PROTECTION OF AUTHOR’S COPYRIGHT

This copy has been supplied by the Library of the University of Otago on the understanding that the following conditions will be observed:

1. To comply with s56 of the Copyright Act 1994 [NZ], this thesis copy must only be used for the purposes of research or private study.

2. The author's permission must be obtained before any material in the thesis is reproduced, unless such reproduction falls within the fair dealing guidelines of the Copyright Act 1994. Due acknowledgement must be made to the author in any citation.

3. No further copies may be made without the permission of the Librarian of the University of Otago.
Rural New Zealand Childhoods:
Social Constructions and Lived Experiences

Mary Ann Powell

A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
at the University of Otago, Dunedin,
New Zealand.

March 2010
Abstract

Rural New Zealand holds a place of unparalleled importance in the affection of New Zealanders, with mythologised aspects incorporated into the national identity. Although rural families make up a significant proportion of New Zealand’s diverse and rapidly changing population, rural children have received little specific research attention. The aim of this qualitative research project, framed within Childhood Studies theory, was to explore the perspectives and lived experiences of children and parents in a diverse range of rural environments. Data was collected from 36 children (21 girls and 15 boys), aged between 6 and 11 years, and 36 of their parents. The participants were recruited from four specific rural locations, ranging from ‘rural with high urban influence’, ‘rural with moderate urban influence’, ‘rural with low urban influence’ to ‘highly rural/remote’. Several data collection methods were used including interviews with children and parents, children’s construction of artwork and photographs, and follow-up interviews with children one year later. An initial interview was developed to obtain children’s informed consent, address other ethical concerns, and help structure the research process with child participants. The range of localities highlighted the commonalities and diversity of rural childhood and family experiences. Consistent with other Minority world research, the findings indicated that constructions of rural childhood predominantly accord with a discourse of the rural idyll. However, in New Zealand, the rural childhood idyll has a specific character, different aspects of which are emphasised in particular rural contexts. Farming parents and those in more remote areas, placed great importance on community, self reliance and practical skills, whereas parents in rural areas near urban centres emphasised the importance of spatial freedom for children. All the parents tended to be satisfied with rural living and what it offered their children, emphasizing perceived benefits and the fostering of skills and attributes, and downplaying negative aspects. However, alternative constructions of rural childhood and family life were also evident, related to the geographical isolation and low population density of rural
areas and exacerbated by other social variables, such as financial hardship. A discourse of social isolation emerged, related to difficulties accessing services and facilities, and social and economic deprivation. Children were generally positive about rural living. Their constructions of rural childhood, focused on being outdoors and the social aspects of rural life. Children creatively maximized opportunities for social participation, in multiple relationships, across a range of contexts. They expressed their agency and competency in complex, sometimes challenging conditions, in partnership with others, particularly parents, negating dominant discourses of childhood which perceive children as passive, immature and dependent. However, children also experienced aspects of rural life that were dull, dangerous or difficult. The modernistic dualisms of rural and urban, and childhood and adulthood, were challenged as more complex and nuanced constructions of rural childhood were uncovered. These findings have implications for policy, which could potentially be obscured by the dominant construction of the rural idyll. This study highlights the importance of including rural children as research participants, with their voices contributing to more robust and authentic constructions of childhood.
Acknowledgements

First, and foremost, I would like to thank the children who participated in this study so thoughtfully and enthusiastically, and the parents who all so generously welcomed me into their homes and frankly discussed their experiences and opinions. The response from participants exceeded my hopes and brought the study to life. I am sincerely grateful to them all. Thanks, also, to the school principals, teachers and others who assisted so readily and helpfully with recruitment. The enthusiasm for this study has been tremendous.

A very big thank you goes to my University of Otago supervisors, Professor Anne B. Smith and Dr Nicola Taylor. I have greatly appreciated Anne’s extensive knowledge and total willingness to share this, as well as her ongoing support. And I am grateful to Nicki for her invaluable insight, attention to detail, and indefatigable enthusiasm for the study. They have both been excellent mentors, offering guidance, providing encouragement, and extending my thinking and skills, both in this PhD study and beyond. Thanks, also, to Jocelyn Diedrichs, of the Centre for Research on Children and Families (formerly the Children’s Issues Centre), for her administrative support over the course of this study.

I would like to acknowledge the agencies that made this study possible by providing funding: Save the Children (NZ), and SPEaR (Social Policy Evaluation and Research Committee). I am also extremely grateful to have received scholarships; initially from the University of Otago (University of Otago Prestigious Scholarship), then from the Tertiary Education Commission (Bright Futures: Top Achiever Doctoral Scholarship), which enabled me to study fulltime and to present papers at national and international conferences. The opportunity to participate in the Childwatch International Rural Childhood Study Group was also much appreciated.

I am extremely grateful to friends, neighbours, colleagues and family, who have been instrumental in this study coming to fruition, through their practical assistance and/or emotional support. There is not the space to thank everyone individually, but, with gratitude, I
hold in mind the people who helped, most likely more than they realised. Often this was by way of saying the right thing, or being there, at just the right time; helping shift my thinking, easing my way, or lifting my spirits. It really helped.

Some have provided ongoing support during the PhD process, and a few of these I want to specifically thank: Jane Kerr (JJ), for consistently providing me with a warm welcome, great company and a ‘home away from home’ in the South Island; Sylvia Blood, for her steadfast support, insightful and constructive discussion, and precious, enduring friendship (Look! We have come through!); Diane Halstead, for her support throughout the process, and fabulous reproductions of the children’s artwork in the thesis; and friends Raewyn and Lawrie Morrison, for the use of their lovely home as a workplace, and the many, very gratefully received, invitations to dinner – always restorative. Thanks, also, for their support over the thesis writing period, to: Ted and Liane Vievieorka, for lending me their bach; Irene de Haan, for providing collegial support and a good strong shoulder; and, of course, Jane Watson.

I will also take this rare opportunity to give a brief, but sincere, nod of acknowledgement to those who shaped my younger life, and were unknowingly instrumental in the choices I have made that have led me here. Thank you to: the late May Evans, who listened; the late Lenore Webster, who made me aware that much more was possible; the Connolly family, who are the source of cherished rural childhood memories; and Peggy Dean, my lifelong and very dear friend. Thanks also to: my mother, with her unswerving loyalty and absolute belief in my abilities, and her many offerings of practical support over the last few years; and my father, also staunchly loyal and a mainstay of moral support - enduring champion of the underdog.

Finally, my heartfelt thanks go to Brendan and Katie Wright who have been absolutely brilliant, unwavering in their encouragement and support throughout this study, as well as enriching my everyday life. Special thanks to Katie for all her ideas and input, including the fabulous artwork on the children’s information pamphlet. And to Brendan, for bearing with my absences, celebrating my successes, commiserating with my disappointments, and always being there. In short, it would seem that he is the big door prize. Thank you.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td></td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td></td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of contents</td>
<td></td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of figures</td>
<td></td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of tables</td>
<td></td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of abbreviations</td>
<td></td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of appendices</td>
<td></td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER ONE

**CHAPTER TWO – The context: Rural New Zealand**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demographic information</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical rural New Zealand context</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental history</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social history</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemporary rural New Zealand context</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining rural New Zealand</td>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The changing face of rural New Zealand</td>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current issues for rural families</td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td></td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER THREE - Theoretical context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theorising childhood</td>
<td></td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The nature of childhood, children and the child</td>
<td></td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominant theoretical frameworks</td>
<td></td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childhood Studies theory</td>
<td></td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key relevant Childhood Studies concepts</td>
<td></td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childhood is a social construction</td>
<td></td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s agency, voice and rights</td>
<td></td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theorising rurality</td>
<td></td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptualising rural childhood</td>
<td></td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER SIX – Findings: Parents’ data

Rural idyll

Rural lifestyle
Beneficial aspects of living rurally
Aesthetic aspects
Social aspects
Community
Family
Safety

Fostering positive attributes in children

Alternative (to idyllic) rural constructions

Rural dull

Rural deprivation
Access to services and resources
Economic issues
Distance and travel
Rural schooling
Children’s activities
Farm and property issues

Chapter summary

CHAPTER SEVEN – Findings: Children’s data

Rural idyll

Individual aspects:
Aesthetic aspects
Outdoor recreational activities

Psychosocial aspects:
Family and friends
Community
School
Home environment
Farm environment

Urban/rural perceptions

Alternative to (idyllic) rural childhood themes

Rural dull
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural danger</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural deprivation</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The most important thing</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter summary</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER EIGHT – Discussion and conclusion</strong></td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answering the research questions</td>
<td>284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructions and experiences of rural childhood</td>
<td>284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity of rural childhoods</td>
<td>294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factors constraining and facilitating parenting</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications of the study</td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations and recommendations for further research</td>
<td>306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concluding comments</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>REFERENCES</strong></td>
<td>311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>APPENDICES</strong></td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1:</td>
<td>New Zealand urban/rural profile classification</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2:</td>
<td>Conceptualising rurality in functional and political-economic terms</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3:</td>
<td>Conceptual model of rural childhood theory</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4:</td>
<td>Distribution of families in functional and political-economic terms of rurality.</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5:</td>
<td>City and country; Artwork by Luna, 11 year old girl, Rodney</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6:</td>
<td>Looking to a bigger hill with Dusk (dog); Artwork by Melissa, 10 year old girl, MacKenzie</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7:</td>
<td>Bike riding - Photograph taken by a family member of a 10 year old girl, MacKenzie</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8:</td>
<td>On the trampoline - Photograph taken by a family member of a 9 year old girl, Canterbury</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 9:</td>
<td>River rope swing - Photograph taken by a family member of a 10 year old boy, Canterbury</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 10:</td>
<td>Swimming - Photograph taken by an 11 year old girl, Northland</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 11:</td>
<td>Tree hut - Photograph taken by a 10 year old girl, MacKenzie</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 12:</td>
<td>Tree climbing - Photograph taken by a 10 year old boy, Rodney</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 13:</td>
<td>Catching kiwai - Photograph taken by a 9 year old girl, Northland</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 14:</td>
<td>There is lots of space to run around (playing soccer with brother); Artwork by Bobbalina, 10 year old girl, Rodney</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 15:</td>
<td>Duck shooting mai mai; Artwork by Luke, 9 year old boy, Rodney</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 16:</td>
<td>Going to school! Artwork by 9er49er, 11 year old girl, Canterbury</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 17:</td>
<td>This is the way I get to school – by bus! Artwork by The Simpsons, 9 year old girl, Canterbury</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 18: My place; Artwork by Billy Buster, 10 year old boy, Rodney

Figure 19: Pet lamb - Photograph taken by family member of a 7 year old girl, Rodney

Figure 20: Feeding the chooks - Photograph taken by family member of an 11 year old boy, MacKenzie

Figure 21: Rubbish fire; Artwork by 9er49er, 11 year old girl, Canterbury

Figure 22: Feeding out; Artwork by Laurie, 12 year old girl, MacKenzie

Figure 23: Mustering, with mum slip, slop, slapping (sunscreen) as usual! Artwork by Melissa, 10 year old girl, MacKenzie
# List of Tables

**Table 1:** The number and gender of participants in each geographical location  
**Table 2:** Reasons contributing to parents’ choice to live rurally, in each area  
**Table 3:** Dominant themes in child participants’ photographs and artwork  
**Table 4:** Extracurricular activities participated in by children in all the areas  
**Table 5:** The most important things children thought should be included in this thesis to tell people about living in the country
## List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ATV</td>
<td>All Terrain Vehicle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICI</td>
<td>Initial Consent Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information and Communication Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNCRC</td>
<td>United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## List of Appendices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A</td>
<td>North and South Island maps showing the urban/rural profile categories</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B</td>
<td>Letter to the parents</td>
<td>343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C</td>
<td>Information pamphlets for the children</td>
<td>345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D</td>
<td>Information pamphlets for the parents</td>
<td>347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix E</td>
<td>Consent form for the parents</td>
<td>349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix F</td>
<td>Consent form for the children</td>
<td>351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix G</td>
<td>‘The most important thing’</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE

Rural New Zealand has an important place in the material realities and social imaginings of New Zealanders, with rural childhood holding a particularly cherished place in popular affections. Despite significant urbanisation, families living in rural localities have always made up a significant, albeit changing, proportion of the population. Rural New Zealand has constantly been subject to fluctuations in economic and social conditions, and recent rapid changes have seen the population in some rural areas grow, as others are depopulated, with subsequent loss of social resources. However, despite the impact these changes clearly have on the sizeable rural population, and the emotional significance of rural New Zealand, rural childhood has not received specific research attention and little is known, about rural children’s lived experiences. This study is designed to address this gap in knowledge, investigating rural childhood in a diverse range of rural New Zealand environments, from the perspectives of children and parents. The explicit aims of the research are: to explore how rural childhood is constructed and experienced, from the perspectives of children and parents; to examine the diversity of constructions and experiences of rural childhood across different rural environments; and to explore the factors constraining and facilitating parenting in rural New Zealand. Increased understanding in these areas can potentially contribute to informing and supporting the development of beneficial policies and practices for rural children and families in New Zealand.

This study is, therefore, essentially an exploration of New Zealand rural childhoods, beyond the imagined; how these are constructed and experienced, in the context of ongoing and rapid change in rural areas. The catalyst for it was a chance conversation I had with a parent about the merits of rural life in general and small rural schools in particular. During our discussion it became apparent that our ideas about what rural childhood is, and our understandings around it, were quite different. The population in the rural area where we both live has rapidly increased over two decades. Farms have been subdivided to create lifestyle blocks, vineyards and olive groves have replaced pastures, improved roads and a motorway extension have reduced the travel time to the city, and information and communication
technology has brought the world (and work opportunities) directly into our homes. Consequently the area, like many others, has grown significantly and many changes, appreciated by some and not by others, are evident.

This chance conversation heightened my awareness that people have vastly different visions and ideas of rural childhood. Moreover, my interest was roused further by the recognition that these visions of rural childhood are invested with powerful, emotional meanings. There is a strong sense that in New Zealand a rural childhood is something of a benchmark for a ‘real’ and ‘proper’ childhood. It is both aspirational and inspirational, incorporating adults’ hopes and dreams for their children with yearnings for an imagined and cherished past. However, despite the apparent emotional attachment to rural childhood, it is unclear what it actually is. Mulling this over initially gave rise to a multitude of questions. What is rural New Zealand childhood? What does it mean and what does it look like? Does a ‘real’ rural childhood in fact exist? And importantly, how and where is rural childhood to be found? These questions, which fuelled my curiosity, are the initial starting point of this study.

This curiosity converged with my strong interest in children’s rights and researching children’s experiences, critical theories of childhood and social issues, culminating in this academic inquiry into rural childhoods. It is an important inquiry for a number of reasons, including and beyond my own curiosity. First, because of the strong place that rural childhood holds in the affections of New Zealanders. Exploring what society believes is important, because it provides insight into how it has been shaped (Goodyear, 1998), which may then have wider social implications. Second, a sizeable portion of the New Zealand population, one in seven people, currently resides in rural areas (Wilson, 2009). This has significant relevance for policy development and delivery of services. Up to date information about the lives and experiences of rural children and parents is currently lacking, but it is needed to help inform policy for rural families. Third, increasing knowledge about the lived experiences of rural children will assist in critiquing dominant discourses and theories of rural childhood, and contribute to reconstructing and advancing theoretical understanding (Mayall, 1999).
In addition, this study is timely as rural childhoods are increasingly gaining recognition internationally as an area of interest (Panelli, Puch & Robson, 2007). Until very recently research attention has tended to focus on children and young people in urban environments, and those in rural environments have been marginalized. However, this study joins the growing body of research focusing on the experiences of rural children. Importantly, it places the voices and perspectives of children and their parents at the forefront of the inquiry.

My starting premise in seeking to gain understanding about rural New Zealand childhoods is that it is essential to access firsthand accounts. It seems obvious that the best source of knowledge about rural childhood is those who are living it! Therefore, it is vital that parents’ and children’s perspectives are included in the production of knowledge, and the methodology in this study was designed to facilitate their authentic participation. Parents’ participation is important to provide their perspective on social constructions of rural childhood in conjunction with their own lived experiences. Children do not exist in a social vacuum and their everyday lives are closely bound with those of their parents. The parent/child relationship is a unique and integral context for childhood participation and development, with each party influencing and shaping the experiences and constructions of the other. In addition, these relationships are shaped within an intergenerational and wider family context. Therefore, parents’ views on rural childhood are extremely important, offering an informed perspective as partners in children’s everyday lives. Parents’ perspectives also offer insight into factors that affect rural children and families, both positively and negatively.

Whilst parents’ participation makes a critical contribution, the key source for understanding the experiences of rural childhood is children who are currently living rurally. These children obviously have direct and current insight into those matters relevant to my research. The theoretical position underlying this study is that children are experts in their own experience and that they are capable of, and competent in, expressing this (James, 2004; James & James, 2008; Mayall, 1999; Prout & James, 1990). Furthermore, in accordance with Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) it is children’s right to participate in matters, such as research, that affect them. A key task in this study was, therefore, developing and implementing a methodology that facilitates children’s
participation, assisting them to engage creatively and actively with the topic of interest. This was achieved by using a range of methods, the outcome of which is the inclusion of children’s voices in this study. Children’s perspectives, hitherto unknown, play a vital role, and their integration with parents’ views makes a significant contribution in the production of knowledge about rural New Zealand childhoods.

The inclusion of four specific localities is a unique and exciting aspect of the study, recognizing the multiplicity of rural New Zealand experiences. The participation of children and parents, from a range of different locations, gives insight into both the commonalities and diversity of rural childhoods and family life. The rural areas range from ‘rural with high urban influence’, ‘rural with moderate urban influence’, ‘rural with low urban influence’ to ‘highly rural/remote’. These different locations highlight the many sites of rural New Zealand childhoods, challenging the urban rural dichotomy, and providing a more nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of rural children and families.

This thesis gives a full account of the research study, documenting the process, from where I started, and what I was looking for, through to what I found and its implications. Chapter Two provides an understanding of the historical and contemporary New Zealand sociocultural context in which this study is located, using relevant literature, demographic and policy information. Rural childhood is defined, and features pertinent to the historical and current situation for rural New Zealand families are discussed. Chapter Three outlines the theoretical context for this study, which is based on Childhood Studies, drawing on the sociology of childhood, sociocultural studies and children’s rights. Children are conceptualised as social actors with agency, who have the capacity to influence their environment as well as being influenced by it.

Chapter Four reviews the international research literature relevant to rural childhoods, with a particular focus on Minority world literature. There are vast differences in the material realities and lived experiences of rural children across world contexts, and my rural childhood
study is located within a Minority world context. The key themes to emerge are the rural idyll, dullness, danger and deprivation. New Zealand research based literature relevant to rural childhoods is also reviewed, focusing on children’s constructions of rurality, young people’s experiences of social participation, and of social inclusion and exclusion in rural and urban contexts.

Chapter Five outlines the research questions and how these were investigated. It discusses the methodology underlying this qualitative research study and the methods used, which incorporates hermeneutics with a child-focused approach. The emphasis is placed on accessing and hearing children’s voices. The selection and recruitment process from four distinct rural geographical locations, data collection and analysis, and ethical issues are discussed. Chapter Six presents the findings from the parents’ data, while Chapter Seven focuses on the findings from the children’s data. In both chapters the findings are reported using the same themes that emerged from the rural childhoods literature review: rural idyll, dull, danger and deprivation.

The final chapter integrates the empirical findings with the research questions, outlined in Chapter Five, which guided and underpinned the study. The children’s and parents’ findings are linked and integrated with the literature and theory to extend our understanding of childhood and parenting in rural environments. This chapter also discusses the limitations, and policy and research implications of the study.

---

1 Majority world refers to the world area in which most of the world’s population live, the economically poorer countries referred to as the ‘developing world’, namely Africa, Asia and Latin America. Minority world refers to the economically more privileged countries, such as Europe, United States, Australia and New Zealand. This fairly broad distinction is problematic, as are all dichotomies, as not all countries fit neatly into one area, for example, some parts of Asia are very affluent. However, “... it enables the reader to reflect on the unequal relations between these two world areas previously referred to with negative connotations (Third/First World) or with geographical inaccuracy (North/South, or East/West)” (Punch, 2001, p. 819).
CHAPTER TWO
The Context: Rural New Zealand

Introduction

Rural New Zealand holds a unique and profound place in the national psyche and identity of many New Zealanders, incorporating values associated with the rural past; a rigorous work ethic, moral wholesomeness and idyllic rural notions (C. Bell, 1997). In New Zealand 'the rural' has often been considered to count as 'the real' (Nairn, Panelli & McCormack, 2003). This chapter sets the scene for my research study, providing a context for exploring the experiences of families in rural New Zealand. After an initial brief overview of the relevant demographic information, this chapter is divided into two sections: the historical context and the contemporary context.

The historical section first considers relevant aspects of New Zealand’s environmental history, the central concern of which is the effect of physical geography on human history (Fairburn, 2006), and then focuses on New Zealand’s social history, as relevant to rurally located study. This includes discussion of the development of a New Zealand identity that has rural experiences, associations and mythologising at its heart. Samuel and Thompson (1990) note that “when we do encounter myth our first instinct, it seems, is to devalue it, to rob it of its mysteries, to bring it down to earth” (p. 4). That is not the intention of this discussion. Rather, my aim is to articulate and explore rural mythologising in New Zealand, with the understanding that “the myths of a society provide insight into what that society believes is important and how that society has shaped itself” (Goodyear, 1998, p. 6). The rural myths are an integral aspect of New Zealand society and identity. The rural New Zealand identity is a predominantly Pākehā/European New Zealand construction, and attention is also given in this section to Māori rural history.2

---

2 Māori are the indigenous people of New Zealand. Pākehā is the Māori language word for New Zealanders of European descent.
The second section of this chapter provides a contemporary context for looking at rural New Zealand. After first defining 'rural' for the purposes of this study, the discussion then centres on the diverse nature and rapidly changing face of rural New Zealand. Finally, this section explores current issues for rural families in New Zealand and their associated policy development considerations.

Demographic Information

New Zealand has a population of just over 4.35 million people (Statistics New Zealand, 2010) resident mostly on three main islands: North Island, South Island and Stewart Island. The majority of people live in the North Island, and about one quarter of the population live in the South Island. New Zealand is a highly urbanised country with three quarters of the citizens living in urban areas of 10,000 people or more (Statistics New Zealand, 2009). Despite this high degree of urbanisation a significant proportion of the New Zealand population, one in seven people, live in rural areas, and the New Zealand economy is heavily reliant on primary production, from agriculture and forestry (Goodyear & Bayley, 2005).

New Zealand was the last inhabitable land mass to be discovered in the world. The first New Zealand settlers, arriving in approximately 1300, were Polynesian, from whom the Māori descend. Currently one in seven people in New Zealand identify as Māori, the tangata whenua. Europeans had a presence in New Zealand from the 18th century, with European settlement beginning in earnest in the 19th century. Immigrants to New Zealand, at that time and subsequently, have mostly been from England, Scotland and Ireland. The current population of New Zealand is predominantly European in origin, with close to three quarters of the population being of European descent (Wilson, 2009). In 1951 nearly 75 per cent of the overseas born population of New Zealand were from the United Kingdom, but this has progressively declined to 30.9 per cent in the 2001 census (Zodgekar, 2005). More recently, a high proportion of immigrants have come from Asia and the Pacific Islands (Statistics New Zealand, 2010).

---

4 Māori language phrase meaning 'the people of the land' (Te Ara Encyclopaedia of New Zealand, retrieved from http://www.teara.govt.nz).

Human population density is comparatively low in New Zealand while, conversely, livestock density is high,\(^5\) with pastoral agriculture being the country’s main land use. The other major land use is forestry, based on plantations of exotic conifers (Ministry for the Environment, 1997). New Zealand’s two top export earners, primary production\(^6\) and tourism, are rurally based, generating about 17 per cent of the gross domestic product (Ministry for the Environment, 2007).

Despite its rural origins and associations New Zealand is one of the most highly urbanised countries in the world (2002 New Zealand Official Year Book, cited in Statistics New Zealand, 2004). In the 19\(^{th}\) century New Zealand had a predominantly rural population,\(^7\) but by the 1911 census more people lived in urban areas than rural areas (Phillips, 2009). During the 20\(^{th}\) century the urban population continued to increase, with a corresponding decrease in the proportion of people living in rural areas. The most recent 2006 census figures indicate that 86 per cent of New Zealanders live in urban areas (Statistics New Zealand, 2009). This figure appears relatively stable, with about 14 per cent of New Zealanders living in rural areas since 1975 (Statistics New Zealand, 2004).

The rural population is typically European or Māori, with very few Asian or Pacific Island people living rurally. The Māori population was largely rural until the mid-20\(^{th}\) century, when the proportion of Māori living in urban areas rose dramatically (Wilson, 2009). Currently just over 15 per cent of Māori live rurally (Statistics New Zealand, 2004), with the majority of Māori, 90 per cent, living in the North Island (Wilson, 2009).

---

\(^5\) In 2007 there were twelve sheep for every person in New Zealand (Ministry for the Environment, 2007).

\(^6\) Including agriculture, forestry, horticulture and viticulture.

\(^7\) For example, just under 60 per cent of the population lived in rural areas in 1881 (Statistics New Zealand, 2004).
Historical Rural New Zealand Context

Environmental History

New Zealand is recognised internationally for its stunning landscapes and productive agricultural and horticultural land. Since human settlement the way we have used our land has fundamentally shaped our nation. (Ministry for the Environment, 2007, p. 213)

New Zealand is unusually remote due to its global position, deep in the south west Pacific Ocean, and its geographical isolation, with no land bridges to other countries (Fairburn, 2006). Sea travel is affected by specific global wind and oceanic patterns and the country is separated by great distances from Asia, the Americas and Europe, and the European trade routes.

New Zealand is an archipelago, with three main islands and approximately 700 offshore islands (Walrond, 2009). The New Zealand coastline of more than 18,000 kilometres is one of the longest in the world, compared to its land area of 270,000 square kilometres (approximately 26,822,000 hectares). It is approximately the same size as Japan or the United Kingdom (Ministry for the Environment, 1997). Half of the land area has natural land cover, including native forest and vegetation, rivers, lakes, snow, ice and scrub (Ministry for the Environment, 2007).

New Zealand is located on the boundary of the Indo-Australian and Pacific Tectonic plates. As a consequence of historic seismic activity two thirds of New Zealand consists of hilly or mountainous terrain, so areas of highly fertile soil and flat terrain are limited (Ministry for the Environment, 1997). These areas tend to be near the coast and, whilst 130 kilometres is the furthest distance a person can be from the coast (Walrond, 2009), 90 per cent of New Zealanders live within 50 kilometres of it (Ministry for the Environment, 2007).

Despite the mountainous terrain, more than half of New Zealand’s land surface has been converted to grass land. Before human settlement grasslands covered one to two million
hectares, approximately five per cent of the land area. This increased to almost eight million hectares following Māori settlement, with significant deforestation from fires. The arrival of European settlers led to further deforestation to increase grassland for farmers and provide trees for timber millers. The total grassland cover of New Zealand increased, in less than one hundred years of European settlement, to 14 million hectares (Ministry for the Environment, 1997). By the 1970s about 51 per cent of New Zealand’s land area had been converted to grasslands, significantly more than the world average of 37 per cent (Brooking, Hodge & Wood, 2002). Conversely, little of the land physically suitable for growing crops and horticulture has been used; approximately two per cent compared to the world average of 11 per cent (Ministry for the Environment, 1997). Through research, development and government assistance New Zealand gained world leadership in grassland farming (Brooking et al., 2002).

The early and rapid large scale conversion of bush to grassland pasture was praised by scientists and historians, as New Zealand was seen to possess a climate more suitable than any other country for growing grass and carrying stock year round, despite the relative paucity of fertile soil (Brooking et al., 2002). Brooking et al. (2002) describe the agricultural establishment as being “obsessed with establishing grasslands as a kind of monoculture” (p. 174).

New Zealand came to be seen as ‘Britain’s outlying farm’. The advent of refrigerated shipping from 1882 made small farms increasingly viable (Stringleman & Peden, 2008) and consolidated the role of New Zealand as an outlying farm. The first half of the 20th century saw a massive increase in farm productivity resulting from the use of phosphate soil fertilizer from Nauru Island and, later, aerial topdressing (Brooking et al., 2002). Pastoral agriculture brought economic growth and prosperity from 1945 until 1973, from fat lambing, wool growing and dairying, and “as a result of this agricultural boom, New Zealand enjoyed one of the highest standards of living in the world” (Statistics New Zealand, 2004). Heenan (1979) contends that New Zealand was unusual internationally, in that the standard of living was broadly equivalent between rural and urban populations. The economic success of agricultural
endeavours at this time contributed to "the notion that the country way of life is morally superior and socially preferable to city living" (Brooking et al., 2002, p. 175).

In the 1970s the situation for rural New Zealand changed. The productivity of farming continued to increase, but the prosperity began to erode as prices fell and New Zealand's traditional trading partner, Great Britain, joined the European Economic Community in 1973 (Wilson, 2009). A period of uncertainty began, with the loss of the guaranteed market and subsequent decline in demand for agricultural products. In addition, government financial subsidies for farmers were withdrawn under a period of New Right governments and economic liberalism (Benseman, 2006). Farmers searched for new markets and diversified their land use, with some subdividing land for sale as lifestyle blocks.

Currently New Zealand's largest land use continues to be pastoral. Changes in the nature of this are evident; the land in dairy pasture has increased and over the past two decades greater diversification of land use has occurred. Sheep farming and dairying still dominate land use but forestry, deer farming and horticultural endeavours have rapidly increased (Statistics New Zealand, 2004). Horticulture has expanded to include vineyards, orchards and perennial crops (Ministry for the Environment, 2007). By the late 20th century organic farming became profitable as a large market for organic products developed in Europe and Japan (Brooking et al., 2002). Increasingly rural people began to focus on urban tastes, with a growth in rural homestays and farm walks, and new products, such as olives, organic food and wine tasting, attracting urban visitors (Phillips, 2009). Lifestyle farms attracted urban dwellers to move to rural areas and "transformed the rural ideal from that of family farm into a playground for city folks" (Phillips, 2009, Urban culture takes over section, para. 8).

New Right refers to a range of right wing groups and ideologies (in this case New Zealand governments since the early 1980s) "which advocate laissez-faire economic policies, anti-welfarism, and the belief in the rights of the individual over the common good" (Collins English Dictionary, 2000, retrieved from http://dictionary.reverso.net/english-definition/New%20Right). Incorporated within this wider socio-political New Right context, economic liberalism saw the introduction of laissez-faire policies in which the markets and competitive forces played the maximum role in New Zealand's economy, with minimal intervention by the government.

Whilst there are a number of definitions essentially "the term 'lifestyle block' was introduced by real estate agents in the 1980s, to describe a rural smallholding attractive to people who wished to live a rural lifestyle but whose income derived from non-farming activities" (Paterson, 2005, p. 1).

Recorded in 2004 as 37 per cent of New Zealand's total land area (Ministry for the Environment, 2007).
The agricultural farming community is clearly part of a wider rural community. The problems and fortunes of farmers are shared by others in rural society and vice versa (Gillies, 1979). The wider rural community is also inextricably linked with the urban community, as different components depend on each other. Carter (1994) suggests that although the primary sector is located in rural areas, secondary (manufacturing) and tertiary (service) sectors bridge rural and urban locations in an unpredictable and interdependent fashion.

Further interaction and interdependence is apparent in the rapid development that has occurred in the peri-urban areas, blurring the boundaries between rural and urban New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, 2004). In this area on the rural fringe of urban cities there has been a proliferation of lifestyle blocks from which people commute to the city for work. Swaffield and Fairweather (1998) point out that "ironically the ideal country life rests upon sources of income external to rural occupation ... city life is essential to its success" (p. 116). There has been a change in the perceptions of rural, with a wider range of people living rurally. Most dramatically, 'rural' is no longer seen as just agricultural (Levett & Pomeroy, 1997).

The rural landscape and natural environment is important recreationally to New Zealanders and to tourists who visit (Growth and Innovation Advisory Board, 2004, cited in Ministry for the Environment, 2007), and outdoor recreational and tourism opportunities have expanded. The vast majority of overseas tourists indicate that the landscape is a key reason they visited New Zealand (Ministry of Tourism, 2005, cited in Ministry for the Environment, 2007).

Pawson (2002) contends, however, that notwithstanding the emphasis on primary production, New Zealand has arguably always been an urban land. The original focus of European colonisation was urban settlement, and colonial towns "encapsulated and symbolised the taming of the 'howling wilderness'" (Pawson, 2002, p. 201). Urbanisation increased steadily from the end of the 19th century, and by the mid-20th century New Zealand became an overwhelmingly urban society (Phillips, 2009). Despite this, New Zealand's

---

11 A biblical phrase in wide use in 19th century Otago, New Zealand (Pawson, 2002).
Environmental history has been heavily ruralised and built upon wilderness and farm perspectives (Pawson, 2002).

Social History

The Polynesians, from whom Māori descended, settled in New Zealand approximately 700 years ago. The early settlements were often at harbours and river mouths, providing good access to fishing and shellfish (Royal, 2009) which were a significant part of the traditional Māori diet. Māori increasingly moved inland to hunt birds and gather food. Horticulture became important, particularly extensive cultivation of kumara, taro and yams in the warmer North Island (Wilson, 2009).

Captain James Cook and his crew, on seeing Māori agricultural and horticultural practices during their first visit in 1769, recognised the potential for European farming in New Zealand (Phillips, 2009). The history of Pākehā/European New Zealand society had begun a little earlier with sealers and whalers having onshore stations from the 18th century, but the identification of New Zealand as an agricultural land signalled the start of significant European immigration and settlement.

New Zealand was promoted by agents in Britain and Ireland as an Arcadian paradise (Phillips, 2009). The countryside was regarded as a place of abundance (Fairburn, 1989; C. Bell, 1997) and portrayed in Arcadian terms; a ‘natural society’ where “natural abundance and innate moderation of their inhabitants have abolished the necessity for social organisation” (Fairburn, 1989, p. 26). This vision helped immigration and boosted investment (Fairburn, 1975).

---

12 A sweet potato that reached Polynesia from South America (Wilson, 2009).
13 Captain James Cook was the first British explorer to visit New Zealand, making two subsequent voyages, circumscribing and mapping the country. The first visit in 1769 was 127 years after Dutch explorer Captain Abel Tasman made the first confirmed European discovery of New Zealand (Wilson, 2009).
14 Arcadia was a region of ancient Greece frequently chosen as a background for pastoral poetry, and the term Arcadian is used to refer to a pastoral scene of simple pleasure and untouched quiet (http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/arcadia).
According to Alessio (2008), a vision developed that was not only of a pastoral, Arcadian nature, but also of a Utopian paradise. There were many sources for this New Zealand paradise myth:

They included the country’s island status, distance from Old World Europe, rich and varied beautiful topography, late settlement vis à vis other settler societies, healthy climate, impression as a destination where social and economic advancement was possible, reputation for radical political experimentation, presumed ‘racial’ superiority (of both Europeans and Māori), and supposed better history of contact between colonized and colonizer. (Alessio, 2008, p. 22)

The majority of European settlers in the 19th century came from rural England and Scotland, strongly influenced by this vision (Alessio, 2008; Fairburn, 1975). Immigrants from industrialising Britain were motivated by dreams of a new and better world, and a way of life that had eluded them in the home country (Alessio, 2008; Arnold, 1981; C. Bell, 1997). C. Bell (1997) refers to this as “the ‘follow your dream’ model of colonisation” (p. 146).

Arcadian ideals depicted symbolically in literary and artistic work of this time, incorporated both the abundance of nature “and a conservative longing for the settled (and hierarchical) social relationships of an imagined past” (Swaffield & Fairweather, 1998, p. 113). English settlers brought with them the views and values of a longed for Arcadia which “motivated and structured the development of European New World cultures in North America, Australia and New Zealand” (Swaffield & Fairweather, 1998, p. 114).

However, economic and labour restraints prevented the planned settlement in accordance with an Arcadian vision of New Zealand, that is, with limited landholding by a few gentry leading the ideal rural life. The availability of relatively cheap land meant that smallholdings of land quickly became a possibility for many (Swaffield & Fairweather, 1998). Land was the main attraction for many British immigrants; the possibility of becoming self sufficient and

---

15 For example, the settlement of colonial New Zealand as planned and promoted by the New Zealand Company, founded by Edward Gibbon Wakefield (Wilson, 2009).
eventually earning a profit through the purchase of land, stock and farming necessities, fulfilled their dreams of independence (Toynbee, 1995).

Evidence suggests that those who left Britain were prompted by the expectation of a better life for themselves and their children, and that they expected to work hard to achieve this. (Toynbee, 1995, p. 19)

New Zealand was mythologised as a new Garden of Eden (Phillips, 2009). However, the reality of the New Zealand landscape did not match the visions of an English rural landscape. “Many found the New Zealand bush to be dark, savage and intimidating, and untouched plains to be a dreary wilderness” (Phillips, 2009, First traditions section, para. 8). The landscape had to be cultivated and transformed, despite displaying “a disconcerting toughness and wildness, foreboding a determined resistance to all efforts to mellow and tame” (Arnold, 1981, p. 358).

From these origins the New Zealand ‘rural myth’ evolved - a myth that has had significant impact on New Zealand society (C. Bell, 1997; Fairburn, 1975, 1989, 2006; Goodyear, 1998; Phillips, 2009). The early bases of the myth of the New Zealand rural way of life included: a chance to be one’s own boss; own one’s own land; and tame the wilderness with the help of family labour (C. Bell, 1997).

New Zealanders became stereotyped as pioneering people of the land (C. Bell, 1997; Phillips, 2009). Pioneering appealed to masculine virtues, and involved subduing the wilderness and conquering new lands (Phillips, 2009). It also allowed the garden paradise myth to continue as nature was domesticated and cultivated by man (Fairburn, 1975).

C. Bell (1997) suggests that:

The early New Zealand pioneer-in-nature myth has two versions: first, the frontier-style slash-and-burn way of taming nature, requiring heroic physical prowess. The second is a gentler version of Arcadia as nature, a garden paradise, cultivated and domesticated by human effort (p. 147).
Both versions include a strong work ethic and moral wholesomeness, although C. Bell (1997) notes that the 'good moral character' aspect overlooks politically or racially questionable behaviours.

Conflict between Māori and the European settlers occurred over land from the 1840s, and this became increasingly severe, as the settlers required more land for their expanding population and Māori became increasingly reluctant to sell it (Wilson, 2009). In 1860 the first war over land broke out, and land wars continued over the next decade, ending in 1872. Over this period Māori lost millions of acres of land, partly though confiscation of land from 'rebellious' Māori following war. Māori land was also lost through the Native Land Court, a new government initiative which facilitated sales by transferring land titles from tribal ownership into individual names (Royal, 2009). Following the land wars many Māori withdrew from contact with European settlers and lived in isolated rural communities (Wilson, 2009).

Phillips (1987) suggests that from the 1890s a sense of nostalgia and a search for national identity raised the pioneer image into a legend, despite the impact of European settlement and their quest for land on the indigenous Māori population.

An emphasis on the harsh struggles of the early settlers became a way of legitimising the Pākehā expropriation of the land from the Māori. Pākehās elevated the conquest of the land so that they did not have to think about the conquest of the people. (Phillips, 1987, p. 39)

The frontier experience of sealers and whalers in the 18th century; goldminers, bushmen and kauri gumdiggers in the 19th century; and early sheep farmers became universalised (Phillips, 1987). An accompanying image was that of “man alone ... a rural dweller, and master of rural skills and of survival” (Fairburn, 2006, p.145). This male figure has earlier counterparts in other colonial societies such as Australia and America.
Despite the high degree of urbanisation since the turn of the 20th century the central place of rural New Zealand in the national identity has continued (Phillips, 2009). Characteristics of pioneering rural settlers, attributable perhaps to the isolation of colonial rural life, have been incorporated into a national identity. Those virtues include versatility, a strong work ethic and physical prowess.

As farming was established in New Zealand from the 1880s the diversity of rural society became apparent. There were greater opportunities for social mobility here than in Britain, as immigrants arriving as labourers acquired their own farms and businesses. The familiar phrase ‘labourer’s paradise’ is based on natural abundance (as perceived in the Arcadian myth) “creating marvellous opportunities for working men to become materially independent” (Fairburn, 1989, p. 42). Another commonly heard phrase, ‘middle class paradise’, refers to New Zealand’s natural abundance and minimal social organisation which supposedly “prevented social conflict (notably class driven conflict) and status anxiety” (Fairburn, 1989, p. 61). Class distinctions did in fact exist, but rural populations were so small that divisions had to be overlooked, and cooperation maintained between classes, in order for there to be enough people for community economic and social needs (Toynbee, 1995).

Larger, more viable, farms did not rely on family labour and were able to enjoy a relatively comfortable existence. By comparison small farms relied heavily on family labour, so family members suffered from hard work and scarce resources, and struggled to make a living (Goodyear, 1998; Toynbee, 1995). In contrast to the rural myths of an Arcadian paradise and pioneering exploits, existed the “sometimes harsh and unremitting drudgery of the small marginal farm” (Goodyear, 1998, p. 157).

In the late 19th and early 20th century the rural population was small and geographic isolation was a fact of life, exacerbated by the distance from neighbours and the poor state of rural roads. Consequently farming families needed to be self sufficient. Rural communities were highly cohesive and dependent on each other socially, economically and in times of crisis (Toynbee, 1995). An additional consequence was that there were few opportunities for people to meet others unlike themselves, so “traditional ideas were reinforced and people were
constantly under observation and open to criticism and other forms of social control” (Toynbee, 1995, p. 143).

The major assumption in colonial New Zealand was that farming was the economic future of the colony (Phillips, 2009). The New Zealand government continued to encourage more people onto the land, breaking up large estates and purchasing more Māori land to create more, but smaller, farms. By the 1890s less than one sixth of New Zealand’s land remained in Māori ownership, and 25 per cent of that was leased to Europeans (Ministry for the Environment, 1997). The land remaining in Māori ownership was mostly rugged and bush clad, and hence unsuitable for agriculture.

Increasing urbanisation meant that by the early 20th century there was “a sense of dismay that the population was no longer predominantly rural” (Statistics New Zealand, 2004, p. 10). The New Zealander faced a terrible dilemma: “his ethos was rigidly rural while his social structure became urban” (Fairburn, 1975, p. 9). The Arcadian influenced belief of British settlers, that the rural life was the ideal, underpinned the idea that urbanisation would adversely affect the population (Goodyear, 1998). This contrasts strongly with 20th century American experience where the agrarian myth diminished under the pressure of urban realities. However, in New Zealand, Fairburn (1975) maintains the rural myth remained intact because the New Zealander “forced urban realities to conform with his rural culture” (p. 10).

In response to fears that urban New Zealanders would lose their pioneering spirit and physical prowess, physical games increased in schools and sports thought to toughen up young men, such as rugby, increased in popularity (Fairburn, 1975; Phillips, 2009). The pioneering spirit was kept alive through physical accomplishment. For example, the programme for the 1924 All Blacks tour in Britain introduced the national rugby team:

... as showing the zeal which infuses the blood of the sons of the Southern Cross, the players frequently ride miles on horseback, fording rivers, and crossing mountains, to play in the backblocks rugby match. (Dansey, 1925, cited in Phillips, 2009, The cult of the pioneer section, para. 10)
Māori also became increasingly and dramatically urbanised. At the turn of the 20th century, 98 per cent of Māori lived in geographically scattered rural communities (King, 2003). Following the Second World War there was massive urbanisation of Māori and “between 1951 and 1971 the proportion of Māori living in cities rose from 20% to 58%” (Wilson, 2009, The people of New Zealand section, para. 12). A combination of factors led to this urban migration including rural population displacement and the ready availability of well paid, but unskilled, jobs in provincial towns and cities (King, 2003). The rural population displacement had come about as a consequence of the declining Māori land ownership, with insufficient land remaining to support the burgeoning Māori population. By the 1950s the overall situation for Māori farming, particularly small dairy units, was uneconomic. By 2001 Māori were as likely to be living in the cities as Pākehā/European New Zealanders (Statistics New Zealand, 2009).

Farming life has remained central to the nation’s identity despite urbanisation. Identities are dynamic and multi-layered, they are socially constructed and carry ideology (Liu, McCreanor, McIntosh & Teaiwa, 2005). The multicultural society of New Zealand today has multiple identities, and the identity incorporating the rural myth persists and flourishes in both rural and urban New Zealand (C. Bell, 1997; Phillips, 2009).16

Identities are constructed through discourses, or commonly shared ways of talking about things. These ‘discursive repertoires’ are articulated in media and reproduced in everyday language; they are evident in narratives commemorating public holidays and the artefacts of museums. (Liu et al., 2005, p. 14)

There has been widespread mythologising of the pioneer, via statues, biographies and autobiographies (Phillips, 2009). C. Bell (1997) notes that nostalgia has a highly functional role in the perpetuation of mythology and “images that sentimentalise country life abound in

16 This thesis is presenting just one of these identities, but I acknowledge the existence of others and arguments about New Zealand identity and exceptionalism. For example, Fairburn (2006) argues that what makes New Zealand exceptional is not any particular unique trait or experience, but rather its domination by Australian, American and British culture. “The degree to which New Zealand was influenced by this particular combination of imported cultures was distinct” (Fairburn, 2006, p. 150).
media advertising, on postage stamps, in small town promotion projects, and in contemporary popular and vernacular culture” (C. Bell, 1997, p. 145).

The New Zealand rural social history, with its roots in mythologised visions of a pastoral ‘new England’ and frontier experience, along with the demanding realities of colonial settlement, and the nation’s economical underpinnings, is a key part of the current national identity.

**Rural childhood in New Zealand history.** There is scanty evidence about rural children in New Zealand (Goodyear, 1998). However, “the myth of the healthy rural lifestyle meant that rural children were regarded as physically and morally superior” (Goodyear, 1998, p. 51).

A significant aspect of life for rural children on family farms in the late 19th and early 20th century was the requirement for their labour. Toynbee (1995) argues that, in the history of rural New Zealand, children’s labour has usually been ignored or rendered invisible, although farmers were dependent on their wives and children for farms to be economically viable. As farming and rural society became established, older norms of family life dominated; women worked on the farms, rather than solely taking care of the home, and children were necessarily less dependent, and, at times, overworked and neglected (Goodyear, 1998). Rural children’s farm work often included tasks that were beyond children’s strength and age, while domestic duties could be tiresome, such as caring for younger children and household chores (Graham, 1987). Women and girls tended to work longer hours, as men’s and boys’ work was curtailed by the daylight hours available (Graham, 1992a). The exact nature of rural girls’ work varied depending on family composition, geographical location, stage of settlement, crop mix and other factors such as the availability and affordability of labour (Hunter & Riney-Kehrberg, 2002).

In New Zealand rural child labour was a significant issue in that it involved a great number of children. In the 1920s, when over 60 per cent of farms relied solely on family members for labour (Dawson & Phillips, 2009), children’s labour on farms caused much concern, particularly after the advent of electricity and milking machines (Goodyear, 2006b). Despite
growing worry from school medical officers in the 1920s and 1930s about overworked country children, many farming families, especially smallholders, continued to depend on family labour for survival (Goodyear, 2006b). Goodyear (2006b) suggests the government’s response to unease about rural children’s labour was muted, as dairy production was an essential part of New Zealand’s economy and legislation against children’s labour might inhibit production.

Goodyear’s (1998) research indicates that some children found helping with work and farm chores burdensome, whereas others clearly enjoyed it (Goodyear, 1998, 2006b; Graham, 1992a). Many farming parents made moderate, reasonable demands on their children, and many children were proud of their physical work. The problem of overworked children arose in families when there was insufficient adult labour to accomplish the farm tasks (Graham, 1992a):

Many parents were caught in a genuine dilemma. The very decision to take on a small farm was often governed by a vision of a better future for the children. The physical and economic hardships involved could not always be predicted. (Graham, 1992a, p. 17)

In reality, the better future was a generation away, not in the difficult establishment years for those with family farms (Graham, 1992b).

The Education Act 1877 made school attendance compulsory in New Zealand for all children living within two miles of a school (Moss, 2006). However, studies suggest that it was not until 1914 that compulsory education was established and accepted (McGeorge, 2006). School attendance in rural areas tended to be erratic and children frequently arrived at school tired and fatigued (Goodyear, 2006b; Graham, 1992b). Rural schools adjusted their formal holidays to accommodate seasonal and cropping demands (Graham, 1992b). Universal school attendance was facilitated by the establishment of large numbers of small schools in rural areas, boarding and travel allowances, truant officers, and “the growing acceptance of the belief that schooling should be the sole business of childhood” (McGeorge, 2006, p. 25).
School buses started in 1924 and this transportation, along with better roads and bridges, contributed significantly to rural children’s attendance at school, thereby affecting the nature of rural communities (Moss, 2006). The local country school became a focus of rural community life (Wilson, 2009).

The myth of the superiority of a country childhood remained despite the obvious disadvantages of rural living experienced by many. The poverty, exhaustion of men, women and children and their often poor housing did not erode the basic belief in the merits of a country childhood characterised by “God’s own sunshine and fresh air” (Goodyear, 1998, p. 230). The claims made that New Zealand was an ideal country to raise children reflected official rhetoric more than the reality (Goodyear, 2006b).

**Contemporary Rural New Zealand Context**

**Defining Rural New Zealand**

There is no universally recognised definition of ‘rural’ and countries differ markedly in the measures they use to determine what is rural and urban (Statistics New Zealand, 2004). At times rural has been defined, with regard to economic distinctions, as the location of primary production (Carter, 1994). However, such a definition has significant limitations. The farming community is only one part of a larger rural community, although there is clearly interdependence between the various community components (Gillies, 1979), and there are inextricable and unpredictable links between the location and roles of the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors (Carter, 1994).

More typically, definitions of ‘rural’ relate to population distribution over physical space, with some countries using population density to define urban areas, and others using population size (Statistics New Zealand, 2004). When population size is used to define urban areas this also can differ between countries. For example, the United States defines an ‘urban area’ as having a population of 2,500 or more people, whereas a similar definition in
Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom refers to 1,000 or more people (Statistics New Zealand, 2004).

Defining what counts as rural in New Zealand is not straightforward. Rural areas, traditionally, are a residual category: that is, those areas not meeting the definition for urban (Statistics New Zealand, 2004). For example, the 1976 census report declared that “the rural population, of course, is that not defined as urban” (Carter, 1994, p. 57). In practice, government officials and others use a range of criteria to define rural and, generally, the further people are from urban areas the more likely they are to be affected by issues of location, travel distances and low population density (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2008b).

Currently Statistics New Zealand classifies urban areas as those having a population of over 1,000 people. However, population based definitions of rural are problematic. Rural areas differ in many ways, and population size, density or distribution alone do not provide a satisfactory picture of an area’s characteristics. In recognition of this, Statistics New Zealand (2004) has developed an urban/rural profile classification, which has three urban and four rural area categories (see Figure 1).

![Figure 1: New Zealand urban/rural profile classification](source: Statistics New Zealand (2004), New Zealand: An urban/rural profile.)
The rural categories are related to the degree of urban influence in the area. This was measured by comparing place of residence to work place, thus providing information about distance from, and need to travel to, an urban area for employment (Statistics New Zealand, 2004). Rural areas fall into four categories ranging from rural areas with high urban influence to highly rural/remote areas. Rural areas with high urban influence form a transition between main urban and rural areas, with a significant proportion of the employed population working in a main urban area. Rural areas with moderate urban influence have a significant, but not exclusively, main urban area influence. Rural areas with low urban influence have a strong rural focus, with the majority of people working in a rural area, although some will work in a minor urban area. Highly rural/remote areas have minimal dependence on urban areas for employment. This profile classification has been systematically applied to all of New Zealand (see Appendix A: North and South Island maps showing the urban/rural profile categories). It is useful for defining and comparing rural areas with different characteristics, and has therefore been central to my sample recruitment criteria.

**The Changing Face of Rural New Zealand**

The rural community is diverse and dynamic, with significantly varying prosperity and demography between and within regions (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2008b). The face of rural New Zealand is rapidly changing, as indeed it has done continuously since human settlement in this country. Webber and Rivers (1991, cited in Mulet-Marquis & Fairweather, 2008) believe that long-term change in rural New Zealand occurred over three distinct periods. The first of these was the period from 1850 to 1911 when rural New Zealand “agriculture was dominated by a relatively small, but politically and socially dominant, group of farmers operating large pastoral runs” (Mulet-Marquis & Fairweather, 2008, p. 1). The second period, from 1911 until 1961, was characterised by the growth of urban areas, both in population and in power, and a decline in the population employed in agriculture. The third period, which is ongoing, is one in which the rural sector continues to be important but is affected by substantial change.
Currently the rural population has a higher proportion of children and a lower proportion of young adults and elderly people than the urban population (Mulet-Marquis & Fairweather, 2008). This lower proportion of young people is possibly due to tertiary education and employment opportunities in urban areas. International research indicates that “once young people leave a rural area they seldom return, except perhaps much later in life” (Goodyear, 2006a, p. 13). The lower proportion of elderly people may be a consequence of the better availability of aged care facilities in urban areas (Mulet-Marquis & Fairweather, 2008). Rural areas are attracting new inhabitants due to the popularity of lifestyle blocks, and the higher proportion of children in rural areas may be caused by a movement of people of childrearing ages to these localities.

The development of the lifestyle block has been encouraged by reduced isolation of rural areas. Better roads, bridges and transport mean people can enjoy living in a rural environment while still working in an urban area (Statistics New Zealand, 2004). Furthermore, “the development of electronic media and communication has helped to reduce the effects of physical isolation” (Statistics New Zealand, 2004, p. 16).

Alongside this burgeoning development, in mostly peri-urban areas, other rural areas are managing the impact of industries related to primary production changing and closing down. Although improved services, such as school buses, have considerably reduced the remoteness of most inhabited rural areas (Statistics New Zealand, 2004) a recent study exploring family wellbeing in the context of rural industry change found that participants considered they did not possess access to the same social resources as families living in less isolated places (Goodrich & Sampson, 2008).

Rural participants in more remote areas in another recent study indicated that they felt community spirit was diminishing by the increase in lifestyle blocks, declining populations, school closures and the loss of amenities (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2008a). Concerns were also expressed about the changing values of rural children, who were seen by some participants as becoming more like urban New Zealanders and losing traditional values, such as a strong work ethic.
The changing fortunes of the primary sector over the last three decades have brought about considerable change, with social and economic effects, in rural communities. There has been significant loss of both government and private service agencies, for example, post offices, schools, shops and hotels (Benseman, 2006). There have also been reductions in the number of agricultural processing plants, which have been replaced by a smaller number of centralised larger plants. The negative consequences of this include “lowering of the viability of rural centres and an increasing dependence on more distant towns and cities” (Benseman, 2006, p. 2).

A recent study indicated that interest among rural New Zealanders in living or working in an urban area is very low (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2008a). Urban dwellers are more likely to consider moving to a rural area, than rural dwelling people are likely to consider moving to an urban area.

**Urban rural migration.** The 2006 census shows that the fastest area of population growth in New Zealand has been in rural areas that have moderate or strong urban influence, reversing a century long trend of cityward migration (Statistics New Zealand, 2009). The previous 2001 census figures also showed a rapid increase in population growth in smaller urban areas and those rural areas close to cities. Population projections suggest that these will continue to be the fastest growing areas of population, with rural areas with a high urban influence growing at twice the national average between 2001 and 2021 (Goodyear, 2006a).

These rapidly growing rural areas, on the urban fringe, represent “the development of commuting or satellite urban areas close to main urban areas, and the development of a rural commuting zone” (Goodyear, 2006a). Generally urban areas are more deprived than the surrounding rural land areas (Crampton, Salmond & Kirkpatrick, 2004). When people live in the rural fringe areas they “have access to urban facilities but live far enough away to avoid the negative factors of city living” (Crampton et al, 2004, p. 23). This in part helps explain the high land values as “rurality itself has become a commodity which is actively sought by middle class migrants” (Swaffield & Fairweather, 1998, p. 112).
The Arcadian ideals that influenced Europeans immigrating to New Zealand in the 19th century continue to have a major influence today on people's decisions to move from urban locations to rural small holdings (Swafffield & Fairweather, 1998). The perceived advantages of rural living include: privacy and the opportunity for self-expression; picturesque settings and a natural environment; recreational opportunities; community life; and the opportunity to raise children in a benign environment.

In a South Island study, urban people moving to rural smallholdings were attracted to a rural ideal of country living, rather than motivated by dissatisfaction with urban life (Fairweather, 1996), and there was a significant absence of anti-urban sentiment (Swafffield & Fairweather, 1998). Fairweather (1996) found that the level of lifestyle satisfaction was high and there was no evidence of significant migration back to urban areas. One of the few concerns expressed by participants was that subdivisions would continue getting smaller and that the smallholder would eventually have neighbours closer than they desired.

A recent study with both rural and urban respondents found a trend, consistent across both groups, of viewing rural New Zealand positively and urban New Zealand negatively (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2008a). The five top rating positive aspects about living rurally recorded by both urban and rural dwellers were: lifestyle; open spaces/landscape; clean environment; population size; and neighbours/community (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2008a).17

However, the migration of urban dwellers into urban fringe settlements has displaced former agricultural communities (Swafffield & Fairweather, 1998) and raised the issue of a "change in social characteristics and traditional rural values in other rural areas" (Mulet-Marquis & Fairweather, 2008, p. 1). A recent study reported some concern among respondents as "an increase in subdivisions and lifestyle blocks was seen to result in a slow loss of rural New Zealand and a decline in community spirit" (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2008a, p. 29).

17 Population size was rated highly by rural dwellers and neighbours/community was rated highly by urban dwellers.
Those living in rural areas with a high urban influence (along with those living in main urban areas) have the highest level of formal qualifications and above average income, compared to other areas (Statistics New Zealand, 2009). However, there are a significant proportion of low income people moving from urban areas to rural towns (Waldegrave & Stuart, 1998). It has been suggested that this “increase in movement of low income and beneficiary households from urban areas to peripheral towns and rural areas [is] as a result of social policy reforms introduced from 1991 on” (Waldegrave & Stuart, 1998, p. 3). The researchers found that the perceived advantages of living in rural areas included the environment, the community and the lifestyle, while the participants reported that the disadvantages included the lack of facilities and the distance from towns.

**Current Issues for Rural Families**

The fact that 14% of the New Zealand population live in rural areas, the importance of rural areas to our economy and society, and the mark that New Zealand’s strongly rural history still leaves on the New Zealand psyche, together mean that the health and independence of rural people should properly be the concern of policymakers and wider New Zealand society. (Fraser, 2007, p. 61)

Significant attention has recently been directed at uncovering and understanding the experiences of families in New Zealand (for example, the Families Commission 2006 project *Families with dependent children - Successful outcomes project*). However, there is a gap in the research with regard to rural families and very little is currently known specifically about rural children (Action for Children and Youth Aotearoa, 2003), rural New Zealand families, or about the range of experiences of this very diverse group of people. Current knowledge has been extrapolated from research projects with a larger population sample, which is not specifically rural.

**Housing.** The quality of housing was noted, in the Ministry of Social Development (2004) briefing paper for the incoming Families Commissioners, ‘New Zealand families today’, as
being of particular concern in some rural areas, such as regions in the Far North and East Coast. The government has put in place targeted rural housing programmes designed to address particular issues for low income rural families: the Rural Housing Programme and the Low Deposit Rural Lending Programme.

**Education.** The same Ministry of Social Development (2004) briefing paper noted that rural families can be affected by the lack of, or limited choice in, availability of education providers. It noted a lack of affordable Early Childhood Education and out of school care in some rural areas. Consequently parents, especially women's, working lives are affected. Families have fewer or no choices about education providers and may be unable to access particular types of education provision, for example Māori immersion, Christian education or special schools.

A report written by the Education Review Office (2001), based on interviews with rural parents, also emphasised the limited range of educational options open to rural children, often with only Playcentre for early childhood education, and one primary and secondary school nearby. This report indicated parental satisfaction with primary schools, noting that the schools were considered integral to the ongoing vitality of the community, although there was an awareness of the difficulty in attracting staff and overcoming geographical isolation to expose students to a range of experiences. However, parents expressed greater concern about secondary schooling in rural areas providing smaller range of subject choice and extracurricular activities.

Government policy is that schools must provide for children to enrol at their nearest school. However, for rural families this can be constrained by dissatisfaction with the smaller local school, or the travel, distance and time involved. Alternative options include enrolment at boarding school and Correspondence School.

---

18 Playcentres are parent cooperatives, affiliated to the New Zealand Playcentre Federation through regional associations, that emphasise parent education and child initiated play, and offer sessional care and education to preschool children.
19 The Correspondence School of New Zealand provides government funded, distance education for early childhood, primary and secondary level students, whose educational needs cannot be met by an ordinary school in their locality, due to location, itinerancy, health, education or personal circumstances ([http://www.correspondence.school.nz](http://www.correspondence.school.nz)).
Information and communication technology (ICT). The literature suggests that broadband uptake has been slow in rural areas because of the monopoly of infrastructure by one company, high costs and residents' lack of knowledge about satellite broadband (Shiblaq, 2008/2009). However, rural internet service in New Zealand is also recognised as being not well served by comparison to international (Minority world) standards, "possibly because of the low bandwidth in many parts of the country" (Sanders, Pauleen & Harmer, 2007, p. 11).

