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Capturing Realities of Informal Housing in Aotearoa/New Zealand

Implications for health and wellbeing

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

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ABSTRACT

Research shows population health outcomes are inextricably linked to a range of social indicators, with poor housing (along with lower levels of income, educational attainment and social connectedness) associated with poorer health. Attention in Aotearoa/New Zealand has increasingly focused on a lack of affordable housing which has forced people into crowded, substandard and/or 'informal' accommodation. According to Census figures, thousands of individuals and families are living in dwellings such as tents, garages, caravans and vans, classified as informal for the purposes of this study.

This thesis explores the 'realities' of those living in informal housing and considers implications for health and wellbeing. In-depth and follow-up interviews with twenty-five participants living in informal housing on the Coromandel Peninsula and fifteen within the Auckland conurbation (providing a rural and an urban sample) looked at participants' perceptions and experiences of their housing situations, health and wellbeing.

Thematic analysis of interviews highlights 'cultural collisions' between mainstream perceptions of housing and health and the perceptions of many of the participants, particularly on the Coromandel. Almost none of the Coromandel participants considered their informal housing compromised their health and wellbeing, although results were more mixed in Auckland. A possible explanation for this difference is the sense of empowerment and choice articulated by Coromandel participants, coupled with a strong sense of connection to the land.

The analysis also shows affordable accommodation was a fundamental concern for a majority in both samples and lack of money a frequent (although not universal) pathway into informal housing. Other factors included illness and other disruptive life events such as job loss, family breakdown, violence and natural disasters, along with lifestyle choices. Follow-up interviews six to twelve months later confirmed all but two of the Coromandel sample were in the same informal housing situations, while in contrast many of the Auckland sample had moved into mainstream housing.

Results of SF-36 and GHQ-12 self-report health questionnaires completed by participants showed no statistically significant differences from the national averages, although physical functioning was higher for both Coromandel and Auckland participants. These results support thematic analysis findings in terms of physical and mental health and wellbeing.

