectiveness of rosters.
- Conflict.
- How participants flatmates described the concept of the household dynamic

The following are brief findings related to these topics.

The ideal flatmate

Firstly, ideal flatmates are those who understand the necessity for a fine balance between being sufficiently sociable but independent, with sensitivity to flatmates' moods and need for privacy, both physical and emotional. The fine balance between being simultaneously separate but connected is part of a broad theme involving a balance, which is essential in a number of spheres for functional households. This

dominant theme is reflected in the thesis title, 'Striking the balance', which is a direct quote from a participant. Secondly, desirable flatmates are formulated as similar to each other in a variety of different ways, with the same values, morals and expectations of each other. Thirdly, participants expressed the extreme importance of feeling comfortable with each other and the need for mutual trust. Similarities are more likely to result in feelings of comfort and trust, which is essential if a home is to be a place of safety, security and relaxation.

Avoiding complications

In considering the positives and negatives of sharing with couples or singles, friends or strangers and potential problems, which may destabilise the domestic environment, considerable insight was gained into interpersonal relationships in the intimate setting of co-residence. Whereas couples were not against flatting with other couples, single people invariably preferred sharing with other single individuals, largely due to in-house sociability being curtailed by flatting with a couple, who are more likely to interact with each other. The attraction of flatting with a ready-made social life at home, alleviating loneliness, was a predominant reason for choosing to flat. Further disadvantages are the likelihood of being caught up in a couple's relationship problems and the potential for a couple to exert disproportionate power in the flat.

Those in favour of flatting with friends cited fear of flatting with strangers, having an established comfortable intimacy precluding awkwardness, and risks associated with the unknown. In the pro-stranger talk, reasons identified were friendships put at risk by co-habitation, difficulty negotiating ground rules with friends, and the prospect of gaining new friends. Townsfolk preferred flatting with friends, while city flatters were more likely to move in with strangers. Both considerations take into account pre-existing social relationship statuses and their potential impact on shared living arrangements. This surpasses a simple sharing of costs, chores and communal areas and underscores the level of complexity of co-residence.

Social psychological advantages

Whereas the dominant motivation for house sharing is economic, some researchers claim that sharing may be more valued for the social benefits. My research supports this proposal since participants invariably spoke of both economic and social benefits

including companionship, friendship, mutual support and increased skills and self-reliance. However, these advantages can be undermined by lack of equal contribution to household chores. While non co-operation from flatmates is a cause for frustration, young adults try to avoid allowing these to develop into outright conflict. Communication was regarded as the best way to circumvent housekeeping problems (indeed any problems). However, there is potential for upset through someone consistently failing to 'pull their weight'.

Rosters

Early research on shared households suggested that rosters are the safest way of overcoming problems with the division of household chores. The dominant view in the current study is that rosters do not work and are not popular among young adults seeking freedom and independence. In addition, rosters are regarded as stressful when more pressing issues need attention. Since life itself does not conform to schedules, having to do duties, such as cooking the evening meal, when more appealing pastimes arise is undesirable. In practice, rosters are fragile and prone to sabotage by more pressing or attractive claims, or are ignored by opportunists, who benefit from the labour of others without reciprocation. A somewhat less prominent view was that if rosters are employed, then flexibility is essential. A sense of freedom is possible with reciprocal co-operation and responsibility. Given the lack of traditionally assigned household roles, informal rules are adopted to suit individual flats. Chores based on preferences, strengths and chipping in when someone else is clearly working toward tidying or cleaning communal areas were preferable. No particular formula for successful housekeeping is guaranteed but positive payoffs can be achieved by mutually agreeable strategies. If everyone contributes, everyone gains but some individuals are never going to comply. If a common understanding and consensus cannot be achieved then the outlook is poor.

Conflict

Five predominant sources of conflict were identified. Different expectations regarding cleanliness and tidiness, especially those demanding overly obsessive, high standards were a cause for discontent. Misuse of individual or communal resources and excessive frugality were also conducive to conflict. Money is a potential source of conflict but problems can be pre-empted to some extent by early intervention, such as

setting up automatic payments. Finally, housework is universally acknowledged as a prime source of discord.

There were two positions regarding management of conflict. The first was the positive rational tactic of holding communal meetings to openly discuss problems. The second preference for avoiding conflict had two components. Evading tension by consideration, tact and sensitivity to housemates' emotional states is preventative, providing such respect is mutual. A second evasive aspect, motivated by disliking confrontation and/or the transitional nature of flats, was to avoid discussing problems. While this strategy can contribute to harmony, it can harm relationship satisfaction and ultimately result in withdrawal from household socialising with negative prospects for survival of the household.

Two common consequences of conflict were identified. The first was the negative psychological and physiological ramifications of unresolved conflict. The second common coping mechanism adopted is to move out, request someone to move out, or regroup in a new location without the unco-operative individual. But leaving is far from simple: considerable effort is required to find new accommodation, physically move possessions and find the necessary money for expenses, such as rent in advance and bond money, while settling existing bills. In asking someone to leave, there is no assurance that the person chosen to fill a room is going to be any better.