Health. Rural areas are likely to have fewer support services for families, including health services, and accessing these services can be difficult (Families Commission, 2006). However, there is very little data available on the health needs of rural populations, or differences from those of urban populations and a paucity of existing analysis (Fraser, 2007). Some narrative accounts demonstrate that "rural people have been highly critical of both the availability and quality of services" (Fraser, 2007, p. 59).

There is an awareness at the policy level of issues facing rural communities regarding health care. Small communities commonly have difficulty attracting and retaining health services (Ministry of Health, 1999). There are issues for those General Practitioners in rural settings that can potentially impact on patient safety: the effect of isolation and distance on services; lack of peer support; solo practice; limited training opportunities; balancing the inconvenience for a patient and family members to travel to an appropriate service and the risk of providing an inadequate or unsafe service locally. Rural people are travelling greater distances to access services, especially after hours (Primrose, 2005).

The Rural Expert Advisory Group to the Ministry of Health (2002) drafted a plan to achieve accessible and appropriate primary health services for people living in rural New Zealand. Three aims were articulated to achieve this goal: focusing on the context for primary health care; access to health services; and development and maintenance of a skilled multidisciplinary rural workforce. Innovative delivery of health services can have a significant impact on rural areas. For example, the national Healthline free calling health advice service, which has been evaluated very positively (Fraser, 2007).
The mental health services for young people in rural areas were noted as being of an insufficient level by The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2003), in their concluding comments responding to New Zealand’s second periodic report.\textsuperscript{20} The report recommended strengthening mental health and counselling services, ensuring that they are accessible to, and appropriate for, all adolescents. In the New Zealand third and fourth consolidated report to the Committee (New Zealand Government, 2008) the government indicated that this had been addressed as all 21 District Health Boards had specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, and they provided outreach services to rural areas.

**Quad bike accidents.** A specific concern, highlighted in a recent study, is the prominence of the rural sector in the statistics for All Terrain Vehicle (ATV) injuries and fatalities amongst children (Campbell, 2008). New Zealand Land Transport legislation prevents children under the age of 15 years riding ATVs on roads and beaches; however, there are no laws preventing younger children from driving them off road, on farms and rural properties. Farms are both home and workplace, and even when not directly working children are regularly in the farm workplace, sometimes as a consequence of no available childcare. ATVs, most designed for adult use, are “rapidly replacing the tractor as the multipurpose farm workhorse” (Campbell, 2008, p. 125) and accidents while riding them or motorbikes to move stock is the most common form of fatal work related accident for older children. Campbell (2008) also notes that ATVs are used for work and recreation on lifestyle blocks, with anecdotal evidence suggesting that children’s use of ATVs is one of the perceived lifestyle benefits. The study states that the number of accidents involving rural children is increasing and urgent attention is required to reduce the risks, concluding that ATVs are inappropriate vehicles for operation by, or near, children.

**Crime.** The rates of recorded crime are lower in rural areas in New Zealand, than urban areas (Wood, 2005). However, the impact of rural crime can be significant due to the relative geographical isolation of the rural population, which also serves to compound inconvenience.

\textsuperscript{20} New Zealand as a State member, having ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1993, is obligated to submit periodic reports to the UNCRC to demonstrate compliance with the Convention.

\textsuperscript{21} The report also noted an insufficient level of youth mental health services for Māori children and children in residential institutions.
Preventing rural crime can be difficult due to the dispersed communities, less funding and limited resources of local agencies (Wood, 2005).

**Transport.** A report examining poverty and hardship in New Zealand noted that lack of public transport is a problem in many rural areas (Ministry of Social Development, 2007). Concern was expressed in the report that people are driving unwarranted and unregistered cars. This may be a consequence of compounding problems associated with financial hardship and living in a rural area for some people, with the cost of maintaining cars becoming too high.

**Long working hours.** A recent study looking at long working hours and family life found that rural families were disproportionately represented amongst those working the longest hours, probably because of the high numbers of rural people working in rural occupations and industries such as agriculture and fisheries (Families Commission, 2009).

**Economic hardship.** Rural areas reported an increase in food bank use by large families and people caring for children over school holidays (Families Commission, 2006). Some (although not all) lower income families migrating from urban to rural areas find essential food and medical care less affordable in rural towns (Waldegrave & Stuart, 1998). A recent study reported that the key negative issue for rural respondents about living rurally was the perceived high cost of living (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2008a).

Problems associated with rural living and financial hardship can be compounding. It can be more difficult to access services and to work in paid employment in a rural area with a lack of access to public transport and a shortage of viable childcare options (Ministry of Social Development, 2007).

**Deprivation.**

Deprivation has been defined as a state of observable and demonstrable disadvantage relative to the local community or the wider society or nation to which an individual, family or group belongs. (Crampton et al., 2004, p. 15)
Deprivation appears to be a significant issue for some rural people, as indicated by the information relating to housing, education, health, transport, long working hours and economic hardship outlined above.

When socioeconomic position is mapped geographically patterns of deprivation in New Zealand are immediately observable (Crampton et al., 2004). Urban areas are generally more deprived than the surrounding rural land. Observable patterns of deprivation in the rural regions have been shaped in part by historical factors. Marginal land generally shows greater patterns of deprivation than fertile land. These richest, fertile lands tend to be those which were first appropriated by European settlers, forcing Māori into marginal lands.

Whilst Crampton et al (2004) note that “deprivation of area is increasingly recognized as a salient predictor of life’s chances” (p. 17), and that New Zealand research demonstrates a strong link between deprivation and health outcomes, they also stress that there is not clear homogeneity in areas or clear boundaries around them. People living in the same area do not necessarily share the same socioeconomic position or level of deprivation. Not all deprived people live in deprived areas, and not all people living in deprived areas are deprived. The extent of deprivation varies widely between different social areas with the same rural classification profile. There can also be considerable variation within regions, in differently classified rural areas. The nature and extent of the deprivation experienced across different rural areas clearly varies widely, and families’ experience of this has yet to be explored.

Policy development.

Rural communities do not exist in a vacuum but are shaped by environmental, economic, cultural and political processes which operate at various global, national, regional and local levels. Responses to change must be sensitive to these contexts. (Liepins, 1997, p. 42)

22 Using the New Zealand index of deprivation created from Statistics New Zealand census data (Crampton et al., 2004).
Recently, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (2008a) produced a document (Rural proof your policy) aimed at ensuring that the circumstances and needs of the rural community are taken into account when developing and implementing policy. The two issues identified in the document as most likely to affect people living in rural areas and influence policy outcomes are: low population density and isolation. These impact on all of the issues affecting families outlined above and are more likely to affect people the further away they live from urban areas.

Three areas relevant to policy development mentioned in the document, as especially influenced by population density and isolation, are connection infrastructure (including roads, telecommunications, electricity, postal and broadcasting services), access to services (including emergency, health, education, disability support, water supply, public transport and social services) and ease and cost of compliance with government requirements in rural areas (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2008b). In a recent report both urban and rural respondents voiced concern about the lack of infrastructure and access to amenities in rural areas (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2008a).

The Ministry of Youth Development (2002) noted in the Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa that young people in rural areas were a specific group facing unique challenges including distance from family, peers, school, services, work and social opportunities that can lead to isolation. Key issues identified for young people included ensuring access to services, addressing transport issues, acknowledging many young people have to move away from the area for education and employment, and increasing access to information and communication technology.

There has been little government directed research or policy development of direct relevance to rural families. There is, however, an acknowledgement in some areas of the unique issues faced by rural children, young people and families. As well as isolation, these issues are primarily related to the low population density and the consequent difficulty in attracting funding and services.
Summary

Rural New Zealand has a distinct, unique character, which is central to my study. It is not merely the physical location in which the study is set. Rather, it is at the core of it, with both material elements and social imaginings of rural New Zealand playing an influential role in shaping the constructions and lived experiences of rural childhood. The discussion in this chapter, of historical and contemporary aspects of rural New Zealand, provides the context for this study.

The historical rural New Zealand context incorporates both environmental and social aspects. The forces at play in the physical geography of the land contributed significantly to the settlement and development of New Zealand. The development into a primarily pastoral, agricultural nation was determined in part by the land and the climate. New Zealand rural society was influenced by the land and also by the dreams, hopes and capabilities of the European immigrants. Clearly the majority of settlers came to New Zealand in search of a better life for themselves and their families. It has been argued that an Arcadian vision encouraged European immigration and formed an integral part of the evolving national identity. Alongside this was the perception of settlers as hard working pioneers, working against, and with, the natural elements they encountered in the New Zealand landscape. A potent rural myth developed, with pioneering, farming families at its core. It idealised life in the country and portrayed a rural childhood as physically and morally superior to an urban one. This vision was perpetuated despite the harsh reality of life for many farming families, which included hard work, poverty and disadvantage.

Rural New Zealand today has inherited the legacies of its social and environmental past. However, it is not a static construction, as the face of rural New Zealand has constantly changed and continues to do so. Over recent decades farming has become less prosperous and there has been increasing diversification of land use. Rapid development has also taken place in the rural areas surrounding urban centres and rural New Zealand is no longer perceived just in terms of agriculture. Arcadian ideals continue to dominate contemporary perceptions of rural life and influence people migrating to rural, particularly peri-urban rural, areas. These
ideals contrast markedly with indications that deprivation is a significant issue for some people in rural areas, encompassing aspects of housing, education, health, transport and economic hardship.

New Zealand evolved rapidly from being a predominantly rural country to being highly urbanised. However, the rural has continued to hold a place of unparalleled importance in the national consciousness. It is surprising then that so little is actually known about the realities of daily life for rural people. There is a scarcity of research data, although there are indications of increased interest in recent years. There is also little acknowledgement of rural New Zealand, or issues for people living in rural New Zealand, in current policy.

This research study is therefore timely in seeking to explore and gain understanding of the lives and experiences of children and parents, living in a range of rural New Zealand environments. It is of great interest and social significance that a key aspect of how we, as New Zealanders, see and understand ourselves is the focus of thorough and rigorous scholarly enquiry.
CHAPTER THREE
Theoretical context

Introduction

Understandings of rural New Zealand childhoods are shaped by the unique sociocultural context and further informed and influenced by the particular theoretical perspectives employed. Having taken the sociocultural context into account in the previous chapter I now turn to the theoretical framework underpinning the study. This chapter makes explicit the ways of viewing childhood, children and rural childhood that are at the ontological, epistemological and methodological heart of my study.

The chapter starts by acknowledging that childhood and children can be conceptualised, and approached as a focus of academic study, in a myriad of ways. I argue that how childhood and children are perceived affects children’s own experiences and the nature of scholarly enquiry. Indeed, the conceptualisations of childhood, and in particular of rural childhood, which are used in this study, are integral to understanding the purpose of the study, the research questions, the choice of methods and the interpretation of the findings.

The theoretical framework underpinning my research is drawn from the academic field of study known as the ‘new’ paradigm of Childhood Studies (James & James, 2008; Prout & James, 1990). The rationale for this being the most conceptually suitable approach is explicated in this chapter and discussed with reference to relevant core concepts, which mesh epistemologically and methodologically with this study.

The latter part of this chapter shifts from looking primarily at the social space of childhood, to addressing theoretical issues relevant to the physical spaces of childhood. Particular

---

23 I have chosen to use capital letters in order to distinguish the interdisciplinary field known as Childhood Studies from collective studies of childhood, which are also referred to in this chapter. Whilst most authors do not use capitals it is not unknown, for example, Woodhead (2009) capitalises the term.
attention is given to theoretical conceptualisations of rurality, and the intersection of social constructions of childhood and rurality. Contemporary issues which arguably are further shaping children’s experience of place and space, such as globalisation and technological changes, are also considered.

This chapter delineates the theoretical context for my study by deconstructing understandings of childhood and rurality, and providing a theoretical conceptualisation of rural childhood. This paves the way for further exploration and greater depth of understanding of the everyday experiences of children and families, within the unique context of rural New Zealand environments.

**Theorising Childhood**

**The Nature of Childhood, Children and the Child**

Any academic enquiry into childhood and children’s lives, including this one focusing on rural childhood, necessarily holds assumptions about the nature of childhood and children, and what a child is, regardless of whether there is a conscious awareness or articulation of those assumptions or not. In order to theorise or research a particular topic or phenomenon, such as childhood, there clearly must be an understanding about the existence of the phenomenon and some sense of its fundamental nature. This understanding is reflected in the research questions being asked and guides the study, epistemologically and methodologically. Before addressing rural childhood specifically, the starting point for this discussion is to acknowledge that there are alternative ways of understanding childhood and to explicitly articulate the ways in which it is conceptualised in this study.

Some theorists contend that the term ‘child’ should be used only to refer to the individual social actor, a specific child, rather than as a generic descriptor representative of all children (James & James, 2004). There is no child who is representative of all children, just as there is no adult who is representative of all adults. Additionally, the term ‘child’ has negative
connotations having been used historically to refer to social groups perceived as inferior, for example colonized people, slaves and women, and “therefore defines not just physiological immaturity but also connotes dependency, powerlessness and inferiority” (Gittins, 2004, p. 27). In recognition of, and in concurrence with, these arguments, the term child is only used in this study when referring to a specific child, as it appears in quotations, or when problematising the term.

Childhood is clearly not a new phenomenon (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998) and likewise neither are questions about the nature of childhood (Smart, Neale & Wade, 2001). A massive body of knowledge has been built up through the systematic study of children by a range of academic disciplines (Prout & James, 1990). Smart et al. (2001) opine this has sometimes resulted in novel and contradictory beliefs, without consensus “simply because these beliefs reflect different visions of the social world held by particular theorists rather than any ‘higher’ truth about children themselves” (Smart et al, 2001, p. 2).

An internationally agreed definition of childhood, the period from birth to the age of eighteen years, is provided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989). However, an age based definition oversimplifies the complex issue of defining childhood, children and the child. The age that delineates the period of childhood varies considerably between and within countries in relation to different issues.24

An age based definition does, however, locate childhood as an early developmental stage in the human life cycle. Childhood is recognised as a biological phase of human development and the structural social space occupied by the next generation (James & James, 2008). It is a constant structural feature of all societies, and as such can be compared with other structural forms in society (Qvortrup, 1990).

24 For example, under New Zealand legislation children can: be held criminally responsible for the crimes of murder and manslaughter at the age of ten, and other criminal offences at the age of fourteen; sit a driving test and obtain a learner’s license at the age of fifteen; leave school, home and get married at the age of sixteen; be legally independent of parent’s guardianship, vote in local body and general elections, and purchase and consume alcohol and cigarettes at the age of eighteen; and are legally classed as an adult with full capacity to make their own decisions at the age of twenty years (Office of the Children’s Commissioner, 2008).
Childhood is characterised by basic physical and developmental patterns, but the ways in which this stage are understood are not a matter of biological predetermination. Interpretations and understanding vary considerably across and between cultures and generations, and in accordance with relationships and how adults engage with children (James & James, 2004). Often quoted, Prout and James (1990) clearly stated the issue; “the immaturity of children is a biological fact of life, but the ways in which this immaturity is understood and made meaningful is a fact of culture” (p. 7).

This recognition that childhood is socially, as well as biologically, constructed and understood is at the heart of Childhood Studies (James & Prout, 1990), which is the theoretical framework underlying this study. This concept clearly has significant implications for studying rural childhood. Perceiving childhood as open to social interpretation, rather than rigidly defined in biological terms, opens up the possibility of different forms of childhood. It challenges assumptions of a universal childhood, and whilst this makes definition problematic, it allows for exploration of alternative childhoods, such as those situated in rural localities. It also implies that rural childhood itself may be understood and made meaningful in different ways.

There are a number of ways in which childhood can be, and has been, theorised. Childhood Studies is the most suitable framework for my rural childhood study for a number of reasons. First, other dominant theoretical frameworks conceptualise childhood and children in ways that negate aspects of children’s competencies and personhood critical to this study, and thus would render the research questions irrelevant and illogical. Second, the key concepts in Childhood Studies are relevant to the focus of study, providing a framework for understanding rural childhood that is meaningful in relation to the research questions being asked. Third, Childhood Studies offers insight into useful methodological considerations for conducting research with children. Fourth, it conceptualises childhood in a way that engages with my own ontological and epistemological understandings, thus allowing for a congruent approach in the study. Discussion of the first two of these points follows, while the remaining two are discussed further on in Chapter Five of this thesis, which addresses issues of methodology and methods.
Dominant Theoretical Frameworks

Developmental psychology and socialisation theoretical frameworks have dominated academic enquiry into children and childhood, and had pervasive social influence over the last century. These frameworks are shaped by and reflect the dominant discourses of the time and place in which they evolved.

Developmental psychology. This theory evolved at a time when modernist thought and empirical science held sway, growing out of attempts to understand children through scientific study, for the purposes of moral and liberal education. It provides an account of childhood as a period of development over time, and can be described as constituting “an extant body of knowledge that suggests how individual children grow and learn” (Lubeck, 1996, p. 154).

It has subsequently shaped views of children and childhood, and influenced theory, policy and practice across a range of disciplines and fields related to children, and their families. As well as becoming an established field of academic theory and research, child development has been applied to educational, clinical, health and social welfare policies and practices affecting children (Woodhead, 2003). At the time in which the theory evolved, the ideas and insights were remarkably progressive, influencing radical attempts to reform social practices for children (Woodhead, 2009).

However, over recent years this theory has been widely criticised. According to Prout and James (1990) there are three key themes that predominate in developmental psychology theory: rationality, naturalness and universality. Rationality, essentially the ability to reason and use logic, is seen as a desirable adult attribute that is not yet possessed by children. Naturalness relates to the idea of natural growth; that the path that children are moving along to reach adulthood, and greater social status, is a biologically driven and thus natural one. Universality refers to the global nature of this development; all children everywhere are progressing along this natural path. The themes link together to produce a view of child development in which all children naturally progress in preordained linear stages, from irrational to rational behaviour and from simplicity to complexity of thought (Prout & James,
1990). Their thinking is seen to be different from adults’ thinking and this difference is understood as a deficiency; a natural deficiency that will be put right as the child grows up (Walkerdine, 2004).

Psychology has played a key role in establishing the norms of childhood, in providing means for visualizing childhood pathology and normality, in providing vocabularies for speaking about childhood subjectivity and its problems, and in inventing technologies for cure and normalization. (Rose, 1990, p. 131)

Conceptualising childhood as a developmental process is historically specific, relevant to some children in a particular time and place (Walkerdine, 2004); that is, those who live in the Minority world and who are white and middle class. Traditional child development theories were shaped by and perpetuated the power base of those who held, and continue to hold, a privileged and dominant place in the social order:

It does not represent a truth that should be applied to all younger human beings, but a set of beliefs that have been constructed within a particular social, political, cultural and historical context, by a particular group of people with power over people. (Cannella, 1997, p. 63)

The imposition of the conceptualisation of childhood based on developmental psychology onto all children denies the legitimate existence of other forms of childhood (Prout & James, 1990). However, despite these criticisms, the reality is, that “any theory, once believed, begins to organise how we think and act in relation to children” (Lubeck, 1996, p. 155). An idiosyncratic view of childhood and development steeped in Western culture and values was promoted (Woodhead, 1990).

Woodhead (2009), however, cautions against discarding the principles of developmental psychology theory completely, and thus, ‘throwing the baby out with the bathwater’. Piagetian

---

25 The terms Minority World and Western are used interchangeably in this chapter. Minority world is the preferred terminology (as noted in the introductory chapter) however some theorists are cited who use the term Western to refer to the same area of the world.
approaches no longer dominate theory and research, and alternative psychological approaches are more in keeping with the principle of the social construction of childhood. Woodhead (2009) suggests that a narrow developmentalism may be discarded, while “the core issues of infancy, childhood and youth remain a central concern” (p. 28).

Socialisation theory. This theory has dominated the way in which children have been viewed in the field of sociology. According to Prout and James (1990) the view of children that is at the core of socialisation theory has been imported from developmental psychology, and children continue to be seen as naturally and universally immature, irrational and incompetent.

Socialisation is concerned with the practices through which children develop into social adults. It is the process and range of practices that lead to internalisation by the child of societal values, and which transforms the child, from the immature, irrational, asocial state into a rational, social adult (Smart et al., 2001). Essentially, it contends that through socialisation children are taught, both explicitly and implicitly, intentionally and unintentionally, the social mores pertinent to any particular society or culture (James & James, 2008).

This theory has been criticised as giving rise to an elitist perspective (Alanen, 1988) which places children and adults in diametrically opposed positions within social relationships. The ‘weak’ children are positioned as subordinate to the more structurally powerful adults. A structural analysis of the relationship sees adults, who have the power, exercising this power over children through socialisation to essentially replicate themselves and perpetuate the social order. Socialisation is primarily seen as something that is done to children; who are the relatively passive recipients of the practices and processes, as part of a developmental drive toward adulthood. Children are marginalised by the presumption that difference equates with deficiency and inferiority.

Socialisation practices are contextualised and located within the family structure. This gives rise to other criticisms, including that of familialisation (Alanen 1988; Smart et al.,
2001), whereby the voice of children tends to become subsumed within the voice of the family, and there is a lack of recognition of the diversities of children’s identities. Children are effectively rendered invisible, while parental agency becomes synonymous with the concept of family (Smart et al., 2001), despite the interests of parents not always being identical with those of children (Qvortrup, 1990).

These are valid criticisms of socialisation theory, explicating how social reproduction through socialisation lacked attention to the process of how it happened and the role that children played in this. Deterministic accounts were rendered that did not allow for any account of children’s agency in that process. More recently, however, socialisation has been viewed in terms of the ways in which children acquire the social attributes necessary and valued in any particular culture (James & James, 2008). Closer attention to the processes of socialisation, by exploring what children learn rather than the ways in which they are taught, “has involved seeing children as social actors who engage with the social world, rather than just as the passive receivers of adult wisdom” (James & James, 2008, p.128). Through active participation children come to understand the core social and cultural values.

The contribution of developmental psychology and socialisation theory is acknowledged, with the massive accumulation of knowledge and the reality that society is “more accurately informed than ever before” (Mayall, 2000, p. 129). These theories have come under sustained criticism in the development and promotion of Childhood Studies, but they also make a valuable contribution to interdisciplinary study. The differences between newer Childhood Studies and these traditional theories have often been cast as diametrically opposed dualisms and overstated in order to effect a separation and develop clear boundaries (Prout, 2005). But it is clear that there are aspects of each that are valuable in the study of childhood and children.

However, these theories that have dominated the policy, practices and research arenas are clearly not appropriate to all contexts and have at times, been destructive. Of immediate importance, these theoretical perspectives are also not suited to this specific study. One of the key aspects of my study is the focus on children’s constructions and experiences of the ir own
childhood, in the present. The primary interest is not in their individual or social development in a rural context, although aspects of that are relevant and interesting. The central focus is on their current lived experiences and perspectives in a range of rural contexts. Additionally, the inclusion of children's accounts of their own experience is a core aspect of this study. This presupposes children as competent participants, rather than immature, irrational and incompetent, and focuses on hearing their voices as well as, but distinct from, their parents. Childhood Studies therefore provides a suitable theoretical perspective for this study.

**Childhood Studies Theory**

The following statement, located conceptually as informed by and informing Childhood Studies from a sociological perspective, is useful in considering the nature of childhood and children in this study:

'Childhood' is the *structural* site that is occupied by 'children' as a *collectivity*. It is within this collective and institutional space of 'childhood', as a member of the category 'children', that any *individual* 'child' comes to exercise his or her unique agency. (James & James, 2004, p. 14)

This recognises both the structure of childhood, as a social space, and the agency of children, as social actors. Importantly, it is not culturally specific, restrictive or prescriptive.

The central view of children in this rural childhood study is one in which they are perceived as competent, agentic beings who participate in the construction and understanding of their own childhoods, and in expressing their understanding of it within a research context. The heterogenous nature of childhood is recognised, with difference conceptualised in terms of diversity, rather than deficiency. Childhood Studies offers a theoretical framework which informs and extends this view. It is a more fitting, alternative framework underlying this study, than the traditional, dominant theories described above.
The primary objective of Childhood Studies “is to extend our knowledge and understanding of childhood and its complexities” (James & James, 2008, p. 3). This relatively new field of study has been referred to variously over recent decades, as the sociology of childhood (Jenks, 2005; Mayall, 2002), the sociological study of childhood (Prout & James, 1990), social studies of childhood (James et al, 1998) and childhood studies (James & James, 2004, 2008; Jenks, 2005; Kehily, 2004). Implicit in these terms are two fundamental features. First, it is an approach to the study of childhood, in which childhood is addressed as a complex social phenomenon. Second, this approach draws on contributions from a number of disciplines.

And precisely because of its complexity, a comprehensive understanding cannot be achieved by applying any single epistemological or disciplinary perspective: complex phenomena require interdisciplinary study, so the study of childhood must be understood as a multi- and interdisciplinary activity. (James & James, 2008, p. 26)

A range of academic disciplines contribute to the theoretical perspective of Childhood Studies. Recently V. Morrow (2008) noted that the ‘new’ sociology of childhood is now a well established field, drawing upon the disciplines of mainstream sociology, social history, human geography, social anthropology, social work, and critical developmental psychology. Other contributing disciplines include biology, medicine, social geography, education, humanities, philosophy, social policy, law and sociolegal studies (James et al., 1998; James & James, 2008).

Pufall and Unsworth (2004) argue for an interdisciplinary approach to understanding childhood, rather than a multidisciplinary one, contending that a multidisciplinary approach brings together a range of disciplines to provide differing perspectives on a phenomenon, whereas an interdisciplinary approach involves different disciplines engaging with each other. Prout (2005) likewise argues strongly for an interdisciplinary approach to childhood studies to further progress understandings of childhood and children, beyond disciplinary dualisms. Childhood Studies has the potential to be an interdisciplinary meeting place, “a forum for
critical analysis, research and debate" (Woodhead, 2009, p. 28). Woodhead (2009) conceptualises this as a wheel, with children and young people at the hub, and multiple spokes of enquiry radiating out from this.

Key theoretical domains incorporated in Childhood Studies are the sociology of childhood, sociocultural theory and a children’s rights perspective. Following is a brief overview of the key aspects of these three domains.

**Sociology of childhood.** This theoretical perspective understands childhood as a social construction and views children as independent social persons, who are active in the construction of their own social lives and have the capacity to influence the social world (Mayall, 1999; Prout & James, 1990; Smart et al., 2001; Taylor & Smith, 2000).

This focus on children as they are, rather than how their childhood experiences might shape the adults they may become, differentiates the sociology of childhood from other social science disciplines, particularly education and developmental psychology, that have been most engaged with the academic study of children and childhood. (Wells, 2009, p. 14)

Childhood is not seen as a natural category or a universal experience. Rather it varies over place, culture and time. It is recognised as being inextricably bound up with social variables (Prout & James, 1990), including, for example, social class, ethnicity and gender. Social variables impact on and contribute to the establishment of a particular construction of childhood. Thus even within cultures the understandings of childhood vary in accordance with the variables influencing the immediate social milieu. In rural New Zealand issues of social class, economic wellbeing, gender and ethnicity impacted historically on children’s experiences of rural childhood and continue to do so.

The social construction of childhood is perceived to be ordered and controlled by adults. Adult ideological perspectives, with their attendant aims, norms, and cultural values determine the construction of childhood (Mayall, 1999). Therefore, the diverse range of experiences and
constructions of rural childhood apparent in New Zealand are shaped by adults, including the dominant idealised construction. This construction is transmitted and reinforced through a variety of media which provides a context for interpreting rural childhood.

Children are viewed in Childhood Studies as social actors who construct and determine their own lives, not as passive subjects who evolve along a preordained trajectory or as the submissive recipients of socialisation processes. They are seen in terms of agency, as:

Social actors who have purpose and who influence as well as being influenced; as people who construct relationships, and childhoods, and who can report on and discuss their experience. (Mayall, 1999, p. 12)

A feature implicit in the sociology of childhood is the belief that children’s social relationships and cultures are indeed worthy of study, independent of adult perspectives (Prout & James, 1990). Rethinking the ways in which childhood has been conceptualised and constructed by adults within the dominant culture, necessarily means a reconstruction of childhood. The recognition of children as social actors possessing agency means that reconstructing childhood can only occur with children’s perspectives at the forefront. Likewise reconstructing rural childhood, stepping aside from mythologizing and interrogating the experiences, requires a privileging of children’s perspectives.

**Sociocultural theory.** This theory contextualises development as occurring, through children’s participation in activities, within social interactions and relationships (Smith, 2007). This has several significant implications. First, the social context is emphasised, highlighting the understanding that childhood is a social construction that varies across cultures, place and time. Consequently, the nature of the skills and attributions deemed valuable for children to acquire varies across cultures. Therefore, understanding childhood necessarily involves an analysis of the culture in which it is located. Rural New Zealand has a diverse and unique character, constantly undergoing social change. Alongside idealised visions and mythologies of rural life, there is evidence of deprivation and hardship. The diverse nature of rural New
Zealand implies the need for an approach to understanding rural childhood that takes into account the multi-faceted character and, at times, contradictory expectations of rural culture.

Second, children develop skills through participation in an interactive process, rather than as a consequence of solely heredity or environmental factors. They make choices about information, interaction and learning, and reconstruct tasks and experiences, based on their own understandings of these, in an ongoing creative and inventive process. Children's agency "arises out of social and cultural contexts" (Smith, 2007, p. 153). Children's social interactions and participation in relationships are a vital part of their everyday experience. An aspect of rural childhood, which contributes to defining it, is the social isolation and distance from others as a consequence of locality. This tends to focus greater attention on the family as the source of social interaction.

Children's development occurs contingent on the experiences available for participation, and "powerful normative models shape our assumptions about what children can and cannot do" (Smith, 2002, p. 82). In what essentially is a self-perpetuating cycle, adult expectations of children's competencies are influenced by dominant discourses, these expectations serve to influence the opportunities for experience available to children, which in turn affects children's development of capabilities and competencies, and then expectations are confirmed. When assumptions and expectations are limited by dominant discourses around children's competencies, children's experience and participation are also limited.

**Children's rights perspective.** This perspective represents a critique and shift away from the needs discourse with its paternalistic view of children (Kehily, 2004). This has been recognised in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which provides a comprehensive, internationally accepted framework for children's rights, reflecting a pragmatist approach. The rights in the UNCRC fall broadly into three categories, sometimes known as the 'three P's'; provision rights of minimum standards of care, protection rights to ensure safety, and participation rights in political and civil rights issues (Lansdown, 1994).
The UNCRC was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) in 1989, and formally ratified by New Zealand in 1993. It is one of the most widely ratified conventions in the history of the UN (Burr & Montgomery, 2003), and "undoubtedly the most significant recent policy development intended to promote and protect children's rights" (Franklin, 1995, p. 16). Ratifying State nations have an obligation to ensure children's rights are met and to integrate the principles of the Convention into policy, law and practice. Whilst the rights enshrined in the UNCRC cannot be enforced by the UN, the reporting mechanism puts pressure on them to comply (Hill & Tisdall, 1997) and its existence has inspired nations to create legislation supporting children's rights (Burr & Montgomery, 2003).

There has been criticism of aspects of the UNCRC from a Childhood Studies perspective. These include that it is: ethnocentric (Hill & Tisdall, 1997; Stainton Rogers, 2004); "upholding and supporting a Western understanding of childhood" (Burr & Montgomery, 2003, p. 157), especially with its emphasis on the individual child separate from the family; obscuring the diversity of childhood by defining 'child' as everyone under the age of eighteen years (Franklin, 1995); and failing to recognise cultural differences. There is not a definitive hierarchy of rights to address potential conflict between rights, despite the best interests of the child being paramount (Hill & Tisdall, 1997). Finally, there have also been feminist critiques of the UNCRC (Olsen, 1992, cited in Hill & Tisdall, 1997), including: the omission of some issues that particularly affect girls; potentially masking or even reinforcing sex discrimination through 'gender blindness'; ignoring actual power distributions in naive assumptions about consent and choice; and noting that it could be used as an instrument to control women by justifying increased surveillance of women as primary caregivers of children.

However, taking these criticisms into account, the "near universal ratification is a major accomplishment" (Freeman, 2000, p. 290), and is "a beginning and not a conclusion" (Freeman, 1992, p. 5). Most importantly the Convention:

Provides a comprehensive framework of civil, political, cultural, social, economic and humanitarian standards against which legislation, policies and practices can

---

26 The UNCRC has been ratified by all the State nations except two: United States of America and Somalia.
be measured and their ongoing compliance monitored. (Smith & Taylor, 2000, p. 12)

Although there are sometimes discrepancies between the rhetoric and the reality, the Convention has opened up a discursive space in which children are seen as autonomous individuals with rights that need safeguarding (James et al., 1998). The relevance of a children’s rights perspective to this rural childhood study lies in this discursive space with the perception of children as “both capable of and entitled to have a say in what is done to and for them” (Stainton Rogers, 2004, p. 134).

Key Relevant Childhood Studies Concepts

There are commonalities across these three theoretical domains: sociology of childhood; sociocultural studies; and the children’s rights perspective, which are incorporated within Childhood Studies. These include: recognition that childhood is a social construction; a focus on children’s agency; acknowledgement of the diversity of childhoods and that children are not a collective and undifferentiated class; a view of children as social actors who are interactive, creative, and who are both influenced by their social environment and influence it; and an awareness that children have a right to participate in the construction of their childhood.

Childhood is a Social Construction

The discussion thus far has highlighted, central to Childhood Studies, that childhood is influenced by the social and cultural context in which it occurs. This study of rural childhoods necessarily holds as a starting premise that there are multiple constructions of childhood, and of rural childhood, just as there are numerous social contexts:
If childhood is a social construction, then there are ‘childhoods’ rather than a single, universal, cross-cultural phenomenon. (Freeman, 1998, p. 438)

The relationship between social context and understandings about phenomenon, such as childhood, is conceptualised in the theoretical perspective of social constructionism. Its roots are in the symbolic interactionism paradigm, with its fundamental view that people construct their own and others’ identities, and everyday life through social interaction with each other (Burr, 2003; James & James, 2008). Essentially social constructionism can be defined as a “theoretical perspective that explores the ways in which ‘reality’ is negotiated in everyday life through people’s interactions and through sets of discourses” (James & James, 2008, p. 122). This theoretical position is also linked to sociocultural theory, which contends that individual development, social interaction and the cultural context in which these take place are integrally related (Rogoff, 1995, cited in Smith, 1998). There is a shared understanding in these theoretical perspectives that meaning is shaped by the cultural context.

A key feature of social constructionism is a critical stance toward ways of understanding the world that are taken-for-granted knowledge (Burr, 2003). Childhood Studies takes a critical approach to the traditional theoretical perspectives that have dominated understandings of childhood and involves having to “suspend a belief in a, or a willing reception of, its taken-for-granted meanings” (James et al., 1998, p. 27).

A social constructionist approach understands childhood and youth to be socially, rather than biologically determined, constantly contested within the bounds of a particular time and place. (Hinton, 2008, p. 288)

The historical, social, political and cultural context of childhood is shaped by existing, and particular, dominant discourses. ‘Discourse’ is a concept used extensively in social constructionist work that provides a way of making sense of differing views of childhood and children (Stainton Rogers, 2003).
The term 'discourse' is a contested one, which has generated a lot of debate amongst scholars as to its meaning and uses. It is used as a heuristic tool in the academic field of linguistics, with regard to language in use, and in social sciences, as denoting a form of social practice and source of insight into social relations (Cameron, 2001). In the context of this study I am using the concept of 'discourse' to mean:

A whole set of interconnected ideas that work together in a self-contained way, ideas that are held together by a particular ideology or view of the world ... each of which works from its own particular set of assumptions, offers its own explanation of 'how the world works' and incorporates its own set of values and ethics. (Stainton Rogers, 2003, p. 21)

Discourse is manifested through language (verbal and written) and serves to create reality, as language both produces and reflects social meaning (Burman, 1994). In this sense, reality is described as discursively constructed, "made and remade as people talk about things using the 'discourses' they have access to" (Cameron, 2001, p. 15). Invisible power in the form of social beliefs, ideology, values and consciousness (Veneklasen & Miller, 2002, cited in Hinton, 2008) perpetuates and refines the taken-for-granted knowledge as it is repeated through language. Childhood, and rural childhood, has evolved in accordance with the dominant discourses of the times, which have served to develop, shape, and reinforce the construct.

There are multiple discourses of childhood underpinning contemporary understandings, constructed through different sources of knowledge. These are not necessarily competitive, but neither are they inherently complementary (Jenks, 2004). Rather, they co-exist, with particular discourses evident in shaping social responses and practices at certain times. In particular situations, some kinds of discourse are more valued than others (Jenks, 2004) and consequently have greater influence. The discourses of childhood "comprise a fund of increasingly entrenched and thus increasingly conventional wisdom which shapes our perceptions of childhood, even within theory" (James et al., 1998, p. 9). This wisdom, through
discursive construction and repetition becomes part of the established taken-for-granted truth about childhood, informing and influencing social practices.

The discourses of childhood considered here, which are relevant to rural childhood, derive from Minority World societal views of children, dating from the introduction of the concept of childhood several centuries ago. Two of the most powerful and dominant discourses of childhood are the seemingly competing puritan and romantic discourses (James et al., 1998; Kehily, 2004; Montgomery, 2003).

**The puritan discourse.** This discourse views childhood as a time of evil and wildness, in which children are perceived as potentially wicked. A source of this view is the Christian belief of 'original sin', which was particularly emphasized by the Puritans, fervent Protestants, from the sixteenth century, who believed children were born both ignorant and sinful (Montgomery, 2003). This belief was espoused widely by the seventeenth century English philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, who perceived children to be born innately evil, unruly and anarchistic. The potential wickedness was thus accompanied by an anarchistic character portraying a child described by Jenks (2005) as the Dionysian child "in as much as it loves pleasure, it celebrates self-gratification and it is wholly demanding in relation to any object, or indeed subject, that prevents its satiation" (p. 63).27

The nature of children was seen to threaten not only their own well-being but also that of society, and there was a perceived danger of children joining bad company and establishing bad habits (James et al., 1998). Therefore, adults, especially parents, were required to be particularly vigilant, and control their children through education, moral guidance, strict discipline and punishment. Thus within this discourse, children need to be carefully controlled, regulated and disciplined (Stainton Rogers, 2003).

The puritan discourse is apparent today in concerns about unruly behavior of potentially 'out of control' children and young people, who are seen to require surveillance and

---

27 Dionysus is the Greek god (Bacchus in Roman mythology) associated with wine, revelry and nature (Jenks, 2005)
programmes of discipline and punishment (James et al., 1998). This is particularly relevant to young people in rural and small town New Zealand, where adults’ concerns about young people congregating in public spaces is apparent, and at times associated with antisocial activities (Panelli, Nairn & McCormack, 2002). A further example of this concern, frequently expressed in the New Zealand press media and by social commentators, is of a ‘boy racer’ culture in rural townships. Young people’s experience can include a sense of surveillance and social exclusion in small rural communities (Nairn et al., 2003).

The romantic discourse. This discourse, on the other hand, views childhood as a time of innocence and children as inherently good. It draws on the work of eighteenth century French philosopher Jean-Jaques Rousseau, who believed that children were born essentially good and wholesome and embodied a state of innocence and purity (Montgomery, 2003). Childhood is seen as a time of happiness, which is strongly equated with the natural world (Kehily, 2004). The natural world setting serves to allow children’s inherent, innocent nature to be free and unfettered, and helps to preserve that innocence. Jenks (2005) describes the child portrayed in this discourse as the Apollonian child “the heir to the sunshine and light, the espouser of poetry and beauty” (p. 64).28

Within this discourse children are seen as needing protection to retain and prolong their innocence and goodness. The ‘non-natural’ world, that is civilized society, is perceived to be a corrupting influence which will contaminate the purity of children. Because of the state of innocence childhood represents a condition that becomes lost or forgotten and thus is “worthy of defence (and susceptible to sentimentalization)” (James et al., 1998, p. 13). In addition to requiring protection of their innocence, children in this view, also require nurturing. In contrast to the consequences of the puritan discourse, “children in this image are not curbed or beaten into submission; they are encouraged, enabled and facilitated” (Jenks, 2005, p. 65).

This discourse is apparent today in the attitudes, policies and practices regarding children’s innocence, vulnerability and need for special protection. It can also be seen in the production of sentimental, romantic images of childhood, often in rural settings, that are used in the

28 Apollo is the Greek and Roman god associated with sunshine and light, music, poetry and beauty (Jenks, 2005)
promotion, marketing and support of innumerable products, services and ideological causes. The association of innocent, carefree children with the natural world gives this discourse particular relevance for rural childhood.

Children's Agency, Voice and Rights

Alongside the social structure of childhood, children as a collective social group receive attention in Childhood Studies. Agency is a central concept in the field of sociology, often debated in relation to the concept of structure. Viewing children as having agency, the capacity to act independently, positions them in a conceptually different way to previous theoretical accounts. Traditional views of children in which they were positioned as passive receivers of social information are reconstructed. Children are perceived to be both influenced by society, and also exerting influence over society.

Child developmental theories have tended to give weight to the role of heredity or of environment, or the interplay of the two. Meacham (2004) suggests that the aspect that has been neglected is the role of children's action in their own lives. The rationale given for this is in historical, social and cultural terms; social inequalities are maintained, and thus the status quo. Whilst warning against an over emphasis on any one of these three aspects Meacham (2004) advocates the proposition that “action, along with heredity and environment, is a third primary cause of children's development” (p. 72). The concept of children's action, or agency, complementary to existing notions of heredity and environmental influences, is central to Childhood Studies:

The new approach emphasizes children's agency and explores the various ways through which their interactions with adults and each other produces, reproduces, challenges and transforms the nature of childhood and society. (Leonard, 2005, p. 607)
An associated concept in Childhood Studies is that of children's voice, which is perceived as "an expression of agency" (Pufall & Unsworth, 2004, p. 9). Although the social sciences have long been interested in childhood, the voices of children have tended not to be heard (Prout & James, 1990). Children were conceptualised as lacking competence, including the capability to voice opinions of worth. Two particularly significant concerns about childhood and children are regarded by James (2004) as dominating the discussion in the maturing of Childhood Studies:

A concern about children's rights and interests and a collective desire to make children's own voices and views audible and recognized within the adult world. (James, 2004, p. 30)

A key premise in my study is that children are the experts in their own experience. It is not sufficient to ask adults for their perspectives on children's experience, although that may add another dimensional layer. Article Twelve of the UNCRC states that children have the right to voice an opinion in matters that affect them. This study focuses on gaining an understanding of children's experiences and constructions of rural childhood. Clearly this is a matter that affects the children whose lives are at the centre of it. It is essential that research into children's experience has children participating, and giving voice to their own experience.

We start with the assumption that children are agents and that they have voice even before they have words. These qualities thrust them immediately into the construction of their social reality and make them participants in the continued reconstruction of their agency. (Pufall & Unsworth, 2004, p. 15)

Current rhetoric about rural New Zealand childhood includes the notion of children's agency in the context that children living in the country 'make their own fun'. This is apparent in challenging social marginalisation and exclusion (Panelli et al., 2002). It is also an extension of the pioneering aspect of the rural myth, in which early New Zealanders were dependent on their own resources and initiative to survive and prosper. Rural children are
perceived as having this capacity to act in and on their environment, which is a source of pride.

Rural young people's agency is shaped, in part, by a range of factors, including social contexts, cultural discourses, spatial relations and personal biographies (Robson, Bell & Klocker, 2007). The discussion shifts in the following section from a theoretical focus on childhood to one on rurality, paving the way to exploring those factors and the links between them.

**Theorising Rurality**

Conceptualisations of rurality have been influenced by three significant theoretical frames (Cloke, 2006). These are: the functional concepts of rurality; political-economic concepts; and social constructions of rurality. The first of these frames identifies those functional elements of rural place and society that combine to create the concept of rurality. Rurality is thus broadly defined in terms of areas, which: have extensive land use for primary production (such as agriculture and forestry); small settlements identified as rural by residents; and "engender a way of life which is characterised by a cohesive identity based on respect for the environmental and behavioural qualities of living as part of an extensive landscape" (Cloke, 2006, p. 20).

However, Cloke (2006) warns against the automatic conflation of the rural with the agricultural in research, as this avoids the difficult issues that have come about with the blurring of city and country life, described in the previous chapter as having occurred in the New Zealand context. Conflation of the rural with agriculture tends to reproduce a rural urban dichotomy, rather than conceptually reflecting the indistinct and blurred nature of the two categories, urban and rural. This is more effectively demonstrated using a continuum model, with rural and urban at opposite poles and a sliding scale of differences.
The second frame uses political-economic concepts to clarify the rural in terms of the social production of existence. Within this frame functional areas are connected with the dynamics of national and international political economy. This is essentially perceived as aspatial, with what happens within rural areas being caused by factors operating outside of that locality (Cloke, 2006). This does conceptually blur the rural and the urban, but Cloke (2006) suggests that a consequence of this was a research focus on socio-economic structures across localities, particularly the changing nature of agricultural production, rather than a research focus on rurality. However, he also noted a rural dimension apparent to structural issues (citing Moseley, 1980), with characteristics including the pleasant physical environment that attracts people to live and work there, the spaced out geography that can cause accessibility problems and costly social services; and a distinctive local political ideology that favours the market and the self helper, rather than government intervention (Moseley, 1980, cited in Cloke, 2006).

Aspects of these first two frames are incorporated in this study in conceptualising environmental aspects of the rural context, that contribute to influencing experiences and constructions of rural childhood. As described in the previous chapter, rural New Zealand has undergone, and continues to undergo, rapid change. An integration of functional and political-economic aspects recognises the shifting dimensions of land use and varying means of social production occurring in different rural areas.

To avoid considering rurality and rural society in terms of an urban rural dichotomy, rural New Zealand is conceptualised in this study using the urban rural profile classification (Statistics New Zealand, 2004) outlined in the previous chapter. The integration of this with the political-economic aspects can be conceptualised, and visually represented, as occurring along two intersecting continuums (see Figure 2). The horizontal axis represents a continuum of rural environment in relation to urban influence, with opposing poles of most and least urban influence. The vertical axis represents a continuum of production and consumption in the rural sector, with opposing poles of primarily production (for example agriculture and forestry) and primarily consumption (means of social production that are not primarily land based production). This conceptualisation of functional and political-economic aspects is
relatively simple and does not attend to the complexities involved, but is useful in this study to highlight the diverse nature of rurality and the lack of clear cut segregation between rural and urban features in rural locations.

![Diagram showing production and consumption with urban and rural locations]

**Figure 2: Conceptualising rurality in functional and political-economic terms**

The third theoretical frame, outlined by Cloke (2006), draws on postmodern and post-structural ways of thinking, and involves social constructions of rurality. This frame is of particular relevance to my rural childhood study. Early academic approaches to the study of rural societies using modernist and scientific epistemologies treated rural society as a given; a naturally existing phenomenon that could be identified, measured, mapped and normalised (Panelli, 2006). Paralleling epistemological developments across the social sciences, including the study of childhood as outlined earlier, there has been a movement in rural studies toward understanding rurality and rural society in a more socioculturally nuanced way:

Postmodern and poststructuralist scholarship has approached rural societies as socio-cultural constructions, landscapes and texts that can be read for the meanings, values and politics associated with rural identities and the diversity of formations and change occurring in different rural societies. (Panelli, 2006, p. 63)
The espousal of a social constructionist frame for conceptualising rurality is part of what has been termed the cultural turn, which "represents a turn to the cultural, away from its fundamental core of concern for socio-economic change in rural space" (Cloke, 2006, p. 22). As with understandings of childhood discussed earlier in this chapter, social constructionism allows for multiple constructions of rurality and a critical stance toward taken-for-granted knowledge about it.

Panelli (2006) observes that this has meant people's lived rural experience can be understood in terms of the social meanings of rural myths and imaginings, as well as material and economic conditions. It also highlights the diversity of rural imagining and experience. Rural living has tangible affects on children's lives, spatially and temporally, for example, how they get to school, where they play, the organisation of their social worlds (Scott, Jackson & Backett-Milburn, 1998). However, it also has meanings that are socially constructed. There has been an emergent focus on sociocultural constructs of rurality and nature, and the imagined and actual lived experiences in these spaces. More nuanced rural studies contributed to and evolved from the cultural turn:

... with its heightened awareness of the constructed and contested notions of rurality, nature, landscape, difference, identity and otherness – including their constructions in lay, popular and academic discourse. (Panelli, 2006, p. 81)

The social constructionist theoretical frame has lead to "significant interest in how idyllised meanings are constructed, negotiated and experienced" (Cloke, 2006, p.21). The rural idyll is a particularly potent image, suffused with nostalgia, and increasingly used in consumerism. It is associated with:

... harmony, permanence, security, inner strength, refreshment and renewal ... family values, community cohesion, a respect for necessary authority and an emblematic nationhood – all set within surroundings that are aesthetically pleasing. (Short, 2006, p. 145)
However, as a review of Minority world rural childhoods literature demonstrates in the following chapter, the rural idyll is a contested term, and the realities of rural life are not necessarily compatible with it. The rural idyll appears to be the strongest construction associated with rural life, but other social constructions of rurality co-exist and contend with this.

**Conceptualising Rural Childhood**

The discussion thus far has clarified theoretical aspects integral to conceptualising rural childhood. The theoretical understandings of childhood and children that underpin this study have been articulated and a rationale provided for this choice. The use of social constructions to aid understanding of both the contexts of childhood and rurality has been discussed. The final section now looks at the intersections and linkages between children and rurality, before outlining a conceptual model of rural childhood that underlies this study.

**Children and Physical Space**

The starting place for this discussion is children’s relationship with, and to, physical space. This has been researched from different perspectives and a range of disciplines “with the main contributions coming from sociology, anthropology, geography and psychology” (James & James, 2008, p. 129). An area of interest in psychology, for example, has been how physical place impacts on children’s development and well being (Spencer & Blades, 2006). An illustration of this is the contention that, “basic research in environmental psychology is confirming people’s intuition that places are fundamental to the child’s developing self-concept and identity” (Spencer & Blades, 2006, p. 1). Interest from within sociology has tended to be more about how children understand and use spaces:

Place is more than simply a geographical location – it is a space imbued with social and cultural meanings. (James & James, 2008, p. 131)
The main source of theorising and research pertinent to children and physical space has been the field of children’s geographies. This is a relatively recent field, identified in the late twentieth century, addressing the gap in geography regarding children. Children’s geographies can be split two-fold into: that which draws on and informs psychological interest in children’s spatial cognition and mapping abilities; and that which draws on sociological interest in children as social actors (Holloway & Valentine, 2000). It is the latter sociologically oriented area that is of relevance to this study researching rural childhoods.

Holloway and Valentine (2000) suggest that the work in this sociological area can be organised into three sections; “the importance of place, everyday spaces and spatial discourses” (p. 9). Each of these sections will be briefly discussed.

**The importance of place.** Place is often understood as geographical location that is “space specific, bounded and unique” (Cummins, 2009, p. 60), in comparison to space, which is not a fixed, absolute place, but something that changes with social activity. “What begins as undifferentiated space becomes a place as we get to know it better and endow it with value” (Tuan, 1974, cited in Higham & Hinch, 2009, p. 217). Place is obviously a key issue in the context of this rural childhood study, with understandings of life in rural New Zealand incorporating aspects of both specific place and social space.

The social construction of childhood is temporally and spatially specific; it changes over time and place (Holloway & Valentine, 2000). A seventeenth century French historian, Phillipe Aries, was the first to challenge traditional assumptions about childhood, claiming that attitudes to children have changed over time and observing that social and historical context determine understandings of childhood. (Gittins, 2004; James & James, 2004; James et al., 1998; Jenks, 2005). Alongside time, place is another variable context, in which differences in the constructions of childhood are visible:

Literally, where children live will shape their experience of the world and the expectations placed on them. (Wells, 2009, p. 18)
Traditional theoretical approaches to the study of childhood have promoted the idea of a universal (although essentially Minority world) childhood, disregarding, or stigmatising characteristics of childhoods in other cultures which are seen in terms of deficit. Research has been undertaken in a range of geographical contexts redressing this perception; focusing on childhoods in different world contexts and drawing attention to cultural differences in constructions of childhood. Assumptions about childhood that have been regarded as ‘normal’, in accordance with the dominant theoretical discourses, have been shown to be far from normal in different contexts (Holloway & Valentine, 2000). For example, defining childhood in terms of economic dependency on adults or in relation to schooling is the norm for only a minority of children in specific places in the world (Walkerdine, 2004).

Furthermore, it is important to note that young people living in the same spatial location may have very different environments, experiences and social constructions of their worlds:

The Western tendency to view the world through sets of binary oppositions (for example culture–nature, culture–primitive and city–countryside ...) can obscure the considerable diversity of places. (Vanderbeck & Dunkley, 2003, p. 244)

The face of rural New Zealand has changed significantly over the years, and continues to do so. As previously discussed, rural and urban New Zealand are not distinct entities and there is considerable overlap between them. This is particularly noticeable in, but certainly not confined to, the rural areas closest to urban centres.

**Everyday spaces.** Spaces of everyday use feature in children’s geographies and childhood studies in terms of how children’s lives and identities are constructed (James et al., 1998). Children’s geographers have examined children’s access to, use of, and attachment to the public spaces and sites of everyday life, including; the street, playground, school and home (Holloway & Valentine, 2000). Horton and Kraftl (2006) emphasise the importance of attending to and critiquing the everydayness, the details of forms of children’s everyday life that are taken for granted. They contend that much of what happens goes un-noticed and that

---

29 This is elaborated on in the literature review, in the following chapter of this thesis.
“more work is needed to take these neglected, underestimated, or effaced parts of the worlds seriously, and into account” (Horton & Kraftl, 2006, p. 71). This study primarily focuses on children’s everyday lived experiences in rural environments, in seeking to increase understanding of how rural childhood is constructed, shaped and experienced.

Children’s experiences of everyday spaces are impacted on by the dominant discourses of childhood, discussed previously, particularly in public spaces, and adult mediation of them. Some children are seen as vulnerable and needing protection, as adults fear their exposure to dangers in public spaces, whilst simultaneously, other children are viewed as potentially unruly and needing to be kept under surveillance and control (Valentine, 1996). Thus, different social discursive constructions of childhood impact differently on children’s use of everyday spaces.

**Spatial discourses.** Specific discourses impact on children’s relationships with physical space and place. Holloway and Valentine (2000) make a link “between childhood as a discursive construction and a variety of spatial discourses” (p. 15), and consider the social construction of contemporary British childhood to be highly spatialised. They note that although the discursive understandings of children as angels (Romantic discourse/Apollonian children) or devils (Puritan discourse/Dionysian children) have produced contradictory ideas about children, they have the same spatial outcome. That is, home is considered the best place for children to be, whether because they are vulnerable and need protection or they are unruly and need to be controlled, and the street is not a desirable place.

The linking of constructions of childhood and spatial discourses is of key importance to my rural childhood study, as “our ideas about childhood and our ideas about different spaces/places inform one another” (Holloway & Valentine, 2000, p. 18). Rural childhood is ideologically located at the intersection of two powerful discourses; the spatial discourse of the rural idyll and the contemporary discourses of childhood. The intersection of these two social constructions provides “a vision of considerable potency” (Jones, 1997, p. 158).
There is a "widespread assumption that children have an affinity with the natural world that is somehow inherent to them being children" (James & James, 2008, p. 130). The veracity or accuracy of this assumption has been tested by Faber Taylor and Kuo (2006) who reviewed the empirical research literature. They tentatively concluded that "nature can promote healthy child development" (Faber Taylor & Kuo, 2006, p. 136). However, they also cautioned that a causal link has yet to be conclusively made to confirm the intuition that nature is good for children.

The supposed affinity children have with nature is recognisable as Rousseau’s legacy and a key strand of the Romantic discourse and Apollonian imagery underlying contemporary constructions of childhood.

In the context of the rural idyll, Apollonian conceptions of childhood merge with idealised understandings of the rural, to produce a new subtheme in rural discourse, the rural childhood idyll. (Holloway & Valentine, 2000, p. 17)

This discourse is potentially very powerful, shaping some parents’ decisions about where to raise their children, and contributing to wider policy neglect of children who may be facing difficulties in rural areas (Holloway & Valentine, 2000).

The merging of idyllic constructions of rurality with romantic notions of childhood, are further idealised when set in a rural New Zealand context. The mythologizing of rural experience and the strong place held by rural New Zealand in the national psyche, combine with the rural childhood idyll, to produce a particular construction of New Zealand rural childhood. This construction equates freedom, innocence, independence, and exploration, with the health giving properties of fresh air and sunshine, physical prowess, and the beauty, and taming, of nature.
Contemporary Issues

A contemporary issue of interest in Childhood Studies is the connections and intersections between global and local processes. Internationally boundaries are blurring between urban and rural areas, geographical locations, and childhood and adulthood. Some social commentators have lamented the disappearance of childhood, as images, providing information unfiltered by adults, are made available to children and adult alike (Lee, 2001). In addition to information, the media is saturated with advertising and marketing of products, casting children in the role of both consumers of child focused products and also potential adult customers (Aird, 2004). Some argue that children's innocence is being threatened and childhood is being destroyed, by technological innovations such as television and the internet, that make a wider range of information available to children (Buckingham, 2004).

Another problem is that the original notion of romantic childhood has become increasingly unsustainable in the era of urbanised, globalised, consumption, ICT based capitalism, and thus ideas of 'the end of childhood' (Postman, 1982), and a series of moral panics (Valentine, 1996) about childhood continue to unfold. (Jones, 2007, p. 194)

However, some theorists have argued that childhood is not disappearing, but is becoming more complex and ambiguous (Buckingham, 2004; Lee, 2001). At the same time, contemporary changes in family and employment, leading to issues for parents such as reskilling, life long education, and reconstituted families, are making the unfinished character of adults lives more visible (Prout, 2005). Both children and adults are in states of being and becoming.

The increasing complexity and ambiguity of childhood can be seen through a lens of globalisation. Recent reference has been made by theorists to the globalisation of childhood, economically and technologically (James & James, 2004; Wells, 2009).
Globalisation has done more for children than make the hamburger available worldwide. It has revealed a great diversity in childhood experiences, both inter- and intra-culturally, with television and other media providing visual evidence of this on an almost daily basis. (James & James, 2004, p. 29)

Local cultures are bound up with global processes, which are important in shaping children’s experiences in locations across the world (Holloway & Valentine, 2000). The global technological changes in cyberspace are affecting rural children’s lived experiences, further blurring the boundaries between rural and urban. Information and images from around the globe are available to all children, including rural children. Local worlds of childhood are made more visible to each other (Prout, 2005), and children are able to communicate with others beyond their local communities.

The urbanisation and indeed globalisation of cultural dissemination through broadcast and print media and especially the internet means that most seemingly rural places in the Western world are effectively culturally urbanised. (Cloke, 2006, p. 18)

**Conclusion – A Conceptual Model of Rural Childhood**

Rural childhood is conceptualised in this study as a social construction built on discursive and material meanings, and shaped by three main factors (see Figure 3). These factors, which interact with each other and contribute to constructing an understanding of rural childhood, are the social discourses related to rural childhood, the rural locality in which it takes place and children’s own lived experiences.

Social discourses of both childhood and rurality underlie perceptions and constructions of rural childhood. The romantic discourse of childhood is a particularly dominant one, and strongly associated with ideas about the natural world. It is compatible with the discourse of the rural idyll, providing idealised visions of harmonious and wholesome rural family life.
However, other discourses of childhood are also apparent, such as the puritan based discourse. This promotes a vision in which children are potentially disruptive to rural living, and consequently perceived as needing surveillance and monitoring.

Rural locality takes into account the material environment and the impact this has on constructions and experiences or childhood. It includes functional and economic-political conceptualisations of rural localities. The relationship of the area with production and consumption is taken into account, as well as the influence and proximity of urban areas, and distinctive local spatial practices.

Children’s actual lived experiences, incorporating social and individual elements, contribute to understanding and giving meaning to the construction of rural childhood. Children’s experiences are influenced by features of the specific locality in which they live, and by the social discourses about childhood that dominate understandings there. However,
their lived experiences also serve to shape the social environment around them and contribute to the constructions of rural childhood. As indicated previously, there is very little research in the New Zealand context about rural children's or rural families' everyday experiences. This is a significant gap that my study has been designed to redress.

The diagram of the conceptual model shows the three facets that together comprise rural childhood. It uses multidirectional arrows to demonstrate the interaction between them. Powerful societal discourses of childhood and rurality contribute to providing and limiting opportunities for children’s lived experiences. Likewise children’s experiences are constrained and facilitated by features of the locality in which they live. Discourses are shaped in part by local experience and knowledge, and vice versa. Importantly, children’s own experiences and use of agency impact on the world around them, influencing the environment, relationships and understandings associated with rural childhood. The wording at the bottom of the diagram indicates that the model is situated within the rural New Zealand context, emphasising the importance of this specific context in which constructions of rural childhood in this study are discursively and materially located. In addition to this, a range of social variables, such as gender, class and ethnicity, influence all the facets of rural childhood.