The 'cultural collisions' evident between participant and mainstream perceptions of what constitutes appropriate housing suggest a need for flexibility so that the resourcefulness of participants can be built on to promote health and wellbeing. This has implications for issues of compliance and public health and housing policies at both local and national government levels.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Above all I owe thanks to the forty participants who shared their lives and their experiences and ideas of housing and health with me. I learned so much from our encounters: thank-you for your time, your openness and your stories. I acknowledge your resourcefulness and spirit, and dedicate this research to you.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ABSTRACT</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>VII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>VIII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GLOSSARY</td>
<td>IX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROLOGUE</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A housing history</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This research</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants' housing – temporary, alternative or informal?</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and wellbeing – essentially subjective concepts?</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to voices from the margins</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter outlines</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concluding comments</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER TWO: BACKGROUND TO INFORMAL HOUSING</strong></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current context – the backdrop to informal housing</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auckland conurbation population and housing demographics</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coromandel population and housing demographics</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing trends – making it harder for those on low incomes</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In search of informal dwelling statistics</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undercounting</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimating overall housing need</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical context – housing a nation</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving health through housing</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responses to post-war shortage</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governments in retreat</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuing Māori disadvantage</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific parallels</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburbanisation and beyond</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concluding comments</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW</strong></td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic determinants of health and wellbeing</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place as a determinant of health and wellbeing</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuing disparities and mediating factors</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social cohesion/social capital as determinants of health</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with socioeconomic inequalities</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing as a determinant of health and wellbeing</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception as a mediating factor</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing tenure and policies</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homelessness</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FOUR: MEDIA DISCOURSES</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health discourses</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing discourses</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey of <em>New Zealand Herald</em> housing stories</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourses and power</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledging 'problems'</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People as 'problems'</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate housing as the 'problem'</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural collisions</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of the media</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concluding comments</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER FIVE: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS</th>
<th>77</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative Research</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnography</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied ethnography</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenology</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hermeneutics</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The method</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background exploration</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining the territory</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessing the participants</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview settings</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The interviews</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional experience</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysing the texts</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflexivity</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criteria for judging study</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical considerations</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concluding comments</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER SIX: DEMOGRAPHICS &amp; DESCRIPTIONS</th>
<th>101</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEP Indicators</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity – self identification</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant demographics</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photographs as ethnographic record/demographics</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal housing tenure</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concluding comments</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER SEVEN</th>
<th>115</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PATHWAYS INTO INFORMAL HOUSING</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural constraints and individual choice</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complexities of choice</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pathways into informal housing</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concluding comments</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER EIGHT: ECHOES OF A PIONEERING PAST</th>
<th>129</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concluding comments</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER THIRTEEN: HEALTH, HOME AND COMPLIANCE</strong></td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complexities of compliance</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morality and ‘risk’</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competing health perspectives</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Health risks?</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative ‘Public Health’</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural collisions</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concluding comments</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER FOURTEEN: DEMOGRAPHICS IN POETRY</strong></td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant (and researcher) perceptions</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concluding comments</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER FIFTEEN: DISCUSSION</strong></td>
<td>297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of research findings</td>
<td>298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tensions, collisions and paradoxes</td>
<td>307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting on the methodology</td>
<td>310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical considerations and dilemmas</td>
<td>314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengths and limitations of the study</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy implications</td>
<td>317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concluding comments</td>
<td>322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>REFERENCES</strong></td>
<td>327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A</td>
<td>349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B</td>
<td>351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D</td>
<td>355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix E</td>
<td>357</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1 Auckland Demographics .......................................................................................... 21
Table 2.2 Coromandel/Te Rerenga Demographics ................................................................. 23
Table 2.3 Informal Dwellings enumerated in 1996, 2001 and 2006 ........................................ 26
Table 2.4 Numbers living in informal dwellings (excluding baches) enumerated in the 2001 Census .................................................................................................................. 27
Table 4.1 Housing stories New Zealand Herald 1990-October 2002 (yearly averages) ........ 65
Table 6.1: Demographic table – 25 Coromandel participants ............................................... 104
Table 6.2: Utilities table – 20 Coromandel households (25 participants) .............................. 105
Table 6.3: Demographic table – 15 Auckland participants .................................................. 106
Table 6.4: Utilities table – 14 Auckland households (15 participants) ................................. 107
Table 6.5: Coromandel participants’ relationships with Land and Structures .................... 113
Table 5.1 Continuum of informal housing dissatisfaction-satisfaction: Coromandel .......... 174
Table 7.2 Continuum of informal housing dissatisfaction-satisfaction, Auckland ............ 175
Table 12.1 SF-36 New Zealand norms with comparisons of averaged Coromandel and Auckland participant results (percentages) ................................................................. 204
Table 12.2 GHQ-12 scores for the Coromandel and Auckland samples ............................. 205
Table 14.1: Empowered – Disempowered Continuum ......................................................... 294
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 0.1 A housing history ...................................................................................................... 5
Figure 1.1: Framework for capturing realities of informal housing ........................................ 15
Figure 2.1 Map of Auckland, Manukau, and Waitakere Cities .............................................. 20
Figure 2.2 Map of Coromandel and Te Rerenga ................................................................. 22
Figure 2.3 Map of Coromandel/Colville Ward ...................................................................... 23
Figure 2.4 Housing Tenure 1986 – 2006 .............................................................................. 25
Figure 4.1 House-as-'commodity' and housing social issues stories 1990-October 2002 ....... 67
Figure 6.1 Informal housing on the Coromandel ................................................................. 108
Figure 6.2 Informal housing in Auckland ............................................................................ 111
Figure 15.1 Framework for the montage of informal housing and dissemination of findings ................................................................................................................................................ 323
GLOSSARY

Glossary of Māori language terms

aroha  regard, love, compassion
atua  spirit, god
hapū  sub-tribe, clan
hauora  healthy
iwi  tribe
kāinga  village, usually of a single hapu
kaiako  teacher
kaitiaki  guardian, caretaker
karakia  incantation, prayer
kaumātua  elder
kaupapa  custom
kōhanga  pre-school education
kotahitanga  unity
kāmara  sweet potato
mana  spiritual power, authority, prestige
mana whenua  prestige/spiritual power from the land/locality
māmuka  teatree
marae  open space in front of meeting house used for gathering
māori  spiritual essence
mirimiri  massage
muka  flax fibre
nikau  species of tree fern
noa  free from tapu, or restrictions
ōhu  commune
papakāinga  village
Papatuanuku  Mother Earth
Pākehā  New Zealander of non-Māori descent, usually European
ponga  species of tree fern
rāhui  embargo
rangitahi  ephemeral, transient
raupo  bullrushes
tangata whenua  local people, original inhabitants
tahā hinengaro  mental aspects
tahā tinana  physical aspects
tahā whanau  family aspects
tahā wairua  spiritual aspects
tapu  religious restriction
tautoko  support
tūrangawaewae  home, ‘a place to stand’
tutū  mess about with
urupā  burial ground
wahi tapu  burial ground
waka  canoe or boat
whakapapa  genealogy
whānau  extended family
whaea  aunty, mother
whare  house
whenua  land, placenta