Social dynamics

All of the above are related to flatting dynamics, but how was the household 'dynamic' explained? One aspect raised was the physical limitations of buildings built for nuclear families. Domestic buildings can exert some influence on interpersonal relationships, for example, lack of adequate communal space restricting socialising. Given the right mix of housemates, it is possible to overlook sub-par buildings and amenities, but this does not mean they are easily discounted in terms of overall housing dissatisfaction, and can impact negatively on interpersonal dynamics when these are strained for other reasons.

Whereas the effect of the physical environment on household dynamics is important to understand, so too are the psychological aspects, which are more complex. The

household dynamic was often defined as ‘how flatting works’. The necessity for a flatmate to be the right fit within the household for social cohesion was one psychological component to understanding the dynamics. This reflects an ideal flatmate spoken of as being similar to other flatmates in a number of ways. Harmony can be increased by discarding people who do not fit and retaining individuals who do. A further dimension was recognition that the dynamic is never static but constantly changing. This depends on occurrences in the lives of housemates and individuals departing, or the introduction of new members to the household.

Participants consistently spoke of a balance required in many spheres of interpersonal relationships to promote functional households. These include independence and privacy versus in-house socialising; tidiness and cleanliness without unrealistic expectations, and individual self-interest contrasted with the collective good. Bathroom routines also need to be balanced so that everyone gets a fair time for ablutions as well as sufficient hot water. Flatmates oblivious to others’ time management strategies can create tension. Balance also extends to understanding the difference between being careful with money and miserliness. Essentially balancing these issues is like the art of tightrope walking, where you have to lean to one side and then the other to avoid falling. In the case of sharing households, the delicate movements and adjustments are psychological rather than physical. Living in close confines on a daily basis can add to the need for constant monitoring and compromising to maintain relationships.

Human groups are not merely a number of independent individuals, but are complex systems of interdependent characters constantly adjusting to the actions and reactions of others. Consequently it could be argued that the concept of the “dynamic” focuses on the holistic aspect of group interaction. For flats to function effectively as welcoming environments, the collective good and interdependence of communal living needs to be carefully balanced against self-interest: an essential emotional trade-off or there are no winners.

The research demonstrates that the art of maintaining harmonious flatting relationships is complex with differing ideas as to what works and what does not. Stories of good and bad experiences were often used to justify opinions as to what to avoid and what had worked in the past. Certainly, what works in one flat may not succeed in another.

Nothing is conclusively correct or erroneous and what appeals to some may be unpalatable to others. Providing there is general consensus as to how a household should operate, harmony can be achieved with consideration, communication, mutual respect and reciprocity.

This research would not be possible without your participation and willingly giving up your time to talk about your house sharing experiences. I have been privileged to meet all of you and have incredible respect for the positive way you face the challenges of today. Thank you once again for participating.

Vicky Clark

Appendix G

DRC 16



MASSEY UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL

STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION TO DOCTORAL THESIS CONTAINING PUBLICATIONS

(To appear at the end of each thesis chapter/section/appendix submitted as an article/paper or collected as an appendix at the end of the thesis)

We, the candidate and the candidate's Principal Supervisor, certify that all co-authors have consented to their work being included in the thesis and they have accepted the candidate's contribution as indicated below in the *Statement of Originality*.

Name of Candidate: Victoria Audrey Clark

Name/Title of Principal Supervisor: Associate Professor Keith Tuffin

Name of Published Research Output and full reference:

Clark, V., Tuffin, K., Frewin, K., & Bowker, N. (2017). Housemate desirability and understanding the social dynamics of shared living. *Qualitative Psychology*. Advance online publication <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/qap0000091>

In which Chapter is the Published Work: N/a

Please indicate either:

- The percentage of the Published Work that was contributed by the candidate 80 % and / or
- Describe the contribution that the candidate has made to the Published Work:

Within the usual realms of supervisor mentoring, the candidate conceived and conducted the research project. All data was transcribed by the candidate who initially analysed and wrote the journal article with invaluable suggestions for improvement from supervisors.

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Appendix H

DRC 16



MASSEY UNIVERSITY
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STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION TO DOCTORAL THESIS CONTAINING PUBLICATIONS

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We, the candidate and the candidate's Principal Supervisor, certify that all co-authors have consented to their work being included in the thesis and they have accepted the candidate's contribution as indicated below in the *Statement of Originality*.

Name of Candidate: Victoria Audrey Clark

Name/Title of Principal Supervisor: Associate Professor Keith Tuffin

Name of Published Research Output and full reference:

Clark, V., Tuffin, K., Frewin, K., & Bowker, N. (2017). Shared housing among young adults: Avoiding complications in domestic relationships. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 1-17. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1367261.2017.1318834>

In which Chapter is the Published Work: N/a

Please indicate either:

- The percentage of the Published Work that was contributed by the candidate:
and / or
- Describe the contribution that the candidate has made to the Published Work:

Within the customary realms of supervisor mentoring, the candidate conceived and conducted the research project. Interviews were transcribed by the candidate, who initially analysed the data and wrote the article with invaluable suggestions for improvement from supervisors.

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