This chapter has discussed the theoretical perspectives at the heart of my study and articulated the conceptual model of rural childhood that underlies it. It provides a theoretical framework integrating the key aspects that contribute to shaping understandings of rural childhood, located within the specific New Zealand sociocultural context. The conceptual model emphasises children’s lived experiences in constructions of rural childhood. In keeping with the underlying theoretical perspective of Childhood Studies, a critical methodological aspect of this study is seeking children’s perspectives about their experiences. The research questions focus on gaining greater understanding of rural New Zealand childhoods from the perspectives of rural children and their parents. Before doing so, however, it is essential to review the research based literature, to ascertain current knowledge and identify gaps. The discussion thus far has indicated a gap in understandings of rural childhood in a New Zealand context. The following chapter reviews the literature relevant to understanding the social conditions and constructions of rural childhoods.
CHAPTER FOUR
Rural Childhoods Literature Review

Introduction

The primary aim of this chapter is to provide a thorough review of current research on constructions of rural childhood, and the experiences of children and families in rural New Zealand; outlining existing knowledge, identifying significant gaps, and integrating the research thematically, in relation to the New Zealand context and the current study.

Over recent years research studies focusing on the lives and experiences of rural children and young people have increased. The focus of the research attention has differed between the Majority world and the Minority world. The Minority world literature has focused on the constructions of rurality in relation to children's experiences, most notably the rural idyll. Alternative constructions of rurality, characterised by dullness and boredom, deprivation, and horror, have also been identified in relation to lack of rural activities, resources and transport, and issues of marginalisation and social exclusion. In contrast, Majority world research has primarily focused on rural children's work experiences. More recently Majority world research has focused on the impact of globalization, technological changes, migration and the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

There are four main sections to this literature review. The first, and largest, section looks at literature pertaining to rural childhoods in Minority world contexts, because the present research study is clearly located in such a context. Chapter Two of the thesis, locating my study in a New Zealand context, highlights the influence of European immigrants, particularly from Great Britain, on the development of the New Zealand rural society.

---

30 As previously noted the terms Majority and Minority world are used in reference to the "...world areas previously referred to with negative connotations (Third/First World) or with geographical inaccuracy (South/North, or East/West)" (Punch, 2001, p. 819). Like most dichotomies it is problematic, however, it provides a means of dividing the world into broad areas of economic privilege and poverty.
Following on from this, the second section provides a brief overview of the larger international context, including a summary of significant issues evident in the Majority world literature. There are some shared themes across the Minority and Majority rural childhood worlds, which are briefly discussed. The third part of this chapter focuses on New Zealand research based literature. It is clear from the discussion in the context chapter that a significant gap exists in the research with regard to rural families and childhood. This section reviews the small amount of relevant New Zealand research currently available. The fourth, and final, section in this chapter concentrates on children and young people’s agency and voice as demonstrated in the research based literature focusing on young rural lives.

The aim of my research is to advance knowledge and understanding about the constructions and experiences of rural childhood and life for rural families in New Zealand. This chapter concludes by discussing the relevance of the literature reviewed to my study, in light of what is currently known of rural childhood and family life in New Zealand, identifying gaps and discussing the role of my study in addressing these.

**Rural Childhoods in Minority World Contexts**

Academic interest in rural childhoods in Minority world contexts is a relatively recent development, although children have long been present in research and literature relating to other aspects of geography, place and environment (Matthews & Limb, 1999).\(^{31}\) This earlier body of work on children’s environments, mostly from within geography, includes studies on children’s cognition, competence, behaviour, attachment to, access to and use of space (Valentine, 1997). However, these studies tended to neglect children’s social and cultural positioning, and by the early 1990s some geographers were calling for changes in the way children were viewed in geography and greater inclusion of children, with further exploration of relevant issues (James, 1990; Sibley, 1991; Winchester, 1991). Research on children’s geographies, notably in the ‘fourth environment’ (the places where children spend time, but

---

\(^{31}\) For example, over 800 references to children were recorded in a book by Matthews (1992) entitled ‘Making sense of place: Children’s understanding of large scale environments’ (cited in Matthews & Limb, 1999).
not home, school or playground) are one response to this call (Matthews, Taylor, Sherwood, Tucker & Limb, 2000), and are set within the context of Western urban societies (Matthews & Limb, 1999).

Research attention in the past has focused on urban children, so that the study of children growing up in the countryside has been called a ‘hidden geography’ (Matthews et al., 2000). Rural children have historically been marginalised in research, both in respect of being children and of living in rural locations. They are part of the rural ‘other’ - “peoples other than white, middle class, middle aged, able-bodied, sound minded, heterosexual men” (Philo, 1992, p. 193).

Recent research on rural children’s lives and experiences redresses the earlier focus on adult interests (Matthews et al., 2000; McCormack, 2000a; Valentine, 1997). However, only ten years ago, Matthews et al. (2000) argued that there was “still no coherent geography of children in the countryside, especially that which draws upon their disparate lifeworlds” (p. 142). More recently others have contended that there is little sociological research on rural life from the perspective of children (Cummins, 2006), particularly those who live on farms (Cummins, 2009; Riley, 2009).

Integral to children’s geographies and socioculturally based studies of childhood is the awareness that cultural contexts shape understandings of rural living and childhood (Panelli, Punch & Robson, 2007). A dominant theme apparent in the literature is the construction and deconstruction of the rural idyll, in relation to the experiences of children and family life. Alternative constructions include rural dull, rural horror and rural deprivation. These constructions of rurality are used in this review as a conceptual framework to organise the Minority world literature.

The Rural Idyll

Perhaps the place-based narrative most often addressed in the geographical literature on childhood and youth is the so-called ‘rural idyll’, the belief that the
countryside provides safe, healthy, and innocent childhoods lived in harmony with nature. (Vanderbeck & Dunkley, 2003, p. 246)

The roots of the rural idyll are apparent historically in the symbolic depictions of European Arcadian ideals of rural peace, relaxation, social harmony, material wealth and comfort, and honest simplicity in pastoral settings (Swaffield & Fairweather, 1998). The rural idyll has both aesthetic and moral components (Kraak & Kenway, 2002). The aesthetic, picturesque elements relate to the natural, physical environment as characterised by trees, fields and open spaces, while the moral component relates to the vision of a close knit, harmonious community, free from stress, danger and the corruptions of urban life (Valentine, Holloway, Knell & Jayne, 2008).

Various bodies of discourse, particularly in the United Kingdom, portray rural childhood as an ideal childhood (Jones, 1997) and the countryside as a better place for bringing up children (Little & Austin, 1996; Valentine 1997). Romantic visions underpin these views of childhood, nature and the countryside (Jones, 1995). A rural setting, with its emphasis on the natural, is perceived as enhancing, protecting and prolonging the English portrayal of childhood as a time of innocence (Ward, 1988). The emphasis on the preservation of childhood innocence is particularly potent in comparison to portrayals of childhood in urban settings. Ward's (1988) seminal book portrayed a “purified identity of rural childhood, uncontaminated by urban influences which muddy and confuse the image” (p. 18).

Popular discourse plays an important part in the creation and dissemination of the idealised vision of natural, free and innocent life in the countryside. The rural childhood idyll is perpetuated, partly through cultural structures such as art, literature and all forms of media (Jones, 1995, 1997). Stories depicting rural childhoods, and stories written for children, celebrate the countryside as a rural idyll and the best place for children (Jones, 1997) and present images and messages that serve to perpetuate these interpretations of the rural (Matthews et al., 2000).
Country childhoods are seen powerfully in terms of a synthesis of innocence, wildness, play, adventure, the companionship of other children, contact with nature, agricultural spaces and practices, healthiness, spatial freedom and freedom from adult surveillance. (Jones, 1997, p. 162)

Deconstructing this rural idyll has been “a core concern of the new rural studies of childhood” (McKendrick, 2000, p. 374). Recent studies have explored children’s heterogenous rural lives, in multiple contexts, and interrogated ideas and imaginings apparent in popular discourses of the rural idyll. Idealised constructions of rural childhoods have been juxtaposed with constraints that children must negotiate (Panelli et al., 2007).

Ideal setting for family life. A significant aspect of the rural idyll is the imagining of the countryside as an ideal setting for family life. Studies have explored the prevalence of this imagining in English literature, lifestyle magazines and children’s toys (Jones, 1997). English and American studies have found that parents perceive rural living as better and safer for children (Little & Austin 1996; Struthers & Bokemeier 2000), with the English parents contending there is more space for children to play, more opportunities for environmental exploration, prolonged childhood innocence and greater freedom (Little & Austin, 1996; Valentine, 1997).

Freedom. The notion of children’s freedom is central to rural idyllic visions of childhood and family life (Little & Austin 1996; Valentine 1997), as shown in an Australian study exploring children’s engagement with play and physical activity in their environments (MacDougall, Schiller & Darbyshire, 2009). This study found that rural children had larger boundaries of exploration around and away from their houses, relative to urban children, and thus showed greater spatial freedom. However, findings from this and other Minority world studies have contested different aspects of the notion of freedom. Freedom to participate in leisure activities for children in English, American and Australian rural areas is often dependent on a parent (usually the mother) providing transport (Little & Austin, 1996; MacDougall et al., 2009; Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000; Valentine, 1997).
The countryside in Great Britain is becoming more inaccessible to its residents and “the spaces for rural children’s play are becoming increasingly commodified, privatized and institutionalized” (Smith & Barker, 2001, p. 169). Children’s environmental freedom is constrained by landowners enforcing trespass laws to keep children off their property, the loss of rural areas and the allure of indoor entertainments, such as television, computers and other electronic devices (Valentine, 1997).

Children’s spatial movement in England is further restricted by parents concerned about the countryside being a particularly dangerous place for children (Valentine, 1997). In response to perceived threats to safety, parents restricted children’s movements, structured their time and drove them to organised activities.

Safety. An elite ideal, within the rural idyll, is that the countryside should be a crime free place to live (Yarwood, 2001). In Valentine’s (1997) English study, however, parents perceived a range of dangers for children in rural areas, including from criminals. The perceived dangers included concerns arising from exposure to global media, for example, national and international cases of child murder. Some perceived dangers were related to urban environments, for example, stranger danger, abduction, and traffic problems caused by speeding cars, narrow lanes and lack of footpaths. Parents also had local concerns, for example, rural demonised strangers, known previous village cases of sexual crimes, and groups of teenagers with nothing to do intimidating children. Similarly, due to “global issues in combination with local reality and experiences” (Fabiansson, 2007, p. 46), young people in an Australian study did not feel safe in their local, rural environment after dark, despite feeling safe during the day.

A North American study found parents were ambivalent about children’s safety. They indicated a belief that their children were safer as a consequence of living rurally, but also described experiences, such as instances of child abuse and inadequate child care, which illustrated lack of safety (Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000).
Despite the concerns expressed by parents for children and the subsequent restrictions and constraints placed on them, parents, in these English and American studies, considered a rural environment a safer place for their children to grow up than an urban one (Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000; Valentine, 1997). These studies demonstrate how parents can understand the rural as simultaneously both safe and dangerous (Nairn et al., 2003).

The rural idyll is particularly potent compared to the urban, including aspects of safety. Most parents in a study in the American mid-west, when discussing raising children rurally, stressed the positive aspects of rural living by comparing safety in their rural area favourably to the city (Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000). Similarly, the rural was constructed as safer for young people in England in relation to alcohol consumption. Valentine et al. (2008) found that binge drinking of alcohol by young people, which adults associated with disorder and unruly behaviour, was constructed as an urban problem, giving rural residents a sense of safety around this. Young people’s drinking of alcohol was normalised, with the social context of the rural and the local pub being portrayed as a safe place for socialising. This contrasts sharply, however, with other international studies, for example, in England (Meek, 2008), America (Dunkley, 2004) and Australia (Kraak & Kenway, 2002), which have highlighted the relationship between young people’s alcohol and drug consumption and social problems in rural areas, at times contributing to their social exclusion from public space. American studies also indicate that some health risk behaviours, including drinking alcohol, may be greater for rural young people than for those in urban locations (Atav & Spencer, 2002; de Haan & Boljevac, 2009).

There has been little exploration of safety and danger in rural environments from younger children’s perspectives. However, the previously cited Australian study in which rural children’s spatial freedom was evident, also found that rural children aged eight to ten years old demonstrated knowledge of danger in the natural environment, and used this to determine specifically where it was safe to play (MacDougall et al., 2009).

**Community.** Community is an important notion for rural dwellers (Liepins, 2000; Nairn et al., 2003), and contributes significantly to the construction of the rural idyll. Within the
multiple constructions of rurality, in the English setting, “perhaps the most powerful imagining is of the rural as a peaceful, tranquil, close knit community” (Valentine, 1997, p. 137). In New Zealand, community is often revered in positive and idyllic terms (Panelli et al., 2002) and English rural lay discourses similarly use ‘community’ to convey a sense of belonging (Halfacree, 1993).

Parents in American and English studies also mobilise popular representations of the rural idyll as a supportive community, in response to fears about children’s safety (Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000; Valentine, 1997), despite experiencing ongoing difficulties with issues such as finding child care, and fear of bad groups and negative influences on their children (Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000). The sense of sameness in constructions of community is also simultaneously fractured by the representations of ‘other’ including differentiation by class, age, and status as ‘incomers’ (recent arrivals) or long-term residents (Valentine, 1997).

Constructions of the New Zealand rural community as an emotionally harmonious, safe and peaceful space may be challenged by women’s experiences of fear in rural spaces, but the notion of community can also be mobilised to provide support and security in the face of fear (Panelli, Little & Kraak, 2004). However, constructions of community can be rigid, narrowly defined and exclusive which can lead to a focus on danger coming from sources external to the community thereby failing to recognise danger from within the community.

**Natural world.** Rural areas represent easy access to nature and the natural world (Haugen & Villa, 2006). Rural life is seen to be closer to the world of nature and therefore more natural, with freedom and the opportunity to explore outdoors as key features (Aitken, 1994).

McCormack (2000b) contends that nature is a highly contested and politicised term, citing Barnes and Gregory (1997) that nature has come to be understood as “something to dominate, something to be dominated by, and something to live in harmony with’ (p. 14). The latter meaning fits with the views of children in a New Zealand study, who were found to frequently interact with natural spaces in rural areas (McCormack, 2000a). These New Zealand children’s experiences contrast with those of young people in an English study (Matthews et
al., 2000), where participants sought out urban-like spaces and expressed dislike of natural spaces, thus challenging the assumption of an affinity between rural childhoods and nature.

Farm children. There is a lack of research specifically about farm children. Most studies of rural childhood focus on issues associated with children living rurally, not on farms. However, two recent studies concentrate on the experiences and perspectives of farm children in the United Kingdom (Riley, 2009) and Canada (Cummins, 2009).

These studies with farming families reflected on the experiences of farm children and the attachments and identities that they may be able to form, associated with greater access to land and land based practices:

To them, the farm space is not simply a space of work or play, but one that is imbued with emotion and one that embodies their personal and family history. (Riley, 2009, p. 256)

Farm children were found in both these studies to engage with the farm, in terms of commonly being involved with farm work and temporally, in terms of attachment through personal and family history (Cummins, 2009; Riley, 2009). Continuity of the family farm was important to some parents and children in the United Kingdom study, as they expressed understandings that children would someday take over the farm. Most children in the Canadian study, on the other hand, did not intend to farm, despite a sense of attachment and being interested in living rurally as adults. These children valued the way of life associated with farm living, including the access to space and animals, but some experienced loneliness too.

A unique component of farm life is close family work relationships, with rural fathers having greater contact with their children than urban fathers (Cummins, 2009). Fathers in a North American study valued the ability to spend more time with their family, perceiving that this benefitted them all, as fathers get to be close to their children and children gain important skills (Zepeda & Kim, 2006). Parents in this latter study also expressed concern about their
children's safety near machinery on farms, although fathers thought children could be taught safety protocols.

Children living on farms demonstrate multiple and fluid identities (Cummins, 2009; Riley, 2009), in different places, for example, home and school. In the school context children were required to negotiate the rural urban dichotomy, as they attended schools in nearby towns. A gender difference was noted in this aspect, in that girls tended to “replay narratives associated with the rural idyll” (Riley, 2009, p. 253), whereas boys identified more with the farm and being a farmer.

**Gendered nature of rural childhood.** Jones (1999) argues that the equation of nature, innocence and childhood has led to the construction of the ‘natural’ state of childhood being male. Popular, literary accounts of rural childhood see boys out in the countryside, wild and innocent, able to be at one with nature, whilst girls can only participate in this imagined, idyllic, natural childhood by becoming a tomboy, a quasi-male, honorary boy (Jones, 1999).

Historical studies in New Zealand, Australia and the American mid-west, demonstrate that girls were traditionally involved in both domestic and outdoor family farm work (Goodyear, 1998; Hunter & Riney-Kehrberg, 2002; Toynbee, 1995). However, by the early 20th century there was increasing pressure to exchange usefulness for dutiful behaviour, and girls became increasingly excluded from outdoor farm activities (Hunter & Riney-Kehrberg, 2002). The gender division between male and female farm jobs continues to be strongly reinforced in Britain (Riley, 2009; Wallace, Dunkerly, Cheal & Warren, 1994), and in Canada, with girls frequently excluded from acquiring important agricultural, for example technological, knowledge (Cummins, 2009; Leckie, 1996). Children’s perceptions of gender roles in rural idyllic and agrarian contexts were typically circumscribed:

Boys as farmers and tree climbers, and girls as willing helpers on the farm—and more traditional in their future vocational aspirations—are part of socially constructed identities. (Cummins, 2009, p. 80)
The gendered image of the countryside, with predominantly male symbols and activities, may mean that girls feel less comfortable in this social context (Rye, 2006). Girls’ use of recreational space within rural areas in a United Kingdom study was found to be disadvantaged, as boys gained and maintained social control over play space (Tucker & Matthews, 2001). This is in contrast to the imaginings of the rural idyll, with findings demonstrating “geographies of anxiety, tension and disharmony” (Tucker & Matthews, 2001, p. 162), as the space is contested through conflict with boys, as well as with adults and other groups of young people.

Australian and Norwegian studies indicate that young males are catered for and supported to a greater extent than young females in rural communities (Fabiansson, 2007; Haugen & Villa, 2006). However, despite this perceived social advantage for young rural males, another Australian study found that risk taking behaviour and danger, particularly associated with cars and speed, is a feature of life for young males in some rural towns, and an important aspect of their masculine identities (Kraak & Kenway, 2002). This was endorsed in the United States where some rural towns have developed a culture of protection for girls, who have no sanctioned safe public space, and no boundaries for boys (Dunkley, 2004).

**Rural idyll as commodity.** In some Minority world settings, such as New Zealand and Great Britain, rurality has become a commodity which is marketed to, and actively sought by, middle class migrants attracted to the idyllic rural vision (Swaffield & Fairweather, 1998; Valentine & Holloway, 2001). A key feature of the rural idyll is an increasing reliance on the notion of exclusion and selectivity, in which the imaginings of the rural idyll are created by the wealthy and for the enjoyment of the wealthy, thus reflecting power relations in society (Little & Austin, 1996). Important influential groups construct and sustain notions about these imaginings, and seek to protect their lifestyle by excluding those who threaten it (Valentine et al., 2008). Concerns with regard to low income English rural families are in contrast with, and subordinate to, the influx of wealthy incomers and early retirees who are a powerful group with dominant interests (Davis & Ridge, 1997). However, the rural urban dichotomy, that is presumed to exist in the notions of the rural idyll, is being troubled by the flows of people, information and influences between the urban and rural areas (Valentine et al., 2008).
Rural Dull

The ‘peacefulness’ and ‘tranquillity’ that adults value so much in the rural idyll, may just be boring to teenagers. (Rye, 2006, p. 411)

Lægran (2002) comments that in Norway there are two competing representations of the rural - “the rural as an idyll: beautiful, safe, healthy and harmonious; and the rural as dull: traditional, backward and boring” (p. 158).

Some young people in Great Britain regard rural areas as places with nothing to do, claustrophobic and restrictive (Davis & Ridge, 1997; Matthews et al., 2000; Tucker, 2003; Valentine & Holloway, 2001). Typically, younger children expressed more positive views of rural lifestyle, with signs of growing dissatisfaction as they became older (Giddings & Yarwood, 2005; Matthews et al., 2000). Rural communities are seen as being better places for children than young people (Glendinning, Nuttall, Hendry, Kloep & Wood, 2003), although some dissatisfaction has been found amongst primary school aged children as they are increasingly restricted in areas for play in the countryside (Smith & Barker, 2001).

The increasing dissatisfaction of young people living rurally in the United Kingdom is accompanied by a greater proportion wanting to live in town (Davis & Ridge, 1997). Likewise, Norwegian studies have found a tendency for young people to leave and move to cities and urban areas (Haugen & Villa, 2006). Scandinavian studies have shown that young people living in rural areas “often experience tension between identification with the local community and a desire to reach out for education and to see the world” (Lægran, 2002, p. 158). For some New Zealand young people the rural is a place to escape from, whilst others demonstrate a strong commitment to it as a place to live, highlighting both the poverty and the possibilities for young people living in rural towns (Smith et al., 2002).

Studies from countries in the Minority world highlight young people’s ability to manage seemingly inconsistent aspects of rural living. Rural youth in a Norwegian study presented a version of rural life in which characteristics of rural idyll and rural dullness were
acknowledged without contradiction (Rye, 2006). Similarly an Australian study found that some young people viewed the rural community as supportive and caring, while others perceived it as boring (Fabiansson, 2007). In an American study young people “aligned themselves with particular public narratives of ‘rural’ and ‘urban’ and distanced themselves from others” (Vanderbeck & Dunkley, 2003, p. 255), actively constructing their own social identities, with a country identity generally viewed as being inferior.

Social exclusion. Social exclusion can be a feature of rural living, whereby young people feel powerless and disenfranchised (Davis & Ridge, 1997; Matthews et al., 2000). Rural New Zealand young people are less likely to be consulted and to participate in community life than urban young people (Freeman, Sligo & Nairn, 2003). Studies with young people in a range of Minority world countries found they can feel observed, under surveillance, and singled out for disapproval and intolerance, with their visibility in small communities being compounded by a lack of space (Davis & Ridge, 1997; Lægran, 2007; Leyshon, 2002; Panelli et al., 2002; Shucksmith, 2004; Weller, 2003).

The idea that everybody knows each other in rural communities, which can be expressed as a positive factor in the rural idyll, particularly when mobilising notions of community with regard to safety, can also be a negative factor for young people where the social fabric is both caring and controlling (Rye, 2006). Studies highlight negative perceptions of rural communities as intrusive, constraining and controlling, with this being felt more strongly by girls and young women, than boys and young men (Glendinning et al., 2003; Haugen & Villa, 2006).

British rural young people who were interviewed indicated that, like their urban counterparts, they seek locations where they can be seen by other young people, but away from the adult gaze (Giddings & Yarwood, 2005; Matthews et al., 2000). Matthews et al. (2000) perceive this as young people trying to create mini-urban spaces in these rural villages. Gatherings of young people can be perceived by adults in the community as disruptive and threatening (Kraak & Kenway, 2002; Yarwood & Gardner, 2000). There can be
confrontations with other young people and adults over contested social space, and a feeling of not being a part of the community (Matthews et al., 2000; Tucker & Matthews, 2001).

Many rural villages in the Minority world are desolate places for young people, characterised more often by spatialities that exclude, marginalise and persecute. (Matthews & Tucker, 2007, p. 105)

These issues are typical of many childhoods, but Matthews et al. (2000) point out that a distinguishing feature of rural childhoods is a sharp disjunction between the symbolism of a rural upbringing, the rural idyll created by adults for adults, and the realities and experiences of growing up in rural communities. In addition, the isolation and lack of a public voice experienced by rural young people compound the problems of criminalisation and surveillance in public space, and leave them more vulnerable to exclusion than their urban counterparts (Valentine et al., 2008).

Technological developments, such as information and communication technologies, have been perceived as having the potential to expand rural children and young people’s economic and employment opportunities, and social and spatial horizons (Valentine & Holloway, 2001). However, children and young people use the internet for purposes relevant to their current experiences, for example, to increase social capital with their off-line friends, and to extend their repertoire of identities in their local community, rather than extending globally as adults had imagined they would (Lægræn, 2002; Valentine & Holloway, 2001).

**Rural Deprivation**

This hegemonic idyll is so powerful, Cloke (1994) argues, that it renders terms like ‘rural poverty’ or ‘rural deprivation’ as culturally illegible, since life in the country can never be ‘poor’ or ‘deprived’. (D. Bell, 2006, p. 152)
James (1990) argues that the urban-rural myth obscures the fact that rural areas have various problems including deprivation, poverty, agricultural decline, unemployment, housing, transport and lack of service provision. The dominance of the idealised rural version in popular discourse means that ‘other’ versions, such as those including rural poverty or rural deprivation are denied (D. Bell, 2006).

The literature indicates a tendency for poverty in rural areas in the United Kingdom to be hidden in various ways (Davis & Ridge, 1997; Little & Austin, 1996). The notion of the rural idyll excludes poverty, and the persistence of this popular notion contributes to keeping it concealed. Even when poverty and deprivation are acknowledged, and linked to poor wages and exploitation, the traditional rural community is constructed as a place of solidarity and happiness (Little & Austin, 1996). The rural idyll “portrays the countryside not only as an ideal place to live, but as an antidote to urban deprivation” (Davis & Ridge, 1997, p. 9).

While some children, in particular younger children, experience many benefits of rural life, some children and young people, particularly those from low income families, experience increased difficulties (Davis & Ridge, 1997). Rural communities can have a lack of social, recreational, sport, welfare, mental health and built resources and alternatives for young people (Boyd, Hayes, Wilson & Beasley-Smith, 2008; Dunkley & Panelli, 2007; Haugen & Villa, 2006; Heflinger & Christens, 2006; Lee & Abbott, 2009). For example, an English study found that youth drinking in pubs and informal spaces is not only tolerated but often regarded as normal behaviour by adults, who are aware that there are limited other social opportunities (Valentine et al., 2008).

Other difficulties in Great Britain include inadequate transport, limited access to facilities and scarcity of resources, as well as competition and conflict between groups of young people, and increasingly with adults, where resources and space are at a premium (Davis & Ridge, 1997; Tucker & Matthews, 2001; Weller 2003). Some of the inconveniences caused by geographical location can be overcome where there is sufficient affluence and mobility, but for those on low incomes this has implications for limiting participation and increasing
exclusion. The interplay between issues of transport, employment and housing can exacerbate and compound disadvantages for young people living rurally (Shucksmith, 2004).

A recent Canadian study points out that information about young people who experience rural homelessness is virtually absent, despite the number of homeless youth who have rural origins (Skott-Myhre, Raby & Nikolau, 2008). An Australian study is cited; “rural homelessness is often neglected as it is invisible to the general population and not consistent with the rural idyll” (Beer et al., 2003, cited in Skott-Myhre et al., 2008, p. 89).

Vanderbeck and Dunkley (2003) contend that “while the rural idyll has seemingly played a central role in defining United Kingdom expectations of rural childhoods, its application in the United States context is problematic” (p. 246). They note there are multiple rural identities in America, and that these are most likely to be perceived as inferior and stigmatised, and often associated with poverty and deprivation. Poverty in rural America is perhaps less hidden than in other Minority world countries, such as the United Kingdom, following the 1980s Great Farm Crisis in the American Midwest, which resulted in the emergence of massive economic and social costs (Elder & Conger, 2000). The poverty rates for children increased dramatically, and children living in rural areas became disproportionately at risk for experiencing poverty (Cochrane et al., 2003).

Rural America presents two faces to the larger society, the appeal of agricultural life, especially for children, and a portrait of chronic, debilitating poverty. (Elder & Conger, 2000, p. 8)

Many of the stressors faced by rural, poor families are non-economic, but endemic poverty accentuates most of the conditions experienced (Wijnberg & Reding, 1999).

Constructions of childhood in Minority world contexts contain a view of children as vulnerable, requiring protection and a range of guidance and services (Halliday, 1997; Valentine, 1997; Valentine & Holloway, 2001). In rural areas in the United States these are lacking or difficult to access (De Marco, 2008; Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000). Poverty and
rural residence in the United States present unique challenges in service delivery for quality child care, education, welfare, health and leisure (Cochrane et al., 2003; De Marco, 2008; Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000). Working parents face concerns about the lack of support services, such as quality childcare, available for children (Cochrane et al., 2003; Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000). These concerns are found in England too, including: the limited and primarily voluntary nature of local services, typically limited preschool and childcare availability, the multiple nature of maternal responsibilities, and the multifaceted nature of service provision, where the child's socialisation is paramount but not the sole consideration (Halliday, 1997).

Lack of community resources, transportation issues and the unavailability of recreational activities also affect leisure time and activities for American rural families (Churchill, Clark, Prochaska-Cue, Cresswell & Ontai-Grzebik, 2007; Trussel & Shaw, 2007). The effort involved in organising recreational activities, which are also influenced by farming demands, weather and work schedules, can mean increased stress, frustration and fatigue (Trussel & Shaw, 2007). There can be limited opportunities for social interaction for farm children because of the distances involved, and the constraints of a heavy workload (Larson & Dearmont, 2002).

**Rural Horror**

The rural is threatening here because it is potentially wild – as are its people.

(D. Bell, 2006, p. 152)

D. Bell (1997) draws attention to the different emotional connotations of rural between Britain and North America, by contrasting the settled landscape of English villages with the frontier life and the ‘Old West’ that is part of American rural history, along with American small towns and farms. The United States had an ambivalent relationship with nature, and the American West was far wilder, vaster and more threatening than England’s neat fields and hedgerows (Goodyear, 1998). The countryside can thus be constructed as wild and potentially
violent (D. Bell, 2006). Horror movies are frequently situated in the countryside, for example *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Deliverance*, and in an inverse of the rural idyll, the victim tends to be urban, whilst the setting and the horror, or monster, are rural (D. Bell, 1997).

Similarly, across Minority world countries the rural is the setting for classic children’s stories and fairytales that have frightening or horror filled plots. Despite rural idyllic imaginings of adults, children may see the country as dark and frightening, rather than safe and welcoming (Scott, Jackson & Backett-Milburn, 1998).

Beyond the book page and cinema screen, as the rural becomes increasingly selective and exclusive (Little & Austin, 1996), people who do not fit middle class rural imaginings, for example ‘hillbillies’, are seen as wild and potentially destroying the rural environment (D. Bell, 2006). In this construction the rural and those within it are regarded as in need of taming, domestication and containment.

The conflation of romantic notions of childhood and rurality produced a rural childhood idyll that has been the focus of rural childhood study in Minority world contexts. The rural childhood literature, particularly in the United Kingdom, has been dominated by studies focused on exploring and deconstructing the rural idyll. The literature indicates that the rural childhood idyll conflicts with other representations of rural living for children and families. Studies have revealed the dull aspects of rural living, particularly for young people, who can experience marginalisation and social exclusion. The rural idyll can serve to conceal poverty and deprivation in rural areas. This is perhaps more noticeable in a United States context, where social discourses of rural inferiority are more prevalent than rural idealism.

**Majority World Rural Childhoods Literature**

There has been a different focus of research in Majority world contexts. While the Minority world research is the most relevant for my research study, an awareness of the key issues in Majority world based research adds a global perspective and broadly contextualises rural
childhood issues. To this end, a brief overview of the key issues for children in rural Majority world contexts, as indicated by recent research, follows.\textsuperscript{32}

Majority world research has primarily focused on urban children and young people, despite most people living in rural areas (Panelli et al., 2007). There are specific issues which have a significant effect on children and families living in rural Majority world areas. Rural dwellers generally have less access to basic services including school, medical, sanitation, electricity, transport and communication services (for example, see Pillay, 2003; Punch, 2004, 2007a), and health issues (particularly child malnutrition and mortality rates) have a significant impact (Ansell, 2005). Great diversity exists across Majority world rural settings, although this is often overlooked with the tendency to contrast urban with rural contexts (Bushin, Ansell, Adriansen, Lähteenmaa & Panelli, 2007).

The main focus of the research on rural childhoods in Majority world contexts has been on productive and reproductive work, which is a feature of life and family survival for many children and young people (Katz, 1991, 2004; Panelli et al., 2007; Robson, 2004).\textsuperscript{33} Studies have looked at children's lives in relation to work (Abebe, 2007; Abebe & Kjørholt, 2009; Admassie, 2003), schooling (Cao, 2008; Katz, 2004; Punch, 2004) and economic developments (Kielland & Tovo, 2006), as well as the overlap between the different facets of children's lives at home, school, work and play (Beazley, 2007; Katz, 1991, 2004; Robson, 2004). Ethnographic studies have demonstrated a continual overlap between work and play in rural children’s lives (Katz, 1991; Punch, 2001), and revealed the lack of clear distinctions between paid and unpaid work, or home and workplace (Punch, 2002).

Research has also focused on the changing circumstances for children and young people in Majority world countries, as a consequence of globalization, technological and economic changes (Abebe, 2007; Abebe & Kjørholt, 2009; Penn, 2001; Punch, 2007b), migration

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{32} This is not an exhaustive review and the references cited in relation to Majority world research literature are representative, to provide recent, relevant examples. The focus in this literature review is Minority world contexts and an in-depth review of Majority world research is beyond the scope of this thesis.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{33} Productive work is “work, for profit or family gain in cash, or in kind”, while reproductive work is “unpaid work that sustains family life” (Levison & Murray-Close, 2005, p. 616), for example domestic tasks, chores and childcare.}
(Ansell, 2004; Carpena-Mendez, 2007; Pribilsky, 2001; Punch, 2002, 2007b; Taracena, 2003) and the HIV/AIDS epidemic (Nyambedha & Aagaard-Hansen, 2003; Robson, 2000; Xu et al., 2009; Young & Ansell 2003). These rapidly changing circumstances contribute to both geographical and social changes for children and young people. The literature highlights the physical and social constraints in children’s lives as well as the active roles children play in family and community life.

Commonalities Between World Contexts

Using a Minority/Majority world division allows for the conceptual organisation of the literature. However, it is important to note that a limitation is clearly apparent in the use of these broad binaries, which dissect the globe, as “the world is not so neatly separated into clear cut and mutually exclusive categories” (Robson, Panelli & Punch, 2007, p. 221). Beyond the binary are diversity and commonalities, both between and within countries.

There are clearly differences in the material realities for children living within each world context. Massive inequalities and differences in cultural expectations, exist between countries, between urban and rural areas, and between specific locations. Focusing on the rural location, however, provides a common background to disparate lives and diversity of experiences, but highlights some commonalities:

Rural locations are regarded as sites of traditional cultural practices, of primary production, of the maintenance of more conservative political structures, and the existence of diverse (sometimes inaccessible) biophysical environments. (Bushin et al., 2007, p. 70)

Robson et al., (2007) identify several important and consistent themes in the lives of young people across both Majority and Minority world contexts:

- there appear to be less restrictive forces and greater relative freedom for young people living in rural areas than in urban areas;
• there is inadequate access to transport and mobility, and lack of access to services and opportunities;
• migration for work or education is often necessary;
• emotional aspects of belonging to a place and experiencing rural life are important to rural young people whatever their context.

These themes are consistent despite the material differences, and are apparent in the research based literature focusing on rural childhoods in Majority and Minority world contexts.

**New Zealand Rural Childhoods Literature**

Research on how New Zealand childhoods are constructed and experienced is scanty, and the research on children in rural environments which has sought their perspectives, is relatively recent. However, the few New Zealand studies undertaken in this area have made a significant contribution to the international body of literature featuring rural children’s voices.

McCormack’s (2000a) multi-method study was conducted at one urban (city) and one rural (town) South Island school, with children aged eight to ten years. The study, looking at children’s understandings of ‘rurality’, and the development of these in relation to their material and discursive experiences, found diversity in the children’s constructions and experiences of rurality:

As each child had their own personalised experiences of rurality so too did they understand rurality in a personalised and diverse way (McCormack, 2002, p. 206)

However, amongst the diversity of children’s constructions of rurality, commonalities were also evident, with dominant discursive themes emerging of agriculture, nature and recreation. Children who lived rurally focused most strongly on agriculture in constructing rurality,
reflecting their material and discursive experiences, while children who lived in urban areas focused mostly on nature and agriculture (McCormack, 2000a).

Diversity of experience was also highlighted in Panelli, Nairn and McCormack’s (2002) study with urban and rural young people, aged thirteen to eighteen years, looking at young people’s experiences of community inclusion and exclusion in urban and rural areas of New Zealand. Young people in rural areas, like urban young people, experienced exclusion as well as inclusion (Nairn et al., 2003). They were also capable of challenging and resisting restraints which contribute to their exclusion, and creating their own social spaces:

This study suggests that in any one ‘community’ the heterogeneity of youth may mean that inclusion and exclusion are complex, diverse and sometimes simultaneous processes. (Panelli et al., 2002, p. 124)

This study also challenged the urban/rural dichotomy. Rural and urban young people identified both urban and natural features as important elements of their respective locations (Nairn et al., 2003). Some young people in rural areas distanced themselves from rural and agricultural descriptors which were associated with inferior status, instead identifying urban features in their rural community as of higher status, such as cafes and multinational fast food outlets (for example, KFC). Representations of rural communities as socially inclusive and closer to nature, and therefore ideal places for young people to grow up were challenged, as were the diametrically opposite representations of urban communities as socially exclusive, removed from nature, and less than ideal.

Smith et al., (2002) conducted a nationwide study using focus groups and “Youth Tribunal” methods, in which young people, aged ten to seventeen, voiced their understandings of what it meant to be a young person in New Zealand at that particular historic moment in time. The rural was perceived and experienced by young people as a place with different tensions and possibilities:
While some young people represented the rural as a place to escape from, there were others who demonstrated a strong commitment to the rural as a place to live. (Smith et al., 2002, p. 177)

Clearly a key theme to emerge from the New Zealand research focusing on rural children and young people is the diversity and heterogeneity of the young rural population (McCormack, 2002; Nairn et al., 2003; Panelli et al., 2002; Smith et al., 2002). The studies also highlight the agency of children and young people as they construct rurality from their own imaginings and experiences (McCormack, 2002) and create inclusion and resist exclusion in their community (Nairn et al., 2003).

Two recent studies have looked at particular circumstances for rural families; one aiming to advance understanding of New Zealand grandparenting in rural contexts (Keeling, Glasgow & Morris, 2008) and the other using a social capital perspective to understand how rural families adjust to social and economic changes in the community (Goodrich & Sampson, 2008). Keeling et al. (2008) note that aspects of rural family life are commonly mythologised, typically idealising family solidarity and generational interdependence. Change affects families in different ways. However, an issue for rural families is the lack of access to social resources, compared to people living in less isolated areas. Living in rural areas heightens the importance of social networks and ties to help families access social and physical resources, especially those without kin nearby (Goodrich & Sampson, 2008).

It is clear from this review that there is little research based literature relating to constructions of rural New Zealand childhoods, or the lived experiences of rural children and families. This represents a significant gap in the understanding and knowledge related to a substantial proportion of the New Zealand population. Research emphasises the diversity of experience for children and young people living rurally. Given the rapidly changing face of rural New Zealand, this underscores the need for future research to address children’s and families experiences across a range of rural environments.
Children and Young People's Agency and Voice

Children and young people's agency. The concept of children's agency is a core feature of Childhood Studies, constructing children and young people as active participants in shaping their environment, as well as being shaped by it:

Agency is understood as an individual's own capacities, competencies, and activities through which they navigate the contexts and positions of their lifeworlds, fulfilling many economic, social, and cultural expectations, while simultaneously charting individual/collective choices and possibilities for their daily and future lives. (Robson et al., 2007, p. 135)

The increase in Minority world research on children's rural childhoods has highlighted the capacity and agency of children and young people (Panelli et al., 2007) within their leisure and work activities, and in relation to adults and to peers (Robson et al., 2007).

Children and young people have been shown to be active participants in the productivity of family farms, both historically (Goodyear, 1998; Hunter & Riney-Kebrberg, 2002; Sjöberg, 1997) and currently (Cummins, 2009; McCormack, 2002; Leckie, 2002; Riley, 2009; Zepeda & Kim, 2006). Additionally, while the major focus on children’s rural work has been in Majority world countries, there have been a few studies in the Minority world which have shown children actively participating in a range of work activities in agricultural and fishing settings (de Coninck-Smith, Sandin & Schrumpf, 1997).

Rural children and young people are creative in their pursuit of leisure and recreational opportunities (Jones, 2000, 2007; Lee & Abbott, 2009; MacDougall et al., 2009; McCormack, 2002). Jones (2007) argues that the adult discourse of the rural idyll can provide circumstances whereby children have a greater degree of power and autonomy. Adults perceive children to be acting in accordance with the idealised childhood vision and they are consequently given greater freedom to pursue their own agendas.
In the country, young people can manage peer conflicts and form social groups (Dunkley & Panelli, 2007; Matthews & Tucker, 2007) even in the face of adult disapproval (Lægræn, 2007; Kraack & Kenway, 2002; Panelli et al., 2002). Rural young people who felt marginalised or excluded were not passive in accepting positions imposed upon them within a community. Instead they used a range of strategies to position themselves within the community (Panelli et al., 2002; Smith et al., 2002; Tucker, 2003) and build specific identities and skills, for example, through a car based youth culture in Norway (Lægræn, 2007). Alternatively, they considered leaving the area as a way of improving their lives (Schäfer, 2007; Smith et al., 2002).

**Children’s and young people’s perspectives.** Until very recently the majority of studies contributing to our understanding of rural childhoods have been from the perspective of parents or other adults, and have tended to be studies on and about children, rather than with children (Matthews et al., 2000). However, more recent studies have emphasised and sought the views of children and young people in exploring their own experience (for example, Matthews et al., 2000; McCormack, 2002; Nairn et al., 2003; Riley, 2009; Tucker, 2003; Vanderbeck & Dunkley, 2003).

There is an academic move away from the construction of binaries that have been prevalent in Minority world cultural meanings and interpretations (Nairn et al., 2003; Skelton, 2000) and a growing body of research emphasising the importance of recognising diversity and difference between children (for example, Freeman et al., 2003; Nairn et al., 2003; Smith et al., 2002).

What to adults may seem to be a zone of sameness, is from young people’s view a realm of difference and diversity. (Tucker, 2003, p. 113)
Overview of the Research - Linked to the New Zealand Context

This chapter has reviewed the current research relevant to the constructions and experiences of rural childhood and family life in New Zealand. The predominant focus has been on rural childhoods literature in Minority world contexts, as this is the largest body of research that is pertinent to the New Zealand context. A brief overview of Majority world rural childhoods literature has been included which, despite differing topics of research interest and vastly different material realities, has highlighted some commonalities across different world contexts. The research undertaken in New Zealand to date has also been reviewed. Finally, the ways in which the agency and voice of children and young people in rural areas have been highlighted in the literature has been discussed.

It is apparent from this review that there is a relative paucity of research based literature specifically focusing on rural childhood in the New Zealand rural context. The research that has been done is exciting and innovative, with studies focusing on the perspectives of children and young people, demonstrating their capacities to construct rural understandings and participate as social actors in their own experiences in rural communities. Although these studies are few in number, they make a significant contribution to the growing body of international rural childhoods literature and to understanding the diversity and unique experiences of rural New Zealand children and families.

Whilst there is little published research specific to New Zealand, the literature reviewed relating to Minority world rural childhoods clearly has relevance for the current New Zealand rural context. The development of New Zealand society and culture was directly and distinctly shaped by influences from British, American and Australian culture (Fairburn, 2006). Constructions of rurality in Minority world contexts outlined in this chapter; rural idyll, dull, deprivation, and horror, resonate strongly with representations of rural New Zealand.

34 A limitation of this review chapter is the inclusion of English language literature only. There are undoubtedly research studies on rural childhood that have been published in other languages, but these are unavailable to me as an English speaker only. In particular, some Scandinavian research publications reviewed here make reference to other research studies which have been published in languages other than English.
Constructions of rurality as a rural idyll have relevance to rural New Zealand. This can be traced historically, as Europeans with idyllic Arcadian ideals migrated and settled in New Zealand, and currently, as these ideals and associated characteristics have become incorporated in the national psyche and mythologised representations of New Zealand rural childhood and family life. Constructing rurality in terms of rural deprivation is also pertinent in the New Zealand context today. The issues currently facing some rural families, discussed in Chapter Two, include those relating to inadequate or poor housing, education, health, welfare and transport services - all of which are exacerbated and compounded by deprivation and poverty. Constructions of rurality in terms of dullness, boredom and social exclusion for young people in rural settings may also be relevant in the New Zealand context. The lack of services noted above perhaps indicates a lack of social and recreational services and choices too. New Zealand research cited in this review indicates that social exclusion occurs for young people in rural communities, as well as inclusion.

Rural horror as a construction of rurality in the New Zealand context has not been explored in this chapter, as there is no research based literature relating to this. However, there are aspects of this construction indicated in the historical experiences of New Zealanders taming and domesticating the land, which had been expropriated by 'legal' means and force from traditional Māori ownership. A horror based construction of New Zealand rurality perceives the Arcadian vision of a self-sustaining pastoral paradise as failing to eventuate and transforming, in conjunction with development of an export market, into an economy based on the wholesale farming and slaughter of animals. Following the advent of refrigerated shipping in 1882, the rural landscape was despoiled and industrialised, as the pioneering colonist became a farmer and butcher. From this perspective the New Zealand dream progressed “from an imagined South Pacific Eden (a ‘better Britain’) to a fallen society with, literally, blood on its collective hands” (De Goldi, 2010, p. vii) – perhaps more aptly, Britain’s butcher. Over recent decades, horror-comedy ‘splatter’ movies, such as Bad Taste (1988) and Black Sheep (2006), present a light-hearted view of rural New Zealand horror.

The Minority world research provides direction and guidance in seeking to understand the New Zealand experience. However, it cannot translate directly into the New Zealand rural
context. Aspects of rural New Zealand social history and contemporary experience resonate in an international context, and commonalities are likely, but unique issues and nuances differentiate the largely unexplored New Zealand experience.

The literature review indicates that rural childhoods and experiences of rural families are of international interest. It is also apparent from the review that, apart from a few insightful studies, little is known about the lived experiences of rural childhood in New Zealand. This review exposes a significant gap in understanding the experiences of children and families in this context. The available New Zealand literature is consistent with the Childhood Studies theoretical framework underlying this study, highlighting the diversity of experiences for rural children and young people. It is clear that in New Zealand there is not just one rural context or one rural childhood, but a diverse range of contexts, with a multiplicity of rural childhoods. The perspectives of children and parents about their own lived experiences in the rural context are largely uncharted territory. This study will contribute significantly to addressing and extending knowledge in these areas.
CHAPTER FIVE
Methodology and methods

Introduction

One of the immutable laws of research is that "theory without research is mere speculation; research without theory is merely data collection" (Tolich & Davidson, 2003b, p. 17). The rationale for my study, and the theoretical framework that underpins it, have been discussed in previous chapters. This chapter provides the context for the research process that links it inextricably with the theory.

The specific research questions in this study are:

- How is childhood in rural New Zealand constructed and experienced, from the perspectives of children and parents?
- How diverse are constructions and experiences of childhood across different rural environments?
- What are the constraining and facilitating factors affecting parenting in rural New Zealand?

These questions have been designed to address a gap in research, and to extend knowledge and theoretical understanding, regarding rural childhood in New Zealand. This chapter turns to the methods used in this study to explore the research questions, and the rationale, including philosophical assumptions, methodological and ethical considerations underpinning these.

The first part of this chapter discusses the methodology, elucidating the theoretical and philosophical rationale for the methods used. The ontological and epistemological assumptions which inform the methodology of this study are made explicit. The methodological approach taken, which has been shaped by epistemological and conceptual
issues relevant to the interpretive and critical paradigms and to research with children from a Childhood Studies perspective, is outlined.

The next part of the chapter focuses on the processes involved in doing the fieldwork, collecting and analysing the data. Relevant information is provided about the participants and research locations in order to contextualise the data collected. Recruitment and gaining consent are discussed, followed by the methods used to collect and subsequently analyse the data.

Methodological and ethical considerations are integrated throughout the discussion, but the final section focuses on ethical issues and ensuring rigour. Throughout the design, implementation and reporting of this research project I have been keenly aware that the ethical and methodological choices made by researchers impact on children’s participation in research (Powell & Smith, 2009). The choices affect the children who participate and potentially many others:

Our research choices will produce knowledge that benefits some and works against others. Our choices will have freedoms and limitations ... Our choices will inevitably expose who we are and who we want to be. Our choices inevitably expose our willingness to search for greater social justice and equity in our work. (McNaughton & Smith, 2007, p. 121)

This chapter discusses, with as much transparency as possible, the choices I made and their supporting rationale, as well as their implications.

Methodology

Methodology refers to “the principles underlying particular research approaches” (Dew, 2007, p. 433), which provide a rationale for the methods selected and the expectations
associated with them (Liampittong, 2009). Methodology plays a pivotal role linking the goals of research with the methods chosen:

Having an informed grasp of methodology is important if we are to interpret data sensibly and with insight, and not simply interpret data in the light of preconceptions and prejudice - and so potentially perpetrate unsatisfactory or inappropriate understandings of the phenomenon of interest. (Dew, 2007, p. 433)

The aim of this study, to gain understanding into lived experiences and constructions of rural childhood from the perspectives of parents and children, affects how data is collected and analysed. In turn, the methods used to elicit those perspectives shape the interpretations and understandings derived from the data.

**Philosophical Underpinnings**

The principles of methodology, and therefore how research is conducted, are determined by the theoretical paradigm, the “basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 105). Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality and what does, or can, exist in the world (Davidson & Tolich, 2003a) and epistemology is related to knowledge and how it can be obtained.

Assumptions held by researchers of what the world is (ontology), and how that can be known (epistemology), determine the methodological position (Dew, 2007). Epistemology and methodology are therefore closely linked, with epistemology being the philosophy of how we come to know the world and methodology being the practice of how this is done (Trochim, 2006).

Research regarding childhood and children can be undertaken from within different theoretical paradigms, providing divergent perspectives on the same phenomenon.
Historically, the majority of studies of childhood and children have been from positivist perspectives. Positivism holds the ontological position that universal truths do exist, and the epistemological stance that these truths can be uncovered through rational, objective measurement. Science is employed to measure independent facts about a single apprehensible reality, with the data and analysis being considered value-free (Krauss, 2005). From a modernistic perspective, childhood is viewed as a stable entity over time and space, with universal truths about children that can be defined and measured objectively.

Studying children's experiences of childhood, as in this study, is considered by James et al. (1998) to be an epistemological break from earlier positivist models that rarely addressed children themselves, viewing children as "the embodiments of growth or the indices for assessing or measuring transitions and changes" (p. 208). My research study has been shaped mostly by assumptions and principles from an interpretive paradigm, with additional influence also from a critical paradigm.

**Interpretive paradigm.** The interpretive position shaping my study is based on a relativistic, constructivist ontology that assumes that there is no objective reality or knowledge independent of thinking (Grbich, 2007). Rather, reality is socially embedded and "there are multiple realities constructed by human beings who experience a phenomenon of interest" (Krauss, 2005, p. 760). From this perspective there are multiple truths and constructions of childhood, arising from the social and cultural context in which the phenomenon of childhood occurs.

In the interpretive paradigm the epistemological focus is on obtaining meaning and understanding of an experience or phenomenon, from the individual's descriptions and explanations:

The research focus is on exploration of the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences of the worlds in which they live, and how the contexts of events and situations and the placement of these within wider social environments have impacted on constructed understandings. (Grbich, 2007, p. 8)
My focus is on gaining understanding of rural New Zealand childhoods, and I conceptualise both childhood and rurality as social constructions. Rural childhood is seen as being socially and culturally contextualised, with multiple realities constructed by those experiencing it. My interest therefore lies in exploring the diversity of lived experiences and social constructions of rural childhood. This exploration is carried out by focusing on individual participants' descriptions of rural childhood experiences and their explanations of them, then further scrutinising and interpreting these (Grant & Giddings, 2002). The research relationship is therefore intersubjective, as I interpret the data from the participants, and reconstruct my views through interactions with them.

Acknowledging the subjective nature of the research, and the multiple realities of those involved, highlights the constructivist/interpretive stance underlying my study (Dickson-Swift, James & Liamputtong, 2008). This approach emphasises the complexity of human life and accepts that values and views differ between place and group. In reconstructing and understanding experience it looks for thick and rich descriptions of the cultural and topical arenas being explored (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

**Critical paradigm.** In addition to being shaped by the philosophical principles and assumptions in the constructivist/interpretive paradigm, the methodology of my study has also been significantly shaped by principles in the critical paradigm. The critical paradigm holds an ontological position of subjectivism, which posits that meaning is applied to and invested in the object by the subject. It shares with the interpretive paradigm the assumption that objects do not have an objective truth or meaning and that this comes to them from elsewhere, as people interpret and give meaning to their experiences.

The critical paradigm also shares, with the interpretive and postmodern paradigms, an understanding that there is a multiplicity of truths. Further to this, the perspective held in critical theory sees, like feminist theory, that the 'truth' can be obscured by the "ideological mechanisms such as hegemony, which work to make the interests of the most powerful groups in society seem natural" (Grant & Giddings, 2002, p. 18).
The critical paradigm relates to a group who are marginalised and disadvantaged in terms of social power, and has a political orientation. The dominant cultural interpretation of childhood is one of vulnerability, immaturity and irrationality, in which children are characterised by dependency, rather than agency; as being in a state of ‘becoming’ (an adult, rational person) rather than in a state of ‘being’. This view of children positions them as a minority group, lacking in social or political power.

Research from within this paradigm has sociopolitical goals, aimed at altering the status quo. Research is designed “not just to explain or understand social reality but to change it” (Grant & Giddings, 2002, p. 18). My research study, informed by Childhood Studies, has a critical social context that aims to understand and contribute to changing the social conditions of children. The aim is to increase knowledge about children’s experiences and views, which can then contribute toward improving policies and the conditions of childhood (Mayall, 1999).

By exploring experience, you uncover the political processes that shape it. Then you deconstruct dominant theory, by imposing on it experience. (Mayall, 1999, p. 13)

**Shared principles.** These theoretical paradigms, contributing to the methodology of my study, both reject the positivist assumption that an apprehendable reality exists and that knowledge is context free and measurable. Both paradigms view the researcher as inextricably linked to the topic of the research and the participants, through their own values and interpretations. Thus both paradigms effectively challenge the traditional distinction between ontology and epistemology (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Knowledge is intertwined in the interaction between a particular researcher and particular participants. The constructivist/interpretive paradigm goes a step further than the critical paradigm, in asserting that the findings of a study are inevitably shaped by the interaction between researcher and participants (Lobe, Livingstone & Haddon, 2007). Unlike the positivist approach, both assume a subjective rather than an objective research relationship.
The aim of my research inquiry is most comfortably located in the interpretive paradigm, given the focus on social constructions of childhood and rurality. However the philosophical principles underlying methodological considerations regarding the nature of children’s participation belong in the critical paradigm. Thus this study is shaped by aspects of both paradigms.

Methodological Approach

Methodology has been defined as:

The strategy, plan of action, process, or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes. (Crotty, 1998, p. 3)

Hermeneutics. Given the aims of my rural childhoods study, and the ontological and epistemological assumptions discussed, a hermeneutic methodology was chosen. Hermeneutics is a methodological approach used in qualitative research, located in and informed by, the constructivist/interpretive paradigm (Grbich, 2007). There are similarities between hermeneutics and phenomenology as research designs. The focus of my study lends itself to phenomenology in that it attempts to generate knowledge about how individuals experience things (Liamputtong, 2009). However, my study moves beyond a purely phenomenological focus of narrative descriptions of the experience, to understandings and interpretations of those experiences. Hermeneutics is the critical theory of interpretation, which focuses on meanings and interpretations (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005) and therefore is more suited to my study:

It [hermeneutics] acknowledges that our understandings of reality are always influenced by interpretations, that there is no independent truth. However, hermeneutics argues that our understandings of reality are also influenced by what
happens in the world, providing us with historical information. (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p. 28)

Hermeneutics is essentially a theory of interpretation and is used to examine the way people develop interpretations of their life in relation to their life experiences (Liamputtong, 2009). These life experiences are independent, knowable phenomena, but the knowledge and interpretation of them is always shaped by culture and therefore socially constructed (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005).

This study, exploring rural childhood, involves the experiences of children and parents in rural environments. My research interest lies in the experiences that the participants have had and the interpretation, or meaning they make, of those experiences. Gaining an understanding of the experiences involves paying close attention to the participants’ interpretations. Using a hermeneutic focus, the narrative of the participant becomes a text, which is scrutinised to reveal meaning in phenomena (Liamputtong, 2009). The understanding in a hermeneutic approach, that meaning is socioculturally contextualised, is congruent with the underlying theoretical framework drawn from Childhood Studies.

**Child focused research.**

Child-focused research not only respects children as individuals with something to say, but also enables children’s perspectives and standpoints to be articulated. (James & James, 2008, p. 19)

The conceptualisation of children in Childhood Studies as competent social agents, who “are active in the construction and determination of their own lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live” (Prout & James, 1990, p. 8), has implications for research methodology. Historically, children’s lives have been explored through research seeking the views of their adult caretakers or subsumed within research on the family (Christensen & James, 2000), but with the more recent conceptualisation of children a new methodology is essential (Pufall & Unsworth, 2004).
Research conducted from the perspective of the 'new' Childhood Studies paradigm tends to hold the following values: children's lives are worthwhile, in the present; children are not merely developing, they are also contributing competently; adulthood is not the perfect endpoint after childhood; and the value of life is measured by its quality rather than longevity (Alderson, 2003).

In accordance with this perspective, research methodologies have been developed that emphasise the role of children as participants in research (James & Prout, 1997). This represents an epistemological break with traditional assumptions regarding children's competence and inarticulateness (James, 2007). Children's views and ideas have become a central focus in research with children, and child-focused methods and ethical procedures that respect children as research participants have been adopted (James & James, 2008). The following discussion focuses on methodological issues relating to children's participation, childhood and adulthood differences in the research context, and the heterogenous nature of childhood.

**Children's participation.** Children's participation has been a keen focus of interest in Childhood Studies. Considerable literature exists arguing for greater participation and involvement of children and young people in decisions that affect them (see Alderson, 2000; Hill, Davis, Prout & Tisdall, 2004; Shier, 2001; Sinclair, 2004) and there has been a dramatic growth in children's participatory activity over recent years (Thomas, 2007).

Children's participation is important for many reasons: to uphold children's rights; to improve policies and services for children; to support better decision making; to promote protection of children; to empower children and to enhance their skills and self esteem (Mayall, 1999; Sinclair, 2004). Research indicates that there are links between children’s participation and their wellbeing (Graham & Fitzgerald, 2008) and that the process of participation is important to children and valued by them (Smith, 2007; Tisdall, Davis & Gallagher, 2008). Participation is an integral aspect of citizenship, which has become a popular focus of theory and research (Taylor & Smith, 2009). Seeing children through the lens of citizenship recognises them as young people with strengths and competencies, borne of
social experiences and interactions, and entitled to “recognition, respect and participation” (Neale & Flowerdew, 2007, p. 27).

The theoretical and practical developments related to children's participation have been paralleled by increased attention to children’s views in research (Hill et al., 2004). There is an emphasis on accessing children’s own understanding of their childhood experiences (Christensen & James, 2000; Mayall, 2002; Pufall & Unsworth, 2004).

Their [children's] participation in research is akin to respecting and promoting their entitlement, and assumes they are persons of value, their experiences are of interest to themselves, and to others, and that they have a valuable contribution to make to social and political life. (Graham & Fitzgerald, 2008, p. 3)

The theoretical perspectives underlying my study emphasise children’s voice and agency and “advance a view of children as competent and both willing and able to make decisions about matters such as participation in research” (Munford & Sanders, 2004, p. 472).

Furthermore, children have a right to participate in research, as recognised in the UNCRC. In particular, Article 12 of the UNCRC, recognising children’s right to express their opinions and have these taken into account in any matters that affect them, protects and promotes children’s rights to participation. However, my earlier research study indicated that children’s participation rights may be inconsistently upheld and seriously compromised by a number of factors throughout the research process (Powell & Smith, 2009).

Researchers’ choices impact on children’s participation, and methodological approaches are advocated that directly engage the child in the process of meaning making and knowledge producing (Jipson, 2000). This can occur within a framework that sees children’s participation as an interactive, and guided, process. A sociocultural perspective contributes to this understanding, emphasising the importance in helping children formulate and voice their

---

35 Article 12: State parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
views, and for “adults to create participatory spaces and to provide support and guidance in partnership with children” (Smith & Bjerke, 2009, p. 18). Research with children incorporating this perspective is thus a collaborative process (Graham & Fitzgerald, 2008).

However, James (2007) argues that the current rhetoric about giving voice to children masks important conceptual problems. It is important to critically reflect on the challenges, as well as the opportunities, currently shaping research with children (Graham & Fitzgerald, 2008). These challenges include the differences between children and the different cultures of childhood and adulthood (Kirk, 2007).

**Diversity of childhood.** Children are not a homogenous group. Rather they are highly differentiated with consequent methodological implications (Kirk, 2007). The diversity of children and childhoods, within the social structure of childhood, needs to be taken into account. There is a risk in advocating for children’s voice, that the diversity of children’s lives and experiences will be glossed over and that what is perceived to be the authentic voice becomes the universal voice (James, 2007).

James and James (2004) argue that the diversities that distinguish individual children are as important and significant as the commonalities they might share. Individual children have different characteristics, family and social relationships, life experiences, cognitive and communication development.

**Child participant and adult researcher.** A central methodological issue in conducting qualitative research with children is an epistemological issue of how one cultural group, namely adult researchers, can gain authentic knowledge and accurately represent the views of another group, namely children.

Childhood Studies promotes hearing children’s voices in research and adults supporting this process:
Why and how this is done becomes, then, a critical, epistemological issue that immediately foregrounds a range of other problems – specifically, those of translation, interpretation, and mediation. (James, 2007, p. 262)

The issues are gaining an authentic understanding of children’s views and the representation of those. This is of fundamental importance given the role of the adult researcher in collecting, analysing and interpreting data, and consequently producing an adult interpretation of the child’s social world (Kirk, 2007). It is the adult researcher who has the control over what is presented. This is clearly related to power differentials, so methodological approaches are advocated that address power relationships between the researcher and the researched (Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000). Disparities in power and status are a major challenge for researchers (V. Morrow, 2007), given the asymmetry between adults and children in status, control and knowledge (Lobe et al., 2007).

Suggestions to manage ways of understanding and representing the child’s point of view include “adopting different researcher roles, reflexivity and involving children at all stages of the research process” (Kirk, 2007, p. 1255). Researchers have suggested and debated the choice of ethics, innovative research tools and techniques, and various researcher roles such as non-authoritarian adult, friend, least adult, and observer, in facilitating children’s authentic participation (Davis, 1998). While these innovations “undoubtedly ease the process of researching children” (Davis, 1998, p. 329) they do not satisfactorily resolve the epistemological issues.

James (2007) argues that there is “no way of escaping the predicaments of representation” (p. 269), and therefore researchers have to find a way of engaging with it:

This means that ‘children’s perspectives’, ‘the child’s point of view’, ‘hearing children’s voices,’ and ‘listening to children’ have to be regarded as standpoints, places from which the analysis sets out, rather than the definitive descriptions of empirical phenomena embodied in the words that children speak. (James, 2007, p. 269)
These methodological issues highlight the need for critical reflection and review in conducting research with children. The concepts that I have found particularly useful are those of standpoint and reflexivity, within the context of child-focused research.

Methodologically, researchers need to consider the standpoint from which they research children (V. Morrow, 2007). Taking a child standpoint, acknowledging and trying to understand the different ways children have of viewing the world, paves the way for conversations and developing a research dialogue with those children participating. Mayall (2002) argues that the unequal power evident in the generational divide need not be an obstacle, and that the standpoint of children is essential in gaining an understanding of society and social life, in relation to adult standpoints. A key issue here is acknowledgement. By acknowledging, rather than avoiding or masking the different standpoints, the question then becomes what sort of dialogue adult researchers can have with children. Having a child standpoint facilitates the development of the research process as a collaborative one. Integral to this standpoint, respect for children’s competencies “needs to become a methodological technique in itself” (V. Morrow, 2007, p. 154).

**Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is an acknowledgement of the role and influence of the researcher on the research project. The researcher plays a key role in how the data are shaped and analysed, and it is argued that as “researchers themselves are an integral part of the studies, it is impossible for them to be objectively distant from the research” (Liampoutong, 2009, p. 25). Reflexivity makes the researcher’s contribution to the interpretive process explicit and, with critical self reflection, enhances the study’s credibility.

Reflexivity is a means of managing the gap between adult researchers and child participants by encouraging a self awareness on the part of the researcher regarding assumptions about childhood and how this may influence the research process. This includes awareness of: childhood experiences and engagement with children as an adult (David,
Tonkin, Powell & Anderson, 2007); personal biases and how these impact on the study (Lobe et al., 2007); and the influence of academic paradigms and non-academic life-based experiences (Davis, 1998). A reflexive approach requires acknowledging the researcher’s own ‘intellectual autobiography’ so that how this may have influenced the construction of knowledge can be critiqued (Pini, 2004).

The ideas, assumptions and understandings that I bring to this study stem from personal and professional experiences. My professional background working as a child psychotherapist informs and influences my understandings of children and childhood, as well as providing particular skills in communicating and forming relationships. My theoretical understandings are further shaped by postgraduate study in Childhood and Youth Studies. This professional and academic background orients me toward an interpretive paradigm and critical stance, with a particular focus on the voices of children. In addition, my personal experiences associated with identifying as a resident of rural areas for a large part of my life, and as a rural parent, stimulate my ideas about and interest in rural childhood and the constructions of that.

Researchers need to:

... critically reflect upon their own assumptions, values and aims, the impact of each in shaping the research process, and the potential effect on those who are recruited as participants. (David et al., 2007, p. 127)

Critical self reflection involved consideration of the role I was playing as researcher and the ways in which this impacted on the participants. This required reflecting on the different subjectivities and intersubjective positioning that occurred (Pini, 2004). The parent participants, in particular, positioned me in various ways; with rural dweller, rural parent and urban academic, being key assigned roles. I was loathe to self disclose too much, a consequence of psychotherapeutic clinical practice. However, I was also mindful of the emphasis given to intersubjective relationships in the interpretive paradigm and the understanding that the researcher is part of the production of the knowledge. Consequently I engaged in small amounts of self disclosure, if it seemed to facilitate the research relationship.
A concept that I found helpful in developing my researcher role is borrowed from a counselling/psychotherapeutic context; that of the naïve inquirer. In this sense naïve is taken to imply lacking information or experience in the matter under inquiry, rather than lacking sophistication, so it positioned me as 'not knowing' and the participants as 'knowing'. Another useful concept was McNaughton and Smith's (2007) suggested role of scribe, which they perceive as helping children to feel safe to share their views, rather than perceiving the researcher as commentator or critic.

Reflexivity was a central part of the research process whereby I was able to reflect on my assumptions and role (Davis, 1998) and also on the choice of research methods I was making and the implementation of these (Punch, 2002). There is debate as to whether research with children requires the same methods as, or different from, those used with adults (Christenson & Prout, 2002; Punch, 2002). Thomson (2007) provides an interesting critique of participatory methods with children, arguing that participation is not inherent to the methods, but is embedded in the interactions:

‘Participation’ is embedded within the social-spatial interaction between participants, which includes the researcher and rests on how researchers invite participants into a research arena and facilitate their exploration and sharing of views on a topic. (Thomson, 2007, p. 209)

This approach requires critical self reflection of the role of the researcher in the process of generating and collecting data.

Throughout the research process I have used a variety of reflexive techniques in an attempt to understand the influence of my own meanings on the process and to monitor how those meanings impact on my understandings of the participants and data in the study (Davis, 1998). These techniques include keeping a reflexive journal throughout the process of data collection and analysis in which I recorded thoughts, ideas, assumptions and queries related to any aspect of the study as they arose. I also engaged in discussion with colleagues, friends and
supervisors about my emotional and intellectual response to situations and issues that arose during the study.

Research Participants

Demographic Characteristics

A total of 36 children and 36 parents, from 24 families, participated in this rural childhood research study. The children were aged between 6 and 11 years of age at the time of their first interview, with the average age being 9 years. There were 21 girls who participated in the project and 15 boys. 36

Geographically the participants were located in one of four specifically selected rural areas. Two of these areas were in the North Island of New Zealand and two were in the South Island. Each of these areas was significantly different from the others, and intentionally selected to reflect a range of rural New Zealand contexts. The urban/rural profile classification developed by Statistics New Zealand (2004), described in Chapter Two of this thesis, was used to identify and select areas from each of the four rural categories.

- An area designated *rural with high urban influence* was selected in the South Island, Canterbury region. Eight families participated from this area; with data collected from 12 children and 13 parents.

- An area designated *rural with moderate urban influence* was selected in the North Island, Rodney District. Six families participated from this area; 12 children and 9 parents.

36 Consent was obtained from 38 children, 36 of whom went on to participate in the study. The two children who did not participate moved house following giving the initial interview at which consent was given, and no response was received to phone messages and letters, sent care of extended family members.
• An area designated *rural with low urban influence* was selected in the North Island, Far North District. Four families participated from this area; 5 children and 5 parents.

• An area designated *highly rural/remote* was selected in the South Island, MacKenzie District. Six families participated from this area; 9 children and 9 parents.

Throughout this thesis these areas are referred to respectively as: Canterbury, Rodney, Northland and MacKenzie. Table 1 summarises the number and gender of children and participants participating from each areas.

### Table 1: The number and gender of participants in each geographical location.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Canterbury</th>
<th>Rodney</th>
<th>Northland</th>
<th>MacKenzie</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Girls</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Boys</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total children</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mothers</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fathers</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total parents</strong></td>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total families</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

New Zealand’s small size makes reporting of research ethically problematic. Using a pseudonym for a community, in attempting to disguise a region, can give a false sense of security as other reported details may make it identifiable (Tolich, 2001). In this study I have chosen to refer to the areas by the district name, rather than use a pseudonym. The rationale for this being that the district names relate to areas which have multiple townships and schools that could have been used for recruitment purposes, so identification is not automatic. Additionally, each area has particular characteristics that contribute to its character and these may have significance for the participants and relevance to their responses. Following is a brief description of each area:
**Canterbury.** This area, on the outskirts of Christchurch city, reflects the peri-urban phenomenon, where rural land near cities has been subdivided into ‘lifestyle’ blocks (Statistics New Zealand, 2004). It is part of a commuter belt with professionals, who mostly work in the city, making up the largest occupational group. There are several small rural centres, and it is in close proximity to Christchurch’s outer suburbs. The area is prosperous and rapidly growing. There is a higher than average proportion of people working in agriculture and fisheries, but this is considerably lower than other rural areas.

The schools that assisted with recruitment in this area were Decile 9, full primary, and an average 97 per cent of the students were Pakeha/NZ European. The only school with a roll of over 100 pupils in this study was in this area.

**Rodney.** This area is in the district north of Auckland city, approximately 60 to 90 minutes drive away. There is an independent urban community within 30 kilometres of the schools that assisted with recruitment. This area also has some subdivision of rural land for lifestyle blocks, and is rapidly growing with the population projected to grow faster than the national average, although not as fast as the areas with strong urban influence.

The schools approached to assist with recruitment ranged from Decile 2 to Decile 9, reflecting the socio-economic diversity in this area. Two of the schools were full primary and two were contributing primary schools. The ethnicity of students ranged from 75 to 80 per cent Pakeha/NZ European.

**Northland.** This area in the Far North is in a region which has pockets of highly rural/remote designated areas nearby. Northland is rich in historic and archaeological sites.

---

37 Rural centres are area units that have a population of between 300 and 999 (Statistics New Zealand, 2004).
38 Decile 1 schools draw their students from areas of greatest socio-economic disadvantage, Decile 10 from areas of least socio-economic disadvantage (Education Review Office, 2009).
39 Full primary schools have students from Years 1 to 8; contributing schools have students from Years 1 to 6.
40 The information about schools in this section was obtained from the Education Review Office website (www.ero.govt.nz) and the Ministry of Education, Te Kete Ipurangi - The Online Learning Centre website (www.tki.org.nz).
41 Independent urban communities are towns and settlements without significant dependence on main urban centres (Statistics New Zealand, 2004).
Generally, areas designated rural with a low urban influence are seen as the rich, productive belt of New Zealand's agricultural sector, but there is considerable regional variation in the standard of living (Statistics New Zealand, 2004), and Northland is one of the poorest regions in the country (Orange, 2009). Northland has the most rural population in the country, however only five per cent of the nation's farms are in this region. This is due to the region's isolation, remoteness, poor access, infertile soils and uneconomic size of holdings (Orange, 2009). Northland is known for its fluctuating population, with a lot of movement of people to and from Auckland. There are more Māori living in Northland than most other areas of New Zealand (except the East Coast/Hawkes Bay region) and Māori language and traditions are strong.

The schools approached to assist with recruitment were Decile 1 and 2. They were all full primary schools. The ethnicity of students at the schools ranged from 73 to 100 per cent Māori.

**MacKenzie.** This area is in the South Canterbury region known for its mountains, which are a principal tourist destination, and hydroelectricity, from the lakes and rivers of the district (Wilson, 2009). Much of the region is grassland for sheep and there is a higher than average proportion of the population employed in the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector. It seems likely that the population of such highly rural/remote areas will decline in the future (Statistics New Zealand, 2004). The area selected in the Mackenzie District was near one of the several small townships.

The schools approached were Decile 7 contributing primary schools. The ethnicity of students ranged from 79 to 87 per cent Pakeha/NZ European.

**Overall sample description.** This is a qualitative research study and, unlike quantitative research, the goal is not for the sample to be statistically representative of, and the findings generalisable to, the wider population (Davidson & Tolich, 2003a; Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). However, I was interested to find that the sample reflected the diversity and characteristics of national and regional demographic trends.
The diversity within the total sample included the following: four families were farming families in which both parents worked on the farm; six families were currently generating income from agricultural or horticultural use of their land, as well as parents working off the property; four families lived in rural townships; eight families had one or both parents identifying as Māori, with the majority being in the Northland sample; four families were headed by a single parent; the annual income of families varied from under $20,000 to over $100,000, with the average being in the $50,000 to $70,000 range.

In addition to the four farming families, six families used the land they lived on to produce some income. The distribution of families, in relation to the rural locality in which they live, and their primary involvement in production or consumption, is portrayed in Figure 4.

![Figure 4: Distribution of families in functional and political-economic terms of rurality.](image)

All of the families in the rural/production quadrant are from the MacKenzie sample. The families in the rural/consumption quadrant are from MacKenzie and Northland. The families in the remaining two quadrants, with greater urban influence, are from Canterbury and Rodney.
As noted, the decile rating of the schools which assisted with recruitment ranged from 1 to 9. The school rolls varied from less than 20 to over 100 students, with only one school having more than 100. Children were also recruited through the Correspondence School.

**Recruitment Process**

Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants for this study who would be able to provide an in depth understanding of the lived experiences of rural childhood. As this is a qualitative study the “aim is not to generalise about the distribution of experiences or processes, but to generalise about the nature and interpretative process involved in the experiences” (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p. 45). Therefore recruitment processes were aimed at accessing and attracting participants who would be able to provide rich information about rural childhood. A sampling frame, selection criteria and recruitment method were developed to enable selection of such children and parents.

The sampling frame used was: children, in Years Four to Six at school, who live in rural areas and their parents/guardians. The following selection criteria were used to select participants from within this sampling frame:

- Children who are in Years Four to Six at primary school (aged approximately 7 to 11 years) and their parents;
  
  This particular age range was chosen for several reasons. First, I was interested in the perspectives of children rather than young people as the literature indicates there are different issues relevant to the older age-group. Second, the age range selected was one where children would be able to participate in the tasks required and, perhaps more importantly, that the adult gatekeepers would perceive them as able to participate competently. Third, my experience with children this age, both professionally and personally, had been interesting and thought provoking.

---

42 The recruitment information provided to potential participants consistently referred to parents/guardians (see Appendices A-E), and the sample included participants where the adult family members were guardians, not parents, but from this point the term parent/s only is used in this thesis for ease of reference.
• Children and parents living in specifically selected rural areas;
For logistical and practical reasons the study needed to be confined to specific rural areas. Collecting data is time consuming and costly. Given the anticipated time span of the project and the potential funding sources, areas were chosen to fit each rural classification so that recruitment, and subsequent data collection, could be focused in four particular areas that I could most easily access.

• Children and parents who have been living in a rural area for at least six months;
The focus of this study is the constructions and lived experiences of rural childhood in a range of rural environments. This criterion was included to ensure that participants had sufficient rural experience.

It was rationalised that in meeting these selection criteria the participants in the sample would be able to provide rich, thick data that would provide information and meaning to contribute significantly to answering the research questions posed.

The aim was to recruit a sample of approximately 20 children and their parents/guardians. This sample size is consistent with the aims in qualitative research in which the purpose is to have in depth communication, to elicit rich information and themes. This target was met with a sample of 36 children and 36 parents participating.

Recruitment was mostly done through information provided to children at school. Schools were identified in each of the four areas selected and their principals of these schools were approached and asked to assist in recruitment by providing an information pack to children in Years Four to Six to take home and show their parents. The schools had no other involvement with the research process.

The approach to schools was an important part of the recruitment process. It provided access to a large number of children in the sampling frame. Considerable effort was put into engaging the interest of principals at selected school and gaining their agreement to distribute the information packs. The approach to principals was initially made by email, and followed
up by a telephone call. This allowed them time to read the information which seemed more likely to be productive than cold calling. All of the principals contacted agreed to distribute the information packs.

Where logistically possible I visited the principals in person to deliver the information packs for distribution. This amounted to eight schools in the North Island areas to which I could drive. I made an appointment to meet with the principal where possible. I considered this particularly important in the Northland schools, where the communities and school rolls were predominantly Māori. It was not practical to visit the schools in the two South Island areas so their principals were contacted by email and phone. The principals showed interest in the project and the phone conversations were lengthy as we discussed the project, school and area.

My experience was that the principals were mostly receptive and positive about the project. They were proud of their schools and keen to support a study that was relevant to children in their school. Several principals offered to ‘shoulder tap’ families if there were not sufficient responses. Fortunately there was enough interest from families that this was not required.

The Correspondence School was also contacted by email and phone and asked to distribute information packs to children who met the criteria and lived in the South Canterbury area. Information packs were sent out to all the six Correspondence School families who met the criteria.

The initial contact with potential participants is critical, so considerable thought went into the content of the information pack. This included an envelope addressed to ‘The Parents/Guardians of Children in Years Four to Six’, which contained information and an invitation to participate in the research study. This was in the form of a letter to the parents (see Appendix B), information pamphlets for the children (see Appendix C) and parents (see Appendix D), a consent form for parents (see Appendix E), a copy of the consent form for the children (see Appendix F) and a freepost return envelope addressed to me care of the Children’s Issues Centre, University of Otago.
The letter was addressed to parents inviting them and their children to participate in the research project. Further information about the project was provided in the pamphlets. These explained that the aim of the project was to find out about growing up in rural New Zealand from the perspectives of children and parents. Separate pamphlets were written for children and parents in order to tailor the style and language to suit each group. Both pamphlets contained essentially the same information; outlining the purpose of the project, what the study involved for participants, and the selection criteria. The voluntary and confidential nature of participation, and participants' right to withdraw from the study, was emphasised. It was stated that the project was being undertaken as part of a University of Otago study and the parents' pamphlet further specified that the findings will be reported in a thesis that is kept in the University library. Parents and children wishing to participate were advised to complete the parents’ consent form and send it to me using the freepost addressed envelope.

Gaining Consent

**Parent participants.** Parents indicated their consent to participate in the research study by signing and returning the consent form by post. The information pack was designed to provide sufficient detail about the project to ensure that the consent given was informed. The information pack contained postal, email and telephone contact details, and encouraged potential participants to contact me if they wanted further information. There were a couple of enquiry phone calls and emails, but the vast majority of participants returned the signed parental consent form with no other contact.

This consent form had statements which the participant indicated agreement with by signing, including those related to the parent’s voluntary participation and right to withdraw, and consent for their child/ren to participate. The consent form acknowledged the child’s voluntary participation and right to withdrawal, and also stated that the child’s choice about participation would take precedence over the parent’s consent for this.
Child participants. Children were also required to sign a consent form indicating their willingness to participate. As with the parents' consent form, statements on the children's consent form related to children's voluntary participation, right to withdrawal, and issues of data collection, storage and use. By signing the form children indicated their understanding of what was involved and their agreement to participate.

The information pack included a copy of the consent form for the information of children and parents, this form, however, was signed by the children during an initial consent interview (ICI) with me. The ICI took place at the child's home, immediately before or after the data collection interview with their parents. It was specified to parents and children that parental participation did not mean that children were compelled to participate.

I was mindful that responsibility rests with the researcher to ensure that children are fully informed (Alderson, 1995) and to find an appropriate way of doing so (Munford & Sanders, 2001). This gave rise to developing the ICI and, as Munford and Sanders (2001) note, “the requirement that we adequately inform potential participants provides us with creative and exciting opportunities to learn new ways of talking with and listening to the people who breathe life into our research project” (p. 103).

The original intention in designing the study had been that parents and children from the same families would participate. However, when the study was implemented, it became apparent for ethical reasons, that it was very important to stress children's voluntary participation, regardless of their parents' involvement. Conducting the ICI with children at the same visit as the data collection interview with parents was done for practical, logistical reasons, and had some unanticipated benefits. I became concerned that it may also put subtle pressure on children to participate, as it can be hard for a child to decline an invitation from an adult, particularly when parents have accepted an invitation for themselves. To alleviate pressure I conveyed to parents and children that I was there to interview parents regardless of their children's participation. Conveying, I hoped, that the purpose of the visit was to interview the parents, and have the opportunity to talk with the child about the project, after

---

43 Red lettering at the top of the form indicated clearly that this was a copy only.
which children could decide about their own participation. My presence in their home, therefore, did not assume or compel their participation. Some children expressed uncertainty initially but decided to participate after talking about what was involved. Some children agreed to participate in certain aspects of the study but not others.

The primary purposes of the ICI were to provide children with information about the study so that they could make an informed decision about participating, provide them with guidelines and materials for constructing visual representations of living rurally, and obtain their consent. It also provided the opportunity to establish rapport with the children and structure the research process.

An unanticipated benefit, in conducting an ICI with children during the same visit as the parent interview, was that there was transparency for both children and parents in my presentation of the project to children. I suggested to parents that they remain present or within earshot while I talked with their children at this initial meeting. The intention of this suggestion was to put both children and parents at ease with the research process. Children had the security of a parental presence and there was a potential “sponsorship of trust” (Cree, Kay & Tisdall, 2002, p. 51), whereby children are more likely to agree to participate if parents seem supportive, and parents were able to see the way I interacted with their children. It also had the practical advantage of ensuring that both children and parents were fully informed as to the children’s participation.

Another unanticipated benefit of the ICI process was that it gave the children the opportunity to negotiate their involvement with the project. Stressing the voluntary nature of children’s participation perhaps indicated that the children could make choices about participation, which they did. For example, when talking about confidentiality some children decided they wanted to be interviewed with a sibling. When the sibling did not share that wish, we worked out ways of interviewing each child that was satisfactory to them both. Another example was one child who was uncertain about participating. He indicated that he would like to take photos, but did not want to do any artwork or be interviewed. We negotiated an arrangement in which he would take photos and then talk to me about them and
I could tape that conversation, which we acknowledged would make it like an interview but not a question-answer type interview.

The process of obtaining consent through an ICI structured the research process, establishing the child as the expert in their own experience and thereby helping minimise the inherent power imbalance. I tried to ensure that consent was kept as a ‘live’ issue throughout the research process (Cree et al., 2002). This was done by checking with children at the start of each meeting that they were okay to continue their participation, reminding them that it was okay to ‘pass’ on a question or stop the tape recorder, and staying alert to verbal and non-verbal cues.

**Data Collection Methods**

In taking the theoretical stance described earlier in this chapter the research design I am using is necessarily qualitative. Qualitative research is ontologically and epistemologically grounded in the interpretive paradigm, advocating exploration that acknowledges multiple truths and multiple realities (Dickson-Swift et al., 2008). It is exploratory in nature, thereby enabling researchers to gain information about areas in which little is known (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). A qualitative approach therefore suits the primary aim of my study.

The research design in this study is an emergent one. The initial focus of inquiry is participants’ understandings and experience of rural childhood, using an inductive process of analysing data to gain meaning that is defined as it proceeds. This approach “sets aside other theories and knowledge and attempts to build an understanding of the world from the data” (Dew, 2007, p. 434).

In keeping with the methodological approach, the underlying assumption is that truths vary between people and over time and that the aim of research is to capture an experience in order to further explore it and derive the essence of its meaning to the participant.
As in any research the methods chosen must match the task at hand (James, 2007). Methods are employed in this study that attempt to gain a text that is rich in detail and understanding. Semi structured interviews have been conducted with child and parent participants, with the intention of eliciting rich, thick data. Participants were asked about the experience of rural childhood. The research questions in this study focus on the experiences of participants as a means to understanding rural childhoods. In keeping with the hermeneutic approach, questions were asked that move away from the experience itself, to consider the understandings that the participant has derived from it. This study attempts to gain the participants’ interpretation of their lived experience, as well as the researcher’s interpretation of the text.

Child-focused research involves using participatory research methods “that enable children’s participation in the research process by making that process more meaningful to them” (James & James, 2008, p. 18). Visual methods, in addition to interviewing, were used with the child participants in an attempt to “use tools that enable children to be active participants in the research process and which offer them the maximum opportunity to put forward their views” (Kirk, 2007, p. 1256).

**Child Participants’ Data Collection**

The data collection methods were discussed with the child participants during the ICI and they were provided with materials to assist in data construction. The following methods of data collection were used:

**Visual representation.** Children were provided with selected art materials. I asked them to construct an artwork that would help me to understand what it was like to live where they lived. A range of possible ways to do this was explored, and each child was given a scrapbook and chose some art materials from a range I had with me. These consisted of pens, pencils, crayons, felt tip markers, and such like.
Photography. Children were provided with disposable cameras, capable of taking 24 photographs, and asked to take photographs of things that would help me to understand where they lived and things that were important to them. Unless I was likely to be returning to their area in the following fortnight, they were also given a self-addressed, prepaid postbag, to post the camera to me when they had finished taking photos. I got the films developed, getting two sets of prints, one for the child to keep and one for me to keep.

Individual interviews. Children participated in an individual interview, usually two to three weeks after the ICI. This timing allowed for the child to construct some artwork and take photographs, post the camera, and for me to get the film developed. The artwork and photographs were then discussed in the interviews. During the interviews, a conversation developed in which the topics discussed included family relationships, family and community involvement, school and work, peer relationships, social participation, recreational activities and other issues of interest.

Interviews did not exceed one hour. They were in-depth, semi-structured interviews, using open ended questions to encourage rich responses and conversation. Discussion of the visual material was included in the interview to elicit further information pertaining to the children's lived experiences of rural childhood. Children were encouraged as experts in their own understanding and the concept of right or wrong answers was actively avoided.

Follow up interviews. Follow up individual interviews were held with all 36 children approximately 12 months after the first individual interview. These were held for several reasons; to address any gaps apparent in the data from the first interviews, to continue data collection in the context of a relationship with an increasingly familiar interviewer, and to acknowledge that participants' thoughts, activities and interests can change over time. The follow up interviews proved very useful for further data collection, with most children giving me a warm welcome, indicating a degree of familiarity with both myself and the interview situation, and appearing eager to update me about their everyday experiences. The 12 month

44 The guideline of 'things that were important to them' was included after a child expressed dismay that he could not photograph a pet as it wasn't about 'where he lived'.
gap was largely for logistical reasons, to allow time for transcription of interviews and preliminary data analysis. There was full sample retention over the twelve months.

Overview. Thirty six children participated, six of whom were outside the selection criterion of children in Years Four to Six at school. These six children were siblings of children who met this selection criterion. They were aged between 6 and 11 years, showed a great deal of interest in the project, and, along with their parents, consented to participating. Four younger siblings joined in interviews, taking photographs and/or constructing artwork. Two older children, both in Year Seven at school, participated fully in all aspects of the project.

Parent Participants’ Data Collection

Individual interviews. Parents participated in an individual interview. In some instances one parent participated, in others two parents took part. If two parents were at home at the time of the interview they were both invited to participate.

The topics discussed included influences on rural children and family such as parenting, family and community support, time, living standards, health and environment, education, values, morals and beliefs.\(^{45}\) As with the child participants the interviews with parents were semi-structured individual interviews using open-ended questions. The interviews were all conducted in the participating adult’s home and took between one and two hours to complete.

The parent interviews all occurred on the same day as the ICI with the children. Frequently the children were at home during the parent interview. Generally I suggested it was preferable that the children were not present at the parent interview, so that the parents did not feel constrained by their presence, but ultimately it was the parent’s decision. Most elected to not have the children present, but in some families they remained in the room or nearby. It seemed

\(^{45}\) These themes were identified and discussed in the Families Commission research report *What makes your family tick? Families with dependent children – successful outcomes project*, March 2006.
the best rapport with parents was developed if I met with the children first, with the parents present or nearby, and then interviewed the parents afterwards alone.

Given the time involved I also tried to ensure that the interviews were scheduled at a time of day that would not inconvenience the family. Generally this was after school and at weekends. I endeavoured to avoid times at which children’s energy level and concentration would possibly be compromised (David et al., 2007).

**Activity record.** Parents were asked to keep a record of their children’s activities for one week following the interview. They were provided with a notebook and pen and asked to keep brief notes as to what the children did over the following week. They also recorded additional thoughts that they considered may be of interest. Parents generally expressed a willingness to keep an activity record, with parents from 19 families completing the task and returning activity records to me. In addition, several parents emailed me information about their children’s activities, which they thought may be of interest to me, in the months following the interviews.

**Overview.** Parents from 26 families returned signed consent forms, and a total of 36 parents from 24 families went on to participate in the study.

Originally another round of data collection was planned in the form of focus group interviews in each area, with children and, separately, with parents. I ultimately decided not to proceed with this given the quantity and quality of data collected in the first round. Furthermore, the diversity and intensity of opinion with the adult participants did not lend itself to focus group interviewing. This decision was discussed with and supported by my supervisors, and participants were informed of this change by letter. No participants commented on this amendment to the original plan.
Research Location

The theory around methodological procedures and the reality of data collection can be very different (MacDonald & Greggans, 2008). Interviewing children and parents in their homes had particular advantages and challenges. A crucial issue in eliciting children’s views is the requirement for flexibility (Bushin, 2007; Gollop, 2000) and this is maximised by interviewing children in their homes. Interviewing at home, however, means that every interview setting is different, and they cannot all be managed the same way (Bushin, 2007).

I chose to conduct interviews at the family’s home for several reasons. It was practical and less time consuming to be able to conduct the parent interview and ICI with children on the same visit. Choosing to interview at home rather than school also meant that children would not be singled out, with confidentiality thereby compromised. In addition to this there are some perceived benefits in home interviewing, including that children may be more used to having voice, and be more comfortable there (Bushin, 2007). Gollop (2000) notes that there are numerous cues in home interviewing to engage children in conversation, and I saw this as being particularly pertinent to my research topic, in which children were being asked about their lived experiences in a rural setting. Children chose where in the home environment they wanted the interview to take place. In addition, many children also chose to show me things they were talking about, for example pets, newborn animals, pets’ graves, special play areas, huts and motorbikes.

The challenges in home interviewing with children included the changing nature of the environment and multiple interruptions, which are part of the complex social reality of people’s lives (MacDonald & Greggans, 2008). Having people around, and particularly parental and sibling presence, meant increased noise and distraction at times, and the possibility that confidentiality might be compromised. When parents remained present during children’s interviews I used several covert and overt techniques to minimise parental involvement (Bushin, 2007). These included limiting eye contact with the parent, specifically using the child’s name when asking a question, raising issues it was more likely only the child
would know about, as well as more overt techniques, such as reiterating the importance of ascertaining the child’s opinions, and asking parents and siblings to take turns answering.

A further challenge in home interviewing is the privileged position of the researcher being in someone’s home, effectively as a guest (MacDonald & Greggans, 2008). There can be conflict between being a ‘good’ guest and being a ‘good’ interviewer. Over the course of the project I was offered (and accepted) numerous cups of coffee, not wanting to reject an offer of hospitality. I was also offered and declined many invitations to join families for a meal, drinks at the local sports club, and, on several occasions, a bed for the night. These I declined (sometimes reluctantly) in order to maintain the boundaries of my role and manage the relationships, particularly with children, which form around the research. “Children’s expectations of adults who show an interest in them are often different from that of adults, who may be more able to understand the transitory nature of research encounters” (Munford & Sanders, 2001, p. 107). I was also invited by parents and children to attend many events such as Pet Day, school shows, local exhibitions, community and sports events, which although I thought would be useful for gaining more of a sense of the communities in which people lived, I generally declined for logistical reasons, as my visits to areas tended to be tightly scheduled to minimise cost.

Data Analysis Methods

Data analysis suggests transformation (Liampittong, 2009), by making sense of the material that has been collected, extracting the meanings to reveal patterns, and transforming it into a coherent narrative (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). This occurs as a process whereby data is collected, reduced, organised and interpreted (Davidson & Tolich, 2003b). The endpoint of data analysis is to understand what has been obtained, and from a hermeneutic perspective to look for what lies behind what is said and thus raise new possibilities of meaning (Smythe, 2000). Two forms of data analysis were used in this study; a thematic analysis of the interview material, and a content analysis of the photographs, artwork and activity records. These will be considered in turn.
Thematic analysis is "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). In my study a massive amount of data were collected, as is expected in qualitative studies, because of the open-ended format of questions involved in the interviews (Davidson & Tolich, 2003b). I used the coding process, which plays a major part in thematic analysis, as a tool to assist in reducing the data to a manageable form, allowing for organisation. Coding involves categorising, summarising and accounting for each piece of data in the search for meaning (Liamputtong, 2009).

Qualitative analysis of interview data requires familiarity with the transcripts and engagement with the data (Opie, 2003), from which codes emerge. Conducting and transcribing the interviews myself, I became very familiar with the data. I listened to each interview audiotape and read each transcript several times. This reading and re-reading is the first step of thematic analysis, and leads to making sense of the data and gaining an understanding of the meanings. This process was also assisted by the checking back that had occurred with participants throughout the interview process. Through this re-reading process I made marginal notes on the transcripts, which acted as part of an audit trail (Liamputtong, 2009) and generated initial codes. Initial coding involves deconstructing the data, breaking it down and reconceptualising it (Liamputtong, 2009). This means looking at the data in different ways, seeing meanings and relationships within the data and linking these.

After looking at the meaning of the data for the individual participants and organising it into codes, the next step was axial coding to make sense of what was being said by the participants as a group and to collate the codes into themes. This is a process of re-examining the codes identified to determine how they are connected, putting the deconstructed data together in new ways and finding the themes that linked them (Liamputtong, 2009). Davidson and Tolich (2003b) consider that themes guide, rather than structure, the research and are flexible and open to change. Accordingly, I initially found the axial coding a tentative process, with ongoing revision, refinement and consolidation as I checked that the themes worked with the codes that had been extracted and the entire data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
The themes that emerged from the interview data initially, using these coding processes, were broadly conceptualised as positive and negative features, and clustered around personal, psycho-social, physical environment and socio-economic categories. Ongoing thematic analysis revealed that, within these broad categories, the features aligned with the themes in the Minority world literature. Consequently, I decided to use the framework that emerged from the literature review to present these themes in the data chapters of this thesis. Whilst there are multiple ways of organising codes and reconstructing data, using the same framework to organise the literature and the data has the benefit of providing integration and conceptual coherence to the thesis as a whole.

Content analysis was used to analyse the photographs, artwork and activity records. This method of analysis, used in qualitative research, is an attempt to quantify content in a systematic way, using codes that tend to be identified before searching the data (Liampittong, 2009). Codes are developed, and then the number of times these codes occur in the data is systematically recorded (Silverman, 2000). This allows for a simple statistical analysis in terms of the frequency of the themes or categories emerging from the data (Liampittong, 2009).

Using this process of enumerative content analysis with a thematic slant (Grbich, 2007), codes were developed for the activity records, photographs and artwork data. The data were then scrutinised looking specifically for the appearance of the coded categories. For example, codes for the artwork and photographs included nature, recreation, agriculture, friends, school, pets/animals, family, home, and self. The occurrence of these codes in each data sample was recorded. The codes were added to and refined as the analysis occurred.

In addition to the enumerative content analysis of the photography and artwork, the visual images were also used as a device to generate more data in the interviews. “Photo elicitation – the provision of photos, captured by ... participants for further interview discussion” (Grbich, 2007, p.156) was used in my study, as children discussed their artwork and photos in the interviews.
According to Hollway and Jefferson (2000), a problem with using a coding process is the fragmentation of qualitative data. They contend that whilst using a system to break down the mass of unstructured data that researchers face is understandable, it reduces the data to segments and decontextualises the text. They use the principles of Gestalt, the understanding that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, to argue that the parts (codes) are defined, and their meanings can only be understood, in relation to the larger whole. Consequently Hollway and Jefferson (2000) advocate understanding the structure and the whole context, in which the parts are situated, to gain understanding of meanings.

Mindful of the problem of fragmenting qualitative data, and seeking to “hold the whole in mind” (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, p. 69), I used a form of structured summary to aid holistic understanding. A summary was written for each family participating in the study, consisting of a family genogram, biographical data, relevant known details about the family’s rural background, and interview information. Thus it included structural and descriptive detail of historical and current significance, conveying a sense of some kind of whole. These summaries assisted in the data analysis process by helping keep the participants in mind whilst working with the data, and by providing links that connected elements of the data in the interpretation.

The data analysis process reduced and organised the material and allowed for interpretation, whereby patterns could be identified and explanations offered (Davidson & Tollich, 2003b). It is a time consuming and labour intensive process (Liamputtong, 2009). A hermeneutic approach involves dwelling in the texts of the lived experience and the participants’ understanding of this experience. It involves assembling and reassembling codes in order to gain clarity and draw out the themes that have been identified. In aiming to capture the essence of the experience the text is interpreted and meanings made through apparent themes.

“Hermenuetically, interpretation is never final or complete, it is always an approximation” (Geanellos, 1998, p. 158). To seek to understand another, acknowledges a multiplicity of truths and understandings. The task of this study is to incorporate text and understanding in
an attempt to uncover the meanings in relation to the research questions and to raise new possibilities.

**Ethical Issues**

Tolich and Davidson (2003) contend that “most codes of ethics can be reduced to a collection of common principles” (p. 81). These are:

1. Do no harm – protection;
2. Voluntary participation;
3. Anonymity or confidentiality;
4. Avoid deceit; and
5. Analyse and report data faithfully.

In addition to these principles, there are two important ethical dimensions that have been taken into account in this study. These are: the requirements and obligations under the Treaty of Waitangi\(^6\); and ethical issues specifically related to research with child participants.

**Ongoing ethical considerations.** This rural childhoods research project attended to the ethical issues noted above and consequently gained full approval from the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee (HEC) in May 2007, prior to commencing recruitment and data collection. However, I remain mindful that ethics is an ongoing part of the research process and “ethical dilemmas may arise at any stage of the research and cannot be immunised against by having ethics approval” (Sligo, 2001, p. 204).

Specific issues in research with children, tend to be focused on disproportionately in ethical codes (Lindsay, 2000), with less attention being given to ongoing ethical practice and considerations (Christensen & Prout, 2002). Having an awareness of this issue from my

\(^6\) The Treaty of Waitangi (Te Tiriti O Waitangi) was signed in 1840 by representatives of the tangata whenua Māori, indigenous people of New Zealand, and the British Crown. Although historically controversial it is seen as the founding document on which Māori-Pākehā relationships and society are based.
previous postgraduate research, focusing on children's participation in research (Powell, 2006), I was committed from the outset of this study to ensuring that children's participation rights were respected and ethical practice maintained throughout the process. The choices that I made in the design and implementation of this study were guided by my ethical understandings, a child centred perspective (Grover, 2004) and a children's rights approach to research (McNaughton & Smith, 2007).

**Protection of participants.** The topic of my research study would not be deemed as sensitive, and it does not specifically raise the issue of potential for harm, but this is always possible when conducting research that asks people about their life experiences. Experiences may be discussed through the research process that give rise to an emotional response from the participant.

My professional background as a child psychotherapist working with children and families means that I have experience in recognising and managing emotional distress. I also have professional networks established nationally, should assistance have been required for participants. There were no situations of upset or distress that warranted further support or intervention.

**Voluntary participation and withdrawal.** Participation in this study was voluntary for adult and child participants. The requirements for consent to participate have been discussed in detail elsewhere in this chapter.

Given the disparate nature of relationships between adults and children, with regard to status, power and control, I considered it essential that children understood that they have full freedom to withdraw their participation. They were informed that they could discontinue an interview any time during it, and could edit or remove the material gained from their interview up to four weeks from the time of the interview. Ways of doing this were discussed in the ICI such as telling me directly, or telling their parent, or phoning my answerphone and leaving a

---

47 There is a lack of definition around what constitutes a sensitive topic in research (Powell & Smith, 2006) but generally it is one with the potential to cause upset and distress for participants or others.

138
message. We also discussed ways children could indicate that they did not want to answer a question, for example, as one child suggested, saying 'pass'. Each time I met with a child participant I reminded them again that they could decide not to take part. Parents were made aware that the child's wishes regarding participation were paramount.

There was no reward offered to adult or child participants for taking part. However, after the final interview had taken place I gave each participant a small gift as a token of my appreciation. Participants were not informed of this beforehand so that it was not an incentive to participate (Alderson & Morrow, 2004).

Avoid deceit - informed consent. Researchers hold the responsibility to be as honest as possible from the outset of the project, so that participants can make an informed decision about participating including all the obligations (Munford & Sanders, 2001). As already discussed, information was provided for children and parents in this study prior to gaining consent, in an information pack, with the opportunity for children to discuss it further and gain clarification in the ICI. Every effort was made to ensure that children and parents understood fully what the project involved.

Anonymity or confidentiality. Interviews can never be truly anonymous as the researcher is able to identify a certain person's responses (Davidson & Tolich, 2003). However, confidentiality has been maintained in this study by securing all documentation, audiotapes and visual images. In the writing up, personal information has been used only in terms of describing the sample, and care has been taken to protect participants' identities. Every attempt has been made to exclude data that may have identifying features. Certain demographic information that could increase identification of participants has not been used. Gender and age have been used, however real names have not. Pseudonyms have been assigned, with the children selecting their own. In some instances the choice of pseudonym may compromise confidentiality as some children chose nicknames familiar to those who know them, or told their family the pseudonym they had chosen. This was discussed with the children at the time, and the choice was ultimately left to them.
The rural areas have been referred to by the general district name, but the actual location has not been disclosed. Further to this, care has been taken to ensure that there are several locations within each district with the same characteristics to further protect anonymity.

Research with families can be ethically challenging as issues arise around the involvement of other family members in the interview process, parental access to children’s information, and confidentiality in the interview setting (Munford & Sanders, 2001). It was made clear to participants that they would only have access to their own information. Some parents expressed a wish to know what their child had said, but accepted the limit placed on this. What was more difficult was maintaining confidentiality in the interview setting. Despite discussing the need for this in the ICI, some interviews with children were conducted with family members around. In some instances parents were not present, but younger siblings interrupted. In a couple of interviews with children, parents insisted on remaining present. In these situations I continued with the interview as planned, but avoided topics that could potentially cause friction or cause children to modify their answers. The children interviewed did not appear to indicate (verbally or non-verbally) discomfort or significant restraint with other family member’s present, leading me to wonder if this was perhaps more familiar and comfortable for some children, and therefore preferable to being interviewed in private. Other children clearly indicated that the privacy aspect of the interview was important to them. This again highlights the diversity of children, and the need to be reflexive and adaptive in research.

**Faithful analysis and reporting of data.**

Research, by definition, is subversive. It takes what is private, or known to a few people, and makes that information public. Once information has been made public, the ability to control how this information is used has been lost. (Spoonley, 2003, p. 59)

According to Spoonley (2003) the researcher adopts the role of guardian. The information must be treated with respect. This chapter has outlined the methods of data collection and analysis. Every opportunity has been taken to ensure that the private information gained
during the research process has been treated respectfully. Reporting of it in this thesis and in future publications will respect the intent and meaning of the participant.

The following two chapters of this thesis report the findings from the data collection with parents and children. These findings chapters are structured using the framework that emerged from the literature review and which I found to be applicable to the data analysis. The chapters are divided into major categories, from which a number of sub-categories and themes emerge. The data is reported by way of a paragraph outlining the theme or findings, followed by selected quotes from participants to illustrate these. The layout of these chapters is such that the quotes exemplify points in the preceding paragraph, not just the sentence that immediately precedes them. The choice of quotes was guided by those that were most illustrative of the finding under discussion. I also endeavoured to ensure that quotes from individual participants were used in relation to issues that they felt particularly strongly about, as a way of faithfully reporting their perspectives. This included reporting the occasional ‘rogue quote’ when a participant’s response was markedly at odds with other participants, but I was aware of the importance of the issue to them. For ease of reading the transcriptions of participants’ quotes have been edited, with punctuation added. In addition to the inclusion of quotes, reference is made to the specific number of participants who provided particular responses, to give clear and accurate reporting of this aspect of the data.

**Treaty of Waitangi.** There are good reasons for many indigenous communities to view research and researchers with suspicion as historically, and more recently, research has been used against their interests (Spooner, 2003). Prior to commencing this research study I consulted with the Ngāi Tahu Research Consultation Committee, as is customary with research conducted at the University of Otago. The Committee considered the research to be of interest and importance. I also consulted with a Māori colleague resident in Northland and discussed aspects of recruitment and data collection, prior to starting the study.

The study followed the guidelines for bicultural research involving Māori, including the three principles of participation, protection and partnership as outlined in the Royal Commission on Social Policy (cited by Thomas, 2000, p. 6). Māori parents and children were
free to participate in this study. Māori were not specifically targeted; however there are participants who identify as Māori. Ethnicity data were collected for the purposes of describing the sample, and for consultation with a Māori colleague, if required, to address issues in the data analysis arising from ethnicity. This has not been necessary.

**Child participants.** Research with children encompasses the same ethical issues as with other research participants and also those specific to conducting research with child participants (Powell & Smith, 2006). Ethical research should:

... enable children to be heard without exploiting them, protect children without silencing and excluding them, and pursue rigorous inquiry without distressing them. (Alderson & Morrow, 2004, p. 12)

In my earlier study (Powell, 2006) I argued that there were some fundamental issues that should be standard ethical requirements. These are that children should always be required to give consent to participation, and the opportunity to refuse and withdraw at any stage; information should always be provided in a child-friendly form about the project; and the researchers should have sufficient knowledge and understanding to be able to reflexively consider children’s responses as the research process unfolds, and thus any ethical issues as they arise. These issues have all been addressed in this study.

**Ensuring Rigour**

Rigour “refers to the quality of qualitative enquiry and is used as a way of evaluating qualitative research” (Liamputtong, 2009, p. 20). Ensuring rigour is essential in qualitative research for establishing that a study is trustworthy, and the findings are believable, credible and thus make a meaningful contribution to knowledge. One of my intentions in this chapter has been to provide sufficient detail about the methodological and ethical choices, involved throughout this research study to demonstrate the degree of rigour involved (Liamputtong, 2009).
Lincoln and Guba (1989, cited in Liamputtong, 2009) proposed four criteria for ensuring the rigour, or trustworthiness, of qualitative research, that parallel those used in quantitative research for demonstrating validity and reliability. These four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, whilst not universally agreed upon or adopted, "are widely known and remain the 'gold standard' that many qualitative researchers still use nowadays" (Liamputtong, 2009, p. 21). They are briefly discussed in relation to this research study.

Credibility. Credibility is comparable to internal validity and is essentially concerned with whether the research findings can be trusted. A key issue is the authentic representation by the researcher of what the participants have said (Liamputtong, 2009). As already discussed, this is a particular challenge with children participating.

There are several ways in which credibility has been attended to in this study. Triangulation is "the most powerful means for strengthening credibility in qualitative research" (Liamputtong, 2009, p. 26) and involves the combining of information from multiple sources to substantiate the data and emerging themes. My study uses methodological triangulation, multiple methods of data collection (in-depth interviews, artwork, photography and activity records), and data triangulation, multiple quotations from the data and multiple participants (interviewing parents and children about the same phenomenon).

Credibility was also ensured through participant validation (also known as member checking), with the child participants during the interview process. Trochim (2006) contends that participants are the only ones who can judge credibility. Prolonged engagement, which allows a trusting relationship to develop between the researcher and the participants (Liamputtong, 2009), provided opportunities for revisiting the earlier research conversations and meanings taken from these.

Other methods for ensuring credibility, which relate to the data analysis process, were used in this study. Constant comparison, which involves inspecting and comparing all the data fragments that occur, and comprehensive data treatment, in which all the data is incorporated in
the analysis with no data being excluded for any reason (Silverman, 2000), were both used in the coding process used in the thematic analysis.

**Transferability.** Transferability, or applicability, refers to the degree to which the findings can be generalised to other contexts and settings. The emphasis is on theoretical or analytical generalisability of research findings. Qualitative data is not generalisable in the conventional (positivist) sense, given the small sample size and lack of significant statistical analyses, but transferability refers to the extent to which findings can be claimed to transfer to another context (S. Morrow, 2005).

Transferability can be enhanced by ensuring a thorough description of the research context, and the assumptions that were central to the research (Trochim, 2006). This includes “sufficient information about the self (the researcher as instrument) and the research context, processes, participants, and researcher-participant relationships to enable the reader to decide how the findings may transfer” (S. Morrow, 2005, p. 252). Every attempt has been made in this chapter to provide rich and thick description of the research setting, participants, methods and processes of undertaking this research (Liamputtong, 2009).

**Dependability.** The concept of dependability can be compared to reliability (Liamputtong, 2009) and relates to the need for a study to be consistent across time, researchers, and analysis techniques (S. Morrow, 2005). Dependability takes into account influences and changes in the context of the research setting. It emphasises the need to account for the decisions made in the research process, and ensuring that the process of research is explicit, logical and clearly documented.

The discussion in this chapter has provided a chronology of the research process, and indicated the existence of an audit trail which details the steps taken and the rationale for and influences on these. A reflexive stance was maintained in this study, throughout the data collection and data analysis processes, to ensure the dependability of the data with an ongoing awareness of the ever changing research context. Reflexivity “makes transparent the context
in which knowledge is produced and thus opens it up to scrutiny and interrogation” (Pini, 2004, p. 169).

**Confirmability.** Confirmability refers to the degree to which the data can be confirmed or corroborated by others, whilst acknowledging that research is never objective (S. Morrow, 2005). It aims to ensure that the findings, and the interpretations of these, are clearly linked to the data, determined by the participants and the conditions of the inquiry, not by the biases, motivations and interests of the researcher (Liamputtong, 2009).

In this study confirmability, similarly to dependability, is demonstrated by thorough documentation of the process of data analysis, which creates an audit trail which others can potentially follow. The description of the documentation given in this chapter lends transparency to the research process. In addition, this study has been undertaken under the supervision of two senior, very experienced researchers, who did not participate directly in the data collection or analysis but oversaw, critiqued and endorsed the process.

In summary, a number of factors in the data collection and analysis methods have been used throughout the research process to ensure rigour in this study. These include methodological and data triangulation, respondent validation, constant comparison, comprehensive data treatment, thick description, reflexivity and transparent documentation. The context of the study with the methodological choices made, including purposive sampling and the prolonged engagement with participants (Liamputtong, 2009), also works to provide a rigorous framework of inquiry.

**Summary**

This chapter has outlined the methodology and methods used in my study. The methodology has been shaped by principles and assumptions from the interpretive and critical paradigms. The theoretical focus on social constructions of childhood and rurality stem from an interpretive position, while the philosophical principles regarding children’s participation resonate with the critical paradigm. I share Mayall’s (1999) contention that research with
children aims to produce data that increases “knowledge about children’s experiences, knowledge and views” (p. 13), and can be used to contribute toward improving the social conditions of childhood. Children’s experiences can be linked with theoretical study, by using them to deconstruct dominant theory, and as the principal basis for reconstructing theory (Mayall, 1999).

An innovative methodology has been used in this study, ensuring that the exploration of rural New Zealand childhood centres on the voices and perspectives of those directly involved: the children and their parents. The methodological approach is hermeneutic, examining the meanings and interpretations of rural childhood from participants’ accounts, and child focused. Consequently, consideration has been given to how best to facilitate children’s participation in the research in a meaningful and authentic way. An aspect of this has been awareness and scrutiny of my own role as adult researcher. A multi-method approach was used to enable children to be active participants in the research process. This included an initial consent interview, developed to attend to ethical considerations and respectfully promote children’s participation. The methods also facilitated parents’ participation in the research process. The methodological and ethical choices made in this study have been explicitly articulated in this chapter, allowing the research design and processes to be scrutinized, and highlighting innovative aspects. The following two chapters present the findings arising from the data collected from the parents and children participating in my study.
CHAPTER SIX
Findings – Parents’ Data

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings that emerged from my interviews with the parents in this study. The data has been organised using the framework that evolved in reviewing the Minority world rural childhood literature. This framework has three main categories, each of which indicates the construction of rural childhood in accordance with different discourses of rurality: rural idyll; rural dull; and rural deprivation. Within each of these categories a number of sub-categories became apparent, from which themes relating to the construction of rural childhood and parenting in a range of New Zealand environments emerged. Findings are presented in this chapter using this framework. The presentation of each theme in the findings is followed by illustrative quotes from participants, exemplifying the points in the previous paragraph. Key themes are briefly summarised at the end of each section, with reference made to relevant theory and literature. At the end of the chapter there is an overall summary of the themes.

Thirty six parents, from 24 families, participated in this study. The findings are presented from 24 individual, or sets of, parents. The parents who were interviewed together tended to present a shared or united opinion, with individual embellishment. Therefore the data from interviews in which both parents participated is referred to as though a single parent participated, but with all quotes identifying which particular parent made the comment. This method of reporting data has been used to avoid skewing the findings, by inflating the number of parents in areas in which two parents participated. Therefore the number of parent participants from each area is: Canterbury – eight; Rodney – six; Northland – four; MacKenzie – six.
Rural Idyll

The rural idyll emerged as the dominant theme in the findings. Many of the issues regarding living rurally were related to idyllic or positive perceptions held by the parents; confirming, challenging, elaborating on and qualifying these. Within this category there are three broad areas of focus. These are lifestyle choice, beneficial aspects of living rurally, and the fostering of positive attributes in children, each of which will be presented in turn.

Rural Lifestyle

The vast majority of participants (n=22) indicated that living rurally was a lifestyle choice. More than half the participants (n=15) made the choice to live rurally for reasons related to their children. This was reflected most strongly in the two areas with strongest urban influence; all the parents in Canterbury included reference to their children when stating their reasons for living rurally, as did two thirds of the parents in Rodney:

Moved out here for the children really. To bring the kids up. I personally regard living out here as a hell of a lot better than being in town. (Cant05, father)

Moving to a rural area was to do with having children. I’m not sure why it was such a burning passion. (Rod01, mother)

In contrast, half the parents in Northland and only one parent in MacKenzie, included reference to their children:

I made a conscious decision to raise my children here ‘cause my childhood was so good. (Nor01, mother)

It was both of our intention to live in a rural setting. We lived in a city for a while, not a situation I would want to have children in. (Mac04, mother)
The vast majority (n=21) made the decision to live rurally deliberately, with most (n=17) specifically choosing the particular area they were living in. The reasons for their choice included proximity to a city, closeness to family and whânau, family connections to the land, and environmental attributes of the region, for example, near the coast or mountains.

At least one parent in the majority of families participating (n=19) had grown up in a rural environment. Of these, 14 had lived on farms or horticultural properties. Most of the parents (n=19) spoke about their rural experiences as children. These childhood rural experiences were related to growing up on farms (n=12), living in a rural area but not having a farming family background (n=4), visiting farming relatives and rural recreational experiences (n=3). These childhood experiences generally had positive emotional associations (n=15).

When I was a kid I would just take off, perhaps with a book, wandering along the hedgerows. Or playing with kids on a neighbouring farm. Parents would ask 'Which farm? Be back by tea time'. When we were older we went off on bikes. (Rod05, mother)

Most places we stayed were rural and isolated 'cause artists just want to be left alone. A positive association. Probably the driving force behind where we are living. (Cant08, mother)

The remainder who discussed their own childhood (n=4) indicated both positive and negative experiences:

Also had biinmin jobs to do. Milking, feeding calves, feeding out hay, bringing in hay, always had something to do. If you weren't doing it for your own family you were doing it for the neighbours. We were pretty busy all the time. (Rod03, father)

48 These 19 participants who talked about their rural childhood experiences are not all the same 19 parents who had grown up in rural environments.
Some of the parents held a nostalgic view of their rural childhood experiences, with references to the “New Zealand of old” (Cant06, mother) and being able to “disappear all day” (Rod02, mother), and from others:

Our friend from Dunedin says it’s so relaxing here, you wouldn’t have a care or a worry in the world. And we just about vomit, you know. (Mac02, mother)

Some participants (n=5) made a connection between agriculture and rural life, suggesting that they considered rural to mean farming, not other non-agricultural lifestyles:

To me rural is when you’re on a farm, farming, but rural out here is not that. People live rurally but they go and work in town, so that’s going to be totally different isn’t it? Rural is agriculture. You can live rural but that doesn’t make you rural. (Rod06, mother)

People who have been here ten years will say they’re rural. They’ve probably got no idea of being rural ‘cause they’re from the city, or another country. Have no knowledge of rural life for previous generations. (Rod03, father)

Only three kids in the class come off farms that are actually farming. [This area] would be well over 50 per cent lifestyle, township versus rural (Cant07, father)

Four families participating in the study were currently farming. In addition, six families were generating income from agricultural or horticultural use of their land, in addition to being in paid employment. Four families lived in small rural townships. The remaining families lived on rural properties that were not economically productive, at a distance from townships and urban areas.

Participants (n=17) from all areas made reference to changes in the rural locality in which they live. For the most part these references were about property subdivisions (n=11) and new people coming into the area (n=10). Most participants (n=8) did not express strong feelings
about the subdivisions, but a few did, describing them as “dead ugly” (Cant06, mother) and changing the character of the area. Only four participants identified themselves as ‘new’ to the area or living on lifestyle blocks, whilst others actively sought to distance themselves from this:

It’s like a lifestyle property – but it isn’t. It makes money. It’s bigger than most lifestyle blocks, sixteen acres, and it’s farmed. We mainly make silage, occasionally fatten lambs. Most lifestyle blocks have three sheep, a big lawn, a pony, whatever ... (Mac05, mother)

Participants’ responses to new people coming into the area differed markedly. Some in Rodney and Northland (n=4) were positive about the increasing diversity of the local population. Northland participants also expressed pleasure that, as well as newcomers, whānau\(^{49}\) members were returning to live in the area. Others in Canterbury, Rodney and MacKenzie (n=4) were negative about the changes they saw occurring within the community. The remainder (n=3) observed the changes without expressing an opinion about them.

Some are fantastic people buying up around here. Some coming back. A few people from overseas. They're loving the place, they can’t believe how beautiful it is. (Nor03, father)

What’s happened now [is that] people are coming out to the country with the town attitude. Ruining a lot of areas I think. In some ways ruining our whole reason for bringing the kids out here. (Cant07, father)

Different people than there’s ever been. Less people on farms ‘cause farms have got bigger, amalgamating, to be economically viable. The changing face of rural New Zealand. (Mac02, father)

\(^{49}\) Māori language word for family, and extended family.
The majority of parents indicated their satisfaction with living, and raising their children, rurally. Only one parent, in Northland, clearly stated that living rurally was not advantageous to her children, however, she did indicate during the interview that the lifestyle suited her personally:

There’s not a lot of advantages having kids out here – it’s just away from the rat race more. But there’s not really any advantages, ‘cause there’s not a lot for them to do. (Nor04, mother)

Three parents were neutral about where they lived. The remaining parents (n=20) appeared satisfied personally with where they currently live and with raising their children there:

They said ‘you can’t just live in this one place all your life’ and I said ‘but I love this one place so I can!’ (Nor01, mother)

The negative things I don’t dwell on. The positives outweigh them. (Rod01, mother)

The satisfaction with raising children in a rural environment was stated most clearly by parents in Canterbury and Rodney, with parents in the other areas tending to infer this:

We’ve got the best start for them that we could have. I’m happy with what we’ve done. And it has been a conscious decision, not something we stumbled on. (Cant02, father)

We can do anything that they can do in the city and we have the freedom of living in a village. I highly recommend this type of construction for rural living – a village. (Cant06, mother)

We are living the dream! (Cant08, mother)
As time went on we both felt it was great to bring the kids up here, because they have access to all things and can mess around outside. It’s working very well – it’s happening as we wanted it to. (Rod05, father)

Where we live – it’s the best of both worlds. (Rod06, mother)

Parents’ reasons for living rurally as discussed in this section, have been summarised in accordance with area and are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Reasons contributing to parents’ choice to live rurally, in each area**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Canterbury Total n=8</th>
<th>Rodney Total n=6</th>
<th>Northland Total n=4</th>
<th>MacKenzie Total n=6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural living related to children</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proximity to urban area</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close to family/whānau</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family/land connections</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental attributes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents – rural background</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents – farming background</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with lifestyle choice</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The large number of parents choosing to live rurally for reasons related to their children is consistent with the perception in some English studies that rural living is better for children (Little & Austin, 1996; Valentine, 1997). Discursive understandings of childhood have
produced the spatial outcome that home is considered the best place for children to be (Holloway & Valentine, 2000), and idyllic discourses of rurality construct the countryside as the ideal setting for that home and family life (Jones, 1997). This idyllic vision is most strongly associated in this study with the areas with greater urban influence, Canterbury and Rodney. Proximity to an urban area is also an important reason for living rurally in these areas, most notably Canterbury, suggesting that while parents value rural living they also appreciate being able to work in cities and access urban facilities. Several participants described this as having ‘the best of both worlds’.

Parents in the two areas furthest away from and least influenced by urban areas, Northland and MacKenzie, chose to live in their specific rural area for reasons related to proximity to family and whānau members, and the family connection with the land. In Northland the land was primarily shared land ownership within Māori whānau, in keeping with traditional Māori practice (Wilson, 2008). In MacKenzie, the family land was in the current ownership of a single family and had been farmed by previous generations. Most parents participating in the study had experienced rural childhoods themselves, suggesting that this may be a factor in choosing this lifestyle. The connection with the land and the sense of intergenerational continuity, apparent also in farming families in the United Kingdom (Riley, 2009), is most important for MacKenzie farming families and Northland Māori participants.

The changes in rural areas noted by the participants, including increased subdivision of rural land and the presence of ‘new’ people moving into the area, reflect the changing face of rural New Zealand (Mulet-Marquis & Fairweather, 2008). There was a sense of reluctance from most participants to identify themselves as newcomers or ‘lifestylers’. Rather, people distanced themselves from this by identifying others in this way and noting recent changes to the area, locating themselves as longer-standing residents. Participants also emphasised agricultural aspects of their lives. Their conflation of rural with agriculture, which according to Cloke (2006) contributes to reproducing a rural urban dichotomy, further distances themselves from an urban lifestyle.
Beneficial Aspects of Living Rurally

Participants identified and discussed many perceived beneficial aspects of living rurally for themselves and their children. These have been divided into: aesthetic idyllic aspects and the social constructions associated with these.

**Aesthetic aspects.** The aesthetic aspects of idyllic rural living identified by participants included having space (n=12), peace and quiet (n=5), and access to the natural world (n=6):

- Love watching the kids run and keep running and not reach the end of the garden. They have so much energy to burn off and it’s lovely to have the space without having to go to a public park with all the teenagers … needles lying on the ground … dog poo. The space is a key feature. (Cant08, mother)

- Feels a lot safer here now than in town ‘cause so peaceful and quiet. (Cant05, mother)

- I liked to get away and be with nature. Really important, and wanted it for the children. So they would know how to extricate themselves in future, if they were being swamped by situations when older to do with peers, other people. The pressures of modern life really. Feel the natural world is the real world. The really important part of what makes this world. The best way to understand it is to grow up with it. I feel very strongly about it. (Rod05, mother)

These aesthetic aspects, drawn from the physical environment, are related to other facets associated with the rural idyll and identified by participants - freedom (n=12) and privacy (n=5):

- More freedom than kids in the city. I let them ride up the road to meet friends. They can be gone for five hours and I wouldn’t worry. (Rod02, mother)
Because I like to have the feeling of space, outdoors. Feeling of not being watched all the time – privacy. (Cant01, mother)

The two idyllic aspects most strongly associated with children’s experiences were freedom (n=11) and space (n=7), which were also both associated with positive rural childhood memories for parents (n=9).

When we are camping with friends, country kids are always the loudest, ‘cause they’re not told to be quiet. I enjoy that. They’ve got the freedom to be themselves, run around and be noisy. (Cant05, father)

Wanted to live rurally as an adult and wanted it for the children. Knew what it had given me when I was growing up – amazing freedom. (Rod05, mother)

These idyllic aspects of rural living were discussed mostly by participants living in the rural areas with a strong or moderate urban influence, and considerably less so by those living in areas with a low urban influence and highly rural/remote.

The aesthetic aspects of the rural idyll, related to the natural, physical environment (Kraak & Kenway, 2002), are associated with childhood through the supposed natural affinity between children and the natural world (James & James, 2008). This positive association of childhood and nature contributes to the discourse of the rural childhood idyll (Holloway & Valentine, 2000). With the natural world as the ideal setting for childhood, freedom to move and explore within it is a key aspect (Little & Austin 1996; Valentine 1997), and this is valued by parents, particularly by those living in Canterbury, Rodney and Northland. Comparison of the rural and the urban lend potency to the rural myth (Leyshon, 2008), and negative constructions of urban childhood, including lack of freedom, space and privacy, are mobilised by rural parents in this study, casting rural childhood in a comparatively favourable light.
Social aspects. The social aspects identified by parents as being important features of rural living correlate with the moral component of the rural idyll, as described by Kraak and Kenway (2002). These aspects include community, family and safety.

Community. Community was identified as an important feature of rural living for families and included: social participation of adults and children; rural school based activities; reciprocity of care; social inclusion; parental involvement in activities; being known; and shared values.

A key feature of community is social participation. Over half the participants (n=13) identified this as an important feature for adults (n=9) and/or children (n=9). For the most part this was expressed positively, however some participants (n=4) acknowledged there were negative aspects to social participation:

Got to be in to win. If you're going to stand back and not join in you're going to miss out. If you're stand-offish, going to lose, won't work. You've got to muck in and do working bees and go and be sociable. You've got to if you want to fit in. Otherwise people talk about you and you're not invited to functions and things. (Rod02, mother)

Kids become citizens of their communities at a younger age. More aware and more empathy. Recently [there was] a house fire in town and the school got children doing things to replace the toys. I don't know if they'd do that in the city, but greater appreciation here. Greater participation. (Mac05, mother)

It was noted that children participate socially with adults. This is attributed by some to a lack of babysitters necessitating children accompanying parents to social events. The parents who raised this issue saw children's social participation with adults as a positive aspect of rural living:
They learn to relate to adults better than some town children. Used to more involvement with adults as well. ... In rural areas you get used to children being invited too, because there aren’t the babysitters ... Enjoyed that with correspondence [school] too, that children are all part of whatever’s going on. (Cant01, mother)

Something strange we found coming from town. If we went to a party [in town] it was all the same age group, but here it was like the whole valley, all ages, which is good. (Cant02, father)

One avenue that increases social participation for rural parents is through meeting other adults at school and child-related activities. In smaller communities the same parents are seen at the same activities. The level of parental involvement was noted by a third of participants (n=8), with particular emphasis given by MacKenzie participants (n=4) to the significant role played by farming parents in children’s activities and related working bees:

Most things in rural communities become social things. Like swimming training, mums sit by the side of the pool and have a yarn. Every other place they drop the kids off, but because we’re rural we’ve gone to the pool specifically, no coffee shop open at night, could go to the pub I suppose but that’s not a good look. So you end up staying there and have a yak. (Mac05, mother)

If you want your kids to do things you have got to be involved to keep the things going. Have to go on committees ... probably at a working bee you’d find a bigger percentage of farming people or rural people than town people. People expect farmers to be able to just walk off their farm whenever, because they’re self-employed they can go and do anything to help out whenever it’s needed, whereas people in jobs in town have to work in jobs nine to five. (Mac01, mother)

Rural schools are a key feature in these communities and were generally viewed positively by participants (n=15). Their small size was mostly regarded as a positive feature (n=7), with
teachers more accessible, parents and community more involved and children being more attended to and more sheltered.

It’s only a little school, but jeez it’s a nice tidy little school. (Nor01, mother)

I would have home schooled if they didn’t go to a small country school where I felt we had more say. If you have concerns you can speak to someone and have it heard in the school system. There’s only four teachers so you can always find someone! (Rod01, mother)

Community is wrapped around the school [correspondence school unit, with seven children and one teacher]. … The school does a couple of productions each year and those little kids get up, everyone in the road comes – the single boys [farm workers], everybody, usually about thirty people for a concert. … School is the social hub. (Mac06, mother)

It’s quite a sheltered kind of a school as well. I think she will get a bit of a shock when she goes to college (Cant02, father)

Most parents in the Canterbury area near a large city (n=7) put emphasis on the school Pets Day as a unique and enjoyable feature of their rural school:

Pets Day is about the kids making things … Like a mini show. I think it’s a cool tradition. A country tradition. Only country schools do it. (Cant07, mother)

The annual Pets Day is a big thing at all the schools round here. The amount of work that goes into the entries! And serious judging. We found it quite amusing when we first got here. Now we’re really into it. Quite competitive, even laminating the certificates! (Cant08, mother)
However, there was a sense from some parents (n=3) that the rural tradition of Pets Day was being diluted in areas with diminishing farms and increasing urban influence from newcomers:

Calf leading was a skill that was a practical necessity, now it’s become dissociated from the skill of leading big cows. If a six year old can’t lead a calf then how can an eleven year old bring in 200 cows to milk? Ag Day has been watered down to become Pet Day. Totally different now. (Rod03, father)

Those parents who had experience of alternative schooling for their children in the form of correspondence school and home schooling (n=4) were positive about the impact of this on their children and their family life:

Home schooling is tied in with living rurally. It was great, brought us together even closer as a family unit. (Rod05, father)

An aspect contributing to the participants’ valued sense of community is the reciprocity of care for each other’s children (n=12) and between neighbours (n=11). Whilst this was mentioned by participants in all areas it was mostly discussed by those in the areas furthest from urban areas (n=8): Northland and MacKenzie.

Because you’re local everybody knows your kids, or knows they’re local kids. You find people look out for them, like if she fell off her bike in the street. (Mac05, mother)

People help you out more up here, in certain areas, when you know people. If you need a ride, or to look after your kids for you. ‘Cause people know each other here in each little area. (Nor04, mother)

There’s an unwritten law that if someone wants something then you get help. If you need something … it’s swings and roundabouts. If you need help you should
be able to just ask someone for help. (Mac06, father) Most of the time you don’t have to ask. They already know and they just give you stuff or volunteer. (Mac06, mother)

Ten participants, across the areas, discussed aspects of social inclusion apparent in their communities, including through sport related activities, welcoming newcomers and social mores attributed to rural social infrastructure:

If you’re watching a game you’re not just watching your children, but also other children. (Rod01, mother)

It’s the attitude of the people. A camaraderie amongst country people that’s totally different to town people ... our kid’s attitude. Like when a close friend dies we take food in, our kids will know to do that instinctively and will do it too. They know to invite lone neighbours for a meal. K [daughter] has done that. You don’t leave people out. (Cant07, father)

Hadn’t been here too long and people were ringing up to see if we wanted to play tennis, really welcoming and open. Lots of really community minded people round here. (Rod04, mother)

In addition, there was a sense that some participants (n=5) perceived certain values as consistent with rural community, such as trust, sharing, empathy, family and whānau.

So you know them and they know you and they know what sort of a person you are likely to be. I went into the garage on Friday and I forgot to take my wallet – so they’ve stuck the docket up on the wall and I have to go and pay for it. I don’t even know if she’s put my surname on it. I don’t know if she even knows my name, but she knows who I am and she knows I’m going to pay for it. (Mac01, mother)
Economics is a disadvantage of living here. Well, it is and it isn't. Personally I don’t see it as a disadvantage, ‘cause things are just things, you have them or you don’t. Don’t put a high value on things, I put a high value on whānau and community and sharing and looking after each other. (Nor01, mother)

There was a strong impression gained from more than half the participants (n=14) that rural communities were close knit social groups, in which ‘everyone knows everyone’. This was indicated across the areas, but particularly in MacKenzie (n=6) and Northland (n=3). It was at times expressed as a positive feature of rural communities (n=8) and at other times as a negative facet (n=8).

I know people here. Small community thing. Makes life sometimes uncomfortable, but most of the time it’s a good thing to have people know your business. You can’t get away from that in a small town. (Mac05, mother)

I’ve found everyone knows each other, went to school together, related to each other. It’s kind of hard working out who’s related to who and how things work. It was kind of hard, quite lonely at first, because everyone’s got old friends, lots of them. … People know everyone and they want to know you too. You get these twenty questions when you move here … They like to put you completely in your box. Almost intrusive, more intrusive than you’re used to, but completely the norm here. On the first day at school for M [son] a kid kept asking questions, he was heavily into the rugby club, related to half the town, everyone knows him. M came home and said ‘I think he’s going to try to abduct me!’ (Mac03, mother)

I was given good advice and it’s quite interesting advice. I’m a yakker, and I was told by someone who’d lived on the road for a long time, you make friends on the road but keep your best friends off the road, out of your community. ‘Cause when you’re living in a place like this you have so much to do with everybody all the time, you need to have an outlet off. (Mac06, mother)
As with reciprocity of care, and perhaps inclusive of this, the positive sense of close knit community featured most strongly in Northland and MacKenzie. The negative aspects of close knit communities, such as gossip and exclusion of individuals, were also discussed most by the participants from MacKenzie:

Need to live here 40 years to not be a townie. (Mac01, father)

Only thing I’ll say about rural communities – sometimes if you’re working in a significant thing in the community it can be very hard. Can be extremely tough [working] in public institutions. If something goes even slightly wrong, because social networks are so tight, it can go around the township, and be blown out of proportion and that can be difficult. (Mac04, mother)

When I first came back everyone was very wary ‘cause I was a solo mum, so I was a woman. A lot of women here aren’t local, they are farmer’s wives, married in. They were more cautious of me coming back, like a bit of a threat. I’m standing talking to her and her husband comes up and it’s rah, rah, rah and she’s ‘how do you know him?’ Went to school with him. ‘Oh, I didn’t know that.’ You get quite defensive really. (Mac05, mother)

A few participants (n=4) expressed opinions that attitudes were changing within the community:

There is an ever decreasing community atmosphere. Every few years you notice it, not every day. Every time there’s a party or a function you always notice there’s a little bit less attendance and a little bit less atmosphere. Everyone’s got quite distant. Everyone’s got too much … too many things to do. (Mac06, father)

Some parents (n=4) expressed strong opinions that things were changing for the worse as a consequence of newcomers moving into their rural areas (Rodney and Canterbury). The concerns included that the newcomers were not aware of the existing social infrastructure and
so were riding roughshod over it, and that they did not share the community values of reciprocity of care and social inclusion. In addition to this, the newcomers were associated with increased wealth in the area which was also perceived to be breaking down traditional social cohesion.

New people are coming in wanting to create a particular kind of community, which is what everybody wants, but without the awareness that that already exists in a less structured, less obvious fashion ... got their own little agenda or own interests, the neighbourly thing isn’t like it used to be. There’s more distance - townie sort of thing, all doing their own individual things. (Rod03, father)

Now, the style of people coming out have money. Lawyers, accountants, in competitive jobs, bringing that competitive nature out to the country. Not going to help anyone else ‘cause if they want something done they pay someone else to do it. They have that attitude like ‘get out of my face, I came here for the privacy’. (Cant07, father)

Others, however, enjoyed the mix of people and saw it as a positive feature of the local community:

It’s very cosmopolitan here. We like it ‘cause it’s such a mix of people. Not all farmers ... people on the neighbouring lifestyle blocks work in town. It’s a totally different lifestyle on a farm. But it’s cool that the people around us on lifestyle [blocks] have no hesitation about ringing us up about looking after pet lambs and problems. Which is cool, really good that they feel they can do that. We haven’t really had that before. (Rod06, mother)

Community is an important notion in the construction of the rural idyll (Panelli et al., 2002; Valentine, 1997), in terms of both tranquillity and belonging (Halfacree, 1993). The value placed on community cohesion and social participation in rural New Zealand areas has historical roots, and current application, in the cooperation required by small communities to
meet social and economic needs (Toynbee, 1995). Aspects of community that continue to be important include social participation and inclusion, reciprocity of care shown toward children and neighbours, and parental involvement required in community based and school activities. While these aspects feature throughout the rural areas, reciprocity of care, parental involvement and the close knit nature of rural communities are most apparent in the more remote areas, Northland and MacKenzie. Geographical isolation and smaller populations heighten the importance of social networks and ties, especially for those without family nearby (Goodrich & Sampson, 2008). Rural schools play an important role in New Zealand rural communities, historically (Wilson, 2009) and currently (Education Review Office, 2001), particularly in areas with low population density where they provide a social hub. However, the harmonious nature of rural community is contested by the effects of the social control exerted within these small communities, through constant observation, scrutiny and criticism (Toynbee, 1995), such as gossip and social exclusion.

The blurring of distinctions between urban and rural (Cloke, 2006) is likely in rural areas that are in close proximity to urban centres. However, people living in the area near the city fringe, Canterbury, distance themselves from possible urban associations, by highlighting particular aspects of community. One aspect emphasised, for example, is the school Pets Day, which has a positive association of children and the natural animal world, contributing to the perception of the rural idyll. Also, Pets Day, with its historical focus on pet lambs and calves, derives from the agricultural heritage in rural areas, and thus is associated with a rural, not urban, lifestyle. Another aspect in which people from Canterbury and Rodney differentiate and distance themselves from urban associations is in their concerns about newcomers moving into the area. The increase in lifestyle blocks and migration of urban people into rural areas is perceived to be diminishing the community spirit (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2008a). Wealthy newcomers are seen by some to be purchasing the rural idyll (Swaffield & Fairweather, 1998; Valentine & Holloway, 2001), and, in doing so, are disregarding the existing social infrastructure and introducing competing values, including exclusion and selectivity (Little & Austin, 1996), that are at odds with traditional rural values.
However, the diverse nature of rural community within the areas is apparent. Some Canterbury and Rodney participants with farming backgrounds see Pets Day as being diluted from an agricultural view of animals to a focus on pets, whilst others embrace it as a symbol of rurality. Participants in MacKenzie place positive emphasis on the close knit nature of the rural community whilst, simultaneously, noting the scrutiny and social exclusion that individuals may face.

**Family.** Family and whānau involvement featured strongly for some participants across all areas. This was expressed in terms of shared activities and experiences within families (n=13) and the importance of having family nearby (n=10):

And we’ll do family things, haymaking, because it suits us. It’s money in the bank but also because we choose to. Shared family experience, probably a rural thing.

(Rod01, mother)

Going down to family’s big in their life … family’s really important. It was like that when I was a kid too. (Nor02, father)

One particular shared activity mentioned by eight participants, predominantly in MacKenzie (n=4), was hunting and fishing. The majority of these parents (n=6) had a farming background and four are currently farming.

One of M’s mate’s family farms up there. We get the call and they go up with [Dad]. M will be in the cab with his mate. The older two will have turns at holding the spotlight. (Mac03, mother)

Dad’s a typical Kiwi bloke really, loves to hunt, shoot, fish. It’s an important part of J’s life. He’s a mini me of his Dad. To me he’s a real Kiwi boy, he loves hunting and fishing. (Cant04, mother)
Intergenerational experiences and continuity were particularly important to participants in Northland (n=3) and MacKenzie (n=5), and also to three participants in Canterbury and Rodney. All of these participants, except one, lived in the area in which they had grown up, with just over half (n=6) living on land that was family owned for generations. All, except two Northland participants, came from farming backgrounds.

Three parents in MacKenzie discussed their expectations about their children’s futures, with two assuming that their children would want to take over the farm. One stated clearly that they did not have the expectation that their children would farm, but they did seem to expect that the land would be retained in the family:

We don’t push farming onto our kids. Want them to think broader, do other things. Compared to my generation when kids were told they were going to farm. It’s got to be their idea, not your idea. I’m not really worried if the kids farm. There are plenty of other options. They could do something else and lease the land out. Probably make more money. (Mac02, father)

An issue emphasised by three Māori parents in Northland was the connection between the whānau and the land. These parents placed great value on family connections and sense of belonging for themselves and their children:

I’ll probably get a house in K [nearby rural township] further down the line, but always believe my roots are here. Always call it my piece of dirt. Dad’s always made me feel like this is mine, brought us up to think this is your fella’s land. Our whenua50 all buried here. Grandkids’ afterbirth buried over there ... [points in direction] greatgrandkids over there. Dad always said where that goes you get drawn back to that place. (Nor03, mother)

The significance of doing things with family members, and the identification of this by some as a rural trait, is related to the geographical isolation necessitating, both historically and

50 Māori language word for placenta (and also for land)
currently, a certain self-sufficiency in families (Toynbee. 1995). Consequently, family 
solidarity has become an aspect of mythologised rural family life (Keeling et al., 2008). 
Hunting and fishing type activities are symbolic of the male pioneer of rural mythology, 
relying on his skills for survival (Fairburn, 2006). These activities combine the rugged rural 
environment, aesthetic aspects of space, the natural world and freedom, and the social 
components of family and community.

The value placed on intergenerational continuity in farming families can be contextualised 
historically with the importance of the family farm in New Zealand as a means to economic 
security and provision (Goodyear, 1998). Over time an attachment to the farm is built up 
through family, personal history and experiences (Riley, 2009).

**Safety.** Rural areas were generally perceived by most participants (n=19) across all the 
areas as being safer than urban areas in terms of crime. A significant number (n=7) attributed 
this in part to there being less opportunity for young people to get in trouble or be involved in 
criminal activity.

I wanted for my children – freedom, and the security, and the lack of fear that you 
have … the right to live in a place where you’re not bombarded with what to be 
afraid of. The right to exist and feel safe and be safe. (Cant06, mother)

In town it’s all gang related stuff which I’m glad S [son] doesn’t really go into 
town otherwise that would rub off on him. I think it’s safer here than in town. 
Considering the ones in town walking around all with gang colour things on … I 
prefere them out here where I can see them. I know mine would probably get into 
trouble in town, but out here [there’s] no opportunities, no shops to go into. 
(Nor02, mother)

Whereas if a child in town gets bored and goes out on the street they can get into 
trouble, they can shoplift, graffitti, throw a stone through a window. My kids can 
throw a stone into a paddock, up a power pole … There’s always something to do,
not that they think there is! More to do, they can’t get in as much trouble.
(Cant04, mother)

Eight participants, half of whom were located in a rural area with strong urban influence (Canterbury), identified stranger danger as an urban phenomenon. Only two of these participants acknowledged the potential for this in rural areas.

They didn’t have the freedom we wanted them to have \textit{[living in town]}. We were constantly vigilant, couldn’t let them go ahead of you on the street. The media is very persuasive with stories about child kidnappings ... it gets to you. Get paranoid. Even though \textit{[we]} probably don’t have reason to be most of the time, but we didn’t want to live with that hanging over us. It was a big factor in us moving out here. Because the children couldn’t have the freedom we had.
(Cant08, mother)

All I hear about Auckland is a girl got kidnapped or there’s been an accident. Had thoughts about moving to Auckland ... but I’m scared my girls might get taken ... Saw the look on my girls’ faces when they saw Auckland at night time, the lights like Sky Tower, looked so excited. I’d like to see their faces like that heaps, but rather see their faces safe than live in Auckland. (Nor03, mother)

In the city maybe stranger danger, maybe people driving too fast. Here everyone knows everyone ... not that that’s really safe. If you want to think deeply about it often it’s the people that are close to you that are the ... aunties, uncles and neighbours are abusers more than anyone. (Rod02, mother)

One participant, however, noted concerns about known young people in the area threatening the safety of children. This was related to drug use by young people in a rural community, and highlights an area of concern for young people, a potential safety threat to children and the role of the community in protecting them:
People keep a closer eye on younger ones 'cause they're worried about the older ones intimidating them. It's new. Our kids still have a lot more freedom to float around ... But if we know somebody is down the road we might say no, you're staying at home today ... Things are changing, different substances are being taken. There's always been substances, but the ones being taken now [P - methamphetamine] are having a different effect. It is out there - us as a community are aware of it. So if someone's out there the kids don't go at that time, they just wait. (Nor01, mother)

The sense of community contributes to a heightened sense of safety for rural parents (n=11). This is in response to any potential criminal threat and to the care extended to children and young people in need, for example if a young person is visibly vulnerable, through excess alcohol consumption, emotional distress or injury.

I don't feel obliged to take the child from door to door. It's a completely non-threatening community. A very 'everyone knows everyone' community. Our dozy youth invariably find themselves being told off by the local constabulary because someone will have seen them in action doing whatever dozy thing they were doing and will have recognised them or their car. They can't get away with much. (Mac03, mother)

You know if the kids are moving around, somebody in this community will know what your kid's up to. So be safe as. Like a safety thing for me. Go camping, stay in someone's paddock, you know someone will be keeping an eye on them.

(Nor01, mother)

If your child has a hissy fit they are not likely to be hitching out of the area without anyone knowing, which means they have a chance to cool off. We also have a social network which says if you see a child upset lure them into a safe environment. That's really important as they get older. (Rod01, mother)
Although most participants indicated a sense of safety from crime, environmental dangers were acknowledged. These included those related to the natural and farming environment (n=9):

There are other dangers from living in the country. Like falling down a hole, or off a fence, falling in the creek, getting charged [by bulls]. Just have to be careful with warning them all the time about the dangers of living in a dangerous environment. (Rod06, father)

Town people have a romantic idea about kids growing up on farms. N [mother] will ask if I want to take the kids with me on the farm and a lot of times you can’t. Because of the machinery. It’s hard to work with kids around, keeping an eye on them. Safety thing – it’s a workplace when it’s out there. (Mac02, father)

However, parents also highlighted the opportunities for learning from living in an environment that potentially held dangers. One parent, after describing her children having broken arms, stitches, broken leg, bruises and grazes, dislocated thumbs and fingers, said:

I figure it’s just boys being boys. I think they have become more wary, because they know that they can hurt themselves. They learn from it. (Mac01, mother)

They do dangerous things and break arms, which is also politically incorrect but all part of learning and you just provide the safest environment that you can. (Rod01, mother)

Traffic was also discussed, in terms of threatening, and contributing to, children’s safety. Seven participants expressed concern about the speed of traffic on rural roads and the potential danger this posed. While three participants in more remote areas cited less traffic as a contributing safety factor for children.
They’re not at an age yet when they can hop on their bikes and go down to friends. We’ve got milk tankers going a hundred down here. And no footpaths. (Cant05, mother)

Traffic is a big one in town. Just doesn’t worry me here. (Mac03, mother)

Some participants (n=6) also discussed traffic safety in the context of young people living rurally needing to learn to drive on the farm, or get their driving license and drive themselves at a younger age, and greater distances, than urban contemporaries to gain independence. Parents tended to discuss this in relation to their perceptions of their child’s competency and their personal attributes.

The Government is talking about increasing the age for driving licenses which isn’t fair for rural kids. By the time they are 15 or 16 you’re sick of taking them to rugby practice, and everything else and running around. It’s not fair on rural parents. I think overall kids in the country are more sensible, most kids learn to drive by the time they are 12. (Mac05, mother)

All three kids [aged five, seven and eleven years] can drive the truck. L [11 year old] been driving since she was three. Not unsupervised, like, I’m feeding out on the back. They do it a lot in the winter to feed out the hay. They start off steering, then driving through the gates, then driving more, you ask them to just back it out, and it extends. I wouldn’t get J [five year old] to drive up to neighbours, but I would expect L to get a parcel from neighbours. She’s not allowed to drive on the road but she drives on the track by the road. (Mac06, father). It’s not ideal and sometimes I cringe, ‘cause I used to frown on that sort of stuff. I know a teenager who ran his own brother over, killed him, in [nearby rural town]. (Mac06, mother). But they’ve all had a dog run over so they know what happens. (Mac06, father)
They go to work with us. L [9 year old son] has a little motorbike – so he’s a free person now. He cruises around with Dad. (Rod06, mother)

I have full confidence in S at this age [11 years old] to drive himself on a little scooter round the back roads, on a wee motorbike, a 10 minute drive to go to work. But I can’t ‘cause if he got pulled over by a cop I feel I could just about lose him. CYFS\textsuperscript{51} would be on our case. Cops would breathe down our necks. We would just be in so much poo. I could even make the Christchurch Press \textit{[newspaper]}. I think if he did the back roads at that hour in the morning he would be as safe as houses. But I wouldn’t let my older girl as she doesn’t have the same responsibility as he has... It’s like we let him use a shotgun and he’s allowed to walk our property with it. When I was a kid that’s just what you did. When his Dad was a kid you could walk round the road like that... (Cant04, mother)

Parents can understand the rural as simultaneously both safe and dangerous (Nairn et al., 2003) by acknowledging some risks and mobilising intellectual defences against these. For example, consistent with findings from studies in North America and the United Kingdom (Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000; Valentine, 1997), parents in this study perceive rural areas to be safer than urban areas. Danger and crime are more frequently associated with urban areas giving rural parents a sense of security. The urban rural dichotomy was raised in relation to fears of stranger danger, with parents, mostly in Canterbury, perceiving it as an urban concern. Parents in more remote areas, Northland and MacKenzie, relieved their fears of stranger danger and other safety concerns, by mobilising the construction of a close knit community in which strangers (potential criminals) would be identified.

The perception that there are less opportunities for young people to get into trouble, discounts and minimises concerns associated with rural areas. These include: increased health risk behaviours, for example, alcohol consumption, found in rural America (Atav & Spencer, \textsuperscript{51} Child, Youth and Family - a section of the NZ Government, Ministry for Social Development, dedicated to the care and protection of children and families.

\textsuperscript{51}
2002; de Haan & Boljevac, 2009); drug use as noted by a parent in Northland; and adult concerns about antisocial activities in small rural New Zealand towns (Panelli et al., 2002).

Similar to the findings of Zepeda and Kim’s (2006) North American study, parents acknowledge the danger to children with regard to environmental risk factors, such as machinery on farms. However, environmental risk is rationalised and normalised by some parents in this study as being part of learning, and by others as something parents can teach children about. This is in keeping with the legacy of the pioneering spirit and physical prowess that is incorporated in the rural myth of New Zealand (Fairburn, 1975).

Rural parents perceive high speed traffic to be an urban danger, consistent with findings from a study undertaken in the United Kingdom (Valentine, 1997), and of less concern to families living in remote areas. Constructing this as primarily an urban problem ignores the issue of young people’s driving safety, despite New Zealand media exposure of this, and risk taking behaviour involving cars and speed being a concern for young males in rural Australia (Kraak & Kenway, 2002). Similarly, the high risk of motorbike and All Terrain Vehicle (ATV) accidents associated with rural New Zealand children, as found in Campbell’s (2008) review of the research, is also discounted by parents. Instead, in keeping with Campbell’s (2008) findings, they focus on the positive aspects of children driving vehicles for recreational and farming purposes, and practical issues such as lack of childcare on the farm when ATVs are in use.

Fostering Positive Attributes in Children

Some participants indicated a perception that living rurally fostered the development of certain attributes and personal qualities in children. A key attribute raised by eleven parents was responsibility. This was seen across the areas, although mostly in MacKenzie (n=4), in several contexts. Eight parents talked about their children developing a sense of responsibility, through the care of animals, use of self sufficiency skills and a good work ethic.
Looking after animals they have a different sort of understanding from kids in town. The commitment D makes to those calves, twice a day for months and months – rain, hail or snow. She takes that responsibility and has done for three years now. I think that will certainly carry through. (Cant02, mother)

With every job they have I want them to know they can solve more problems, be more practical. So if they are in an office and something goes wrong that they can solve problems, work things out. (Mac01, father)

The development of social responsibility was seen in children caring for each other (n=5):

They are generally good kids that want to make sure that everyone’s alright. They go out in the front paddock, seven of them, and they all have to look after each other. And they go and light fires. Having social responsibility to each other. And that’s all I’ve ever wanted for them, is that they can go out and they wouldn’t walk past someone who was bleeding on the street. They would feel some sort of social responsibility. They’re already like that and I think that’s what they get from living here. (Mac06, mother)

An issue related to social responsibility is the development of social skills, with five parents considering that rural living assists children to develop the ability to mix socially with a range of adults and children. Parents who lived more remotely chose to transport children long distances to attend sport and recreational activities, to ensure the development of social skills.

The development of independence, as a consequence of rural childhood, was identified by eight parents, the majority of whom were in MacKenzie (n=5). Independence was associated by some parents (n=4) with the development of common sense and a practical approach.

We want them to have outdoor experience and with that comes children having to be independent, think things that they want to do. … Having that practical
common sense as well. If something bad happened like an earthquake they would have a better chance of surviving it because they know how things work. It’s not a primary concern, but I like that they know. Wherever they end up in the world they know veges come from the garden. They know they have a good chance of surviving. Number eight mentality, pioneering spirit type thing. (Mac01, mother)

Having access to outdoor recreational activities and experience, and generally spending time outdoors, was highly valued by parents (n=19). They regarded it as contributing to the development of particular positive attributes in a number of ways. One of the key advantages of spending time outdoors was perceived as the ability of children to entertain themselves (n=13):

It sounds like a cliché but they have to make their own fun, find their own fun. It’s not all laid on for them. (Cant02, father)

Activity without being delivered the activities. They have the opportunity to climb trees, get in the river, they swim in the river, they fish, they fall out of trees. Lots of opportunity for them to muck around outside. (Cant03, mother)

The freedom to play outdoors was associated with the development of confidence (n=4). The natural world was emphasised as providing an environment for the development of creativity (n=5) and an adventurous spirit (n=3). Whilst these perceptions were expressed by parents from across the areas, the development of creativity and adventurous spirit were associated mostly with the areas with more urban influence: Canterbury and Rodney:

We want the children to use their own imagination rather than be reliant on someone else’s imagination. So we try to get them out in the garden. They’ve got the facilities around here with games in the hedges and things like that. (Cant08, mother)
The sense that a rural upbringing contributed to retaining childhood innocence was expressed by three parents. Related to this, children living rurally were perceived by three other parents as having more time to be children, indicating a prolonging of childhood.

Yes, they may be a wee bit sheltered ... I think it's good if you can keep that childhood, so long as it's not too sheltered. We can be a wee bit selective about what they're exposed to. (Cant02, father)

Playing outside they can have more of a childhood really. They haven't got Playstation. Their Playstation is outside! Going out and playing, throwing stones in the creek, doing simple things. (Mac02, mother)

One issue specific to families living on agricultural properties was the sense some parents (n=8) had that their children were gaining an appreciation of the realities of life. This included an understanding of life and death, looking after farm animals, and food production.

Real stuff. They learn about life and death with animals dying and babies being born. (Rod06, father)

They know about the nitty gritty of farming life, there's a down side to it, dealing with sick stock and stuff like that. (Mac06, mother)

It's not all beer and skittles. One thing is they have to learn about death in a hurry when they lose an animal. See it hanging up in a tree being fed to the dogs. (Mac06, father)

Related to this was the emphasis placed on self sufficiency aspects by six participants. These included a sense of pride related to managing utilities, growing vegetables and constructing things and the hope that this would impact positively on their children. The weather played a role in their pride about their self sufficiency and ability to manage in

---

52 Playstation is a video game console that connects to a television.
stressful conditions. Participants across the areas made reference to weather events affecting them at times including snow, flooding and drought. For example, all participants in the MacKenzie area made reference to the ‘Big Snow’ that occurred in 2006, and the ways in which they managed the loss of power and communication and in some instances remained house (or property) bound.53 Two very isolated participants noted the length of time it took the council-based civil defence services to reach them, expressing a belief that by living in remote locations they are perceived as more self sufficient and able to fend for themselves in times of crisis. One of these parents ironically noted that it took so long for civil defence to make contact with them, that it ensured they had to be self sufficient!

There was a sense too, that participants took pride in their ability to be self sufficient and to manage during times of adversity. They perceived urban dwelling people as lacking this ability. All the MacKenzie residents made reference to the much publicised Auckland power blackout of 2006, derisively comparing that experience, and their perception of Aucklander’s ineptitude at coping, with their own experiences during the Big Snow.54

We had no power in the Big Snow for ten days. That was okay. I kept saying I was a pioneer woman, after ten days I wasn’t! ... The kids loved it, camping out inside, didn’t have to go to school, hung out, tracked mud in, everyone worked together, all went feeding out. It was good. No one died. (Mac06, mother)

It was fine. We didn’t have power for twelve days, didn’t have phone for eleven days. The kids thought it was great for two or three days until the novelty wore off. ... I just felt like a pioneering woman ... It was hard work, but it was kind of simpler because all I had to worry about was boiling water. ... Two or three weeks later civil defence came with a box of food, just as the power came back on! (Mac02, mother)

53 The Big Snow, June 2006, refers to the heaviest snowfall recorded in South Canterbury in decades which left many rural homes without power for several weeks.
54 The Auckland Blackout also occurred in June 2006, resulting in over half of Auckland including the central business district, being without power for up to eight hours.
We had it [electricity] out for five days during the Big Snow. This was while Auckland was crying into their lattes over their five hours. There was a thing in the paper – ‘Auckland’s busy crying and no one has noticed that the South Island has disappeared’. While we [local township] haven’t even batted an eyelid. (Mac03, mother)

These positive aspects and attributes of rural living for children fall into two main areas: those associated with New Zealand’s historical and social context, and those associated with romantic discourses of childhood contributing to the rural childhood idyll. The New Zealand context has the pioneering history and subsequent rural mythologising at its heart. Attributes valued by rural parents, such as responsibility gained through the care of animals and a good work ethic, social responsibility, independence and confidence outdoors, practical abilities, self-sufficiency skills and an understanding of the life cycle, resonate with the stereotype of the pioneer in the natural world (C. Bell, 1997; Phillips, 2008). These attributes and skills are particularly associated with MacKenzie and farming families. This is consistent with findings from studies, in the United States and Canada, that parents consider there are benefits for children working on farms, including acquiring a work ethic and a sense of responsibility, as well as useful knowledge and skills (Neufield, Wright & Gaut, 2002; Zentner, Berg, Pickett & Marlenga, 2005; Zepeda & Kim, 2006). Parents in these and the current study believe that farm work brings families closer together, helps children learn how to cooperate and work on a team, and that these benefits outweigh the risks.

The positive aspects identified by parents that are associated with the rural childhood idyll include: the development of creativity and an adventurous spirit in an outdoors context, and the retaining and prolonging of childhood innocence (Kehily, 2004; Montgomery, 2003). The importance of these to parents in Canterbury and Rodney reinforces the centrality of the notion of the rural idyll in the construction of rural childhood in these areas.
Alternative (to Idyllic) Rural Constructions

The predominant focus in parents’ interview data was on the idyllic aspects of rural living. However, two other themes also emerged from the data that were congruent with themes from the literature review. These were rural dull, related to social isolation and dullness for rural children and families, and rural deprivation, which relates to lack of services and facilities, limited social and economic opportunities, and aspects of deficiency or hardship in everyday life.

Rural Dull

The issue of isolation from other people in relation to themselves was raised by ten parents. These parents were spread across the areas, and evenly divided with five seeing themselves as isolated, and five perceiving themselves as not being isolated. This included two parents from the highly rural/remote area; one of whom felt socially isolated and one who did not, despite living at great geographical distance from the nearest township. Several parents stressed that it was a personal choice that people made to live in potentially isolated rural areas.

A neighbour said it feels so isolated here, but we’ve never lived around so many people and never lived so close to town. It’s such a novelty to live so close to town. Where we live, it’s the best of both worlds. (Rod06, mother)

I like it better up here but it can be pretty isolated up here. Sometimes might not see anyone for a few days ‘cause of how far out I am plus other people work, so they’re doing their own thing. (Nor04, mother)

People that are really isolated they choose to go there. And they wouldn’t go there if it wasn’t their thing. (Rod06, father)

Social isolation of children was indicated as an issue by a third of the parents (n=8), in terms of the distance they lived from their friends. Five parents stated that their children did
not play with their friends much after school, whereas seven parents stated their children did. The issue of social isolation was seen to increase as children got older, and was exacerbated by a lack of public transport (n=4).

Her mates will come here and kick around here for a few days, but then they need mall therapy, they need to go and hang out. It’s an age issue when kids get to high school. You have to chauffeur them. (Cant04, mother)

The only area in which parents did not indicate that their children were socially isolated was in Northland, where the majority of participants (n=3) indicated that extended family provided an important social network:

Each generation that grows through do the same sort of things and stay really good mates. Probably the biggest advantage for me as a parent is knowing that they’ll always have a strong connection so they’ll always look after each other. (Nor01, mother)

Parents appeared to have developed a range of strategies to manage their children’s isolation. These included children in all areas being encouraged to play with siblings (n=10) and playing with neighbours (n=7) despite differences in ages and interests. Parents from all areas (n=8), except Northland, indicated an acceptance that they drove more as they provided transport to take children to socialise with friends. Four parents in Canterbury also indicated that their children attended and hosted more sleepovers as a way of increasing social contact with friends.

The diversity of parents’ response to isolation reflects their individual experiences coupled with their expectations, and is not associated with any particular geographical area. Physical isolation has been reduced in New Zealand with better transport and roading infrastructure (Statistics New Zealand, 2004), and social isolation reduced with globalisation and the development of information and communication technology (Cloke, 2006).
Social isolation for children is a feature of rural living as a consequence of the geographical distance families live from each other. However, parents maximise social opportunities for children, including relying more on family and neighbours, as is customary for rural families historically (Toynbee, 1995). Consistent with indications from the literature (Glendinning et al., 2003), social isolation is perceived by parents to be more of an issue for young people than children the age of those in this study. Parents also indicated that boredom and feeling restricted was an issue for older children, which corresponds with findings from studies in the United Kingdom and Norway (Davis & Ridge, 1997; Lægræn, 2002; Rye, 2006; Valentine & Holloway, 2001).

Some parents talked, in the previous rural idyll section, about their own and their older children’s perception that there is nothing for young people to do in the country. As noted by Matthews et al. (2000), the experiences of young people living rurally, which include boredom and dullness, highlight the contrast between the idealised construction of the rural childhood idyll and the realities and lived experience of young people.

**Rural Deprivation**

Participants in this study indicated that rural deprivation was an issue in the context of access to services and resources, economic issues, distance travelled, and educational and recreational opportunities.

**Access to services and resources.** Some services were not available at all in some rural areas. Other services and resources were difficult for people living rurally to access. MacKenzie participants made reference to using interagency Government services available in a single location, at Heartland Services.55 Half the parents mentioned using this, and an interview I conducted with two children took place in a room there, as a matter of convenience for the family. Availability of and access to social and health services was an

55 Heartland Services is a government funded interagency initiative providing people in provincial and rural New Zealand with access to Government services (see www.heartlandservices.govt.nz).
issue for those living in all areas except Canterbury. Parents in all areas except Northland discussed a lack of babysitters (n=5) and childcare choices (n=4). For the most part, parents indicated satisfaction with the social services available in the nearest township, but acknowledged the distance and travel involved to get to them.

Likewise travel was an issue in relation to accessing health and medical services. However, satisfaction with these services varied remarkably according to what was available in each area. Two parents in Rodney expressed dissatisfaction with the unavailability of after hours medical care, which necessitated travelling to the nearest urban centre, approximately 40 kilometres away.

I was nervous about having J [baby] up here. And with good reason. I think it’s a real worry because if things go wrong they go wrong really quickly and a 30 minute ride to hospital just doesn’t cut it. ... I don’t think it’s a rural thing, but the distance we are, I think they should be more careful. With babies things happen so quickly. (Rod02, mother)

Sickness. It drove me crazy that there was no after hours service. The doctor’s attitude is quite shocking. (Rod01, mother)

At the other end of the spectrum, four parents in MacKenzie expressed great satisfaction with the medical care available in the nearest township. Farming participants talked about the merits of the medical care available in the context of emergencies. Two MacKenzie farming participants felt that the local doctors knew them sufficiently well to trust that it was a genuine emergency, and to accommodate them if they phoned after hours. However, despite praising the local medical service, one of these parents also noted that the services available were meagre. A farming participant from another area commented on the importance of supporting emergency services as a rural person, because of the likelihood of needing them at some stage.

The doctors in town here are very good. When R broke his leg I didn’t phone 111 ‘cause you don’t want to put people out. That number eight mentality – rural,
pioneering people, just get on with it. The doctor came out. He said ‘cause I’d phoned he knew it must be serious. (Mac01, mother)

Our services are meagre. They might be of good quality, but they are meagre. The cost of it is high. And the distance to get there is almost dangerously long. The GP says if we’re in doubt to ring an ambulance and they’ll send a helicopter out. Sometimes you have to drive to meet them, ‘cause sometimes you can’t even wait for a helicopter. That’s the down side of it all. (Mac06, father)

We’ve had some pretty quick trips to the doctor at odd hours, but it’s a fact of life, you have to do what you have to. We always donate to the rescue services and helicopter because of where we’ve lived. (Rod05, father)

There was also diversity of opinion within areas, with one Rodney parent expressing satisfaction, while two did not. Similarly in Northland, two parents were fulsome in their praise of the free local health services, while one was less so, describing an incident with a child, in which they went directly to the hospital in an urban area over an hour’s drive away, rather than go to the local service first:

Usually go to [nearby township], but decided to go to Whangarei because she was in pain. Glad we did ‘cause they said any longer she would have died. ... Because only one of us could sleep in the hospital room he [father] had to sleep out in the car. Only one parent can stay in. He don’t know anyone in Whangarei. (Nor02, mother)

One parent in MacKenzie described involvement with youth mental health services for a family member. The stress involved had been exacerbated by the lack of adequate local mental health care and the distance from the nearest specialist youth mental health facility:

There were huge delays. One night we phoned CAT Team [Crisis and Acute Treatment Team] when A took some pills. We left a message and someone
phoned back – the next afternoon! We were unable to get help. The [adolescent] inpatient unit is in Christchurch. A spent a night in [nearby smaller city hospital] and had to have a chaperone, a parent stay in, 'cause it was the adult ward. Then A went up to Christchurch. They [adolescent inpatient unit staff] talked about what they usually do, like, watch them at school. It didn’t happen because of where we live. (Mac03, mother)

The distance from shops and urban centres was discussed by a lot of participants (n=17). Whilst the distance to shops was a negative factor for some participants (n=9), others appreciated the lack of commercialism nearby, particularly with regard to their children (n=5).

Whenever we travel the first thing I do is check out the supermarket. Got so much stuff in it! That you can get every day! That’s the one thing I’d love to be able to do, go and get fresh things every day. (Mac06, mother)

Out in the country they’re running around. They’re not going up town to the Spacies,56 spending money in the dairy. If they want it here they’ve got a long walk. When we go to town it’s ‘I want … can I have … but you said …’ (Nor02, mother)

Information and communication technology have impacted inconsistently across and within the rural areas. For some families (n=3) the impact has been positive, for example with one parent noting that the isolation of living rurally has diminished with improved phone and internet services:

I don’t think there are any disadvantages to bringing children up rurally these days, 'cause also with things like access to computer and videos and that even if you can’t take them to see something these days you can get hold of things to show them. (Cant01, mother)

56 Video game parlour
For other families (n=3) it has not made any difference as they are living out of cell phone range, with slow dial up internet services. Not all families participating had internet access. Two highly rural/remote families had fast broadband internet through satellite, which was an expensive but efficient option.

The findings reflect the diversity of participants' experience of access to, and local availability of, services. People living closer to urban centres have ready access to a range of service options and urban facilities (Crampton et al., 2004). This is demonstrated by the availability of services and facilities to those parents living in Canterbury, in close proximity to a large urban centre, and highlights the lack of access for those in other areas. The distance from shops can be inconvenient for rural parents, but favourably serves notions of the idyllic rural childhood, by distancing children from consumer opportunities and contributing to preservation of imaginings of childhood as a time of innocence, associated, as Ward (1988) notes, with the natural world, unsullied by urban influences.

Health services are critical for communities, and diversity in satisfaction with these was expressed between and within areas. Parents in specific areas experience satisfaction to a greater or lesser degree, with some highly critical of the available services, consistent with narrative accounts in Fraser’s (2007) literature review of rural health in New Zealand. Parents in more remote locations have an awareness and appreciation of the need for doctors to balance the inconvenience of travel with the possible risks to patient safety, and express a pragmatic and self sufficient attitude to managing health issues and injuries, in the context of the geographical distance.

While ICT potentially provides many opportunities for rural and farming residents, including children, uptake of technology is adversely affected in rural New Zealand by political, economic, social and technological factors, including inadequate telecommunications infrastructure (Shiblaq, 2008/2009).

**Economic issues.** Specific economic issues affect rural families. In all areas except Canterbury, some participants (n=5) noted the higher cost of products when shopping locally.
This contributed to people choosing to shop at nearby towns, rather than smaller local townships. Another contributing factor was the bigger range of products when shopping in a larger centre. Two participants in Rodney and MacKenzie noted that the local shopping had become more inclined toward the holiday and tourist trade, with less ordinary, everyday items available. But one participant stressed the need to keep doing some shopping locally in order to support local business and not lose the convenience of them.

The shopping’s absolutely crap. Everything’s twice the price. Alright if you want to buy antique or boutique things, failing that, forget it. (Rod02, mother)

The Warehouse and PaknSave take it all away from a small town. So everything fades away ‘cause it can’t compete. Most people go shopping in [larger town]. Get as much as you can. I don’t get bread and milk ‘cause I like to support the small shops. If you don’t, then they’re not there one day. (Mac05, mother)

Travelling to shop in other areas and providing transport for children’s social, sporting and recreational activities, was considered a disadvantage of living rurally in economic terms. The increasing cost of petrol was causing some parents (n=6) to reconsider children’s activities and the amount of travelling they were doing.

A disadvantage is petrol consumption and wear and tear on cars. To hop down to school is ten k’s each way. On a rough road. It’s a drive to just about anywhere from here. With increasing fuel costs we’re starting to watch those trips now. (Rod05, father)

Access to cash was mentioned by three parents in areas with high to moderate urban influence, as being an issue living rurally, in that they frequently had no cash on hand when needed by children. This may be influenced in part by the ability to manage finances through internet banking, which was celebrated by two parents.
Participants talked about the higher cost of living in rural areas. As well as petrol and wear and tear on cars, some participants have increased telecommunication costs (n=4). An additional cost faced by some rural parents (n=5) is the cost of boarding school, although this was rationalised in terms of the benefits it would provide for the children.

Participants in Northland and MacKenzie (n=2), described costs involved in accessing water at times of low rainfall and drought. Other participants (n=6) talked about the financial pressure of establishment costs when building in a rural area. These costs included gaining local body consents, installation of septic tanks and water catchment systems and accessing materials.

However, some parents in Canterbury, Rodney and Northland (n=4) considered living in rural areas to be less expensive than living in the city. Children’s activities were perceived by three Rodney parents to be more affordable in rural areas, with generally lower fees and subscriptions:

Children’s stuff is very, very cheap. I think if we lived anywhere else they wouldn’t be able to do all these. When you’ve got three kids it needs to be cheap.
(Rod04, mother)

Three parents made reference to the economic disadvantages of living in the Northland rural area due to their limited employment opportunities. These issues did not deter parents from continuing to live there, but for one parent they were significant enough for her to be encouraging her children to leave the area when they were older:

Would like them all to go [to boarding school]. Like them to get used to not just being here. I don’t want them to be used to not doing anything, want them to get into the habit of work, then they can go off and do their thing when they get older, travel away, not just stay here doing nothing ... You’re lucky if you find work. A lot around here on the dole, drinking, nothing to do, nowhere to go to. I hope they stay at school as long as they can, then get work or go somewhere where they can
get work. It is nice up here but you gotta be realistic about living, they can always come back if they have to. (Nor04, mother)

If I really wanted to get work I would probably have trouble doing it really. Depends on what you value. If you want all the good things in life and you work for it, then you deserve to have it, but it doesn’t really bother me. Everybody has hardships - doesn’t matter what your status is. All things have stress in them. I don’t really look for my downside. (Nor01, mother)

Some participants (n=4) discussed the financial deprivation associated with living rurally. One noted that despite the perception that farmers are wealthy this is not the case. Another two participants described the initial financial drain involved in their experience on a lifestyle block.

From my own [farming] childhood I wanted my kids to grow up in an environment with more money ... We were always on the bones of our ass. And we knew it was because of the land. (Cant04, mother)

City people have this idea that farmers are wealthy. We’re at the mercy of the markets and the weather. Not a guaranteed income. (Mac02, mother)

Put heaps of money into it. Money goes on bullshit ... put thousands into planting trees, putting in ponds, building barns. Then we thought we’d raise calves, which is more money. Then you stuff it up and they die and that’s more money ... now we’re on top of it, it doesn’t cost money. Now it’s just upkeep. (Rod02, mother)

**Housing.** The standard and availability of rental housing was raised by four participants. Three participants (Rodney, Northland and MacKenzie) noted the difficulty they initially had finding houses to rent in the area. Rental houses in rural areas were less available and described by one participant as ‘substandard’. However, another participant in Northland reflected on the lower cost of accommodation, in comparison to Auckland.
Two participants (Rodney) talked about the difficulties they encountered building their homes. This was related to costs associated with rural dwelling, such as installing a septic system and water catchment tanks, and also local body consent and building requirements.

The diversity of responses from participants regarding economic issues reflects, in part, the socioeconomic diversity of the areas selected for this study. For example, while there is regional variation, Northland is one of the poorest regions in New Zealand (Orange, 2009), whereas the Canterbury area is relatively prosperous (Statistics New Zealand, 2004). In addition to regional socioeconomic variation, geographic location affects economic hardship in terms of proximity to a range of services and shopping options, with areas like Canterbury having greater ease of access to these. The further parents are from urban or service areas, the greater the cost associated with travel. Some inconvenient aspects of rural living can be overcome with sufficient affluence and mobility, but are more likely to be compounded without it (Shucksmith, 2004).

There are some higher costs associated with rural living that are acknowledged by a small number of parents. These are contextualised as an unpleasant, but unavoidable, aspect of rural life and are generally downplayed since, as D. Bell (2006) notes, the dominant view of idyllic rural living denies deprivation. In Northland, where economic disadvantage and uncertainty were more visible, with local unemployment and substandard housing, the rural community was constructed by participants as a happy, united setting for family life, consistent with findings from an earlier English study (Little and Austin, 1996). Rural living was further constructed by some Northland participants as offering a respite from urban deprivation, corresponding with Davis and Ridge’s (1997) findings of constructions of rural life in deprived United Kingdom contexts.

Distance and travel. Parents from all rural areas are affected by the distances they are required to travel. Generally speaking the further the area is from an urban centre, the greater the distances travelled to access services, shops and recreational activities. For the most part participants (n=16) expressed an acceptance that increased time spent driving was a
consequence of rural life. Seven participants, from the Canterbury and MacKenzie areas, specifically discussed the negative impact of the time involved in driving distances.

Living here works socially for the children as well, 'cause the parents do the ferrying round. That's just what we do. That's the lifestyle here so everyone does it. It's not a difficulty. (Cant03, mother)

I drive 190 kilometres a day. Drive to the end of the road for the school bus. Turn around, drive back down to the [primary school]. Then in the afternoon back to the end of the road again ... the second year of so much driving 'cause we made the choice to not send her to boarding school at ten [years old]. Finding it difficult this last term, but it's worth it to have them at home. (Mac06, mother)

Seven participants discussed the impact of the distance to travel on children's activities. This was evenly divided with three parents stating that the distances had an impact on children's activities and three parents saying it did not. One parent said it sometimes affected children's activities. Carpooling was mentioned by six parents (three of whom lived in the same Rodney area) as a means of getting children to activities. Although two parents noted that the further out you live the more driving you do, even when carpooling. Two parents also made the point that they could spend the same amount of time travelling if they lived in an urban area, but cover less distance, with the increased city traffic.

Unspoken rule that if kids are coming out here, or ours going into town, parents will each do a trip one way. But somehow we do more travelling. May as well. Often end up going both ways, with kids in different places. Like with carpooling from [township]. We drop the kids into towr, but town families will phone to say they are back, come and get the kids. (Mac01, mother)

How many people in Auckland when they carpool have to drive five kilometres out of their way to pick a child up? (Rod01, mother)
I'm not stuck in traffic every morning and every afternoon. It's the same amount of time, but I'm covering distance. (Mac06, mother)

The unique rural context creates difficulties associated with accessing facilities and recreational activities, both in this New Zealand study, and in other countries, like North America (Churchill et al., 2007) and Canada (Trussell & Shaw, 2007). Families are constrained by geographical distance from facilities, children's activities and friends, and lack of public transport. Participants manage this by being selective in activities, car pooling with other families, making positive comparisons with urban driving, and accepting travel as a consequence of rural living.

**Rural schooling.** This study found that some aspects of rural schools appeal strongly to parents, as discussed earlier in relation to positive depictions of rural community. However, there are also aspects of rural schooling that are of concern to parents across the areas. Some of these are related to the small size of some rural schools (n=6). Three parents chose to bypass the nearest school in favour of a larger one, for different reasons, including the perception that a larger school would be better resourced, have more sports available, and would increase social opportunities. Two other parents opted to home school their children, using correspondence school, in preference to attending schools which were perceived as ill equipped, with social problems.

Chose it *school* because we're heavily into sport and the local one is too small to participate in competitive sports 'cause there's only about 30 kids. We want our kids to be active and into sport. (Cant05, father)

They don't go to that *local* school. It's a small school. Everyone knows everyone else. It's good to have access to a bigger community. We want them at a bigger school, to mix with town and country children. A broader range. I felt lost when I went to a big high school. Just felt so lost. (Mac02, mother)
Another parent referred to “small school syndrome” whereby the small number of children attending the school means that some are singled out and isolated socially. This parent’s perception is that at a larger school there is a wider range of children, therefore more social and friendship possibilities.

Two Northland parents expressed concern at the possibilities of school closures and the need to support the local school. Whilst closure was not imminent, other local schools had closed, and it had been discussed at one point as the school roll fluctuated:

The only thing I don’t like is if our school was to shut down they would have to go to school on the bus. I won’t let them go to school on the bus to town. There are big kids on the bus and they are quite mean. ... Our school’s not under threat now, but a lot of schools are. (Nor02, mother)

[Nearby] school closed down ... The school needs support. All rural schools need support. It went from Decile one rating to Decile four. That’s about $35,000 less from the Ministry for our school. On paper the SES of this area has grown. In reality it’s not even ... (Nor01, mother)

Some parents (n=6) made reference to local colleges having a bad reputation and the difficulties this posed for them. The concerns related to violence at school and on the bus, a perceived lack of adequate adult supervision, poor quality teaching staff, and less opportunities for children. In both these areas there was no alternative college accessible for children. One parent, however, disputed the idea that the local college had less academic opportunities, as correspondence schooling was used by the school to provide education for specialist areas.

For three families boarding school was, in part, the solution to concerns about the local school. Other reasons for choosing boarding school as the college option for their children, for these and another two families, were reducing the travel time to school for children and increasing resources and opportunities available for them. Whilst parents were generally
positive about the boarding school option, three acknowledged the cost of this. Two parents indicated dissatisfaction that they were unable to get financial assistance from the government because of their proximity to a school, albeit one they considered lacking adequate resources and facilities, to assist with this.

I thought it would be good for them to go [to boarding school]. Thought [it would be] good for them to see what it’s like, to get out to different things more. (Nor04, mother)

They spend five to six hours a week on the bus. When they could be doing sport or homework at school. Costwise with food etcetera it’s not that much difference, so not as dear as you’d think ... reputation of local school. They have trouble attracting good teachers to rural areas. Once they get teachers they stay, but get a bit stale. The ERO report is pretty grim reading. A small country thing. (Mac02, father)

When they go to boarding school they won’t have to spend hours on buses. They can go straight out and do things after school. Can do something every day and it’s not a problem. The opportunities are there ... there is so much more out there and this way they get to go out and start experiencing it in a supervised situation. The local school’s poorly resourced. Country schools need more funding. It’s geographical, depends what’s happening in the community at the time. (Mac01, father)

Two parents expressed reluctance and some concern about the children going to boarding school, with one acknowledging feelings of guilt about the decision. However, both indicated an awareness of the potential benefits for the children.

I have a theory that once they go to boarding school then that’s it. They don’t really come home again. Come home for an odd weekend, then they start being social. (Mac06, mother)
Every kid handles it differently, but the earlier you start, the easier it is at the end. But the later you start the more mature you are to cope with it. I could cope with it by fifth form, but I'd had five years before that. (Mac06, father)

Every time I take them back I get guilty feelings. I think they should be at home. But I’ve said to them ‘where do you want to be?’ and they’ve said they would rather be down there. I still think it’s the best place for them. (Mac01, mother)

Whilst parents are generally positive about small rural primary schools, the limited options cause difficulties when there is dissatisfaction with the local school. This intensifies for parents with regard to secondary education, with boarding school as a potential solution meeting educational and recreational needs of young people, but involving increased financial cost and disruption to the family.

The concern regarding primary school closures in Northland reflects a number of salient issues. School closures also highlight social and economic changes in New Zealand rural communities brought about by changes in the primary sector, resulting in increased reliance on urban areas (Bensemann, 2006). These limit educational opportunities for children and increase the likelihood of further costs for parents of children being educated out of the area. In addition, rural schools are a key venue for community socialising (Education Review Office, 2001), with closure impacting significantly on community spirit.

**Children’s activities.** Parents across all the areas discussed a wide range of activities that their children participated in. Several areas, two in Rodney and one in Northland, had local sports clubs that provided a central hub for sports and socialising, and were viewed positively by parents. Some less positive features of children’s activities in rural areas were also discussed, including some parents stating that there were less options for their children to choose from (n=5), waiting lists for some activities (n=2), a lot of travel involved (n=7), and a requirement for greater parental involvement to ensure that activities took place (n=5).
Down at the little centre down the road, always had a community get together of sports or whatever every week. All the kids together, play one sport. It’s at the old primary school, run all by volunteer parents. Sport has always been a great feature in our rural living. (Nor01, mother)

Small town thing – got to be on a committee, or things don’t happen. Like swimming, every parent is on a committee or doing something, do their bit, to keep it going. Otherwise they just die. People like Aucklanders, or from away, just rock up and pay the money, heaps less than paid up there, and walk away. Most parents are committed. A small handful will pay and walk away, but they are the first to complain when it’s all not going the way they want it to. (Mac05, mother)

There are constraints on children’s recreational activities as a consequence of living rurally. However, parents mobilise idyllic constructions of rural life, such as parental involvement and support, to minimise these limitations. The difficulties are thus reframed to demonstrate community involvement and rendered more potent by comparison to opposing urban stereotypes.

**Farm and property issues.** Some parents who had a farming childhood (n=4) talked about the hard work they had been required to do. By contrast, parents whose children worked on their farms (n=6) described it as something the children enjoyed doing, with some (n=2) being paid for significant jobs. Two parents pointed out that the reality of farming life is that if the parents are working they often have to take the children out on the farm with them.

They don’t have specific jobs. There are things they do that they don’t get paid for... if they help us with big jobs they get paid. With docking, for example, they spent the whole day with us doing that. One sprayed all the lambs, the other put the rings on. They got paid by the chap who owns the farm... this employer said anybody that works on this farm they will get paid. (Rod06, father)
From the day she was born she was milking cows. Right through she was on a motorbike, she was everywhere. It’s probably where the outside thing comes from, she was never plonked in front of TV. She always had to come to work ‘cause I was working. (Mac05, mother)

An issue for farming families, including those who use their property agriculturally to generate income, is the tie to the property. This was discussed by seven participants, with three of them emphasising the need to get off the property sometimes to have a break from it. Other participants (n=3) talked about the difficulty of being able to do this. One participant deliberately manages the property to ensure that the family is able to leave it on holiday weekends and over the summer break.

We try to go away most years. One year feeding out 180 days in a row when there was a drought. Was coaching rugby and going to games, so had to get up early to do the feeding out. Stuff has to be done. (Mac01, father)

When you live rural and on the job you’ve got to get off to have a holiday. Gotta go miles away. Disjoint from the farm completely. Because there’s always something to do. Seven days a week. You could easily make it seven days a week for 52 weeks a year. (Rod06, father)

You can’t get away from it. You can see it outside the window, always with you. (Mac06, father)

When we were growing up we never went on holiday because of the farming life. Here, we have animals that don’t tie us. Because I have nurse cows I don’t have to feed them. So once that’s done we can go away. I make sure the cows calve during winter when there’s no public holidays. (Cant04, mother)

The tie to the land is something of a mixed blessing as farming parents also highlighted the time they have with their children:
The good thing about the farm, you live on the job, when you’re with your kids, in and out of the house all day. Some days you can do your jobs then spend time with your kids. Most of the time with the kids is quality time, whereas if you had an eight to five job in the city I think you’d miss out on so much, especially if both parents are working. (Rod06, father)

A farming childhood is constructed by parents in this study as enjoyable for children, comparing favourably with the poverty and hard work characterising New Zealand farming life for earlier generations of children (Goodyear, 2006b). “Farming is the only profession in which children live and play at the worksite” (Zepeda & Kim, 2006, p. 109) and this creates particular issues for rural parents, including the need for children to accompany them on the farm in the absence of childcare alternatives. This is perceived by parents as being beneficial, as families spend more time together, children develop skills and gain attributes that parents value, and potentially keep out of trouble. However, it also raises concerns, in this study and in others in Canada (Cummins, 2009) and North America (Zepeda & Kim, 2006), about issues such as children’s safety around machinery and in the farm workplace.

Findings from this study echo others (Zepeda & Kim, 2006), as parents value the opportunities farming gives them to spend time with their children. However, like their counterparts in Canada (Trussell & Shaw, 2007), they also face particular challenges given the difficulties managing time off the farm for family leisure activities.

Chapter Summary

Rural idyll. This was undoubtedly the most dominant theme emerging from the findings. Alternative constructions of rural living were apparent in the data challenging and contesting this major theme, but most parents tended to consciously construct rural childhood and family life in idyllic terms.
**Rural lifestyle.** Most parents consciously chose to live rurally and are satisfied with this choice. Parents in the two areas with the strongest urban influence (Canterbury and Rodney) stated that they chose to live rurally for reasons related to their children, indicating a belief, consistent with other studies from the United Kingdom (Jones, 1997; Little & Austin, 1996; Valentine, 1997), that rural living is better for children and families. This response was stated less frequently in Northland and MacKenzie, where the main reasons for living rurally were related to Māori whānau and land connections (Wilson, 2008) and intergenerational continuity in farming families, as found in Riley’s (2009) study in the United Kingdom. Parents specifically chose the area they live in for reasons related to proximity to the city (Canterbury), proximity to family (Canterbury, Northland), family owned land (Northland, MacKenzie), and environmental recreational opportunities (across the areas). Most parents had a rural background, which had positive emotional associations for them. Participants were aware of the changing face of rural New Zealand (Mulet-Marquis & Fairweather, 2008) and had varying responses to it. Some parents distinguished between agricultural and other kinds of rural lifestyles, indicating that rural is equated with farming thereby not only reproducing the rural urban dichotomy (Cloke, 2006), but also excluding ‘newcomers’ from rural social status.

**Beneficial aspects of living rurally.** Participants identified a range of beneficial aspects of living rurally. Idyllic aspects, such as freedom, space, privacy, peace and quiet, and the natural world, were particularly important to participants in rural areas with strong or moderate urban influence (Canterbury and Rodney). As such, it appears that these parents associate positive aesthetic aspects of the natural world with childhood, reinforcing the discourse of the rural childhood idyll (Holloway & Valentine, 2000), and shoring it up with comparisons to negative constructions of urban childhood (Leyshon, 2008).

An important aspect of living rurally for parents is the social construction of community, which encompasses family, schools and neighbours. Aspects of community identified as important across the areas, include social participation of adults and children, reciprocity of care, social inclusion, parental involvement in activities, being known, and shared values. Community is important in constructing the rural idyll (Panelli et al., 2002; Valentine, 1997),
and has strong roots in the context of rural New Zealand, where people relied on family and neighbours for economic and social reasons historically (Toynbee, 1995), as well as relevance currently (Goodrich & Sampson, 2008). However, idyllic constructions of harmonious rural communities are contested and fractured by the potential for scrutiny and social exclusion (Toynbee, 1995), and the negative attitudes expressed of and attributed to ‘newcomers’ attempting to purchase the rural idyll, corresponding with findings from studies in the United Kingdom (Little & Austin, 1996; Valentine & Holloway, 2001). Participants in the highly rural/remote area (MacKenzie) were most likely to acknowledge both positive and negative aspects of close knit community including gossip and social exclusion of individuals. Changing attitudes within the community as a consequence of newcomers was raised by a small number of participants across the areas.

With a few exceptions, small rural schools were viewed positively and as an advantage of living rurally. Family and whānau living nearby were important across the areas and shared activities and experiences were also identified across the areas as being part of rural living. Self sufficiency and family solidarity are attributes incorporated and valorised in the rural New Zealand myth (Fairburn, 2006). Hunting and fishing were family activities across the areas, but predominantly in MacKenzie. Intergenerational experiences and continuity were particularly important to participants from those areas least affected by urban influence (Northland and MacKenzie), with attachment to the land featuring strongly for farming families.

Rural living was generally perceived by parents as safer than urban areas in relation to crime, matching findings from North American and English studies (Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000; Valentine, 1997). The sense of community contributes to a heightened sense of safety, as do perceptions that there is less opportunity for young people to get into trouble, despite evidence that there are specific risks associated with living in rural areas for young people, such as health risk behaviour in rural North America (Atav & Spencer, 2002; de Haan & Boljevac, 2009). Although they felt safe from crime, dangers related to the natural and farming environment were acknowledged by parents, corresponding with Zepeda and Kim’s (2006) North American study, although these were also constructed as opportunities for
learning. Safety concerns associated with driving vehicles and ATVs (Campbell, 2008) were minimised by parents, who instead focused on their positive farming benefits and recreational aspects.

**Fostering of positive attributes in children.** Parents perceived that living rurally fostered the development of certain positive attributes and qualities in children. Some of these are associated with the historical sociocultural context of pioneering rural New Zealand, such as responsibility, confidence, independence, caring and common sense (C. Bell, 1997; Phillips, 2008). Farming parents, in particular, also value the educational aspects, such as learning about the realities of life that children gain from rural living. Other attributes such as creativity and adventurousness were associated with idyllic rural childhood visions, as were beliefs that rural life would enable children to retain their innocence for longer (Kehily, 2004; Montgomery, 2003). Outdoor recreational activity and experience for children is highly valued by rural parents across the areas, for the purposes of adventurous and imaginative play, and for hunting sports.

**Rural dull.** Parents were evenly divided in each area between feeling socially isolated where they live and not seeing themselves as isolated. Parents (except in Northland) perceive that social isolation is an issue for children in terms of their distance from friends. This issue increases as the children get older, and is seen as more significant for young people, corresponding with other Minority world studies (Davis & Ridge, 1997; Gendinning et al., 2003; Lægran, 2002; Rye, 2006; Valentine & Holloway, 2001). A range of strategies are used to manage social isolation including playing with neighbours, hosting sleepovers, and parents providing transport.

**Rural deprivation.** Living rurally results in a complete lack of some services and resources, and difficulty accessing others. Health services in particular are inconsistently available across rural areas, with some parents highly critical of what is on offer. Parents’ criticisms related to the meagreness of services, problems accessing them and difficulties for rural residents associated with specialist or after hours care in urban areas. For example, despite the changes made by the government in addressing the concerns of the United Nations
Committee on the Rights of the Child (2003) regarding mental health services for young people (New Zealand Government, 2008), the experiences of one participant revealed that these still involve considerable travel and result in increased stress on families, including those related to their employment and family commitments, and provision of childcare for other children.

Economic aspects of living rurally affect families, including the higher costs associated with travel, local shopping (all areas except Canterbury) and unemployment (Northland). For some participants these are merely inconvenient, but when families are also faced with economic hardship and lack of mobility these aspects are compounded and create more difficulties (Shucksmith, 2004; Waldegrave & Stuart, 1998). Improvements in information and communication technology (ICT) have impacted inconsistently for participants across and within the rural areas, with uptake of technology adversely affected in rural New Zealand by a range of factors (Shiblaq, 2008/2009).

Rural distances and travel time impact on rural families, particularly the further they live from rural or urban centres, although the majority of parents were accepting of the time involved in travelling to services and activities. There are a number of issues affecting rural families regarding schooling, specifically ones related to small schools, and alternative schooling options, such as correspondence school and boarding school. These options involve extra cost and can increase financial stress on families, highlighting the challenges faced in rural areas and exacerbated by poverty regarding childcare and education, as also found in North American studies by De Marco (2008) and Struthers and Bokemeier (2000). Children’s activities in rural areas are affected by travel, parental involvement, cost and limited options. These issues and difficulties for families associated with rural deprivation or poverty tend to be obscured and denied by the mythologising of idyllic rural living, both in this studies and in others (Davis & Ridge, 1997; James, 1990; D. Bell, 2006).

Concluding comments. This summary of key themes highlights some of the differences apparent between rural areas in terms of rural family life and childhood. Particular issues are more or less relevant to specific rural locations. As well as diversity between the areas there
are also commonalities of experience and perceptions. The majority of parent participants in this study indicated that they are satisfied with living rurally and with what this lifestyle provides for their children. A central theme, with a few exceptions, is the portrayal of rural childhood by parents in terms consistent with the rural idyll. Aspects of dullness, deprivation and difficulties associated with rural living are raised and contest idyllic rural notions. However, constructions of rural community as a place of social harmony and happiness (Little & Austin, 1996), and the significantly greater emphasis on idyllic aspects, serve to obscure these somewhat (D. Bell, 2006), or provide a psychological antidote to them.

Alongside this, a recurrent theme in the findings is of rural parents holding a negative view of cities and urban areas, particularly in comparison to aspects of rural living (Leyshon, 2008). This theme is evident in different sections of the data, for example, parents comparing idyllic rural features with stereotypically negative aspects of urban living; holding negative perceptions of newcomers from urban areas, who are seen to not possess 'rural values'; identifying certain crimes, such as stranger danger, as an urban phenomenon; and talking derisively about urban dwellers’ (mostly Aucklanders) incompetency in managing at times of crisis or adversity. The overall sense gained is that the majority of parents perceive rural living as offering many benefits both to themselves and to their children, and to be largely superior to an urban lifestyle.
CHAPTER SEVEN
Findings – Children’s Data

Introduction

A critical aspect of this study is the inclusion of children’s voices in seeking to increase understanding of rural childhoods. This chapter presents the findings from the participating children’s data. The data were collected from children using three different methods; interviews, construction of artwork, and photographs. Additional data relevant to children’s activities was provided in the activity records kept by parents. The primary source of data was the interviews, with the visual constructions of artwork and photographs used to stimulate and augment discussion. In addition to supplementing the interview data, these visual constructions provided complementary numerical data. Comprehensive data were gathered from these sources as the children spoke extensively about, drew and photographed aspects of their everyday lives and experiences. In addition to using children’s words from the interviews, I have selected a small sample of 20 of the children’s visual constructions, from the total of 933 photographs and 119 drawn artworks, to illustrate some aspects of the interview data.57 As with the quotes, the choice of photographs and artwork was guided by those that were most illustrative of the findings and/or of specific importance to individual children. Despite the vast number of photographs taken by children, only a small proportion clearly depicted the topic without additional commentary.

The framework that evolved from reviewing the rural childhood literature, and structured the findings from the parents’ data in the previous chapter, is now used in this chapter to organise and present the children’s data. This framework conceptualises children’s experiences and perceptions in terms of: rural idyll; rural dull; and rural deprivation. A rural danger section has been added in this chapter, which focuses on the dangers children perceive.

57 Children were specifically asked to give consent for their artwork and photographs to be used in this thesis, knowing that for some it may compromise confidentiality. All children whose artwork and photographs have been used agreed to this. Their pseudonyms have been omitted from photographs to avoid linking with interview data.
as being present in rural environments. It is not entirely synonymous with the rural horror section of the literature review, but it does resonate to an extent, in that it exposes aspects of rural living that may cause or heighten fear and anxiety. As with the previous chapter, findings are presented and followed by quotes from participants, along with artwork and photographs, to provide illustration and greater depth of understanding.

Using the same conceptual framework to organise the children's and parents' data reveals areas of commonality between them, in terms of everyday experiences and constructions of rural childhood. Areas of divergence are also evident as some knowledge, understanding and perspectives are unique to the child participants. As well, the commonalities and diversities of children's everyday experiences, within and between each of the four geographical areas are apparent.

Thirty six children participated in this study. The number participating from each area varied: Canterbury – 12; Rodney – 10; Northland – 5; MacKenzie – 9. The children were aged between 6 and 12 years at the time of data collection. Any inconsistencies in individual children's ages, when quoted in the text, are a consequence of children's age changing over the 12 month span of their interviews.

Eight children lived on farms, and a further six children lived on properties that generated income through agricultural use. Thus, over a third of the child participants (n=14) lived on properties with current agricultural activity. The gender of these children was evenly divided, with four girls and four boys living on farms, and three girls and three boys living on properties with agricultural activity. A total of five children participating (three boys and two girls) lived in small rural townships. The other 17 children lived on rural properties, which were not agriculturally productive, away from townships or urban areas.

Rural Idyll

The rural idyll is the largest theme to emerge from the children's data. It encompasses three main categories: individual aspects; psychosocial aspects; and urban/rural perceptions. The
first category includes children’s personal responses to living in a rural environment in fairly
general terms. It also incorporates aesthetic, idyllic rural aspects valued by children. The
psychosocial aspects affect children in a range of different, but related, settings including
family, friends, community, school, home and farm. This section largely corresponds with the
section in the previous chapter outlining the beneficial aspects of living rurally expressed by
parents. The urban/rural perceptions category focuses on aspects of children’s rural identities
and their constructions of urban and rural lifestyle.

Individual Aspects

The children are generally positive about living rurally, with the majority of child
participants (n=28), ranging across the areas, clearly stating that they like where they live. Although there are areas of dissatisfaction for children, which are presented as this chapter proceeds, no children stated that they did not like living where they did.

It’s a good life. It’s not noisy, well, apart from the animals. It’s good living round here. Good, peaceful, more things to do. (Shubba-lubba-ding-dong, 10 year old boy, Canterbury)

I feel like this is my natural home and I’d like to stay here forever! (Victoria, 7 year old girl, Rodney)

I’m comfortable here. It’s just a warm place. Yeah, and safe. Our family will be looking after each other and stuff. (Hannah, 12 year old girl, Northland)

I’m happy with where I live, ‘cause we’ve got the beautiful view and there’s quite a few sunny clear days like this. You got the mountain to go skiing on. Bike trails and tracks. (Poo Spider, 10 year old boy, MacKenzie)
In addition to positive feelings about living rurally in the present, the majority of children (n=25) indicated their intention to live rurally as adults. Eleven children who saw themselves living rurally, did not indicate a preference for any specific rural area. However, more children (n=14) saw themselves living in the same area they currently lived in. The majority of these children (n=12) lived in Canterbury and Rodney. One child in each of the areas with the strongest urban influence (Canterbury and Rodney) specifically stated they would like to live rurally but near a town or city. Surprisingly, given the strong generational family ties to the land, only one child from Northland and one child from MacKenzie indicated a preference to stay in that specific area. The majority of children who currently live on farms and agriculturally productive land intend living rurally, however nearly half (n=6) do not have a specifically preferred area, and two intend living in cities. Six MacKenzie children live on farms that have been in the family for several generations; whilst only one child indicated that they intended living there, four others thought that siblings or family members would continue farming that property.

I’ll probably stay out in the country, find a nice house around here. Well, to be honest I plan to live in, like, a village, but out in the country, like [village near this area] but probably a bit smaller. (9er49er, 12 year old girl, Canterbury)

We just live out here and it’s peace. I want to live right here – it’s just gone through the whole family. It’s gone through Dad’s Dad’s Dad and we’ve still got photos of the first guys who lived here. This house is a hundred years old. I really want to take it over. (Laurie, 12 year old girl, MacKenzie)

I want to live in the country, New Zealand or Australia, and I want to live on a hill ‘cause I like views. (Melissa, 11 year old girl, MacKenzie)

It would be good if I could get a place near the shops but it had lots of land. (Billy Buster, 11 year old boy, Rodney)
Eight children were interested in living in a town or city as adults. The majority of these children (n=6) were from the two areas with the least urban influence; Northland (n=3) and MacKenzie (n=3). For some children this interest was related to experiencing a different lifestyle. The remaining three children expressed a wish to go travelling, rather than settle in one area.

I'd go to Australia – don’t know. Maybe Sydney, in the city. All the flashing lights and that. They got all the flash stuff and cool stuff. (Alice, 12 year old girl, Northland)

I’d stay somewhere like Auckland, but not as big, not so many people. I like the country but I just want to see what it’s like to get out of the country. (Maggy, 10 year old girl, Rodney)

Children were asked what work they thought they might do as adults and a wide range of occupations were named. The three largest categories were farming (n=6), animal related occupations, such as veterinarian or zoologist (n=6), and sporting or entertainment celebrities (n=6). Four of the children (two girls and two boys) intending to be farmers currently live on farms. Half of the children (n=4) who expressed interest in living in a town or city related this to their intended occupation, which they perceived as being urban based; beauty therapist, sportsman, doctor and joining the Navy.

Children were specifically asked what they thought it was like for their parents living rurally. The majority of children (n=26) perceived their parents to be satisfied with their current rural lifestyle:

I think she finds it delightful, ‘cause she sometimes sits out over there under the plum tree and drinks coffee. (Isabella, 9 year old girl, Canterbury).

My parents didn’t grow up in the country. They came to the country because, one reason was Dad got robbed twice, from the house. It’s safer in the country. My
cousin got robbed in Auckland and his girlfriend got stabbed. Stuff like that doesn’t happen round here. And, because it’s quiet and peaceful and no traffic. I think they enjoy it a lot more than living in the city. I know my Dad definitely likes it more because he hated the traffic down there. My Mum prefers it here too, finds it less un-peaceful. (Bill, 10 year old boy, Rodney)

I think it’s good for her [Mum] to live here ‘cause this is where she’s from and most of her family and sisters live here. (Hannah, 11 year old girl, Northland)

I know Dad really enjoys it because he likes having privacy, as well, in the country. Not so sure about Mum. I reckon she likes it ‘cause she loves going on the motorbike with Dad. She always wants to go mustering with Dad too. (Melissa, 10 year old girl, MacKenzie)

Five children responded with negative perceptions of their parent’s satisfaction, related to their rural lifestyle involving hard work and lots of driving. Two children gave a mixed response and three were neutral.

I reckon they’d get quite annoyed having to drive us around everywhere we want to go ‘cause we live so far out. It takes up most of their time. But I think they’re pretty happy to get rid of us when we go to school. (9er49er, 11 year old girl, Canterbury)

I don’t know ‘cause Dad’s real stressful about it because he owns the farm. I always see him in the morning and when I stay up later at night. Mum’s real stressful ‘cause she’s got to feed Dad, pick me up, the travelling – drives her up the walls, because we’re not going to sell our truck and the price of petrol is going up. (Laurie, 11 year old girl, MacKenzie)

It’s probably hard because of all the stuff they need to do, like feeding out and everything like that. (Josh, 10 year old boy, Canterbury)
Children’s satisfaction with living rurally, combined with most children’s expressed intention to live rurally in the future and positive perceptions of parental satisfaction, link with the parents’ expressed satisfaction to give an impression of family contentment with rural life. This impression is consistent with the imagining of the countryside in popular discourse as being the ideal setting for family life (Jones, 1997).

However, there are some aspects of the findings that ameliorate or contest this overall impression. For example, some children are aware of aspects of rural living that are stressful for parents. Also, contesting the impression of contentment with rural life, is the expressed intention of some children to not live in rural areas as adults. Whilst the majority intend to live rurally indicating, as Cummins (2009) suggests in a Canadian study with farm children, satisfaction with the surroundings and way of life, some are curious about and keen to discover what urban areas and the wider world have to offer. Recognising that children and young people perform and negotiate multiple identities, which are fluid and dynamic, means that the intention to live elsewhere may reflect a desire to explore other life styles and identities, or represent shifting discursive formations as different meanings of place are synthesised (Leyshon, 2008). Some children intend moving to urban areas for employment and educational opportunities, thereby joining the ongoing drift of young people in New Zealand for this purpose (Goodyear, 2006a). This is particularly pertinent for children in Northland, where there are limited employment options and a fluctuating population (Orange, 2009), with children seeing extended family members move to and from Auckland.

Children’s place attachment, in the form of emotional bonds that are developed with a particular place, (Lewicka, 2008) is evident across the areas. One indication of this is the expectation of many children in Canterbury and Rodney to live in the same area when they are adults. Another indication is the positive emotion evident in children’s interview narratives as they talked about where they lived and their everyday experiences in that environment.

The finding that most farm children do not intend farming may be related to witnessing the hard work involved for their parents, as found in Cummins (2009) study. However, it is interesting to note that despite the majority of MacKenzie farming children indicating a
preference for occupations other than farming and an intention to live away from the family farm, this does not necessarily mean a lack of connection to the land. Farm children’s enduring attachment to family land, found in a study with farm children in the United Kingdom (Riley, 2009), is evident in the current study, with MacKenzie farming children recounting family history, attaching symbolic meanings to physical features of the environment, and assuming that family members would continue farming the property. For some children, like Laurie, this ongoing place attachment is hugely important, and as found in Riley’s (2009) study, is characterised by a strong sense of intergenerational continuity and set within an historical context. Similarly, despite some Northland children being keen to live in urban areas, there is clearly a strong connection to their current rural area, evident in their feeling that they are part of the group and incorporating symbolic attachment to the place. These features have been identified in the literature as indicating a sense of belonging (Schaefer-McDaniel, 2004), that is associated with family residence and history, social factors and physical features of the environment (Lewicka, 2008).

**Aesthetic aspects.** Children across the four areas expressed an appreciation of the aesthetic idyllic aspects of rural living that the parent participants had also discussed. The most highly valued aesthetic aspects were space (n=30), natural world (n=25) and peace and quiet (n=18). There was very little difference across the areas, with space being the most important aspect for children in Canterbury, Rodney and MacKenzie, and the second most important in Northland.

Getting the fresh air and having the amount of space - you can play ... instead of playing out in the streets. And then you can experience a whole lot of new things out here. (Sharpay-A, 9 year old girl, Canterbury)

I like outside best. There’s more outside stuff here, more areas to play in, like big paddocks to play round in. There’s more room to play. And I just like being outside anyway. That’s the good thing about the country, you can always be outside. But when you’re in the town it’s a bit hard being outside with all the noise. (Roxy, 11 year old girl, MacKenzie)
I greatly enjoy living in the country because it seems to make me think about nature and plants. If I lived in the city it would not be enjoyable because it would mean that you would not have a large garden to play in and in my opinion children need to have a decent amount of space to play in. So I think it would be good for people to live in the country instead of the city. (Luna, 11 year old girl, Rodney). Written text on artwork - See Figure 5

The most important aspect in Northland, which was discussed by all the child participants living there (n=5), was the natural world. For two Northland Māori participants the natural
environment is entwined with a sense of belonging, as they identified their maunga\(^{58}\), pointing it out to me during the interview and including it in their artwork and photographs. The natural world was the second most important idyllic aspect for children in Rodney and MacKenzie.

I love looking at the hills – really want to climb that hill, if you go over it you end up in [names township] ... It’s a rugged landscape. You can’t walk anywhere without seeing rocks, gorse, tussocks and stuff. I like the rugged. (Melissa, 10 year old girl, MacKenzie) - See Figure 6

Figure 6: Looking to a bigger hill with Dusk (dog); Artwork by Melissa, 10 year old girl, MacKenzie.

\(^{58}\) Māori word for mountain. It is significant in this context as Māori people define themselves by their iwi (tribe), hapū (sub-tribe), maunga (mountain) and awa (river).
Nature, that’s what I’m interested in … like wildlife. (Jack, 9 year old boy, Rodney)

That’s [names mountain], my maunga. I been up there once, at the foot of it with my Mum and [stepfather] and sisters and that, when [stepfather] was pig hunting. (Jenna, 11 year old girl, Northland)

Half the children (n=18) participating in this study indicated that lack of traffic in rural areas was an aspect of idyllic rural living that was important to them. Children across all the areas, but especially Canterbury and Rodney, raised this issue. The main factor in valuing the lack of traffic for children (n=15) was from the point of view of less noise. Three of these children, plus another three children, also appreciated less traffic from a safety perspective.

It’s nice and quiet. If you were living in town you’d always not get to sleep at night because of all the cars driving. And all the neighbours might be still up and being noisy. We don’t have that much neighbours and not that much cars come past so it’s not noisy. (Bobbalina, 10 year old girl, Rodney)

Freedom was a factor of rural living noted by some children (n=5). Privacy was the least important idyllic aspect, with only one child, who moved to live in a small rural town during the course of the study, noting the lack of privacy in the township environment.

There’s not as much privacy here in [small rural] town. Here if you play outside there are always people watching you. (Billy Buster, 11 year old boy)

You feel free [in the country]. You don’t feel like you’re cramped up in a little house, ‘cause there’s traffic everywhere … And the fun stays a bit more. Not so much traffic so you can walk the dogs on the road. You see people walking dogs after dinner. It seems to make the day last longer. It’s more relaxed. (Ashley Lewie, 11 year old girl, Canterbury)
The two most important aesthetic aspects for children, space and nature, are consistent with other reports, from Canada and North America, of children's favourite places and spaces as being outdoors and closely linked with nature (Cummins, 2009; Derr, 2005). These aspects are integrally linked in discursive constructions of contemporary rural childhood, which emphasise the natural world as the spatial setting for childhood (Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Kehily, 2004).

The romantic discourses of childhood and the spatial discourse of the rural idyll combine to promote children's freedom, in the context of nature and agricultural spaces (Jones, 1997). Consistent with findings from Jones (2007) study, children's experience of spatial freedom in this study is endorsed by parents, who believe that children are acting in accordance with romantic constructions of childhood, and thus children are allowed the space and freedom to pursue their own agendas.

**Outdoor recreational activities.** Children value the outdoor recreational activities and opportunities associated with living rurally. This corresponds positively with the finding that rural parents value their children having access to outdoors recreation and encourage them to spend time outside, believing that it will foster attributes they would like their children to have. The outdoor activities that children liked doing can be organised into four categories: physical play; imaginative play; animal related play; and exploratory play. These categories are not necessarily discrete and can overlap. For example, a 10 year old boy in Rodney, William Crooks, described a complex fantasy game which he played with a specific friend, that involved collecting things and fighting, making use of the trampoline, a picnic table, and a trailer which became ships, and a rope swing and pipes that connect across the driveway to travel between places. It incorporates elements of military re-enactments and has complex themes involving money, land and battles, continuing over several days.

**Physical play.** This includes physical exercise and backyard sports (n=20), bike riding (n=17), playing on the trampoline and swings (n=16), swimming (n=15), playing games like hide and seek (n=9), motorbike riding (n=6) and riding small wheels\(^{59}\) (n=5). Although

\(^{59}\) Small wheels include roller blades, scooters and skateboards.
children liked doing these things throughout the areas some activities were more strongly associated with particular places. Bike riding was primarily an activity in Canterbury and MacKenzie (see Figure 7). The trampoline was mostly an outdoor activity in Canterbury and Rodney (Figure 8). Swimming was an important activity for all the children in Northland, in rivers, creeks, waterholes and the school pool after hours (see Figures 9 and 10).

I like going for bike rides by myself - there’s not much traffic. I go down the road beside the house. Sometimes dogs chase after me. I practically know them all, like the babysitter has two dogs and I know their names. They bark but they don’t chase. I like to go on my own. I know the place so I don’t really get freaked out. (Ashley Lewie, 11 year old girl, Canterbury)

Sometimes I ride down the farm because it’s a really steep hill, with lots of bumps. I like going over the bumps, have to brake a lot. My little sister goes down like an old granny – she barely goes down. (Bobbalina, 10 year old girl, Rodney)

Figure 7: Bike riding - Photograph taken by a family member of a 10 year old girl, MacKenzie
Figure 8: On the trampoline - Photograph taken by a family member of a 9 year old girl, Canterbury

Figure 9: River rope swing - Photograph taken by a family member of a 10 year old boy, Canterbury
After school if it’s hot I go for a swim with my cousins. There’s a special place, with a waterfall, down by the trees across the road. I go with my cousins, some of my cousins live there. Sometimes we go swimming at [names place] down by the bridge. Not adults, it’s just a kid’s thing. I wouldn’t take A [little sister] ‘cause it’s too muddy, too deep, she’d be scared. It’s for kids over six years old ... that can swim. Some teenagers go there too. (Hannah, 11 year old girl, Northland)
**Imaginative play.** This play was associated by children (n=14) with all the areas. At times this overlaps with other categories, for example with exploratory and physical play, as illustrated in the following examples:

We use croquet mallets to try and climb the cliff like mountain climbers. Me and R [friend] pretend we’re mountaineers. We kind of jump down, stop just before the river. It’s fun there, specially in summer ‘cause it’s got long grass. We can hang onto it, then it breaks, like a rope breaking, we either fall on the bank or into the river. (Poseidon, 9 year old boy, Canterbury)

I like to make huts a lot these days. Mostly in Mum’s garden. I find hollow bits in her garden and I put some waterproof stuff there, on the sides. Just me. I sort of play in it after I’ve made it or I get a friend around and play in it. We play we’re lost in the jungle or we’re orphans. We also play chefs and use bowls and make things out of the plants to eat. (Sharpay-A, 9 year old girl, Canterbury)

The field is the most important part, because I have lots of energy and can run around it ... When I come home I usually do three laps of the field to tire myself. Then I go and play near the water – making grass houses. I make houses out of grass and sticks, then I make lots of houses and I make cities in the water. (Lula, 6 year old girl, Rodney)

One good thing - my friend lives over there, across the paddock ... She comes over to my house quite a lot. Sometimes we bike down to the river or down to the creek. We play in the tree hut. We have to play with my sister, ‘cause if she’s left out she starts crying. We go over to sheep pens and play there, we play being sheep. (Roxy, 10 year old girl, MacKenzie)

**Animal related play.** This includes playing with pets and other animals (n=8) and horse riding (n=6):
I like to run outside and play with the puppy. Run outside and play with the horses if they’re here. Take the puppy for a walk. I took a rope up to catch the horse one time, brought it down from up the back. My horse Cloud - beautiful horse. She’s mine and I’m gonna keep her. Can’t ride her yet but she’s really tame and will walk up to you. Dad’s breaking her in. (Princess Fiona, 9 year old girl, Northland)

**Exploratory play.** This includes building huts (n=11), climbing trees (n=6), exploring the environment (n=6), catching eels and kiwai$^{60}$ (n=4) – see Figures 11, 12 and 13.

I love living next to the forest. We go out and explore it, with my brother - sometimes his friends come over, sometimes my friends. We go possum hunting. We play in the forest quite a lot. But I don’t go over so much when I have a friend over ‘cause some of my friends aren’t allowed to go over there, ‘cause their parents don’t want anything happening. (Bill, 11 year old boy, Rodney)

I like climbing hedges, at school and outside home. There’s always gaps in the corner and you climb up through the inside to get to the top. People can see you at the top but inside they can’t and that’s where I always hide, in the middle. I discovered it and only told S [friend]. We climb to the top and make huts and put booby traps inside the hedge … We put buckets on ropes from the hedge and drop them down to put food in. (Dante, 9 year old boy, Canterbury)

The hedge was my most favourite part in the school grounds. They had to take it down to put in a playground. I wish the hedge was back. We made these huts in it and when you laid back it was really soft. The playground’s only got a tunnel, climbing wall, slide, pole and lots of stairs. It’s not so much fun, not many people play on it. (Sam, 7 year old boy, MacKenzie)

---

$^{60}$Kiwai are small fresh water crayfish, also known as koura.
Figure 11: Tree hut - Photograph taken by a 10 year old girl, MacKenzie

Figure 12: Tree climbing - Photograph taken by a 10 year old boy, Rodney
Other activities mentioned by individual children include ‘mucking around’, sketching, and gardening.

I like practically mucking around on the lawn here. Just doing nothing, maybe talking to yourself, singing to yourself, just outside. (9er49er, 11 year old girl, Canterbury)

We muck around at P’s [friend’s] place. There’s a river and we go swimming there. He made a swimming hole. There’s a log to jump off into the deep part. When it’s rained heaps we can’t go in it because of the tide, so have to go in the shallow end. But one time it was flooding and we went in with S [older girl] and everyone was floating away. So funny … And P had these big long white things [for house renovation] – we stand on them, go ice skating on them, down the ramp. We joined more things together and had races. (Alice, 11 year old girl, Northland)
It’s kind of cool when you live in the country and you’re good at art ‘cause you can go anywhere you like where there are trees around and that you can draw different sorts of things. Sketching is an outside thing to do. (Poseidon, 9 year old boy, Canterbury).

Similarly to rural children in a recent Australian study (Lee & Abbott, 2009), children in this study participate in a wide range of outdoor recreational activities, making do with the available options and using space creatively. Children’s agency is apparent in the innovative ways in which available space is used, and transformed into a play space (James & James, 2008). The sites of their outdoors activities in this study tend, as Spencer and Blades (2006) found in reviewing the literature, not to be places that have been created specifically for children, such as playgrounds, but are spaces that they appropriate for their own use.

Exploratory play was facilitated for some children by access to a diversity of natural places and parents allowing children the spatial freedom to explore these, consistent with findings from North American and British studies (Derr, 2005; Jones, 2000). Trees and forested areas are particularly important places for children to visit and play (Cummins, 2009), and were frequently used by children participating in this study. As well as using natural places to play, children also use polymorphic spaces, which are within adult structures but can be used for other purposes (Jones, 2000), such as Roxy’s use of the sheep pens. Some of the play spaces come about as “opportunistic exploitation of situations” (Jones, 2000, p. 42), for example, Alice and her friends swimming during the flood, and play with ‘big, long, white things’ appropriated from a house renovation site.

Children make use of specific special places, which they have formed emotional attachments with (Lewicka, 2008). Consistent with Derr’s (2005) findings, these places provide them with opportunities for exploratory, creative and imaginative play. Social and cultural meanings have become attached to these spaces, as children use them for particular activities, individually or with specific people. These special play spaces may be located away from home, for example Hannah’s waterfall or Bill’s forest, allowing exploration and play to be controlled by children without adult intervention, as found in other studies (Derr, 2005;
Or the play spaces may be closer to home, such as Sharpay-A's garden, Dante's hedge, and Poseidon's riverbank, and frequently used for social activities (Derr, 2005). Children play spaces also include safe places they have created, such as Roxy's treehut and Dante and Sam's hedge huts, within which they can act individually or collectively (Robson, Bell & Klocker, 2007).

In addition to types of recreational activity or play in different places, children also talked about 'mucking around' outside. This equates with 'doing nothing', which Aitken (2001) posits as a time of searching and change, requiring a certain degree of freedom, including time and space away from adult supervision, in contrast to 'doing something' which is usually sanctioned by adult authority.

Alongside the individual artwork and photographs presented here, the interview data emphasising the importance of aesthetic and outdoor aspects, is supported by the dominant themes apparent in the collated artwork and photographs. A number of themes occurred in the visual constructions: nature, recreation, agriculture, friends, school, home, pets/animals, and family. The dominant themes, occurring most frequently when collated across all the areas, were recreation, pets/animals and nature (see Table 3). These themes correspond with the aesthetic aspects and the focus on outdoor recreational activities found in the interview data.

Children's visual constructions reflect important features of their lived experiences and provide insight into their constructions of rural childhood firmly locating it, according to the most frequently recurring themes across all areas, in the rural outdoors environment. The dominant themes of recreation, pets/animals and nature, were central in three out of the four areas: Canterbury, Rodney and MacKenzie, although the order of importance varied. Another important theme in those areas was agriculture, as seen in the photographs taken by children in MacKenzie, and the artwork constructed by children in Canterbury and MacKenzie. The only divergence from the prevalence of these themes in these three areas was the inclusion of 'home', occurring in the artwork created by children in Rodney.
Table 3: Dominant themes in child participants’ photographs and artwork

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHILDREN’S PHOTOGRAPH THEMES</th>
<th>Most dominant</th>
<th>Second</th>
<th>Third</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canterbury</td>
<td>Pets/Animals</td>
<td>Recreation</td>
<td>Nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rodney</td>
<td>Nature</td>
<td>Pets/Animals</td>
<td>Recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northland</td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mackenzie</td>
<td>Recreation</td>
<td>Pets/Animals</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All areas combined</td>
<td>Recreation</td>
<td>Pets/animals</td>
<td>Nature</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHILDREN’S ARTWORK THEMES</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canterbury</td>
<td>Pets/Animals</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rodney</td>
<td>Recreation</td>
<td>Pets/Animals</td>
<td>Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northland</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Nature</td>
<td>Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MacKenzie</td>
<td>Recreation</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Pets/animals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All areas combined</td>
<td>Recreation</td>
<td>Pets/Animals</td>
<td>Nature</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These themes resonate with the dominant discursive themes of rurality, conveyed by New Zealand children, of nature, recreation and agriculture (McCormack, 2000a). However, the emphasis given to different aspects of the rural environment varies between areas. Nature was a dominant theme in visual constructions for children in Canterbury, Rodney and Northland, but did not feature significantly for children in MacKenzie. The dominant theme of agriculture in MacKenzie children’s visual constructions, reflected the farming and agricultural associations of everyday experience for most of them. McCormack (2000a) found differences between urban and rural children’s constructions of rurality. Nature was the dominant discursive theme for urban children, and agriculture was the dominant theme for rural children. This suggests that children in rural areas with the strongest urban influence have similar constructions of rurality to urban children. Interestingly, agriculture was also a dominant theme in Canterbury. The majority of children in Canterbury do not live in properties used for agricultural production, but their visual constructions indicate agricultural practice is an important element in their constructions of childhood. The interview data,
however, was consistent with McCormack’s (2000a) finding, that rural children held a more
detailed and realistic agricultural knowledge of rurality, and that urban children (or in this
case, children living near urban areas) had more stereotypical agricultural knowledge.

The dominant themes in the visual representations constructed by Northland children were
significantly different from the other three areas, with the inclusion of people and social
aspects. In the collation of photographic data from the Northland participants, three themes
prevailed: friends, school and family. Whilst nature was an important theme in the artwork,
family and home were also dominant themes. These dominant social themes are consistent
with findings from the Northland parents’ interviews that family, whānau and community are
of key importance in rural living. It may also be influenced by gender, as all the Northland
child participants were girls. Whilst McCormack (2000a) found no clearly defined trend
indicating gender differences, her earlier study (1998, cited in 2000a) found that boys focused
more on agriculture in their constructions of rurality, and girls discussed elements of
community. Findings relevant to the additional themes: friends; school; family; and pets and
animals are discussed in the following section focusing on psychosocial aspects.

**Psychosocial Aspects**

**Family and friends.** Family was important for all the participants, in talking about their
everyday lives and experiences. All participants talked about family members, parents and
siblings, in a range of different contexts.

Family activities were valued by participants, with children from different areas placing
greater emphasis on particular activities. Playing outside with family members (see Figure 14)
features in children’s lives across the four areas (n=23). This takes into account playing sport
and games outside around the home (n=15) and activities away from the property (n=7).
Whilst playing outside with family members was a feature of rural children’s lives across the
areas, it was highlighted by all the children in Northland (n=5), and most of the children in
MacKenzie (n=8). Playing with siblings and cousins is a key feature of life for children living
in these rural areas with the least urban influence.

227
Other activities such as family outings, for example, picnics and movies (n=17), and indoor pastimes (n=10) like board games and lego, were family activities across the areas. Holidays (n=6) featured most strongly for children in Canterbury (n=4).

Hunting, shooting and fishing were family activities important to children (n=13) from all areas except Northland. The majority of these children (n=9) were members of farming, or agriculturally productive, families.

We go duck shooting in the season. We hide in the maimai and if we see a duck we quickly go out and aim and shoot. Went shooting at [names area]. We shot a few, [six year old sister] came too. Just down from the house Dad shot one, got it in the wing. I went down and had to get it 'cause it landed in the creek. It flapped
around and I got all muddy trying to catch it. And I got it! (Luke, 9 year old boy, Rodney) - See Figure 15

Shooting is the best thing. When I use my shotgun Dad has to come with me. But I can shoot my air rifle when Mum and Dad are inside. At [nearby lake area] we go trout fishing and at night spotlighting for rabbits, with Mum and Dad. You only get one shot with a shotgun, because the rabbits run off 'cause of the noise. (Shubba-lubba-ding-dong, 10 year old boy, Canterbury)

Some participants talked about the importance of extended family members in their lives. Important extended family members included grandparents, and cousins, especially in MacKenzie and Northland, where the activity records and interview data indicated more frequent contact.
Grandparents are important and were discussed by nearly half the participants (n=17) in terms of frequent contact, reciprocal affection, and company and care. They were also referred to in connection with the family home or area, providing a source of information about these. Most MacKenzie participants (n=8) talked about their grandparents. These children mostly (n=7) come from families who have lived in the MacKenzie area for several generations and have fairly frequent contact with grandparents who are alive.

I was up at Nana’s last night—stayed over. When Mum goes out I usually stay over... I had to go and do everyone’s lawns, Nana and her neighbour. Her neighbour has a big paddock lawn... he complains about it being mucky so me and Nana thought we’d help out. I go to Nan’s quite a lot when she’s not busy. When I stay we do some cooking. (Roxy, 10 year old girl, MacKenzie)

Nana lives right next door. I see her every day, most days, when she gets back from work. She gives me chocolates and lollies. I help her do the dishes, washing her clothes, putting them on the line. I nearly fell off the bucket the other time! Sometimes I sleep over there. One time my Nara got a big flu and I ran over there ‘cause I heard her calling out and I had to hit her on the back to help her sick it all up. I like going over to Nana’s if she’s home. I feel sorry for her, ‘cause she’s lonely, she’s got no mokos61 there, she’s living by herself now. (Princess Fiona, 9 year old girl, Northland)

Other extended family members, stated as important by a third of the children (n=12), were cousins. This included all participants from Northland (n=5) and more than half from MacKenzie (n=5). As noted these are the two areas in which participants’ families were most likely to have lived for several generations. For all these ten participants, cousins were part of the friend group and seen regularly:

After school I play with my cousins and friends who live close. My friends are my cousins. Well, not really cousins all of them, but I’m related to them. Call them cousins. (Hannah, 11 year old girl, Northland)

---

61 Moko is an abbreviation of the Māori word Mokopuna meaning grandchild.
One of my mates plays cricket too. He’s a cousin as well as a friend. He’s in the generation after me. I’m in his mother’s generation. So he’s my third cousin once removed. (XXx, 12 year old boy, MacKenzie)

Friends were considered important to children (n=18) across all the areas. In particular, children from Northland all talked about their friends. This was also highlighted in the photograph themes, in which friends was the largest category for Northland participants. School and family were the next largest categories, with an overlap of friends, school mates and cousins, being the same people.

Children’s capacity as purposeful social actors, who construct relationships and influence the social world in their everyday lives (Mayall, 1999), is apparent across all the rural areas. Social relationships with family and friends are intensely important in the social lives of these rural children, consistent with Lee & Abbott’s (2009) Australian study. Another study, in the United Kingdom (V. Morrow, 2001), found these social relationships to be crucial to children’s sense of belonging and wellbeing. The focus in the findings on playing with siblings, cousins and friends, highlights the impact of the social on children’s sense of place, constructions of rural childhood, and performance of identities. Children interpret life and historical events in accordance with their relationships and interactions with others, which are then woven into personal identities and meaningful life stories (Butler et al., 2009).

Historically, in New Zealand, the geographical distance between people in rural areas and the low population density, increased the need for families and communities to be self sufficient in a social context (Toynbee, 1995). In the more isolated rural areas, family and whānau continue to be an important source of social connection for children. Playing with siblings and cousins provides social opportunities for children who are geographically isolated from other peers, as found in other rural studies (Lee & Abbott, 2009). Children indicated positive sentiments toward siblings, similar to the recent Canadian farm children study (Cummins, 2009), and emphasised that the cousins and relations they played with were their friends. This highlights the importance of family connection and continuity across time and place, rather than merely as a social stopgap in the absence of other alternatives.
Family activities took place in a variety of locations. Those specifically associated with farming families, including shooting, hunting, and fishing, tended to locate farm family recreational activities in agricultural settings (McCormack, 2000a).

An idealised construction of rural New Zealand family life emphasises family solidarity and generational interdependence (Keeling et al., 2008). This construction reflects the lived experiences of some families, particularly in MacKenzie and Northland, and is exemplified by the frequent contact some rural children have with their grandparents. The contact includes reciprocal caregiving, whereby traditional constructions of childhood, in which children are seen in terms of dependency on others for care (Prout & James, 1990), are negated as some children provide company and care for grandparents. The majority of the MacKenzie children are members of farming families, and their relationships with grandparents are also contextualised, with reference to intergenerational continuity, and historical and personal attachments to the farm, consistent with findings from Riley’s (2009) farm children study in the United Kingdom. Children gain knowledge, respect and a sense of ownership for certain places from their grandparents, which Derr (2005) argues creates greater interest in knowing their history and protecting the land.

Northland children place considerable emphasis on social relationships in their experiences and constructions of childhood and place. This resonates with the value placed on family, whānau and close knit community, by Northland parents. The demographic context of the Northland community provides some insight into this emphasis. Some of the characteristics of the Northland region, such as geographic isolation and economic disadvantage (Orange, 2009), are associated with the development of strong local social connections (Stephens, 2008). Whilst this study is not designed to inquire directly into ethnic and cultural differences, it is important to acknowledge that Northland has a large Māori population, with strong traditions, emphasising the centrality of whānau to Māori wellbeing. In traditional and contemporary contexts, whānau is an important concept in Māori society, and can be defined as “a collective concept which embraces all the descendants of a significant marriage, usually over three or more generations” (G. Smith, 1995, cited in Cram & Pitama, 1998, p. 149). This continues to be an important way of organising the social world, embracing Māori beyond the
physical location of whānau members (Cram & Fitama, 1998), and encompassing extensive family relationships and social networks, beyond the nuclear family.

**Community.** Aside from family and friends, additional people designated as important by children in this study, included adults whom children (n=13) had frequent contact with; such as landlord farmer, farm workers and teachers. For two children, living on a large, isolated station, workers who lived on the property were important:

D, he’s another [farm] worker. He’s one of our longest workers ever. He went away and then he came back. Most people never come back here! I like him really well. He’s one of my favourite workers in the whole entire world. (Sam, 7 year old boy, MacKenzie)

Aspects of community were considered a significant feature of rural life by some children (n=11). One aspect was the friendliness in the community, both of people known to the person and strangers. Another aspect was the sense that everyone knows everyone and, especially, that the child was known to people.

Important to know that everyone in [names area] – they always try to get to know you and they bond with you. So you gotta know that they’ll be there for you. (Bill, 11 year old boy, Rodney)

I want to live in the South Island if I live in New Zealand – it just feels like my home ‘cause I’ve grown up here and I know people and in the North Island I’d just go there and be like a stranger. (Melissa, 11 year old girl, MacKenzie)

In this study rural children, like their parents and those in Valentine’s (1997) English study, mobilise the notion of community in constructing rural life as caring and safe. Current literature indicates that young people can experience the close knit community in rural areas as claustrophobic and restricting (Davis & Ridge, 1997; Matthews et al., 2000; Tucker, 2003; Valentine & Holloway, 2001). However, the children participating in this study consider the
social closeness to be a positive aspect of community. This is consistent with other studies in the United Kingdom finding that younger children generally express more positive views of the rural lifestyle (Giddings & Yarwood, 2005; Matthews et al., 2000), and older children and young people increasingly feel socially excluded and marginalised (Matthews et al., 2000; Tucker & Matthews, 2001).

A sense of children’s individual identity and social belonging in rural communities is evident in the findings. Who children are, is often intimately related to where children are (Bushin et al., 2007). In conjunction with place attachment, children in this study, express a sense of place identity, defined as “those dimensions of self that define the individual’s personal identity in relation to the physical environment” (Proshansky, 1978, cited in Lewicka, 2008, p. 211). Children identify as rural dwellers and see themselves as belonging to specific areas. Where children are, is also strongly related to who children are with, and the multiple connections they have with others (Riley, 2009). Children’s sense of identity is constructed and negotiated in social relationships (Wenger, 1998), and links individuals and their communities (Butler et al., 2009). Children in this study feel a sense of belonging and that they are part of a collective community, in which they are social participants. Participation can be defined in terms of the agency expressed in the multiple relationships children, and other citizens, engage in (Moosa-Mitha, 2005). As participants, engaging in reciprocal relationships, with family, friends, whānau and community, children in this study have the opportunity to practice citizenship. Their understandings of rights, responsibilities, respect, recognition and participation, some of the key constructs of citizenship (Lister, 2008), are embedded in the social interactions of everyday experience (Smith & Bjerke, 2009).

School. School is obviously an important part of children’s lives, given the time they spend there. Travel to school for rural children can also take a significant amount of time. The majority of children in this study went to school by bus (n=21) – see Figures 16 and 17. Two of these children caught two buses each way, and two children rode their bikes to the bus stop. Three children were driven to the bus stop, as in one case the driveway was nearly five kilometres long, and in the other the nearest bus stop was over a twenty minute drive from home. The duration of the trips to school varied, with the longest being approximately 50
Figure 16: Going to school! Artwork by 9er49er, 11 year old girl, Canterbury

Figure 17: This is the way I get to school – by bus! Artwork by The Simpsons, 8 year old girl, Canterbury
minutes. Children spend time on the bus in a number of ways, mostly socialising with friends, playing games, reading or listening to music.

On the bus people like doing hand claps. I usually sit with my friend. The bus driver V gets quite angry if we be noisy and play up, but usually she’s quite nice. (The Simpsons, 8 year old girl, Canterbury)

We’re the first on the bus, then the last off. We’re allowed to sit wherever we want. Friends get on the bus and we sit with them. We sit and talk and play. Usually play hand games like ‘Slime yuk’. (Kaia, 8 year old girl, Northland)

One time the bus was broken down and we had to use the other bus. And all the people from two different buses went on same one. So we were on the bus for even longer, maybe an hour, going up past [names area]. It was quite cool, we got to see all our friends. (Alice, 11 year old girl, Northland)

Some children are driven to school by parents (n=11), with three of these carpooling with other families. The majority of these children live in the Canterbury area (n=7). The remaining four children, all living in rural townships, walk or bike to school.

At the time of interviewing only one child participant was enrolled in correspondence school and this was taking place with a group of seven children (all on correspondence), under the guidance of a teacher. Five other children had previously experienced correspondence schooling. Small country schools have specific issues for children related to the size and number of pupils attending. These were raised by thirteen participants, and relate to both academic and social issues. Academically, the small size of some schools meant that some children (n=4) had a sense of isolation in their learning, as they were the only child or one of a small number studying specific topics. Size also contributed to social issues as some children played alone, or felt there were not many alternative options for socialising, if they were being bullied or singled out by other children (n=5).

---

62 Hand games played in pairs.
I'm the only one my age at school. There are three of us who are the odd ones out. It's a big bother. (Sam, 7 year old boy, MacKenzie)

Correspondence school is quite easy. It's easier than you think it is. Easier than the big schools. You don't get so much distracted, do more work. But the thing is you don't get to do fabric or science or technologies. All we do is maths and English. (Laurie, 11 year old girl, MacKenzie)

At lunchtime I used to get bullied sometimes ... It's hard because the school is so small. You can't really get away. (Jack, 9 year old boy, Rodney)

Conversely, some children (n=9) also liked the small number of children at their rural school as they felt comfortable knowing everyone and thought it was easier for the teachers to manage. However, coming from a small school did increase nervousness for some children when they transitioned from a small primary school to a larger intermediate school or college.

Our school is good because it's small, not like [nearby township school] or college. Good 'cause it has less people. You wouldn't want a school with loads of people. 'Cause if there's too many people in the class it could be really hard to control. (Maggy, 9 year old girl, Rodney)

There's no emo63 kids round here. At [names school] we're all pretty happy and that. People have different friends that they like and then other people that they don't really like, but we know basically everybody at the school. (Melissa, 11 year old girl, MacKenzie)

The first day [at Intermediate School] I was in tears – terrified, really, really scared, because there's as many people in my class as there are in the whole of my old school. The second day I went on the bus to school. I was so scared I got off at

---

63 Emo is a slang term meaning, overly emotional and melodramatic (http://onlineslangdictionary.com), and related to a musical style influenced by punk rock and featuring introspective and emotionally fraught lyrics (www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary)
the wrong stop, at another Primary School. I was so frightened. I went to the sick bay and they phoned Dad and he came and got me. I was so scared about going there, but the moment I started work I was fine. Now I'm alright, I'm okay with it, even though I miss [previous small school]. (Luna, 12 year old girl, Rodney)

Children’s social participation at school during morning breaks and lunchtime was an important feature of the school day, and very similar across the different areas. Children take part in playing sport type games (n=23), playing on the playground (n=11), fantasy play (n=8), talking with friends (n=4), and hut building (n=3). For most children a key part of lunchtime was spending time with friends, but some children spent time alone reading (n=5).

Important school based activities included music tuition, in Canterbury (n=4) and MacKenzie (n=3), and use of the school pool outside of school time, in Northland (n=4). An important part of the school calendar for children in Canterbury, Rodney and MacKenzie (n=13) is the annual Pets Day. Not all children take pets to school, but participate in other activities on the day, such as cake making, sewing and art competitions.

The importance of school as a social context for children, is emphasised by participants in the Northland area. School was the second largest theme in the photographs taken by Northland participants, and these mostly showed friends at school and areas of the school environment used to play and socialise. Children in Northland were enthusiastic about events involving other schools including a cultural festival, interschool sports and school trips. As part of the cultural festival all children participating in this study (attending different schools), were members of kapa haka groups. Children from one particular school were also involved in weaving tukutuku panels for the festival, which represented geographical aspects and stories of the area. For these participants, school was a social meeting place, integrating aspects of friendship, whānau and belonging in the area.

---

64 Excluding sports which are included later in this chapter in the findings related to children’s participation in organised recreational activities (see p. 269).
65 Kapa Haka is a ‘cultural dance’ of the Māori people, performed by groups in rows; an avenue for Māori people to express their heritage and cultural identity through song and dance.
66 Tukutuku are woven panels that adorn the walls of Māori meeting houses; their purpose is to tell the stories of life.

238
I think school is better than holidays sometimes 'cause holidays sometimes we do nothing at all on holidays and I'd rather be at school playing with my friends. (Hannah, 12 year old girl, Northland)

The [tukutuku] panels represent the rivers branching off everywhere, from [names place] to all the kids at the school. It was hard to do 'cause we had to finish the whole panel before the kapa haka festival ... now they're hanging in the library. Mum's proud, they're awesome. (Jenna, 12 year old girl, Northland)

Some children anticipated going to boarding school (n=9). They were generally positive and accepting of it, indicating that there were some benefits, such as greater sporting and recreational opportunities, or being allowed a mobile phone and bankcard. However, most also expressed some concerns about being away from family and misgivings about the unfamiliar urban environment.

I'll go to boarding school when I'm the same age as [brother]. It depends on what the teachers are like here [at local school] ... Mum and Dad have talked about it. It will be good ... hopefully. (Genevieve, 10 year old girl, MacKenzie)

I went there for a look. Quite nice buildings. It's quite cool. The only bad thing is that you only get to see your family in weekends. (Victor, 10 year old boy, MacKenzie)

It would be a major change 'cause it's in town and different from country so I'll probably be a bit ... at the start of it. A bit nervous and that. A bit weird because in the country you can shout all you like and that, but in town it's sort of like you've got to be silent. It's okay because lots of people from [area] are going there, like [names two friends] and they've both got older sisters there. So I'll already know somebody there. (Melissa, 11 year old girl, MacKenzie)
I don’t want to go to [boarding school]. Mum wants me to but it’s such a girly girl school … I don’t really want to go ‘cause it means I can’t help out around the farm and that. When we had the Big Snow those girls [neighbours] just got home in time otherwise they would have been stuck in [boarding school] for two weeks. (Laurie, 12 year old girl, MacKenzie)

School is an important site for social participation for rural children, consistent with findings from Lee and Abbot’s (2009) rural Australian study. In fact, in this study, children mostly spoke of school in terms of engagement in social interactions. The time some rural children spend travelling on buses also makes these vehicles a site of social importance and participation. Children act to modify the travel situation, demonstrating their agency as they engage in reciprocal, creative social interactions with peers and drivers. Some children living in relatively isolated locations, like Alice and Kaia, appreciated the opportunities for social participation afforded them by their time on the school bus.

Community involvement is an important aspect of rural New Zealand schools (Wilson, 2008), particularly in the smaller schools in more isolated areas, like Northland. The findings show that small schools can represent a microcosm of the rural community macrocosm for children, engendering the same feelings of community cohesion, with a sense of belonging and development of social networks, as found in V. Morrow’s (2001) study in the United Kingdom, and also, simultaneously or variously, feelings of social exclusion.

The option for some children of boarding school is met with ambivalence, as children understand the rationale, perceiving the benefits, yet at the same time convey their anxiety about it. Community is invoked by some, in the sense of knowing others attending boarding school, as a defence against their anxiety of this unknown environment.

**Home environment.** Home is an important place and featured in a lot of the children’s artwork. It was the third most frequently recurring theme in the artwork of children from Rodney and Northland, and was often depicted as a map of the area including the surrounding area or entire property, with important sites highlighted (see Figure 18).
Figure 18: My place; Artwork by Billy Buster, 10 year old boy, Rodney
Pets. Pets play a very important role in rural children’s lives (n=18) and pets/animals were photographed by all the children participating except four (n=32). Pets were considered members of the family by nine participants. More than half of these children (n=5) were in the Canterbury area. The death of pets was a sorrowful event for children, with seven participants expressing great sadness about this. Children took me to see, and also photographed, the graves of their pets.

The only way to get Paris [pet pig] to you is to get an apple core or food scraps, and whistle for her, then she comes running to you. She lives outside but she comes inside sometimes – on a Friday night. (Sharpay-D, 9 year old girl, Canterbury)

The animals – you can talk to them about it and they listen the whole time. You get an adult, like Mum, and she’ll say her thing and it might upset you. (Laurie, 12 year old girl, MacKenzie)

Magic [cat] goes under family, not pet. Likewise Heidi [dog]. Heidi died – was put down when she was 18 years old because she was deaf and blind and sick. It was very sad, made me cry. (Johnny English, 9 year old boy, Canterbury)

We had this other dog, Jade, she was sick and coughing bad. We tied her to this log and Dad had to shoot her. I thought it was horrible, she was trying to run from the log, trying to get off it ... I saw it ‘cause I went with down with Dad to say goodbye to her. I feel sad when I think about it and when I talk about it, I feel sad now. (Luke, 9 year old boy, Rodney)

The most frequently discussed pets were dogs (n=26), cats (n=18), lambs (n=11), calves (n=7), and horses (n=5). Other domestic animals included chickens and ducks (n=10), birds (n=2), guinea pigs (n=2) and rabbits (n=2). School Pets Day\(^{67}\) was an important event, with

\(^{67}\) Called Show Day in some areas.
nine children from Canterbury and Rodney detailing the preparation involved with the animals for this and the experiences on the day (see Figure 19).

Figure 19: Pet lamb - Photograph taken by family member of a 7 year old girl, Rodney

I’ve had Star [pet calf] since she was one week old. Looking after her involves brushing her, feeding her, get her to learn how to lead. Have to feed her formula calf milk. I do that. When you first try to put the halter on they get a bit of a fright and don’t want to see you again. Have to leave the halter on and start slowly. You need to start with a longer lead rope, tug it a wee bit, then take the pressure off when she takes a step. I do the practice in the paddock. This is my fourth calf, so I’ve been doing it since I was seven. (9er49er, 11 year old girl, Canterbury)

I’ve had Show Day calves for three years. There are more lambs at Show Day than calves ‘cause they’re more easy to handle. You have to get a calf, train it up, brush it, lead it. You train it up to come to the bottle when you call it. It’s easy for the first few weeks, but then it starts to get hard as they get bigger, and the other
cows talk them up a bit. Makes them a bit harder to handle. (William Crooks, 10 year old boy, Rodney)

We had Show Day this year. Snowy [pet lamb] collapsed once – so she could eat grass. I was nervous she would do that. And embarrassed … She got really fat so we stopped feeding her. I still go and see her so that she’ll know me. (Victoria, 7 year old girl, Rodney)

**Work.** A lot of children participating in this study were required to do work around the home. Half of them (n=18) fed and looked after animals (see Figure 20). Children (n=17) across all areas were also required to do household chores, including mowing lawns and washing cars. As previously noted for two children, one in Northland and one in MacKenzie, who had regular contact with grandparents, doing chores for them was a regular and important part of their everyday life. Some children enjoyed aspects of work around the home, whilst others disliked it.

![Image of feeding chickens](Image)

*Figure 20: Feeding the chooks - Photograph taken by family member of an 11 year old boy, MacKenzie*
It's mostly just more work then you have more time to do things ... There's more responsibilities, but when you're doing them you can have fun with them. If we're going to get the eggs or something we can just make a game of it. We hang around down there so it takes longer than it's supposed to be. Have more fun. (William Crooks, 11 year old boy, Rodney)

Things like picking up pinecones and that, I often run away from, because I don't like it. Getting pinecones for firewood. It's the worst thing to do. (Victor, 9 year old boy, MacKenzie)

Some children (n=10) were engaged in forms of paid work, in all areas except Northland. For some children (n=5) paid employment involved farm work, for example calf raising, grubbing thistles and docking. Other children (n=3) worked at their parents' place of work, for example, café work, preparing items for distribution and delivery of items. The remainder earned money collecting and selling pine cones, selling produce at the gate, and doing specified paid chores, such as gardening.

Children also demonstrated an interest in and knowledge about aspects of rural life related to self sufficiency. This included children across all areas talking about growing and providing food, from horticultural and agricultural practices (n=11). Seven children identified important aspects of rural living related to the maintenance of utilities, such as water, power and rubbish disposal.

We do the recycling of glass bottles. All the rest goes in the fire. I drew it [artwork] because lots of people in town expect the rubbish truck to pick their rubbish up. (9er49er, 11 year old girl, Canterbury) - See Figure 21

Recreational activities. Children in this study engaged in a range of indoor activities. These included using the computer (n=26), watching television or videos (n=20), reading
There was some variation between areas in the type of indoor activities engaged in. The more technological activities of using the computer, watching television and videos, and

---

68 Playstation is an interactive video game which is displayed on the television screen.
playing Playstation, were mostly done by children in the areas with greatest urban influence (Canterbury and Rodney). Only one child from Northland and one child from MacKenzie expressed interest in watching television. The activities records compiled by parents indicated that children in those areas did watch television, but perhaps it was of less interest to them than their other activities. In these two areas of least urban influence the smallest proportion of children were involved in computer use, and no children talked about Playstation. The negligible computer use correlates with the lack of functioning computers in the homes of four of the Northland children. Reading and activities associated with music, were engaged in by children in all the areas, but mostly by children in MacKenzie.

Outdoor activities, engaged in and enjoyed by children in their everyday lives at home, have been presented earlier in this chapter, in the context of outdoor recreation, and also participation in family activities. In an associated vein, the weather is a topic of interest for a lot of rural children in relation to outdoor activities and being confined indoors. The awareness of the impact of the weather on activities and aspects of everyday rural life, was expressed by children (n=20) in all areas. Of particular importance are weather events that disrupt usual everyday living, such as snow (n=10), wet weather (n=5), flooding (n=3), drought (n=2) and fog (n=1).

It’s a cold, wet, fun place. In winter it’s practically always like this – grey and raining. But you can still have lots of fun. You can go down the hill and slip over. And when it’s raining we put dishwashing liquid on the tramp [trampoline] and slip around. (William Crooks, 10 year old boy, Rodney)

You should’ve seen the flood! The tramp was floating – it was up to [stepfather’s] legs. Some of the road was under water, but it was at night. Mum and [stepfather] were up at two in the morning moving things ‘cause the water was so deep. (Alice, 12 year old girl, Northland)

We’ve got a big drought, the biggest we’ve ever had. Drought means less grass and less water. We’ve had to go down to the lake with a big fire truck and pump a
lot in and then pump it into our tanks. We had no water for like a week. In March and in January. You can’t flush the toilet. We fill up the bath, then use it for toilet water so we don’t waste it. (Laurie, 11 year old girl, MacKenzie)

A specific example of the impact of the weather in children’s lives is the reference made by the majority of children in MacKenzie \((n=8)\) to the ‘Big Snow’ in 2006. Some children found it frightening initially, some enjoyed the unexpected break from school and participating in necessary farm work, while other children after an initial excitement, found it boring and tedious. All the children except one talked about it during the interviews over a year later:

In the Big Snow I started crying when I woke up at night, because there was no electricity and I got scared. But then I looked outside and everything was bright … I helped Dad with the feeding out because there was nothing else to do. (Victor, 9 year old boy, MacKenzie)

In the Big Snow we had no power. We had a generator but we were only allowed to watch the daily news. We had to get some torches so we still played. The way we cooked tea was on the coal range. (Genevieve, 9 year old girl, MacKenzie)

We had to go snow raking. In the truck you get a rake in front and behind you and it rakes the snow out of the way and makes a pathway for the sheep to get to the feed and water … The first few days were alright, then it got harder ‘cause we couldn’t muster the sheep down the hills. So we had a shepherd on each hill and Dad ran out of shepherds so I had to go out and help him. We got a bit frustrated ‘cause the path wasn’t wide enough for the sheep. It was frustrating ‘cause we couldn’t get through this bit or that bit and then we’d fall in a ditch. The snow was probably the height of the table. (Laurie, 12 year old girl, MacKenzie)

248

69 The ‘Big Snow’ of 2006 referred to by parents and children in the MacKenzie district was an unusually heavy snowstorm that resulted in road closures and disrupted provision of services. Many places lost electricity for a period of time, with some homes in outlying areas having no power for up to two weeks.
Children's agency arises out of the social contexts in which they live (Smith, 2007). Rural children's varied experiences in the home setting, described in this study, highlight their agency arising out of the social contexts within this environment. Across a range of dimensions, through recreation, work, relationships and the physical environment, children influence the social world around them, participating in the construction of their own childhoods (Mayall, 1999). The concept of childhood as a time of passive dependency is challenged, as children take responsibility for the care of pets and animals, contribute to reproductive household and other productive work, and engage in recreational activities.

Pets are particularly important to most rural children, being cast in the roles of friend, confidante and dependant. Cummins (2009) suggests that children rely on farm animals and pets to provide comfort and security in coping with loneliness. Loneliness did not emerge as a strong theme in my findings, however, pets undoubtedly provide comfort and friendship, as described by Laurie and Johnny English. Findings from Derr's (2005) study indicate that children develop a strong sense of social responsibility and accomplishment through the care of animals. This was resonated with findings from the current study in which children demonstrate empathy, knowledge and understanding of the needs of animals, and respond accordingly.

Social responsibility is a key component contributing to citizenship (Lister, 2008), and apparent in the everyday experiences of rural children caring for their pets and other animals. It is further evident as children competently negotiate and undertake the tasks of family life (Smith & Bjerke, 2009). Consistent with Jones (2000) study, some children opportunistically exploit work and task related situations and environments to create chances for play. This opportunity is enhanced if the work is further from home, as Punch (2001) found in rural Bolivia, giving children in this study, like William Crooks, greater control and freedom.

Children engage in a wide range of recreational activities in the home environment throughout the four rural areas, further confirming the diversity of rural childhood experiences within and, in some respects, between areas. The dualism of an urban rural dichotomy is challenged, as children in Canterbury and Rodney participate in stereotypically urban
technological activities and also agriculturally based Pet Day preparation, to a greater extent than children in other areas.

Specific weather events impact unevenly, but significantly, on rural children. In different social contexts children’s participation in recreational and work activities is disrupted, influenced and challenged by weather related issues. Farm children in this, and the Canadian study (Cummins, 2009), demonstrate an awareness of the weather related restrictions and stressors placed on their families. However, children adapt their social participation in accordance with these environmental pressures, demonstrating agency and competency in their responses, and thus modifying the social environment around them. Social responsibility is apparent in children’s participation in strategies to manage water during the drought, and increased contribution to farm work during the Big Snow.

**Farm environment.** Farm animals were talked about by eleven participants, mostly from the MacKenzie area. Children (n=15) demonstrated considerable knowledge about animals and a range of agricultural practices. Most children living on farms or agriculturally productive properties (n=10) participated in farm work and gave detailed descriptions of taking part in docking, lambing, moving stock, feeding calves, milking, fencing, feeding out and mustering – See Figures 22 and 23.

Dad’s always on the farm. He only comes back for lunch and tea. If we help him do things he might get things finished more easier then he can do a lot more things and then he might finish and the workers won’t have to do so much. But we definitely have to feed the sheep and cows. (Sam, 7 year old boy, MacKenzie)

Dad doesn’t like one thing about living in the country – if sheep are running the wrong way he gets really annoyed, really angry. Like if the dogs aren’t doing what he says he swears at them. Sometimes he whacks them with a stick and I think it’s really horrible. I don’t like it when he does it. Makes me sad. If I was a dog and I got whacked like that I wouldn’t like it. (Luke, 9 year old boy, Rodney)
I like doing the lambing and calving beat. When ewes are having lambs we go out and check on them every day. Usually have them in the closest paddocks. I do the lamb beat out on the truck around the outside of them all. I do it with Dad and on my own. If there are problems I come back and tell Dad. (Laurie, 12 year old girl, MacKenzie)
I love farming. It’s fun. I like helping Dad on the farm. Mustering takes ages, it’s hard too. Really annoying with sheep because when one goes, they all go. Dad’s voice gets all hoarse from shouting. I really like mustering because I like the dogs. (Melissa, 10 year old girl, MacKenzie)

For most children participating in farm work was an enjoyable experience, although three children indicated that it involved monotonous, unwelcome chores, such as feeding animals and working on the farm, when there were other things they would rather be doing:

Yesterday me and [younger brother] had a good swim, then we had to get out and go and muster a hundred sheep. Then we got to have another swim, then Mum got home from the horse show. … Nah, I don’t like helping mustering, I’m more into swimming. (Sam, 7 year old boy, MacKenzie)
Probably *important to know* that sometimes it’s quite hard work, but you just have to get on and do it. (xXx, 12 year old boy, MacKenzie)

I don’t actually have to go round the farm with Dad. Usually he asks me and I say ‘no’ because there’s things I’d rather be doing. In the winter all he basically does is just feeding out. And in the summer all he does is basically sowing seeds. (Victor, 9 year old boy, MacKenzie)

An aspect of rural life for children, particularly on farms, is riding motorbikes and ATVs, and driving vehicles (n=17). Two of the children talked about this, only in the context of being on a vehicle with a parent or sibling. The other 15 children described doing this on their own, with some children on farms (n=5) having their own motorbikes. All children indicated their enjoyment of riding motorbikes.

I like motorbike riding. Got my own motorbike. I got stuck in the mud and Dad said ‘that means you’re riding your motorbike properly’ ‘cause I’m going more places now. … Sometimes I work on the farm with Mum and Dad. If Dad needs help I go on my motorbike and shift sheep. Once I got them in by myself on my motorbike. It felt great! I was eight when I did that. (Luke, 9 year old boy, Rodney)

I like feeding out with Dad and helping him. I know what I’m about to say is illegal, but I like driving the truck … Even though we’re not meant to be driving, me and my cousin drive all the time. I always tell Mum where I’m going. (Laurie, 12 year old girl, MacKenzie)

I use my motorbike when Dad and Mum have to do stuff together and we can’t be left alone here. So I go on my bike unless we’re going up the hills. (Victoria, 7 year old girl, Rodney)

---

70 Some children did not distinguish between two wheeled and four wheeled ‘quad’ motorbikes (ATVs), referring to them all as motorbikes.
In the absence of alternative onsite childcare, three children living on farms talked about caring for younger siblings, while they and their parents were working:

We go down to the woolshed when Mum and Dad are working down there, but if we get bored then we come up here [home] and just watch TV. If [younger brother] comes up then me and [older brother] have to go check on him. (Victoria, 7 year old girl, Rodney)

I have to get the motorbike [quad bike] up the hill. It’s quite grunty. Sometimes I have the baby with me, she was born in July, still not crawling yet. I’m holding the baby and trying to steer around it ... There’s an area you can play in when the cows are being milked. [Stepmother] usually looks after the baby, but when she’s working she waits for Dad to finish the milking, then Dad takes the baby and she goes and does the cows. My brothers play ... the boys usually just come with Dad and do whatever down there and the baby just stays home with [stepmother]. (Roxy, 11 year old girl, MacKenzie)

Life cycle. Some children (n=10) living ruraly indicated familiarity with the life cycle, and issues of life and death in an agrarian context. This was indicated by children across all the four areas, with the largest number (n=4) living in MacKenzie. Just over half of the children (n=6) talking about life cycle issues, were from farming families. Children’s attitude accompanying this issue varied from interest and curiosity, to satisfaction with their comprehension or involvement, to a more matter of fact acceptance, as indicated in the following excerpt from a parent’s activity record:

Great excitement lunchtime. I looked out kitchen window to see three wild deer just over fence near house. [Father] quickly loaded rifle and shot two of them. [Daughter] went for look, [son] more interested, fetched his Dad’s hunting knife from motorbike and they skinned it. [Son] intent on collecting its organs and wanting to ‘mummify’ it – reading too many books on King Tut’s tomb I say!! (Mother, MacKenzie, activity record)
412 is my favourite calf. I don’t take them to Pets Day, because you can’t lead them. They’re not bottle fed … They’re not pets. They will grow up and be killed. (Josh, 10 year old boy, Canterbury)

Doing the lambing beat we had a ewe with milk fever and had to bring her in. One lamb died. You bring them in near the killing house, where there’s a wee paddock. The killing house is for killing sick animals and feeding them to the dogs … With the killing house I always go up and help ‘cause I sort of like doing it ‘cause I like the experience ‘cause if I need to do anything like that in a paddock, like if a ewe’s dying and I have to do anything like that and gut her to get the lamb out … you know what I mean? (Laurie, 12 year old girl, MacKenzie)

The farm is a unique context within rural localities. Farm children live and play at their parent’s worksite, and are themselves an important part of the labour force on farms, in the findings of this study, and other farming family studies from the United Kingdom and North America (Riley, 2009; Zepeda & Kim, 2006). They have a role in sustaining the farming activities, as active participants who hold responsibilities for various tasks. Most children are willing to undertake the responsibilities associated with farm work and enjoy doing so. Some children have a pragmatic approach, with an awareness of the hard work required by their parents, as did those in Cummins (2009) study, and a sense that their own work is a ‘normal’ part of farm life. Other children see farm work as boring and dull.

A unique component of farm life in studies of farm children and families is the close family work relationships, particularly the greater contact of fathers with children (Cummins, 2009; Zepeda & Kim, 2006). Another aspect, identified in Riley’s (2009) study, is the greater access to the land, than for most other rural children, and therefore the potential to form place attachments and develop identities associated with land based practice. For children in the MacKenzie area whose families have lived on the same farm for generations, the findings echo these studies as the “farm mixes together family, history and place” (Riley, 2009, p. 251). Children develop an identity which is anchored to the farm, and distinct from, although sometimes co-existing with, other rural identities. These identities incorporate their agency.
and transformative capacities, as they experience and gain knowledge in different aspects of agricultural practice, including the practicalities of life, formulating their own views, and undertaking farm tasks.

The daily tasks of farm children include working on the farm, in the home, caring for animals and providing child care for younger siblings. Farm work can involve children riding motorbikes, on their own or with others. Children on farms therefore participate effectively in complex and challenging activities, demonstrating agency and competency in undertaking these tasks. Through social engagement and partnership with parents, and the scaffolding of activities, children as competent learners have gained the necessary skills and developed confidence and autonomy, to participate meaningfully in these activities (Smith & Bjerke, 2009). Sociocultural theory provides a framework for understanding that parents’ expectations of children, creation of participatory spaces, and engagement with them in partnership, assists children to use their agency to participate competently in social contexts (Smith, 2002), including the farming context. This social participation and responsibility is a source of pride for children in this study and contributes to their development as citizens (Lister, 2008). The farm can therefore be regarded as a social site of citizenship practice.

**Urban/Rural Perceptions**

Most children (n=28) were positive about where they live, with many (n=19) also expressing a negative perception of the city. This included perceiving the city as not having enough space (n=11), being too noisy (n=7) and frightening (n=4). Only four children were positive about the city, stating that there was more to do there, including going to the shops.

I love to live in the country! Never go in the city! It’s because I don’t like the city, {people} always rushing, shouting, I can’t get a quiet sleep. (Sam, 7 year old boy, MacKenzie)
You can’t do much active things in the city ’cause so many people [are] walking around the road. You can mainly drive around and buy things. ... There’s a big difference. Heaps of kids in Christchurch – a lot of them might be gang related. Their Mums and Dads might smoke marijuana. Might smoke a lot. (Poo Spider, 10 year old boy, MacKenzie)

I don’t really like cities. They scare me. Like in Auckland there are so many people and I don’t know where I am. Even when I’m with Mum and Dad, there are so many people and it’s scary. And there’s heaps of people dressed up and it’s weird. (Bobbalina, 11 year old girl, Rodney)

Some children (n=7) indicated that children living in rural and urban areas are largely the same. Any differences were considered to be knowledge based and a consequence of what children had been exposed to in their lives:

[Living here] It’s kind of exactly the same as town if you think about it ’cause we do exactly the same activities and kind of the same schools, apart from Pets Day. I can’t think of any differences from town – bad things or good things, it’s just normal. (Johnny English, 9 year old boy, Canterbury)

[We] think city people don’t know stuff. It’s not really differences in how they behave, just they don’t know anything about the farm. (Bobbalina, 11 year old girl, Rodney)

They [townies] find it hard to do anything out here. Like people out here probably do more physical things and know how to do things. Like, farm things. They probably don’t know what to do ... If you grew up round here you’d know what to do. (Shubba-lubba-ding-dong, 11 year old boy, Canterbury)

However, a large number of children (n=21) perceived people living in the city to have different attitudes to rural people. The attitudes attributed to urban people were considered
negative and inferior, in comparison to supposed rural ones. Children (n=14) across all the areas thought urban people, including children, put a great deal of emphasis on appearance, being conscious of how they look and liking to dress up. As part of this, children from town were also perceived as not liking to get dirty.

People that live in the city would have maybe neater clothes. And people that live in the country probably have country clothes. I usually just have shorts and I don’t really dress up fancy or anything ‘cause if I did they’d probably get dirty from all the dirt and that round here ... Maybe in town they have more popularity than out here. (Isabella, 10 year old girl, Canterbury)

In town they got all the flash clothes, ‘cause they live right next to the stores and that. [Friend’s] clothes match up better – the colours match. Because her parents work in town all day, so she gets heaps of town things. (Kaia, 9 year old girl, Northland)

We had someone over to play, we used to jump in the river and get all muddy and she said she’d never been muddy like that. She’s a townie, but she’s our next door neighbour! She acts like a city child. She’s not so much of a city child but she’s not willing to get her hands a little bit dirty. City thing is kind of like an attitude. (Poseidon, 9 year old boy, Canterbury)

Urban children were also perceived negatively (n=5) as being ignorant about animals, selfish and lazy, whilst people living in the country, were seen to have positive values and to be knowledgeable, caring, and hardworking. Children in town were also perceived as preoccupied with technological entertainment, seen as “townie things” (n=5).

Townies ... [brother] says it’s when people stay in bed till twelve o’clock, then they have lunch, then they get back into bed. But I don’t really think that’s true ... is it? (Victoria, 7 year old girl, Rodney)
Country people think townies are wussies. When they were building the track at the kindy\(^1\) at [nearby township] it was only farmers that turned up to help. Townies are, like, wussy – not as fit as they should be, scared of quite a lot of things. (Victor, 10 year old boy, MacKenzie)

They watch TV and play on the computer more. Country kids don’t really do that – they just watch TV sometimes and play outside a lot. (Jack, 10 year old boy, Rodney)

Children (n=8), all of whom lived on farms and agriculturally productive properties, attributed positive traits and attitudes to rural or farming people, who were perceived as fitter, relaxed, louder, and less concerned with appearances. Rural living was also perceived by six participants, in Canterbury and Rodney, to provide more fun and new experiences that urban living.

Country people don’t really care about what they are wearing so often, but town people do. I think it’s ‘cause in the country you’ve got more harsher weather – when you’re out on the farm and that, on the hills, it’s quite windy so you have to wear warmer clothes. Country people always say they’re fitter and that’s kind of true ‘cause we’ve got farms to run around in. Townies can go for walks, but it’s all flat. Country people certainly always have louder voices. Town people have quieter voices, you notice it at school. Townies probably think that they’re positive and we’re negative and we sometimes think that they’re negative and we’re positive. (Melissa, 11 year old girl, MacKenzie)

People from out in the country are more laid back and the other people [in the country] just don’t really care about what they do. (William Crooks, 11 year old boy, Rodney)

\(^1\) Kindergarten
Children living in rural townships can have an ambiguous status. Two children living in rural townships, who considered themselves country people, indicated that other children not living in the township consider them ‘townies’, with negative connotations:

The word ‘townies’ – I don’t like being called it. I get called it by some people on farms. I don’t really agree ‘cause it’s such a country town. Townies live in Christchurch, big places like that. I don’t think it sounds very nice. They say it in a nasty voice. (Poo Spider, 10 year old boy, MacKenzie)

Sometimes we do get called townies, because we live in town. And some townies are a little bit dumb on the whole farming thing, but I got used to it going out with friends and stuff. Sometimes they say ‘oh, that’s because you’re a townie’ and they mean ‘cause you don’t live on a farm and go out on a farm, but most of the kids in town do go out with their friends on the farm and stuff. (Frog, 11 year old girl, MacKenzie)

The parents’ data indicated that some participants considered that subdivision and development of rural land posed a threat to valued aspects of the rural idyll. Subdivision was an issue for some child participants (n=9), most of whom lived in Canterbury (n=5) and Rodney (n=3). One of these participants, who lived in a small rural township, viewed subdivisions positively, expressing pleasure that they provided a good venue for bike riding. But the majority of participants (n=6) considered subdivisions to be a negative development affecting rural life. The remaining two participants were more neutral in their responses.

I want to move because there are going to be lots of subdivisions surrounding us. That will be really annoying. Sometimes when we get home on Fridays Mum isn’t here and the door will be locked more because there will be more burglars. So I want to move to more country, where you can’t hear cars going along the road, because you can quite easily here. (Sharpay-A, 9 year old girl, Canterbury)
More houses have been built, round near [names area]. It's a bit annoying because I like wildlife and animals. If you keep on building houses soon there will be no land for wildlife to live on. (Jack, 9 year old boy, Rodney)

Well, I like living in the country better and now there's heaps of people living round us, now there's heaps of people moving in. I suppose it's alright. Well, it's not hurting me, but I don't know. I wouldn't like it all crowded round. It's okay out there, but not too close. (Roxy, 10 year old girl, MacKenzie)

Children across all areas demonstrate place attachment, the emotional bonds developed with places, and place identity, defining individual's personal identity in relation to the physical environment (Lewicka, 2008). The dynamic, multiple and fluid nature of identities (Giddings & Yarwood, 2005; Leyshon, 2008) and children's autonomy in shaping these (Riley, 2009) is evident in the findings. Amongst the multiple identities that children developed, a rural identity, specific place identity and/or farm identity were apparent. These identities incorporated aspects of the New Zealand rural myth and knowledge of the countryside, and drew on features of the rural idyll found in other studies from the United Kingdom (Leyshon, 2008; Riley, 2009). The “rural myth gains its potency from its relationship with, and juxtaposition to the urban myth” (Leyshon, 2008, p. 15), and children “identify with each other through their collective rejection of an imagined other” (Cloke, 2003, cited in Leyshon, 2008, p. 12). Children in this study perceive themselves as hard working, caring, fit and relaxed. Conversely, urban people are perceived as inferior physically and mentally, being lazy, weak, unfit, and concerned with superficial issues, such as appearance. Children who live in rural townships construct rural identities, predicated on the small size of the rural town or farm experiences, as well as town identities, in defending against the collective negative perceptions of 'townies'.

Aspects of a farm identity expressed by children are related to the physical challenges of farming, and exposure to the natural elements. These necessitate warm, rather than fashionable, clothes, physical fitness, and a strong work ethic. There is a moral component evident in the farming identity (Leyshon, 2008), that perhaps relates to what Cummins (2009)
describes as the myth of the agrarian way of life in which “farming is understood to be a noble calling, a good way of life for those who undertake it” (p. 67).

Some children perceive property development and the subdivision of rural land as a threat to the countryside, with the potential urban encroachment, as did young people in Leyshon’s (2008) study. It was seen as threatening to disturb the idyllic qualities of tranquillity and community harmony. The majority of children who expressed concern about this, lived in the areas most likely to be affected, those nearest urban centres. However, within this rhetoric, children’s agency in transforming and appropriating space (James & James, 2008), is apparent in Dante’s use of the development site for recreational purposes.

**Alternative (to Idyllic) Rural Themes**

The rural idyll is the most dominant theme emerging from the children’s data, by a significant margin. However, other themes, namely rural dull, rural danger and rural deprivation, are also evident and are discussed in this section. Rural dull relates mostly to children’s social isolation from peers. Rural danger incorporates dangerous and risky aspects of living in a rural environment and associated safety concerns. Rural deprivation is related to aspects perceived as lacking in the social environment of rural children.

**Rural Dull**

Social isolation is an issue for children living rurally (n=22) with the distance from friends being a significant factor. Two of these children (in Rodney), noted that it was more of a problem for teenagers, and for children who were the only child in a family. The distance from friends was particularly an issue for children in Canterbury (n=8) and MacKenzie (n=8). Some children (n=6) did not find the distance problematic, including three from Northland, who, as already noted, had strong friendship ties with cousins living nearby.
One thing is getting friends over to play ... there's loads of fun stuff, but it's sometimes tricky getting people over. (Josh, 10 year old boy, Canterbury)

I can't do everything. I can't go to town or have people over in the weekends. The things I do on the weekends I enjoy and at the same time I want to have people over ... Mostly I ride at the weekend, do social stuff at school during the week. I want both but I can't have both at the same time. (Laurie, 11 year old girl, MacKenzie)

Mostly I play with people who live close enough to walk to each other's house. I have friends who live further away. I don't play with them after school or weekends. I play with them at school. After school I play with my cousins and friends who live close. (Hannah, 11 year old girl, Northland)

The company is important. That we always get more company 'cause every time we go down for a swim there's heaps of people down there that we can talk to. (Princess Fiona, 10 year old girl, Northland)

Some children (n=11), mostly in the Canterbury area, played with neighbours occasionally after school, although these neighbours were not necessarily their close friends. Other children (n=11) indicated that they did occasionally play with friends after school, with some describing strategies whereby they coordinated visits with after school activities that required them to be in a certain place, near where friends lived.

I don't play much with [friend] after school 'cause he's too far away. I play with [another friend] who lives just over the hill and we can ride to each other's house. He doesn't like fantasy games - he's more interested in basic stuff like playing on the tramp. (William Crooks, 10 year old boy, Rodney)

Sleepovers at friends' houses, also mentioned in parent interviews and activity records (n=14), are a way that children commonly maximise their social opportunities, gaining a
longer time socialising and spreading the travel over two days. Children also used other strategies to socialise after school, such as using an internet social networking site, Bebo (n=6), chatting on the phone (n=4), and texting friends on a mobile phone (n=1).

I still have a Bebo page. All my friends have pages too. We go online and talk to each other nearly every day. I come home [from school], go on Bebo, and they’re on, so we talk to each other. (Hannah, 12 year old girl, Northland)

I don’t really get to play with friends after school or in weekends. Don’t really play with friends in the holidays. I talk to my friends on the phone all the time. (Alice, 11 year old girl, Northland)

Text friends all the time. It only works in certain places in the house. Two windows outside the bathroom are best, so that’s where everyone gathers. (9er49er, 12 year old girl, Canterbury)

Social isolation from peers as a consequence of geographical distance is an issue for rural children, particularly children who live in more remote locations. However, unlike the findings from Cummins (2009) study, children in this study did not identify loneliness as an issue. Rather, they acknowledged the distance from peers and used their agency and capacity to influence the social world (Mayall, 1999) by developing creative strategies to maximise socialising opportunities. School and sporting activities provide opportunities for social involvement with peers that children welcome and maximise, in this and Lee & Abbott’s (2009) study. Children’s social strategies also included playing with family members and neighbours, coordinating visiting friends with activities in townships, attending and hosting sleepovers, and using information and communication technology (ICT).

Despite popular anxieties that the use of ICT will have a negative impact on children’s physical and social relationships, it does appear to enhance children’s friendships (Valentine, Holloway & Bingham, 2000), providing rural children with a way of maintaining friendships.
Children use the internet for social purposes, extending their repertoire of identities in the local community, in this and other studies (Lægræn, 2002; Valentine & Holloway, 2001).

As discussed earlier in this chapter, children find some aspects of rural living dull and boring. Not all children enjoy farm work, and some indicated a sense of boredom with the monotony of daily and seasonal tasks (see p. 252-253). Similarly, weather impacts on children’s social lives, and even the excitement of the Big Snow, gave way for some to the boredom of being cooped up inside or working in inclement conditions (see p. 248). It is apparent also, that children use their agency to transform some of the dull situations, and take advantage of circumstances where they have freedom from adult supervision, as do children in rural North American (Derr, 2005) and Bolivian (Punch, 2000) studies. They can also opportunistically exploit situations, as Jones (2000) found in a study in the United Kingdom.

**Rural Danger**

Potential danger and related safety concerns are a significant issue for some rural children. Accidents and injuries sustained, were raised by 11 children across all the areas. The rural dangers are primarily in relation to environmental safety, traffic and crime.

Potential danger related to environmental hazards were raised by nearly half of the participants (n=16). Nine of these related to possible sources of danger on farms, such as charging bulls and cows (n=6), and the more benign, but annoying, issue of stepping in animal poo (n=3). Some children (n=3) noted the danger of branches breaking while climbing trees.

There’s not really anything I don’t like, only if there are little kids they could go into a bull’s paddock, and electric fences, some trees could be unstable – just growing and some branches could be thin and break and then they *children* could fall. And horses running in their paddocks down steep hills. They might not have, my Mum says, brakes, and might not be able to stop and they might run into you. (The Simpsons, 8 year old girl, Canterbury)
When I first started I didn’t really like cows, thought they were a bit scary, so Dad gave me this little one. We all got one. I was about six [years old]. I didn’t know what the cows would do. Didn’t know if they would chase after you. Now I know they won’t do any harm unless you really annoy them, then they’ll come at you. I’m not nervous now - they’re more scared of you. (Roxy, 11 year old girl, MacKenzie)

Water safety concerns were raised across all the areas, but were a key concern for participants in Northland (n=4). This probably reflects the importance of swimming in rivers and waterholes as an activity for the Northland children. At times the concerns were related to inclement weather and the impact of heavy rain and flooding, on swimming sites. The impact of the weather and various natural elements were alluded to, directly and indirectly, in relation to safety issues. Children indicated awareness of needing to dress for the conditions in rural areas and play in certain areas.

I used to have skateboard ramp in the shed, so I just went out there when it was raining. I always went out with a friend – ‘cause if it was night time and raining and I was alone and I fell over no one would hear me. It’s alright on sunny day when people are outside. (Josh, 10 year old boy, Canterbury)

Some children discussed danger specifically related to motorbike riding on farms and safety rules that they abided by (n=4):

I can just go on my motorbike wherever I want to at the weekends. I go with [brother] sometimes, otherwise on my own. I’m not allowed going on the road. Not allowed going too far away from the house. And not in the sheep and cow paddocks. I’m not allowed to go down the steep hills, ‘cause it’s too far away from the house. (Victoria, 7 year old girl, Rodney)
I think I shouldn’t go on the hills without anyone watching me, because if you fall off and break your arm or leg or get knocked out, you can’t actually get back. So you need someone with you or watching you. (Luke, 9 year old boy, Rodney)

Traffic danger was an issue for a few rural children (n=4), in Canterbury and MacKenzie. The speed of traffic was the primary concern, for children cycling (n=1) and walking (n=3). One child also noted it was confusing being a pedestrian in urban areas, as he did not have much experience with negotiating traffic. Two children discussed safety practices related to catching the school bus: wearing fluorescent visibility vests when bussing to and from school; and having a recessed driveway by the mailbox so that they did not have to cross or wait on the road. Another traffic hazard mentioned by a child in Northland was the danger of stock on the road causing accidents.

There’s no footpaths and be careful ‘cause down there they go a hundred k’s [kilometres] an hour. There was a guy who walked across the road and got squished by a bus … The traffic moves fast. (Chilli Sauce, 8 year old boy, Canterbury)

I’m not really good at walking round places. I nearly got hit by a car [in town]. They all just turn around in random directions. (Billy Buster, 11 year old boy, Rodney)

However, four children, also in Canterbury and MacKenzie, indicated that it was safer cycling in rural areas, because there was less traffic:

You can do stuff, like going for bike rides without being hit by cars. (Shubba-lubba-ding-dong, 10 year old boy, Canterbury)

Ten participants, mostly in Canterbury (n=5) and Northland (n=3) specifically raised the issue of crime. Some children (n=5) expressed concern about it, while others (n=5) believed
that there is less crime in rural areas. The nature of the small, local community was considered an ameliorating factor in any potential criminal activity, by three participants.

Watch out for the drunk people down in the village. A guy tried to bowl over his girlfriend with a tractor. [People should] put an alarm on their door. (Kaia, 9 year old girl, Northland)

I reckon it’s pretty good here ‘cause in the city you can easily get kidnapped or something. And a little town like this you just know everyone ‘cause it’s so small. (Bobbalina, 11 year old girl, Rodney)

People always wave when they’re driving. You don’t even know them, but it’s friendly. It makes you feel like it’s a safe place. You know that no one’s going to kill you or anything. (Ashley Lewie, 11 year old girl, Canterbury)

These findings indicate that children’s knowledge of dangers, relative to their own environment, allows them to determine where it is safe to play, as a recent Australian study also found (MacDougall et al., 2009). Some children indicated an awareness of environmental dangers, including those associated with swimming and motorbike riding and provided a rationale for restrictions on certain areas or activities. However, I gained the impression that certain risky behaviours were not perceived as such, or minimised, by children in the rural social context. Children talked about going shooting, swimming, driving vehicles and riding motorbikes unsupervised, thus appearing to have greater responsibility in determining physical and behavioural boundaries. Riding motorbikes and quad bikes is an area that poses serious risks for children (Campbell, 2008). Four children discussed restrictions on motorbike riding, designed to increase safety, while others described risky behaviour such as having to ‘steer around the baby’ on the motorbike (see p. 254), without apparent concern.

MacDougall et al. (2009) suggest that for rural children there is “a process of learning to appreciate the opportunities and dangers inherent in the environment, and making sensible decisions to maximise their range of movement while minimising risk” (p. 201). From a
sociocultural perspective, rural parents, particularly those on farms, expect their children to be more capable and responsible, and provide opportunities for them to learn safety protocols. Children respond to their guidance and expectations by positively demonstrating skill and competency in challenging situations.

Children have an awareness of potential crime risks, referring to local knowledge of specific people or issues that are a safety risk. However, similar to parents in this and North American and English studies (Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000; Valentine, 1997), children generally tend to construct the rural environment as safer than an urban one.

**Rural Deprivation**

For the most part the children did not indicate strong feelings of deprivation. A few children specifically mentioned things they were not able to do in the rural environment, with one boy wishing there was a skate park in the rural township, and another boy pointing out that the rural environment is not suitable for all toys:

Sometimes there are things that sound cool on TV and you want it and you finally get it, like an XTV – which is half plane, half car, but it needs concrete to go on and we only have a little bit of concrete to go on. (Chilli Sauce, 8 year old boy, Canterbury)

The most significant aspect of rural deprivation is the lack of nearby facilities and consequent need to travel considerable distances regularly, especially in MacKenzie. Three children considered the travel a part of rural living and were accepting of it, stating they did not mind. However, for other children, the travel was tiresome and at times affected the activities they took part in (n=14). Some children demonstrated an awareness of the cost involved in travel in rural areas (n=5).
I don’t notice the driving. Mum quite likes us to do swim training and swimming carnivals – to get more energy. She doesn’t really mind about the car and driving all the time. (Roxy, 10 year old girl, MacKenzie)

In term two and three I did dance in [nearby township]. [A different town] was getting a wee bit far for me and I didn’t like travelling that far ... It was Mum’s idea to change because both me and her were sick of the travelling. (Genevieve, 10 year old girl, MacKenzie)

Driving bothered Dad because he took us down [to town] and it cost money. I know it bothered him because he said when we don’t help around the house that he wouldn’t take us down. Said we had to do something to make it up for what he had to do. But he always took us down. (Bill, 11 year old boy, Rodney)

Lack of shops nearby and limited access to shops is an issue for rural children (n=11) across all the areas. The majority of these children would like greater access to shops, but a few (n=4) expressed some positive feelings about not having shops nearby.

Town also has its good side because you get to go down to the shops. If you live here you have to convince your parents to take you. (xXx, 12 year old boy, MacKenzie)

I sometimes wish the shops were right next to your house like in the city ... Vodafone shop, dairy, Two Dollar Shop. But then again, if they were there you wouldn’t have so much fun land to play on. (Bill, 10 year old boy, Rodney)

Children living rurally are generally not deprived of recreational opportunities and take part in a large range of sporting, creative and recreational activities (see Table 4). Children in Canterbury, Rodney and MacKenzie travel to urban centres to participate in some of these activities. Children in Northland have the least access to a range of organised activities. The figures in Table 4 for Northland activities are somewhat inflated as three children attend a
Table 4: Extracurricular activities participated in by children in all the areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Canterbury (n=12)</th>
<th>Rodney (n=10)</th>
<th>Northland (n=5)</th>
<th>MacKenzie (n=9)</th>
<th>Total (n=36)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tennis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netball</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rugby</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touch rugby</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cricket</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swimming</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cubs/Guides</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drama</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hockey</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pony club</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gymnastics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

weekly, local sports club, run by parental volunteers, and the activities (tennis, netball, rugby and touch) are offered on a rotational basis, not simultaneously.

Advances in information and communication technology have had a beneficial effect on the lives of some rural children. Children use a range of internet technologies for communication and socialising purposes. These include interactive online games (n=17), social networking on Bebo website (n=6), email (n=5), and MSN instant messaging (n=4). With the exception of Bebo, which is used by children in all the areas, the internet is used socially mostly by children in Canterbury and Rodney. Other uses of the internet include homework research (n=12) and purchasing items from the Trademe\textsuperscript{72} website. Some

\textsuperscript{72} Trademe is New Zealand’s largest internet auction website.
children’s interest in using the computer and other technology waxed and waned over the course of the study:

When we first got the computer we used to play games a lot. Now I see no use in the computer. I think because it’s just wasting your time when you can do other things that are funner. (Sharpay-A, 9 year old girl, Canterbury)

I do have a Playstation and I’m only allowed to use it at the weekends but I don’t use it much anymore – only when it’s raining. I used to use it a lot but now I have better things to do. (Josh, 11 year old boy, Canterbury)

Some rural children have mobile phones (n=7). However, for the majority of children in this study mobile phones are regarded as being more important to young people older than themselves. Several children made reference to getting mobile phones when they start college or go to boarding school.

Most children do not focus on deprivation when talking about their lived experiences although they are aware of aspects of rural living that contribute to depriving them of particular opportunities or experience. The main area of this is the lack of nearby activities, school and shops, which results in considerable time spent travelling long distances. The lack of services and transport, can heighten feelings of boredom or isolation, consistent with Matthews et al. (2000) findings in a United Kingdom study. Children also acknowledge the need to leave the area for certain education or employment opportunities, particularly in the more remote areas (Goodyear, 2006a). However, for the most part, rural children themselves do not construct their childhood in terms of deprivation or marginalisation, echoing findings from another study in the United Kingdom (Giddings & Yarwood, 2005). In the current study, as in others, the positive perceptions children this age have of rural living, outweigh the lack of local amenities (Glendinning et al., 2003).

School and sporting activities provide opportunities for rural children to socialise with peers, with the findings indicating that children participate in a wide range of recreational
activities and sporting activities. In the absence of specific facilities, and with fewer formal physical activity options available, rural children, particularly in Northland, creatively make do with the leisure options available to them and engage in physical activity at a recreational level, resonating with findings in the rural Australian study (Lee & Abbot, 2009).

Although geographically isolated, rural areas are not a social vacuum (Giddings & Yarwood, 2005), and children in rural areas “experience, relate to, and appropriate knowledge and ideologies from beyond their immediate locality” (Riley, 2009, p. 248). Through electronic media, rural children have access to globally and locally produced material (Buckingham, 2008). Children in this study use ICT for social participation, expressing their agency, negotiating social relationships, creating and configuring friendships, and having fun with online and offline peers, as do children in other studies (Valentine & Holloway, 2001). However, it is important to be bear in mind that while ICT provides many opportunities for rural children, political, economic, social and technological factors affect uptake of new technology (Shiblaq, 2008/2009). Consequently, not all homes of children participating had computers, and many did not have access to broadband internet, thereby limiting children’s social participation in cyberspace.

**The Most Important Thing**

The final question, at the completion of the very last interview with each child, was to ask them what they thought were the important things for me to write in this thesis, about living where they lived. These have been incorporated in the findings throughout this chapter, but are specifically identified here also (see Table 5). In addition, ‘the most important thing’ told by each child has been included in full as an appendix (see Appendix G), to ensure that what children wanted to convey is included in their own words.

Some children did not have anything more that they wanted to say (n=3). For those children who did have something specific that was important to say the outdoors environment was a key feature. A large number of the children (n=12) thought it was important to let
Table 5: The most important things children thought should be included in this thesis to tell people about living in the country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The most important things:</th>
<th># of children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for fun</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good environment</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local knowledge and advice</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly community</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal and land care advice</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More space for pets/animals</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for learning new things</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural living involves work</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same as anywhere else</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

people know that living rurally is fun, with a particular focus on the space available for outdoor play. Four participants emphasised positive aspects of the rural environment, including the beauty of the natural world and the healthy aspects of it. Animal and land care advice was suggested (n=3), and some participants (n=2) also noted the importance of more space for animals. Two children also wanted it noted that the rural environment provides opportunities for learning new things.

Social aspects also featured in children’s thoughts about important things to write about. These included the friendliness of the rural community (n=3), and offering local knowledge and advice about less friendly aspects. Two children were fairly pragmatic about acknowledging the work involved in living rurally. Finally, one participant indicated it was much the same as anywhere else and depends on what you are used to.

Across these areas, of important things, a significant number of children (n=12) had cautionary advice for people about living in the country. A lot of these participants acknowledged positive aspects of rural living, but they also cautioned about the need to take responsibility for the land and animals, and care with regard to potential dangers.
Chapter Summary

The findings highlight the commonalities and diversity, within and between childhoods in a range of rural environments. There are also clear links between the parents' and the children's constructions of rural childhood apparent in the findings.

**Rural idyll.** Similarly to the parents' perspectives this is also the most important theme from children's perspectives. The aspects relevant to idyllic constructions of rural childhood fall into three broad categories: individual aspects, psychosocial aspects, and urban/rural perceptions.

**Individual aspects.** The majority of children are positive about living rurally and intend living rurally in the future, indicating, Cummins (2009) suggests, satisfaction with their current lifestyle. Their perceptions of parental satisfaction, link positively with the findings from the parents' data. The overall impression gained, is of children and parents being satisfied with their rural lifestyle, and aware of each others' satisfaction with it. Whilst some children intend to live in urban areas or travel in the future, place attachment, in the form of emotional bonds to a particular place (Lewicka, 2008), is evident for children in all the areas. For some farming children in MacKenzie and others in Northland, place attachment is related to intergenerational continuity and a sense of belonging.

Children, like parents, value the idyllic environmental aspects, while space and nature are the most important aesthetic aspects. These aspects link discursively with romantic constructions of childhood, to provide a view of idyllic, natural, rural childhood (Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Kehily, 2004) that promotes children's spatial freedom, a vision shared by children and parents, in this and other studies (Jones, 2007). Most of the children indicate that they value the opportunities for outdoor play and recreational activities. A diversity of natural places and parent's endorsement of outdoor play, contribute to providing them with opportunities for exploratory, creative and imaginative play, individually and socially with others, resonating with findings from studies in North America and the United Kingdom (Derr, 2005; Jones, 2000).

275
Variation between areas in the weight given to aspects of everyday life is apparent in the visual constructions. Recreation, nature, and pets/animals are important features of life for rural children in Canterbury, Rodney and MacKenzie. Agriculture is also an important theme for South Island children, particularly those in MacKenzie. However, Northland children place much greater emphasis on social aspects of their everyday lives.

**Psychosocial aspects.** Social relationships with family and friends are important to all participating children. Geographical isolation and low population density in rural New Zealand meant that historically, families and communities needed to be socially self sufficient (Toynbee, 1995). This continues currently as rural children across the areas, play with neighbours and siblings, as also found in other rural studies (Cummins, 2009; Lee & Abbot, 2009). Children in the two areas with least urban influence, Northland and MacKenzie, spend a lot of time with extended family members, particularly grandparents and cousins. This is consistent with findings from the parents’ data indicating the importance of intergenerational experiences and continuity in these areas. In MacKenzie the intergenerational experiences appear to be related, in part, to ongoing family relationships to farming the land, consistent with findings from a study of farm children in the United Kingdom (Riley, 2009). In Northland these may be related to the strong Māori traditions, in which whānau is an integrally important concept (Cram & Pitama, 1998).

A sense of belonging, social participation, and the social construction of community, is valued by rural children and parents, particularly those from Northland and MacKenzie. Children across all areas identify as rural dwellers and feel a sense of belonging in their community. They are social participants who engage in social interactions and reciprocal relationships with family, friends, whānau and community, and thus have the opportunity to practice citizenship (Smith & Bjerke, 2009). School, and the school bus, are important sites for social participation for rural children, echoing findings from an Australian study (Lee & Abbott, 2009), with small rural schools reflecting aspects of community cohesion.

The findings reveal children’s participation in a range of social contexts, and their agency arising from within these environments (Smith, 2007). Children’s social responsibility is
apparent in everyday experiences of caring for pets and other animals, and the negotiation and undertaking of the tasks of family life (Smith & Bjerke, 2009). Pets are important for most child participants, featuring dominantly in the visual constructions of children from all areas except Northland. Children's agency is also evident as they creatively use opportunities in work related tasks and play environments. Across all areas they engage in a wide range of recreational activities in and around the home environment.

Farming is a unique rural context, and children who live on farms have distinctive experiences. They live and play on the farm, participate in sustaining farming activities, and have responsibility for certain tasks, consistent with findings from farm studies in the United Kingdom and North America (Riley, 2009; Zepeda & Kim, 2006). The tasks include caring for animals, and childcare of younger siblings. Children are generally interested in and knowledgeable about agricultural practices. They tend to have close family relationships, as found in other farm based studies (Cummins, 2009; Zepeda & Kim, 2006) involving work and recreational aspects, participating meaningfully, through social engagement and partnership with parents (Smith & Bjerke, 2009). The children’s and parents’ findings indicate that children participate effectively in a range of complex and challenging activities, in the farm context.

Urban/rural perceptions. Children, like parents, view rural lifestyle and childhood positively, particularly in comparison to, and juxtaposition with, urban areas, in this and other studies (Leyshon, 2008). They demonstrate multiple identities including a rural identity, specific place identity and/or a farming identity. These incorporate aspects of the rural idyll, knowledge of the rural area, land based and agricultural practice, resonant with findings from other studies (Leyshon, 2008; Riley, 2009), and the rural New Zealand myth. Aspects of these identities resonate with the positive attributes, described in the parents’ findings, that parents hope rural living will foster in their children.

73 Children in Northland did also photograph and talk about their pets, however, not to the same extent as they portrayed family, home, friends, school and nature in their visual constructions.
For the most part rural children perceive urban areas, and people living there, in a negative light and see their own environment and lifestyle as better. There is a moral component apparent in the rural and farming identities found in other studies (Cummins, 2009; Leyshon, 2008), which is apparent in this study also, extending, at times, to negative perceptions of children living in small rural towns. However, the rural urban dichotomy is challenged in a number of ways, for example, as children in small townships also form rural identities based on their everyday experiences, and as other children acknowledge it is only lack of farming and rural experience that differentiates town and country children. Children and parents share concerns regarding the potential urban encroachment of land subdivision and property development. These concerns are expressed mostly by those living in the areas most likely to be affected, Canterbury and Rodney.

**Rural dull.** Social isolation is a significant factor for rural children across the areas. However, they manage this in a variety of ways including playing with family members and neighbours, co-ordinating town activities with visiting friends, and using communication technology to socialise. ICT appears to play a role in some rural children's lives, enhancing and maintaining friendships, consistent with findings from other studies (Lægran, 2002; Valentine, Holloway & Bingham, 2000). School is an important part of everyday life for social reasons, particularly in Northland and MacKenzie, where it is more difficult to see friends outside of school, because of the distances people have to travel. Although, as noted previously, Northland children socialise a lot with nearby extended family members who are part of the peer group.

Despite the findings from the parents' data indicating that boredom was an issue for young people, rather than younger children, some children say that some aspects of rural life are boring. These include aspects of farm work, daily and seasonal tasks, and weather related constraints on social activities. However, children also use their agency to transform dull situations and take advantage of opportunities that are available to them, in this and other studies (Derr, 2005; Jones, 2000; Punch, 2000).
**Rural danger.** Children are aware of environmental dangers, including farm, traffic and crime related, and use their knowledge to help determine where it is safe to play, consistent with findings from an Australian study (MacDougall et al., 2009). Rural parents, particularly those on farms, expect their children to be capable and responsible, and learn safety protocols. This expectation, and children’s consequent skill and competency, is apparent in children’s awareness of dangers, and understanding of parental advice and restrictions related to safety. However, dangerous aspects of some children’s everyday experiences, for example the serious risks posed by motorbike and ATV riding (Campbell, 2008), are not discussed, or are minimised, by some children and parents.

**Rural deprivation.** Children have an awareness that living rurally deprives them of opportunities for social participation, recreation, and future education and employment. The time spent travelling can negatively affect their participation in activities and everyday experiences. However, consistent with studies in the United Kingdom (Giddings & Yarwood, 2005; Glendinning et al., 2003), the findings indicate that most children participating in this study do not construct their rural childhood in terms of deprivation and that the positive aspects of rural living outweigh the lack of local amenities for them.

Children take part in a wide range of activities across the areas, although there are some differences between them. Children in Northland have fewer formal recreational opportunities available to them and creatively engage in other leisure options and recreational activities. Children living near urban centres, Canterbury and Rodney, have access to a greater range of activities, including those available locally and those accessible in nearby urban areas. Children in Canterbury and Rodney also engage in technology based recreation more than other children. It appears that factors affecting uptake of technology in New Zealand (Shiblaq, 2008/2009) result in uneven access to ICT across rural areas, which limits this as a forum for children’s social participation.

**Concluding comments.** The children participating in this study, for the most part, construct rural childhood in a positive light, and clearly wanted to convey these aspects of their everyday experiences. Top of the list of children’s most important things to be included
in this thesis was the opportunities for fun that are part of living rurally. However, the same number of children also had cautionary advice to offer people who might be considering living rurally. The findings indicate that children are able to hold and manage the tension that exists between an idealised rural childhood and aspects of rural living that do not meet this ideal. Rather than the rural idyll obscuring dull, dangerous or difficult aspects of life (D. Bell, 2006), the overall sense is that these aspects coexist in children’s everyday experience, with the positive aspects dominating their constructions of rural childhood.
CHAPTER EIGHT
Discussion

Introduction
The starting point of this study was essentially a search for some authentic insights into the nature of rural New Zealand childhood. It rapidly became clear to me that this was a complex phenomena, about which little was academically known, despite the sizeable rural population, the strength of positive feeling about rural childhood apparent in lay and popular social discourses, and the integral place rural New Zealand holds in the national identity. The thesis so far has charted the background, process and findings of my research, and I turn now to discussing and interpreting the meaning of the findings.

My search to understand rural New Zealand childhood, led to the discovery of many, multi-faceted, diverse, rural childhoods, which children play an active role in constructing. My qualitative approach and sustained contact with children and parents from rural New Zealand, paid particular attention to accessing children’s own lived experiences, through artwork, photographs, and several interviews. The methodology was an exciting aspect of the study and allowed me to get closer to understanding rural childhood by hearing directly the voices and perspectives of rural children themselves. The participation of children and their parents in this study has played a critical, and hitherto seldom heard, role in carrying out this research, and adding to knowledge of rural childhood in New Zealand.

Initially I explored the historical and contemporary sociocultural context of rural New Zealand and reviewed the relevant research. Arcadian imaginings of the rural idyll contributed to the immigration of European settlers (Alessio, 2008; Fairburn, 1975) and shaped the development of New Zealand culture (Swaffield & Fairweather, 1998). This evolved, integrating elements and attributes associated with the rural pioneering culture, such as a strong work ethic, versatility, moral wholesomeness, and physical prowess. These characteristics were shaped by the physical geography, mythologised and incorporated into
the national identity (C. Bell, 1997; Fairburn, 1995, 2006; Phillips, 2009). Agriculture became the 'backbone of the country's economy'. Rural New Zealand, however, has undergone various changes in fortune, going from prosperity to economic uncertainty in the latter part of the 20th century. As a consequence of fluctuating economic markets and social policy reforms under a period of New Right governments there has been considerable social change in parts of rural New Zealand, with diminishing population, loss of public and private social services, and increasing dependence on distant towns (Benseman, 2006). Contemporary rural life in some parts of New Zealand does involve social and economic hardship and deprivation. At the same time, there has been a proliferation of lifestyle blocks in rural areas on the city fringes, creating areas of rural lifestyle, which are not agriculturally based, and are characterised by aspects of the rural idyll. The face of rural New Zealand has undergone frequent and rapid changes, so rural childhood is located in a diverse range of contexts.

There is little in the way of New Zealand research based literature to provide insight into the nature of rural childhood, but existing research does provide some valuable insights. First, children, living in rural and urban environments, construct and experience rurality in diverse ways (McCormack, 2000). Second, young people's experiences in rural communities include both social inclusion and exclusion (Panelli et al., 2002). Third, the supposed distinctions between urban and rural are somewhat imprecise and blurred in the experiences of young people in rural and urban New Zealand (Nairn et al., 2003). The themes that emerge from this literature therefore challenge the perceptions of one distinctive rural New Zealand childhood. Young people's social experiences in rural New Zealand are consistently positive, but not universally so. Furthermore, social aspects of the rural cannot automatically be constructed as diametrically opposed to the urban.

Little is actually known about rural New Zealand childhood and the experiences of rural children and families, outside of lay and popular discourses. What is known is somewhat contradictory and challenges aspects of popular imaginings. A review of the international rural childhood literature showed that rural childhood in the Minority world is constructed in contrasting contexts as idyllic, dull, dangerous and deprived. Aspects of this research resonate with the New Zealand context and provide insight into understanding how rural childhood has
been constructed in other countries, but it does not bridge the existing gap in knowledge about rural New Zealand childhoods.

Given the scant information available, the next step was to find out more about rural childhood, directly from children and parents who live rurally. Childhood Studies provides a useful theoretical and methodological context for doing this. It views children as social actors who play an important part in determining their own lives, rather than being the passive recipients of socialisation. Another core tenet of Childhood Studies is the conceptualisation of childhood as a social construction, with the attendant understanding that there are multiple constructions of childhoods, and that these vary over time and place. This immediately challenges the idea that there is a single ‘real’ rural childhood and transforms the search for multiple constructions of rural childhoods. The theory guides the formulation of specific research questions to explore and gain understanding about rural childhood. These were:

• How is childhood in rural New Zealand constructed and experienced, from the perspectives of children and parents?

• How diverse are constructions and experiences of childhood across different rural environments?

• What are the constraining and facilitating factors affecting parenting in rural New Zealand?

This final chapter in my thesis responds to each of these questions by integrating existing knowledge with the findings from my study. The experiences of children and parents make a critical contribution to deconstructing existing understandings and reconstructing rural childhood theory. The implications of this for policy development and further research are also considered in this chapter. Finally, I discuss the limitations of my study, before ending with some concluding comments.
Answering the Research Questions

To find answers to my research questions I asked those closest to rural childhood, that is, children who are living rurally and their parents, about their understandings, views and experiences. This was done using a variety of methods, over a period of at least 12 months. The methodology enabled me to talk to children and parents about rural childhood and to elicit their unique voices. This section considers the children’s and parents’ perspectives, linking the key findings from their data and integrating them with existing knowledge, and the theory that underpins the study. In doing so, the research questions are answered and theoretical knowledge extended by drawing on firsthand accounts of contemporary rural New Zealand childhood.

Constructions and Experiences of Rural Childhood

The findings clearly indicate that childhood is constructed positively by children and parents living in rural New Zealand. Essentially, children like living in the country. There may be some things they would like to be different and aspects that are less enjoyable, such as time spent travelling, and distance from friends, but overall they like lots of things about rural living and prefer it to their perceptions of urban living. Parents, too, are generally satisfied with what living rurally provides their children. The exceptions to this, indicating parental dissatisfaction with aspects of rural family living, are discussed later in this chapter. However, overall, most parents consciously choose to live rurally and are pleased with the consequences of that choice and what it offers for themselves and their children.

The rural idyll features strongly in constructions of rural childhood. Consistent with theoretical understandings and the existing rural childhood literature, the perspectives of children and parents participating in my study indicate clearly that there is not one ‘real’ rural New Zealand childhood. Children’s and parents’ accounts reveal multiple constructions of rural childhood. The rural idyll is by far the most dominant theme in these constructions of rural childhood, resonating with findings of studies in other Minority world contexts,
particularly those in the United Kingdom (Jones, 1997; Matthews et al., 2000; Valentine, 1997). Within this theme, however, rural childhood is constructed and experienced in diverse ways.

Aesthetic aspects of the rural idyll are important, with children and parents placing a great deal of emphasis on the outdoors as a site of children’s everyday experiences. Although children living rurally participate in a range of indoor and outdoor activities, it is the outdoor aspects that are emphasised by children and parents. Children value recreational activities such as biking, swimming, building huts and climbing trees. The outdoors environment is the setting for physical, imaginative, and exploratory play, as well as play with pets, family members and friends. Children’s agency is evident within this context as they engage creatively, individually and collectively, in social contexts close to and away from their homes, in places that hold special meaning for them. They form emotional attachments to specific places (Derr, 2005), where they engage in exploratory, creative and imaginative play, such as Bill’s use of the forest for exploring and hunting, and the riverbank in Poseidon’s imaginative mountaineering play. Children also creatively use opportunities outside, that become available unexpectedly or fleetingly for play (Jones, 2000), such as Alice’s ‘ice skating’ play with the ‘big, long, white things’ from a house renovation site.

Social aspects of the rural idyll, including relationships with family, friends, neighbours and community are also important to children and parents in constructing rural childhood. Features of rural community are highlighted by children and particularly important to parents. Children have a sense of belonging in the local community and the belief, as expressed by one child, that ‘you gotta know that they’ll be there for you’. Similarly, parents identify important aspects including social participation of children and adults, reciprocity of care and social inclusion, occurring within the context of a close knit community. Parents express confidence that their children will be safe from harm under the communal gaze and attended to, if hurt or upset.

Children’s agency arises out of the social and cultural contexts in which children live their lives (Smith, 2007). Their outdoor play and the associated freedom is endorsed by their
parents who conceptualise it as being an integral part of the idyllic, natural, rural childhood (Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Kehily, 2004). Parents in this study actively encourage their children to play outside and gain satisfaction from them doing so, seeing it as an advantage of rural living. In constructing rural childhood parents draw on memories, that are frequently romanticised, of their own rural childhood experiences and social discourses that believe children benefit from outdoor play, have an affinity with the natural world and will be safe under in the context of community. These discursive constructions, in accordance with parent’s perceptions of children’s competencies, play a role in extending children’s opportunities to exercise their agency spatially, as parents allow them freedom to roam. For example, the parents in Northland value children’s freedom to go swimming at local waterholes, expressing this as part of rural childhood, and allow their children to swim without adult supervision at certain ages, depending on their perceptions of the child’s swimming skills and responsibility. Children experience a degree of spatial freedom, as their parent’s constructions, in conjunction with the available space, provide them with opportunities to spend time as they wish without adult supervision and surveillance (Aitken, 2001; Jones, 2007).

The New Zealand context uniquely shapes constructions and experiences of rural childhood. Whilst the dominant construction of rural childhood is consistent with the rural idyll it clearly has a unique New Zealand flavour, incorporating its geographical and social history. The construction of an idyllic rural childhood is particularly potent, given its location at the intersection of two powerful social discourses – the rural idyll and the romantic discourse of childhood (Jones, 1997). The findings in this study also reveal a distinct and unique national perspective to this construction, as a third discursive strand, that of the rural New Zealand myth, intersects with the rural childhood idyll. The specific location in a New Zealand context infuses the rural idyll with virtues inherited from the pioneering culture, such as a strong work ethic, moral wholesomeness (C. Bell, 1997), and a self reliant, adaptive mentality, characterised in the expressions used by parents such as ‘do it yourself’, ‘kiwi can-do’, and the ‘number eight wire’ metaphor.74

74 Number eight wire is a standard gauge of fencing wire, which is frequently used adaptively for emergency repairs.
The integration of the rural idyll and the rural New Zealand myth in parents' constructions of rural childhood is evident in their belief that outdoor rural experiences will foster certain virtues and attributes in their children, such as responsibility, independence, confidence, good work ethic, practical skills and common sense. Parents perceive that these will serve children throughout their lives, for example, giving them a better chance of survival in the event of a natural disaster, being able to solve problems in any job, and having a sense of social responsibility that will see them assisting someone in need. However, importantly, parents also perceive these attributes as valuable in children's present lives and everyday experiences across a range of social contexts.

Parents regard these attributes as developing from, and contributing to, children's participation in household and farm work, taking care of pets and animals, and recreational activities. Parents value children's ability to create their own social and recreational opportunities, expressing this in terms of rural children having to 'make their own fun' and 'use their imagination', without being 'delivered the activities'. These attributes are also sometimes specifically associated with agricultural practices. For example, riding motorbikes, ATVs and driving vehicles in the context of farm work is a regular occurrence for many children in my study. Parents of these children consider them to be responsible enough with sufficient common sense and skill to manage driving, despite the potential safety risk or the illegal nature of this in particular situations. It is purely the potentially dire legal consequences that prevent one mother from allowing her 11-year-old son to ride his motorbike on back country roads, despite her belief that he is responsible and skilled enough to manage.

Children meet their parents' expectations of competence in household and farm tasks, and social resourcefulness. They use their agency in home and farm activities, with varying degrees of enthusiasm. They appropriate and transform space around or near their homes into a place for children (James & James, 2008), for example, Roxy playing in the sheep pens and Dante making huts in the hedge. Children also creatively maximise opportunities for social participation, at home, school, on the school bus, in recreational contexts, and through the use of ICT. They employ a range of strategies to spend time with friends, family members and neighbours. These include having friends stay for sleepovers, coordinating organised activities
with visits to town based friends, and playing with children who live nearby even if this means engaging in less interesting games than they otherwise would with close friends. For example, William Crooks prefers complex fantasy games to other sorts of play, but spends time with his neighbour doing ‘basic stuff like playing on the tramp’, in order to socialise with peers at home.

A sociocultural theoretical perspective offers a framework for greater understanding of rural childhood, by considering the positioning of children, and viewing their development as occurring in social contexts, through engagement and partnership with adults (Smith & Bjerke, 2009). Social and physical aspects of rural life position children as competent and agentic. Rural children’s agency arises from contexts which are shaped by social discourses, spatial relations and social relationships, as well as the individual child’s personal characteristics (Robson et al., 2007). The unique social and cultural contexts of rural New Zealand childhood emphasise social resourcefulness, self reliance and social participation, with an outdoors focus. Parents’ expectations of children align with the social discourses constructing rural childhood, and consequently they provide children with scaffolding of activities and opportunities for them to acquire the skills and competencies necessary for this. Rural children learn, in partnership with their parents, the skills needed to be resourceful and competent in rural contexts, including challenging tasks, that would not usually be associated with children this age. This negates traditional, dominant views of children as incompetent and dependent. Examples of this include children riding motorbikes, driving vehicles, raising and training animals, providing care for family members, and ‘making their own fun’ individually and collectively.

The construction of rural childhood in New Zealand allows for social inclusion and participation of children in partnership with adults in a range of contexts. The lack of available babysitters contributes to ensuring that children attend social functions with their parents. Children have social responsibility for a range of household and farm tasks, caring for animals and family members. Some children on farms contribute to the agricultural work practices, performing complex tasks in challenging conditions. In these and a range of other contexts children demonstrate their capabilities, actively making choices about their participation, and
influencing the social world around them. This occurs in conjunction with their parent’s
expectations, creation of participatory opportunities, and engagement with them in partnership
(Smith, 2002).

The nature of parents’ expectations of their children, and children’s own competencies and
creative use of agency in a relational context, therefore mark rural childhood as a unique site
of social participation and citizenship practice. The parents and children provided many
examples of what Lister (2007) identifies as the four building blocks of citizenship for
children; membership, rights, responsibilities, and equality of status, respect and recognition.
While these aspects are not fully integrated into all rural children’s lives in a consistent or
ongoing fashion, some are apparent in a range of everyday social contexts, as identified in the
following examples taken from the children’s findings. Membership is evident in children’s
place attachment, identifying themselves as being from a specific locality, and expressing a
sense of belonging in the local community, feeling that in ‘a little town like this you just know
everyone ‘cause it’s so small’ and ‘we’re all pretty happy ... we basically know everybody at
school’. Children’s rights are inherent in rural childhood, for example, the right to play and
recreation, to participation and to protection. Limited access to resources and amenities may,
however, threaten children’s provision rights in some cases. Rights related to civic
involvement were not specifically identified, but social participation rights are embedded in
everyday interactions (Smith & Bjerke, 2009), as indicated by their social inclusion in family
and community activities. Social responsibilities are apparent across a range of contexts as
children undertake household and farm tasks, including the care of pets and animals. Equality,
respect and recognition were apparent, for example in agricultural contexts in which children
participated in essential work and were sometimes remunerated financially for their
agricultural labour, raising calves, docking lambs, and grubbing thistles.

An idyllic and idealised rural New Zealand childhood is constructed by children, and by
parents, in which children have the space, freedom and inclination to play creatively outdoors,
developing the attributes and skills necessary for current and future wellbeing and citizenship,
participating in a range of social contexts, with their parents’ support and approval, under the
benevolent gaze of a close knit community. However, to quote one parent in this study, ‘it’s
not all beer and skittles'. The construction of the rural childhood idyll as portrayed above incorporates 'real' and vital aspects of rural childhood, but it is only one dimension. Parents and children express these aspects and also simultaneously contest this construction and offer alternative representations and experiences, providing greater depth and a more nuanced understanding of rural childhood.

Alternative (to idyllic) constructions and experiences of rural childhood are apparent. Aspects of rural living which contest the idyllic construction of rurality and rural childhood are evident from the perspectives of both parents and children. Rural childhood is also conceptualised in the literature, and by participants in this study, in terms of rural dullness, danger and deprivation. There are difficult aspects of rural living that children do not enjoy, such as the time spent travelling, distance from friends and a lack of shops. Farming and agricultural practices can involve hard work that children do not always feel like doing. Challenges for children are inherent in geographical features, such as the isolation and demanding weather patterns. Individual children want improved facilities and amenities, such as a skatepark, more concrete to play on, better cell phone reception and internet connection, amongst other things. There are also aspects they consider dangerous that are specific to the rural environment, such as charging bulls and unstoppable running horses. Parents also acknowledge difficulties, mostly associated with the geographical and social isolation, and subsequent lack of or limited facilities and services. Coordination and increased travel time is therefore often required. As well as being inconvenient, these difficult aspects potentially increase the economic cost of rural living, further compounding the problem. As a consequence of these issues, quite a few of the children do not intend staying in rural areas, when they are older.

Some parents discussed specific issues of concern related to their children's future educational, social and employment opportunities. This was expressed clearly by a parent in Northland who wanted her children to go to boarding school out of the area as she worried about them staying locally and being like other young people, 'on the dole, drinking, nothing to do, nowhere to go to'. Consistent with Minority world literature, the perception by parents in this study of rural life as socially isolated, boring and restricted tends to be related to young
people, rather than children (Davis & Ridge, 1997; Glendinning et al., 2003; Lægr, 2002; Rye, 2006; Valentine & Holloway, 2001). Children did raise boring aspects of rural life in my study, but these tended to be related to monotonous, repetitive aspects of farm work and daily tasks rather than social isolation.

Children and parents clearly acknowledge aspects of rural lived experience that are not consistent with the construction of a rural childhood idyll. However, what is particularly interesting, from a Childhood Studies perspective, is the different ways in which parents and children construct rural childhood with regard to these aspects.

The negative aspects experienced in rural living do not deflect most parents from constructing and promoting a vision of rural idyllic childhood. Some parents, particularly but not exclusively those on farms, acknowledged both positive and negative aspects of rural living for children and families, concluding that the benefits far outweighed the disadvantages. However, most parents tended to downplay any negative aspects of rural living, focusing on positive aspects, and were quick to reassure me (and perhaps themselves), that these less desirable aspects were not of concern to them. Examples of this include a Canterbury parent presenting extensive travel time as 'just what we do', and a Northland parent indicating that she was not really bothered by unemployment, because she valued whānau and community, not possessions and status. This tendency to focus on the idyllic aspects, has the potential to obscure, deny or minimise other aspects (Davis & Ridge, 1997; James, 1990; D. Bell, 2006). In addition, some of the negative aspects such as economic deprivation and unemployment, are downplayed and presented as urban issues, and idyllic constructions of rural family life are activated as offering respite from these (Davis & Ridge, 1997). Focusing on positive aspects to the exclusion of other more difficult aspects of rural living effectively renders these latter issues invisible, which then has implications for managing or resolving them.

Children in my study, however, do not omit or downplay negative aspects of rural living. In their constructions of rural childhood, these experiences coexist with the aspects they do like, without apparent tension and contradiction. An inclusive picture is painted in which the dull, dangerous or difficult aspects experienced, contribute to rural living alongside the idyllic ones.
This is evident in the cautionary advice offered by some children as the most important thing to readers, in conjunction with the fun to be had from living rurally. This suggests that lived experiences play a greater role in children’s constructions of rural childhood than the social discourses that strongly influence adult constructions.

Children are aware of the idyllic discourses that permeate the social world, and draw on these, for example Luna, wrote in her artwork:

I greatly enjoy living in the country because it seems to make me think about nature and plants. If I lived in the city it would not be enjoyable because it would mean that you would not have a large garden to play in and in my opinion children need to have a decent amount of space to play in.

But in terms of the task of helping me gain understanding of rural childhood, children’s constructions are strongly predicated on lived experience and do not deny difficult aspects of rural life. Hearing children’s voices highlights their agency in constructing their own views (Pufall & Unsworth, 2004), reconstructing traditional perceptions of children as passive recipients of information. Children in this study clearly form their own opinions based on their lived experiences as well as social discourses. Consequently, the voices of these children give a more robust and authentic picture of rural childhood than would be gained by accessing their parents’ voices alone.

The rural childhood identity is reinforced by comparison to urban childhood. Parents and children frequently compare, both explicitly as Luna did above, and by implication, characteristics of rural and urban childhoods. These ultimately cast rural experiences, childhood and identities in a positive light, with a rejection of urban childhood characteristics, which are perceived in terms of negative stereotypes. Underlying the rural identity are the discourses of the rural idyll and the New Zealand rural myth. Just as the rural myth idealises rural living, a corresponding urban myth is mobilised, denigrating urban experience, which gives the rural myth greater potency (Leyshon, 2008). Children perceive of the city as noisy, crowded and frightening, with some, like Poo Spider, holding extreme views about urban
children’s likely involvement in gangs and their parents’ use of drugs. Parents consider urban residents to hold different (inferior) values and lack important skills necessary for managing adversity and crisis. The Auckland experience of coping with a five hour power cut was greeted with derision, with one parent referring to Aucklanders ‘crying into their lattes’, in comparison to MacKenzie residents ‘not even batting an eyelid’ when going without electricity for up to two weeks.

In rejecting aspects of urban identities, parents and children accentuate the urban rural dichotomy, with rural characteristics and lifestyle being cast as superior. Children perceive rural people as morally and physically superior to their urban counterparts. Consequently, children living in rural townships and near urban areas emphasise their rural identities. In turn, these children who live in rural townships identify those in larger towns and cities pejoratively as ‘townies’, distancing themselves from urban associations and claiming greater agricultural and rural knowledge. Thus, a rural identity is actively sought and constructed by children and parents.

However, dualisms are limiting and inadequate for understanding childhood (Prout, 2005). They do not reflect the lived experiences of children and parents which challenge an urban rural dichotomy, and at times are directly at odds with it. For example, parents in Canterbury and Rodney, whilst distancing themselves from urbanites, celebrate having ‘the best of both worlds’; a rural lifestyle with all the advantages of urban life easily accessible. Families living on the rural fringe of urban areas, like Canterbury, often have considerable links with urban areas. In my study these links include many parents being employed in urban centres, children attending activities and facilities in the city, and some families being confronted with, or even part of, increasing urban encroachment from land subdivision and property development. Despite these urban associations, parents and children seek to distance themselves from urban lifestyle and strengthen their rural identity, for example by emphasising agricultural associations such as Pets Day, and setting themselves apart from ‘newcomers’ to the area, who are dismissed as having urban values. They construct childhood and family life by drawing strongly on rural discourses, reproducing the urban rural dichotomy and
strengthening rural identity (Cloke, 2006), which belies the experiences of regularly traversing rural and urban worlds.

Features of globalisation and technological development also contradict the clear distinction between urban and rural (Cloke, 2006), and childhood worlds (Lee, 2001; Prout, 2005). Even some very remote farms in this study have satellite broadband internet access, meaning that children there have access to information and communication technology that is available in urban areas and throughout the world. Idyllic rural childhood discourses tend to conceptualise technology as urban media, despite its increasing availability, globally and nationwide. However, it does reinforce the range of options open to children (Buckingham, 2004).

An urban rural dichotomy also reinforces the notion of a singular rural childhood across rural New Zealand. However, despite the areas of commonality discussed, this is clearly not the case, as is discussed in the following section.

**Diversity of Rural Childhoods**

The inclusion of participants from four distinctly different rural areas highlights the diversity of rural childhoods in New Zealand. Different aspects of the rural idyll are emphasised in different areas, and attributes of rural locality clearly contribute to children’s experiences. Furthermore, childhood varies within different rural areas.

Different aspects of the rural idyll in relation to childhood and family life are emphasised in different areas. Aesthetic and social components of the rural idyll are clearly appreciated throughout all the localities, but the weight given to them differs. Parents in the areas with stronger urban influence tend to place greater emphasis on aesthetic aspects of the rural idyll, than parents in more remote areas who emphasise the social components.
Parents in Canterbury and Rodney emphasise the aesthetic aspects and associate rural living with the opportunities for children to develop creativity and an adventurous spirit in the natural environment. This is expressed by parents in terms of children being able to 'get away and be with nature' and 'use their imagination'. It reflects an underlying romantic discourse of childhood, with a supposed affinity between children and nature, and perceptions of the natural world as the appropriate setting for childhood, which is seen as a time of innocence and naïve exploration (Holloway & Valentine, 2000; James & James, 2008). Whilst parents in these areas have the advantages of urban life nearby, rural living is perceived as keeping the corrupting urban influence at a distance and enabling childhood innocence to be maintained, protected and prolonged (James et al., 1998; Jenks, 2005).

Parents in the more remote and less urban influenced rural areas tend to place less weight on the aesthetic aspects and much more on the social aspects of the rural idyll. Socially cohesive and close knit community is a key feature in the construction of the rural idyll (Panelli et al., 2003; Valentine, 1997), and also a legacy of the historical context of rural New Zealand, arising as a consequence of geographical isolation and low population density to meet social and economic needs (Toynbee, 1995). There is greater intergenerational continuity and family ties to the land evident in these areas, as Northland and MacKenzie families continue to live on family land. For example, one child talked of the house having 'gone through dad's, dad's, dad' and her intention for it to be hers one day. Extended family and whānau members live nearby many of the children and feature strongly in their lives, such as the child in Northland who helped her nana next door when she was sick, and feels sorry for her 'cos she’s lonely, she’s got no mokos [grandchildren] there, she’s living by herself now'. Parents stress the social aspects as protecting children and promoting their positive development as citizens in a social context. Rural schools are an important site of community social participation for children and parents, as demonstrated by the school concert that even the ‘single boys’ go to, and participation in working bees in MacKenzie, and the local interschool cultural festival in Northland.

Underlying the differences in emphasis on the rural idyll between these areas, is the weight given to different social discourses. Clearly there is some variation in the prevailing
discourses across and within New Zealand. Taking this variation into account, the construction of rural childhood in more rural, remote families appears to be influenced more strongly by the New Zealand rural pioneering myth. However, in rural areas with more urban influence the romantic discourse of childhood is given greater weight.

**Rural locality affects the construction and experiences of rural childhood.** This theme is illustrated throughout the findings by reference to the four localities in which the study was undertaken. The sample is not representative of those areas, nor are the localities representative of all rural New Zealand. However, they do illustrate the plurality of rural childhoods and the diversity between and within geographical locations. This was highlighted by the finding that different issues had greater relevance in particular areas.

The movement of people between urban and rural areas is an example of this. In areas further away from urban centres, such as Northland and MacKenzie, the historical trend of rural urban drift continues. Young people in particular leave to seek employment and education opportunities, which are unavailable in rural areas. Many children in my study knew that they would need to leave in order to go to university, or to find work. In fact, some children were aware they would be leaving to attend boarding school in the near future, because of the distance from school or inadequate educational options available near home. Conversely, areas near to urban centres, such as Canterbury, have a reverse trend as migration from urban areas to lifestyle blocks and smallholdings in the rural fringe increases, and the population of these areas grows. Children there have a greater range of recreational, educational and employment options open to them, which are more readily accessible nearby. Thus, migration patterns, and their relationship with access to services and amenities are factors directly impacting on rural childhood experiences.

The urban rural migration, as noted in Canterbury, also impacts on the land use and has implications for rural childhood. In New Zealand rural is no longer just agricultural (Levett & Pomeroy, 1997). Historically, the land provided the means of survival, and children were a source of labour on family farms. This continues to an extent in farming families today. However, in the rapidly growing rural areas near urban centres, the land is equated with
providing a desirable lifestyle for children and families, rather than production to sustain life. Rurality has become a commodity, marketed to middle class migrants, wanting an idyllic lifestyle (Swaffield & Fairweather, 1998). Parents spoke cynically of newcomers to the area having attitudes and values they perceived as urban, and related to wealth and competition, such as being ‘less neighbourly’, paying for work to be done and expecting privacy. There is a sense that rural childhood, too, is constructed by some as a commodity, which in the current neoliberal political-economic climate can be purchased and gifted to children. The parent, as consumer, can, if sufficiently wealthy, purchase this childhood for their children, by buying the land and accoutrements of the rural dream, all the while retaining the advantages of urban living close to hand.

The constructions and experiences of childhood also vary within areas, in accordance with the prevailing social discourses, different features of the locality and lived experiences. Parental expectations vary in accordance with this, and consequently, children’s experiences differ as they negotiate the constraints and boundaries resulting from their parent’s constructions of childhood. For example, one parent in the MacKenzie rural township perceived freedom for their child as being able to bike alone to the shops and to school, whereas freedom for another MacKenzie farming parent is perceived as their child being able to drive the truck around areas of the farm alone. In a dynamic interplay of factors, children’s experiences of freedom in turn impact on their parents’ constructions of childhood. Consequently, childhood can be constructed and experienced in a variety of ways within the same locality.

The locating of this study in different areas highlights the social construction of childhood, as specific issues and social variables impact on this (Prout & James, 1990). These include features of the locality such as economic disadvantage, ethnicity and class, which vary across and within rural New Zealand areas.

**Farm and agricultural settings are a unique context for rural childhood.** Within rural localities, the farm is a unique context in which children experience particularly challenging conditions, and demonstrate competency and agency in partnership with parents. Children
living on farms routinely participate in farms tasks, having an indispensable role in activities such as mustering, feeding out and docking. They take responsibility for these tasks in, at times, harsh weather conditions, acquiring and demonstrating competencies at much younger ages than would be expected in the context of dominant discourses, as a consequence of their life experiences and social environment (Lansdown, 1994). In a Rodney farming family, for example, the seven year old girl and nine year old boy both have their own motorbikes, which they ride when helping with farm work, with the boy very proud of having shifted sheep on his own when he was eight years old.

A key aspect of the farm social environment is the relationship children have with their parents, who live and work in the same place, thereby enabling considerable contact between family members. The parents’ expectations of children and children’s pride in their contribution to farming life suggest childhood constructions in some New Zealand farming families incorporate components of citizenship such as competence, responsibility, and respect for hard work and equal participation.

Identity is strongly influenced by children’s experiences of agency and voice (Pufall & Unsworth, 2004), and consequently some children in this study have strong farming identities, as well as other identities. These are constructed in relationship with their parents and others, through everyday social interactions, activities, and sets of discourses, within the farm contexts (Hinton, 2008; James & James, 2008). The parental expectations and scaffolding of learning, providing experience on farms, gives children a farming identity in which they have self efficacy and are active, valued participants, influencing the world around them. This identity is strengthened as children relate to others, drawing on their experiences and the available discourses. For example, in comparing themselves to others at school, they identify farm children as loud, strong, fit and not “wussies”.

The context of the farming environment constructs a unique childhood with commonalities, that are evident across localities. However, the rural locality is also an important contributing factor as more remote farming families are confronted with more extreme and challenging conditions engendered by the isolation, and severe elements. For example, the conditions
experienced by some remote MacKenzie farming families during the Big Snow (2006) when they were without power, telephone and civic assistance for several weeks. The central role of farming in the pioneering context of New Zealand history has consolidated the importance of self sufficiency skills and incorporated this within the rural myth (C. Bell, 1997; Phillips, 2008).

Factors Constraining and Facilitating Parenting in Rural New Zealand

Parenting is facilitated by notions of community Parents in my study emphasise aspects of community in constructing rural childhood, and contributing to the well being of children and families. Aspects of community that are valued by rural parents include social participation and inclusion, reciprocity of care shown toward children and neighbours, and parental involvement in children’s activities. Parents frequently talked about people ‘helping out’ in a range of situations, such as if they needed a ride, or someone to look after the children, or if a child was hurt or a friend died. One MacKenzie parent described it as ‘an unwritten law, that if someone wants something then you get help’. The notion of community is perceived by parents and children as supportive and enhancing safety (Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000; Valentine, 1997).

The aspects of community valued by parents in this study are those which empirical evidence suggests are high in rural communities, that is; a sense of community and neighbourhood cohesion (Boyd et al., 2008). These provide community members with strong social connections and a sense of belonging, embodied in reciprocal support and collective efficacy working together for the common good. Parents in the more remote rural areas indicate a high degree of this, apparent in supportive social networks and parental involvement in community activities, like working bees. They also are more likely to acknowledge the negative aspects of close knit communities, such as social exclusion in the form of scrutiny, criticism and gossip. One MacKenzie parent noted her loneliness when first moving to live in the area as “everyone knows each other, went to school together, related to each other - it’s kind of hard working out who’s related to who and how things work”. While
another MacKenzie parent described the wariness she felt toward her from other women when she returned to live in the community as a single mother.

**Parenting is constrained by aspects of social isolation and economic deprivation.** Parents in my study were constrained by aspects of social isolation and economic deprivation, directly related to rural living. One key constraint is the lack of, or limited, services and facilities available in rural areas, which necessitates increased travel time and costs. Parents in all areas acknowledged the increased petrol costs, and the impact of this in limiting children’s participation in activities, frequency of shopping trips and increasing financial stress. Children were also aware of this, referring to changes in their activities and parental stress, with one child graphically describing her mother as being ‘real stressful’ because of the travelling which ‘drives her up the walls, because we’re not going to sell our truck and the price of petrol is going up’.

Deficiencies in health services are a significant concern for rural parents. There are difficulties associated with accessing local primary health care, and problems associated with specialist and after-hours care in urban areas. A significant problem for a few rural parents has been managing when children require hospitalisation in cities at a distance from their home. For example, despite the changes made by the government in addressing the concerns of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2003) regarding mental health services for rural young people (New Zealand Government, 2008), the experiences of one participant revealed that this still an area of concern. The situation involved considerable travel and resulted in increased family stress related to employment commitments and provision of care for other children, whilst attending to the child hospitalised in an urban centre. In addition to this the earlier crisis and assessment process was woefully inadequate.

The lack of educational options is another factor significantly affecting rural families. This is particularly so with regard to high school and is compounded if parents consider the teaching to be unsatisfactory or the range of subjects inadequate. The option of boarding school chosen by some parents is expensive and one they are not entirely at ease with,
expressing feelings of guilt at parting from children, but rationalising the choice financially and in terms of benefit to the children, with access to after school activities.

An area that did not receive much attention in the interviews is the dangerous aspect of rural life regarding children's use of vehicles, including motorbikes and ATVs. This creates tension between children's need for protection, their own and their parents' wish for them to participate in what they consider to be one of the beneficial aspects of rural life, and for some agricultural families, the need for children to use vehicles to provide necessary labour. It can be distilled to a tension between children's rights – to protection and to participation, occurring within a context in which farm children particularly, are seen as highly competent and skilled participants, yet the wider social discourses perceive them as vulnerable and needing protection.

Sufficient affluence and mobility is required to overcome the inconveniences caused by geographical isolation (Shucksmith, 2004). However, for families already under financial pressure, or contending with low income or poverty, the inconveniences and difficulties associated with rural living are exacerbated. Financial deprivation can have a more socially isolating effect on children and families than geographical location. It reduces opportunities for social participation, compounding travel difficulties, and limiting choices that are already constrained by the rural location.

**Implications of the Study**

This study makes a contribution to increasing understanding of the social conditions of rural New Zealand childhood, from the perspectives of rural children and parents themselves. Participants have identified factors that contribute both positively and negatively to rural living for family members. Two key themes emerge from the findings with respect to implications for policy development and implementation. The first of these highlights issues that are of concern or requiring policy consideration, such as social isolation, deficiencies in service provision, and children's safety in regard to motor vehicles. The second significant
theme, builds directly on my findings about the diversity of rural voices. There is a clear need to take these multiple rural perspectives into consideration in policy development. These two themes are considered in turn.

A key area of policy importance is reducing the negative impact of social isolation for rural children and families. Developments in ICT contribute significantly to this, even for families in very remote locations. Children use ICT for social purposes to maintain and extend social relationships, access information and educational resources, and to pursue recreational interests. Internet access is an important aspect of everyday learning for children at home and school. Parents use ICT similarly and also for commercial and business purposes. Globalisation is shifting national and conceptual boundaries and offering diverse opportunities. It is imperative, therefore, that there is consistent, reliable, affordable delivery of ICT services across New Zealand. Currently the rural internet service does not meet international ( Minority world) standards and is inconsistently available throughout the country (Sanders, Pauleen & Harmer, 2007), with some participants still using unreliable dial-up services. Shiblaq (2008/2009) suggests that the responsibility for improving uptake of ICT rests with rural residents, internet service providers and the government. There needs to be a commitment to upgrading and maintaining ICT infrastructure, including the provision of broadband technology and telecommunication networks. Ensuring that ICT is accessible throughout society could include making educational programmes available, community based computer access for those who do not have personal computers at home, and liaison between government, private business and schools in offering computer access and resources (Shiblaq, 2008/2009). Rural families should enjoy the same level of access to ICT as urban families.

Another focal area for policy consideration is the availability and accessibility of high quality services for rural families. In particular, provision of, and access to, health and education services is important. A key issue is the recruitment and retention of skilled primary health and medical practitioners in rural areas. Government funding initiatives include: incentives for rural General Practitioners (GPs) and midwives; a programme to identify and recruit rural GPs; an Accident Corporation (ACC) funded emergency service providing
support by rural GPs and nurses; and implementation of ‘telemedicine’, which uses telecommunications technology to link patients and clinicians and/or GPs and specialists (Fraser, 2007). A small number of deprived rural areas are accorded Special Medical Area status, and have GPs operating out of local base hospitals and maintaining a network of clinics to remote areas, in conjunction with a district nurse. These initiatives potentially increase the availability of health care in rural communities, which is of key importance to participants, particularly those in areas furthest away from urban centres and when medical emergencies require urgent attention. Similarly, specialist health practitioners must have the resources to travel as necessary to assess and meet patients’ needs in the rural community. Other government funded initiatives include a mobile surgical bus, mobile dental clinics and air ambulance services (Swarbrick, 2009). Even with these initiatives rural health services are a concern for rural residents and need ongoing prioritisation as an area for policy development and implementation.

An additional health issue, raised by participants, is the social and economic costs involved for rural families when accessing tertiary health care in urban areas. Specialist health or medical care in cities has implications for the whole family, with an important issue being accommodation for parents and family members. Low or no cost accommodation needs to be made available for family and whānau at hospital sites or nearby, such as the Ronald MacDonald House near Starship Children’s Hospital in Auckland, where families stay free of charge.76

Rural education is an area that also requires ongoing consideration. A number of initiatives are in place aimed at sustaining rural schools, including incentives for rural teachers, and support for ICT (Education Review Office, 2001). Given the limited educational options available in rural areas, and their implications for families who are dissatisfied, this is clearly an area that needs further review. The closure of rural schools is a significant concern for rural families affecting children’s access to education, social participation and rural community cohesiveness. Schools are often the social hub and play an essential role in the social well-

75 Primary Response in Medical Emergency service (PRIME)
76 Ronald MacDonald House is run by a community charitable trust and receives funding from the Ministry of Health, ACC, grant bodies, donations and bequests (http://www.rmhauckland.org.nz)
being of small rural communities. School closures force children to travel greater distances and longer times to new schools. They can also potentially contribute to an erosion of social networks in the community and opportunities to reduce social isolation and facilitate rural parenting are lost. When the Ministry of Education is assessing the economic realities of maintaining schools in rural areas that are experiencing depopulation, and consequently falling enrolment, the impact of school closures on the community, as well as on the individual students, needs to be taken into account and balanced.

The geographical distance of more rural and remote areas from urban centres makes it difficult to meet residents' needs for social resources. The availability of interagency services at a centralised rural site, such as Heartland Services, increases accessibility to services by rural families. The MacKenzie participants' use of, and satisfaction with, this service, indicates that this is a worthwhile initiative. Rural communities would benefit from this service being made available throughout rural New Zealand, with sufficient publicity to increase awareness of it.

The safety of rural children driving vehicles is a somewhat controversial issue that requires policy attention. Whilst the findings suggest that parents and children do not see this as an area of concern, there are clearly significant safety issues with the increasing number of rural children under the age of 15 riding motorbikes and driving ATVs (Cryer et al., 2009) and other vehicles in farm work and recreational contexts. This heightens concerns for children on farms, who are particularly at risk of agricultural workplace injury (Lovelock & Cryer, 2009), even though most parents in my study said they provide informal training and safety guidelines for their children. Campbell (2008) argues that social dialogue may be useful for improving rural child safety, but this is a lengthy process and "voluntary compliance with existing guidelines for the operation of ATVs is an insufficient strategy for reducing or eliminating existing risks to rural children" (p. 124). She therefore advocates legislative change to place restrictions on children operating vehicles, whilst acknowledging that this will be unpalatable to many rural people, including children. Currently the government is considering a proposal to raise the legal driving age from 15 to 16 years of age during 2010. This causes concern for rural residents who consider driving to be essential for young people.
in the absence of public transport. Many advocate raising driving standards through training instead. Social dialogue is an essential part of the process of ensuring children’s safety and a campaign raising awareness of the risks, the current high injury and fatality rates, and measures for improving safety is essential. Consulting rural families about proposed legislative changes is an important component of that dialogue.

In a more general vein, there also needs to be greater awareness of the potential impact of any social policy on rural families. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (2008b) has proposed ‘rural proofing’ policy, to ensure that the needs of the rural community are taken into account when developing and implementing policy. This includes special consideration of connection infrastructure, access to services, and ease and cost of compliance. I contend that the impact on rural families and children also needs specific evaluation in this context. There is an obligation under Article 3(1) of the UNCRC to ensure that the best interests of the child become a primary consideration in all actions affecting children, which should be incorporated into all policy development. The consideration of impact on rural children and families is particularly essential, given the potential for idyllic rural imaginings to obscure the more difficult aspects of rural life. As one of the parents in this study said, as a message to local body politicians:

You just need to be thinking in every policy document you write – how will this affect families - rural families, all families? (Rod01, mother)

This leads onto the second key theme to emerge from my findings with regard to their policy implications - that of the diversity of rural voices and experience. Whilst there are important issues specifically relevant to rural living that need to be addressed by government and policy makers, as discussed above, I also consider it is essential that rural New Zealand is not regarded as a singular voice. Rather, my selection of the four areas from which I recruited the participants, together with my findings, clearly shows the diversity that exists in current rural lives. Some rural voices are already apparent in political and policy debates, but these are mostly associated with advocacy on behalf of farmers, such as Federated Farmers and Rural Women (formerly the Country Women’s Institute). However, other rural voices, including
those of children, lifestylers and smallholders are evident and need to be heard too. This will help to shift rural policy away from the more generalised approach that conflates the 'rural' with the 'agricultural', as shaped by rural mythology and New Zealand’s farming heritage, to a better understanding of the nuances of rural life across a range of lifestyles and family situations.

My study, therefore, highlights the importance of consulting with children and parents from the range of rural locations within our country. The dominance of the rural idyll and the New Zealand rural myth in lay and popular discourses, has the potential to obscure the realities of rural life. It is essential that the multiple voices of rural people are heard with regard to rural matters. Children, as well as parents, have opinions and ideas about their everyday lives and experiences, that they are capable of expressing. Historically, children’s voices have been subsumed within families, or silenced altogether. However, it is clear that children’s perspectives may differ from their parents’ and it is thus essential that children’s voices are sought and listened to. Furthermore, under Article 12 of the UNCRC, children have the right to express an opinion in matters that affect them and to have that opinion given due weight. Alongside this obligation, there is valuable insight to be gained by ensuring that rural children are included in forums established to hear the voices of children.

This study also demonstrates that children’s participation in research is crucial to understanding their experiences. It adds to the existing body of literature showing that children have much to offer and provides valuable insight into constructions of childhood and the social world. The unique perspective that children bring to this study highlights their competency, agency and voice, and the importance of structuring research in ways that facilitate children’s authentic participation.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

There are limitations inherent in the design of my research study. One limitation of this, and qualitative research studies generally, is that small samples are used and findings cannot
be generalised to the whole, or a wider, population. This study does not survey and provide information about the wider rural New Zealand context. What it does is explore in depth the perspectives and experiences of a small number of people.

Another limitation relates to the self selection of participants in the sample. It may be that parents attracted to participating in this study have a vested personal interest in promoting the rural childhood idyll, and thus it is disproportionately emphasised. The participants' motivation for taking part in this study is not known. In hindsight it would have been an interesting question to have asked, and may perhaps have shed even more light on the themes that have emerged. Some parents stated their reasons for participating. Four parents told me that they wanted to ensure that I got a rounded, balanced view of rural living in their area, without particular views dominating. These parents all felt strongly that the rural culture was changing for the worse with the increased migration of urban newcomers. Two other parents told me clearly that they saw research as a valuable activity, and thought that my study could potentially benefit rural families. I gained the impression that many of them just wanted to talk about, and promote, the rural lifestyle they feel strongly about.

Research is important to me because of doing study and reading other people's research. It's important to me that they have a view of the rural area too. And that we have a voice. Everything that they perceive about here is the negative aspect of it. But people come here and they love it so much they stay. It's a nice place to live in. There's a true sense of belonging I should say. (Nor01, mother)

Likewise, the motivation of children to participate in this study is not known. Some children indicated that they thought it would be an interesting experience. Other children seemed unsure initially as to what the study was about, and indicated that their parents had wanted to take part and so had encouraged them to. Whatever their reasons were for taking part, the children who did, negotiated aspects of their participation, and indicated that they had enjoyed aspects of the process. They expressed enthusiasm over talking about their lives, creating artwork and photographs, and some children asked me to think of any more questions
I could ask them, with a few even suggesting some more.77 There was full sample retention, over the extended time frame, which also indicates an ongoing commitment to the process of the study.

A weakness in the analysis of data in my study is that participants have not seen and verified the findings. Research reports will be sent to children and parents at the completion of this project, following submission of the thesis. Attention has been given to detail in the data collection and analysis process, and in writing these up, to help ensure the credibility of the study in asserting that the findings reflect the opinions of the participants.

Further areas for research have emerged in the process of undertaking this study. This study conceptualises rural childhood as a social construction, that is shaped by locality, the demands of the physical environment, social discourses and lived experiences, in a particular sociocultural context. This study has highlighted some of these social variables which require further research in relation to rural childhood. These areas include ethnicity, gender and socioeconomic position.

My study has touched on experiences and constructions of rural childhood for Māori, mostly in the context of Māori families in Northland. This has raised issues about the unique relationship Māori have with the land and their strong rural traditions, within the context of whānau. These impact on constructions and experiences of rural childhood, giving the impression of a significant focus on social aspects of rural living for children and parents. This is an important area for further research.

Research from other Minority world countries indicates that gender is a social variable that has a significant impact on rural childhood constructions and experience. Interestingly, gender did not appear as a significant feature in my study. However, it was not a focus and was therefore not specifically targeted in the data collection. It thus remains relatively unexplored in the New Zealand rural context.

---

77 These suggestions included ‘Would you rather live in the country or the city?’, ‘Would you rather live on a farm or in town?’ and ‘What wildlife lives around here?’
Rural childhood research has given little attention to the effect of socioeconomic status, so that is an area that clearly needs further research. I have suggested that financial deprivation impacts on children’s social participation in rural areas to the extent that, combined with geographical location, it further compounds social isolation and deprivation.

Further research is needed into the aspects of rural life that children and families perceive as beneficial, primarily the social and community aspects. This study draws attention to the unique contexts of rural environments for children and families’ everyday experience, and social participation and the weight given to the role of community in facilitating parenting. This could be further explored using a social capital framework to provide greater understanding of the processes and practices which support children and parents’ positive experiences and enhance individual and community wellbeing, with subsequent implications for social policy development. The importance placed on aspects of social capital by parents in rural communities, and the lack of research regarding this with respect to children, suggest it would be another potentially fruitful direction for further research.

**Concluding Comments**

The purpose of this study was to increase understanding about rural New Zealand childhood, which holds a special, and idealised, place in the affection of New Zealanders. This study extends our knowledge of rural childhood, showing its multifaceted nature across a range of environments. The inclusion of participants from four distinctly different rural areas, provides insight into the commonalities of experience and the influence of place on the diversity of rural childhood. The rural childhood idyll is a dominant aspect of constructions of rural childhood, with varying emphasis given to it in different areas. Sociocultural context shapes this unique construction of rural New Zealand childhoods, integrating aspects of New Zealand’s rural history and mythology with current lived experiences.

Diversity occurs as a consequence of rural locality, particularly with regard to the influence of urban areas and proximity to services and facilities. Factors other than locality also
contribute to diversity in rural New Zealand childhood. Farming and agricultural contexts are a unique setting, highlighting the capacity of children to participate in complex activities in challenging conditions, demonstrating their agency and competencies in the context of parental relationships and expectations, in combination with the demands and opportunities of the physical environment. Social variables also have significant impact on the construction of childhood. In the current social context, with globalisation and technological developments, financial hardship is potentially a bigger factor in producing social isolation for rural children than geographical isolation.

The methodology used to access the voices of rural children and their parents was critically important to allow children to express a unique perspective which was distinct from, yet overlapping with, their parents’ perspectives. Parents participating in this study tended to downplay any negative aspects of rural living and present an idealised view of rural childhood, consistent with lay and popular discourses. Children, however, presented a more integrated picture of rural living, drawing on social discourses and their own lived experiences. This provides a more robust view of rural childhood and allows a greater understanding of the social conditions.

This study extends rural childhood theory by challenging the modernistic dualisms of rural and urban, and childhood and adulthood. A more nuanced view of rural childhood is uncovered in which characteristics traditionally considered rural and urban are integrated. Furthermore, children are identified as social participants who are capable, in the sociocultural context of multiple relationships, of much more than would usually be expected.

Children’s voice, as an expression of their agency, is vital in any exploration of matters affecting them. This study demonstrates the importance of consultation with children, and the important contribution their participation in research makes to our understanding of childhood. It contributes to the body of literature indicating that children’s perspectives are unique and worthy of attention. The unique contribution made by children to this study extends our understanding of rural childhoods, allowing us to get closer to what rural New Zealand childhoods ‘really’ are.
REFERENCES


Fairweather, J. (1996). ‘We don’t want to see our neighbours’ washing’. *New Zealand Geographer, 2*, 76-83.


324


MacDougall, C., Schiller, W., & Darbyshire, P. (2009). What are our boundaries and where can we play? Perspectives from eight- to ten-year-old Australian metropolitan and rural children. *Early Child Development and Care, 179*, 189-204.


Neufield, S., Wright, S., & Gaut, J. (2002). Not raising a “bubble kid”: Farm parents’ attitudes and practices regarding the employment, training and supervision of their children. The Journal of Rural Health, 18, 57-66.


Appendix A

Urban/Rural Profile Categories: North Island

Urban/Rural Profile Categories

- Main urban area
- Satellite urban community
- Independent urban community
- Rural area with high urban influence
- Rural area with moderate urban influence
- Rural area with low urban influence
- Highly rural/remote area

Source: Statistics New Zealand, Census of Population and Dwellings, 2001
Urban/Rural Profile Categories: South Island

Urban/Rural Profile Categories
- Main urban area
- Satellite urban community
- Independent urban community
- Rural area with high urban influence
- Rural area with moderate urban influence
- Rural area with low urban influence
- Highly rural/remote area
- State highway

Source: Statistics New Zealand, Census of Population and Dwellings, 2001
March 2008

Dear Parent/s

Re: Rural Childhoods - Research Project

I am doing a research study talking with children and parents who live in the country about their everyday experiences. I would like to invite you and your child to take part in this research project.

I am interested in what life is like for children growing up in the country today, and what it is like for parents (or those in a parenting role) raising children in rural areas. The aim of this project is to find out about growing up in rural New Zealand, from the perspectives of children and their parents. I have enclosed pamphlets to tell you and your child more about the study and what it involves.

Your child’s school, or an agency or person known to you has sent you this letter on our behalf, to see if you are interested in participating in the research. They will not have any further involvement or access to your families’ interview material.

If you are interested in taking part in the study or finding out more about it please contact me by email (mapowell@clear.net.nz), phone (09) 4229747 or Freephone 0800 0800 88 and leave a message with your details, or text 021 02524257. Or, you can fill in the enclosed consent form and send it to me in the stamped addressed envelope provided. Then I will contact you.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Mary Ann Powell
Ph.D. Student Researcher
Who can take part?

You can take part if:
- You are in Year 4, 5 or 6 at school; and
- You have lived in the country for longer than 6 months

What if you change your mind?

If you change your mind and don’t want to take part that is okay. You can say that you want to stop anytime.

If, when we are talking, you want to stop talking or turn the tape off then that’s okay. If you don’t want to answer some of the questions, that’s okay too.

What now?

If you want to take part then you need to talk to your parents or caregivers about it. They have been given some information about this project to read too. If both you and they decide that you can take part then they can let me know. Then I will come and meet with you to talk about it some more.

My contact details are:
- Mary Ann Powell
  - PhD student
  - Children’s Issues Centre
  - University of Otago
  - PO Box 56, Dunedin

E-Mail: mapowell@clear.net.nz
Freephone: 0800 0800 88, and leave a message for Mary Ann.

Rural NZ Childhoods:
Living in the country
A Research Project

Information for children
Children living in the country

What is the research for?
Hi, my name is Mary Ann Powell and I am writing a report for my University work. It's like a homework project. My report is going to be about what life is like for children who live in the country and what they think about it.

If you agree to take part I would like you to talk with me about living in the country. Lots of children live in the country and adults don't always know what they think. So this report will help to let adults know.

You don't have to talk to me if you don't want to. If you decide not to that is okay.

What do we want to do?
First, if you are interested, I would like to meet with you to talk about the project and see if you want to take part. You can ask me any questions you like before deciding.

If you do agree to take part then I will ask you to do a picture or story using drawing or photos or words or whatever you like to help me understand about living in the country.

I will also ask you some questions about what it is like for children living where you do and what kind of things children do or would like to do there.

The talk and the pictures are not like a test - there are no right or wrong answers.

I will also be talking to your parents or caregivers at a different time about what it is like for them living in the country.

What will happen to the information?
All your information will be CONFIDENTIAL. This means that the only people who see or hear your story will be the people doing the research. But, if you tell me something that means you or other people are not safe, then I'll talk to you about that and we'll work out what to do.

When we are talking I will put the tape on so that I can remember what you have said. The words on the tape will then be typed. The tape and the typed copy of your words will only be seen by me, my teachers (Anne and Nicola), the typist, and maybe a helper.

After we have finished the project your story will be locked away for 5 years, then destroyed because those are the University rules.

When I write my report I won't use your real name. You can choose a fake name for me to use. This way your information will be private.
Who can participate?

We are seeking participants for this study who:
• Are children in Years 4-6 at Primary School, and their parents; and
• Live in a rural area; and
• Have lived in a rural area for at least 6 months.

What will happen to your information?

The information we collect will be securely stored and all personal details will be destroyed at the end of the study. Any raw material on which the results of the project depend will be kept in secure storage for five years (as is University policy), after which it will be destroyed.

Once the study is complete we will provide you and your child with feedback on the findings. The results of the research will be written up in a report that will also be available for you and others to read. Articles will also be published in journals and presented at conferences.

We gratefully acknowledge the financial support of Save the Children and the Ministry of Social Development SPESR Linkages Programme.

Who can participate?

We are seeking participants for this study who:
• Are children in Years 4-6 at Primary School, and their parents; and
• Live in a rural area; and
• Have lived in a rural area for at least 6 months.

What will happen to your information?

The information we collect will be securely stored and all personal details will be destroyed at the end of the study. Any raw material on which the results of the project depend will be kept in secure storage for five years (as is University policy), after which it will be destroyed.

Once the study is complete we will provide you and your child with feedback on the findings. The results of the research will be written up in a report that will also be available for you and others to read. Articles will also be published in journals and presented at conferences.

We gratefully acknowledge the financial support of Save the Children and the Ministry of Social Development SPESR Linkages Programme.

What now?

If, after reading the information, you and your child would like to participate in this study or to find out more information you can:
• Sign the enclosed parent’s consent form and post it in the envelope provided to Mary Ann Powell, who will then contact you. (Your child will be asked to sign their consent form at the first meeting)
• Email Mary Ann at mapowell@clear.net.nz
• Phone Mary Ann on (09) 4229747 or the Children’s Issues Centre on freephone 0800 0800 88, and leave your details for Mary Ann to contact you.

If you and your child decide not to be involved you do not need to do anything.

If you or your child have any questions about this project, either now or in the future, you are welcome to contact Mary Ann.

Supervisors:
Nicola Taylor: nicola.taylor@otago.ac.nz
Anne Smith: anneb.smith@otago.ac.nz
Children’s Issues Centre,
University of Otago,
PO Box 56, Dunedin.

Rural New Zealand Childhoods:
Children’s and parents’ experiences of living in the country
A Research Project

Information for parents and guardians

We gratefully acknowledge the financial support of Save the Children and the Ministry of Social Development SPESR Linkages Programme.

Save the Children
New Zealand
A significant proportion of New Zealand's population, one in seven people, live in rural areas, but very little is known about their everyday lives. Views of growing up in the country include those of wholesome and carefree childhoods and, conversely, ones shaped by deprivation and hardship. Researching the everyday experiences of children and parents living in the country is important for understanding and advocating for the wellbeing of rural families.

We are inviting children and their parents to participate in a research study looking at families' experiences of rural childhood in New Zealand.

**The aim of the study**

This research project aims to find out about growing up in rural New Zealand, from the perspectives of children and their parents.

Mary Ann Powell is undertaking this project for a Ph.D. in Childhood and Youth studies through the Children’s Issues Centre, University of Otago. Every stage of the project is supervised and supported by two supervisors - Professor Anne Smith and Dr Nicola Taylor.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee.

---

**What will the study involve?**

If you and your child agree to take part, you will both be asked to provide information about children’s experiences of growing up in rural New Zealand.

Children will be asked to:
- Meet the researcher to talk about the project and give consent to participate;
- Construct a picture to describe experiences of growing up in the country;
- Participate in an individual interview and talk about their everyday experiences;
- Participate in a focus group discussion with up to five other children about living in the country.

Parents will be asked to:
- Participate in an individual interview and talk about their parenting experiences and their perspectives of rural childhood;
- Keep a brief record of their children’s activities for one week;
- Participate in a focus group discussion with other parents living in the same area.

One year later Mary Ann will interview each child and parent again.

The individual interviews with you and with your child will be an hour maximum and will be audiotaped.

This project involves an open-questioning technique where the precise nature of the questions which will be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops. If the line of questioning develops in such a way that you or your child feel hesitant or uncomfortable you (or they) may withdraw from the project at any stage without any disadvantage.

---

**Voluntary and confidential participation**

Participation in the research is entirely voluntary. Consent forms are used to confirm that you and your child’s participation is voluntary and will be treated confidentially.

You and your child may withdraw from participation in the project at any stage during the interview process or up to a month following your interview.

There is no payment for participating in the research study, however all materials necessary will be provided and provision will be made for reimbursement of travel costs to attend interviews or focus groups. The location of individual interviews will be at a place agreed with you, such as your home.

We will respect your right to confidentiality. The only people who will have access to the interview material will be myself, Anne and Nicola, and possibly a Maori cultural advisor (if you and/or your child are Maori).

We will ensure that there is no identifying material, such as names and geographical location, used in writing up the study. Your child will be asked to choose a pseudonym.

If your child reveal any issues of concern or information relating to the safety of themselves, or any other person, we will discuss this with you and them and arrange support from an appropriate agency.

---

Voluntary and confidential participation

Participation in the research is entirely voluntary. Consent forms are used to confirm that you and your child's participation is voluntary and will be treated confidentially.

You and your child may withdraw from participation in the project at any stage during the interview process or up to a month following your interview.

There is no payment for participating in the research study, however all materials necessary will be provided and provision will be made for reimbursement of travel costs to attend interviews or focus groups. The location of individual interviews will be at a place agreed with you, such as your home.

We will respect your right to confidentiality. The only people who will have access to the interview material will be myself, Anne and Nicola, and possibly a Maori cultural advisor (if you and/or your child are Maori).

We will ensure that there is no identifying material, such as names and geographical location, used in writing up the study. Your child will be asked to choose a pseudonym.

If your child reveal any issues of concern or information relating to the safety of themselves, or any other person, we will discuss this with you and them and arrange support from an appropriate agency.
Appendix E

Rural Childhoods: Growing up in the country
Consent form for Parents/Guardians

I have read the Information Sheet concerning this project and understand what it is about. I have read the Information Sheet and Consent Form given to my child. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage. I know that:

1. My participation in the project is entirely voluntary;

2. My child's participation in the project is entirely my choice and their own;

3. If my child chooses not to participate that takes precedence over my consent for their participation;

4. I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without any disadvantage;

5. My child is free to withdraw from the project at any time without any disadvantage;

6. The audio tapes will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project but any raw data (for example, transcripts of interviews, parent's written records, children's pictures) on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which it will be destroyed;

7. This project involves an open-questioning technique. There is no set format and the questions asked will depend on the way the interview develops. If I am uncomfortable with the line of questioning or unhappy with what is being asked I can refuse to answer any particular questions(s). If my child is uncomfortable with the line of questioning or unhappy with what is being asked he/she can refuse to answer any particular question(s).

8. The results of the project may be published in journal articles, presented at conferences and also will be available in the University library but every attempt will be made to preserve my and my child's anonymity in any reports on the research.

I agree to take part in this project and I agree that my child may take part in this project.

(Signature of participant) .......................................................... (Date)

Participant’s name & preferred contact details: ..........................................................
(eg. Phone/Email/Postal address) ..............................................................................
............................................................................................................................

This project has been reviewed and approved by the
University of Otago Human Ethics Committee

349
Appendix F

Copy only

This is a copy of the children’s consent form, included for parent’s information. Children will be asked to sign a consent form at the first meeting with Mary Ann.

Rural Childhoods: Living in the country

Children’s Consent Form

Mary Ann has told me that:

• If I don’t want to talk to her that’s okay.
• She will be asking me questions about what I think about growing up in the country.
• There are no right or wrong answers and that if I don’t want to answer some of the questions that okay.
• Anytime I want to stop talking that’s okay and she will turn the tape off.
• She is writing a report for her University work.
• She will write about some of the things I’ve talked about but won’t use my name.
• The tape and the copy of my words from the tape will only be seen by her, her teachers (Anne and Nicola), the person that did the typing and maybe a helper.
• The tape and the copy of my words from the tape will be kept private.
• If I have any worries about our talk then I can talk with her about that.

I agree its ok for Mary Ann to talk to me.

I agree its ok for Mary Ann to use the tape.

........................................... (I agree) Day..................................

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Otago

Human Ethics Committee
Appendix G

The Most Important Things for People to Know

Canterbury

Well if they want to go live on a life style block I think it’s wise to have not too much acres, so it’s not too big for them to manage. It can be better to start with not as much land, easier to control. If people want animals – some animals actually need the space – like horses, can’t just live in a back yard.
– 9er49er, 12 year old girl

Learning to do new things and look at new stuff.
– Ashley Lewie, 12 year old girl

There are trees, fields, animals. You can run round naked. You can pretty much do anything, run round, bike round. There are no footpaths and be careful ‘cause down there they go a hundred k’s [kilometres] an hour. There was a guy who walked across the road and got squished by a bus ... The traffic moves fast. And some people have guns and they shoot signs.
– Chilli Sauce, 9 year old boy

That’s there no traffic and its real fun.
– Dante, 10 year old boy

Probably that it’s a really nice village and if you’re deciding to live in a village or countryside it’s a good idea ‘cause then you’d have more animals - if you liked them. In the city you’d probably not have that much, only a cat or a dog. In countrysides and villages you make quite a lot of friends. And you have heaps of fun going to school [grounds] after school and playing on the playgrounds. And you can also go out and play on rollerblades or bikes or whatever you have – scooters and that.
– Isabella, 10 year old girl
That it’s got lovely trees and there’s no … okay, there is heaps of pollution. I was going to say not much, but there is, because of the dairy farms. The cow poo. It’s nice to drive round the countryside and have picnics. It’s nice for biking.

– Johnny English, 10 year old boy

If you live around here you should be more outside and enjoying the land you’ve got ‘cause if you think about other countries where they’re all closed in … You should enjoy being outside; not do things inside the whole time. Like, even in town they don’t have much room to go around in. And in the real populated countries like China there’s houses everywhere and they don’t have much places for farming. And if they do since it’s so important they don’t let anyone on to it. Soon town is going to expand and come out here – already in [nearby area] got lots of subdivisions going in.

– Josh, 11 year old boy

It’s funner than the city. More things to do than the city. Different things in the city, but more fun in the country. Fun sports. Running round and playing games.

– Poseidon, 9 year old boy

Getting the fresh air and having the amount of space you can play in, instead of playing out in the streets. And then you can experience a whole lot of new things in your life out here. You can find out a whole lot of things and you try new things that you don’t really want to do. Sometimes we have people come and visit and they don’t want to go in the river and sometimes I push them in and sometimes they go into the kayak and its sort of unstable, so they fall in then they realize that it’s not actually that bad. Also in the country you can get a whole lot of broken bones and bruises ‘cause you experience the new things but I think that’s a way of learning what not to do and what to do. Like, I like to climb trees too and I haven’t had a broken bone yet, and if you find a branch and it’s a bit hard to get to and then you accidentally fall off and you break a bone or get a really bad injury, you learn that you can’t really get up there or that trees too high for you. I have had some bruises from doing that.

– Sharpay-A, 9 year old girl
You normally have more things to do. If you want to be left alone there’s lots of room, so it’s easier to be on your own.

- Sharpay-D, 10 year old girl

I don’t know. Same as living anywhere else it just depends ‘cause people are probably used to living different places. Like they are probably used to living in town and don’t really mind it, but if they came out here they probably would mind it. We are used to living out here, but if we moved into town you would notice the difference. I’d rather be country.

- Shubba-lubba-ding-dong, 11 year old boy

It’s nice having the space to play. Do stuff outside. And you can have all kinds of pets, indoor pets – cats - that can still go outside as well. Such far away from school as we are, you don’t have to use a lot of petrol, you can just go on the bus like we do.

- The Simpsons, 9 year old girl

Rodney

It’s important to know where are all the forest and the main roads are – it’s a big forest – have to learn to navigate it and know where you’ve been. Important to know everyone in [this area] – they always try to get to know you and they bond with you. So you gotta know that they’ll be there for you. Living here is easy riding – kind of easy to adapt to it.

- Bill, 11 year old boy

It’s probably a very good place to grow up in ‘cause there’s lots more room and you can be louder. You can climb trees – ‘cause I don’t know who all these trees [in rural township] belong to. We can just go onto the farmer’s property. We made a tree hut over there … There’s not as much privacy here in [small rural] town. Here if you play outside there are always people watching you.

- Billy Buster, 11 year old boy
How people don’t really have to drive everywhere and stuff, we can just walk around. There’s not many people, so you can make heaps of friends.

– Bobbalina, 11 year old girl

If you’ve never seen what it’s like to be out in the countryside … You can see more animals. There’s more space. Better environment. Better oxygen. Healthier.

– Jack, 10 year old boy

Important to know that people do what they like doing – like planting trees or baking. It’s different from what kids do in the city – more trees, more quiet, plant more stuff, have more space.

– Lula, 7 year old girl

Townies wouldn’t like to be in front of the TV every two seconds. What it’s like to be outside having fun outside, things you can enjoy outside. TV is not the most important thing in the world. Being outside can be as much fun as being on playstation. Books can be really fun.

– Luna, 12 year old girl

Big responsibilities - they have to look after everything on the farm otherwise they, the animals, will die. If you live in town it’s quite different, have more space [in the country]. And there’s more things to do.

– Maggy, 10 year old girl

If they live in the city and they’d like to move to the country [important to know] that if you’ve got cows, or something like that, you got to be nice to them, not be mean like stamp on their feet. But if you really need to do things to them, like my dad has to sometimes, then you have to do it. Sometimes you have to be kind of mean to them if they don’t do what you need them to do. Like we killed [dog] ‘cause he had a really infected leg and we couldn’t help it.

– Victoria, 7 year old girl
It’s mostly just more work, then you have more time to do things. You’re out of the way of town life so you’re usually more calm. More time to do things. There are more responsibilities, but when you’re doing them you can have fun with them too. If we’re going to get the eggs or something we can just make a game of it. We hang around down there so it takes longer than it’s supposed to be. Have more fun.

– William Crooks, 11 year old boy

**Northland**

Don’t wear funny clothes – like townie clothes. Because some people go round asking for stuff, and they will think you are rich. Have a lock and alarm. Have a phone, a cell phone, so you can call someone.

– Alice, 12 year old girl

That it’s a fun place. And quiet – if we’re not playing around outside.

– Hannah, 12 year old girl

There’s lots of cows always out on the road ‘cause people are always shifting their cows around. Then heaps of people might crash if they don’t know. And it floods when it rains – across the road. We normally have short days [*at school*]. The bridge gets covered and the bus can’t get across so school closes. People should come out here and go for a swim.

– Jenna, 12 year old girl

Watch out for the drunk people down the village. A guy tried to bowl over his girlfriend with a tractor.

– Kaia, 9 year old girl

The company is important. That we always get more company, ‘cause every time we go down for a swim there’s heaps of people down there that we can talk to. There’s a lot of shade. There’s lots of trees. I’ll go outside later and I’ll feel hot and I’ll go into the shade, then go for a swim. That’s the plan for the day.

– Princess Fiona, 10 year old girl
MacKenzie

They could have lots of pets.
– Genevieve, 10 year old girl

Depends what sort of people they are … Some people think farms are scabby and got insects and poo. Some people think it’s gorgeous land and beautiful looking animals. It’s sort of hard to say. I see it as beautiful.
– Laurie, 12 year old girl

When you’re out in the country you get a lot of open space. And in other countries the kids in a school, that has 1000 pupils, have only probably the size of this field to play in. We have a big field and big, big, little patches of grass to play in and a huge playground.
– Poo Spider, 10 year old boy

There are sort of more opportunities to play outside, ‘cause sometimes when you live in town you don’t have as much area to run around and do what you like. I like being outside. Some kids don’t like running round as much as some kids. Some kids like doing different things.
– Roxy, 11 year old girl

When you’re near trees, stay where there are no trees that could fall near or on you. That’s the most safest thing to do when there is a big, big wind. It happened at school. I thought there was a tornado nearby. A tree fell down.
– Sam, 7 year old boy

I think you’ll get quite active round here ‘cause you’ve got paddocks to run round in.
– Victor, 10 year old boy

Probably [important to know] that sometimes its quite hard work, but you just have to get on and do it.
– xXx, 12 year old boy

358