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AHB: Auckland Hospital Board
CRESA: Centre for Research, Evaluation and Social Assessment
DHB: District Hospital Board
DIY: do-it-yourself
GHQ-12: General Health Questionnaire with 12 questions
HNZC: Housing New Zealand Corporation
OECD: Organisation of Economic and Community Development
SEP: Socioeconomic position
SF-36: Short Form (health questionnaire) with 36 questions
SHORE: Centre for Social Health Outcomes Research and Evaluation
TCDC: Thames-Coromandel District Council
TLA: Territorial Local Authority
UK: United Kingdom
UN: United Nations
US: United States
WINZ: Work and Income New Zealand
WHO: World Health Organisation
Texts must recount the position from which the author speaks.

(Ezzy, 2002:56)

The important thing is to be aware of one’s own bias, so that the text can present itself on all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one’s own fore-meanings.

(Gadamer, 1975:269)

This thesis explores ‘realities’ of people living in informal accommodation. My own housing history is presented here, thus attempting to fulfill Ezzy’s (2002) stipulation that the text ‘recount the position from which the author speaks’ and allowing readers access to possible ‘biases’ and ‘fore-meanings’ (Gadamer, 1975) in the ‘montage’ of informal housing which follows. It is a history which has included inner city, rural and suburban living, a family bach, and time spent travelling around in van-as-home.

I was well into the participant interviews before realising many of the themes emerging were mirrored by my own varied housing experiences: frequent moves accentuating the importance of a nodal ‘family’ home as a base; ‘doubling up’ and shared facilities; uninsulated, damp dwellings; mobile home; communal ownership; investing in land with no legal security but a strong sense of ‘ownership’ and kaitiaki; ‘choice’ governed by available resources; close associations of ‘home’ with family; the return to the familiar...

I became acutely aware of the importance of home and the psychic significance of the dwellings of my past. As the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard wrote in The Poetics of Space, “our memories of former dwelling-places are relived as day-dreams and these dwelling-places of the past remain in us for all time” (Bachelard, 1994:6). Interviews with Coromandel participants also made me highly conscious of my own attachment to certain places and spiritual relationship to the land. A visceral sense of connection has been a doorway to understanding, albeit from the point of view of a fifth generation Pākehā settler,
the significance of the Māori concepts of wairua and turangawaewae and the role these, along with colonisation, continue to play in informal housing.

I acknowledge the Treaty of Waitangi, and the huge impact of colonisation on this land and its people.

I acknowledge those, Māori and Pākehā, who have lived on the Coromandel and in Auckland before me – and I particularly acknowledge my mother, Betty Edna Lewis, and my father, George Michael Carroll, without whom I would not exist...

A housing history

My mother used to joke she’d been on the waiting list for a state house for thirty years and was still waiting. By then she was living comfortably in her own home. But back in the early fifties, when as a single parent with three children under four and nowhere to live, she applied for a state house, this was not a joke.

I spent the first year and a half of my life in a Grey Lynn (Auckland) boarding house. It was 1949 and there was an acute post-war housing shortage (my aunt, uncle and baby cousin lived in similar circumstances close by). Bathroom and cooking facilities were shared. My grandparents lived around the corner in the family home my mother and aunt had grown up in. Throughout my childhood I spent a lot of time there, and that Grey Lynn house remained an important touchstone, or ‘node’, until my grandparents and great aunt died and it was sold thirty-two years ago.

We moved out of the boarding house and the city after the birth of my brother, into an old farm cottage which went with a share-milking3 job at Hikauai, on the Coromandel Peninsula. Today Hikauai is only a two-hour drive from Auckland; back in the early fifties the winding Kopu-Hikauai dirt road made it a formidable journey. I know living conditions were very basic, but my mother would never talk about those early years. Like many Pākehā of her generation growing up during the Depression and WWII, her focus was firmly present and future oriented: “the past is past”, she would say; “why would you want to go there?”

When I was three years old my mother was left alone with three children under four. That’s when she first applied for a state house. She took a housekeeping job on a farm in

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3 Share-milking is an arrangement whereby the ‘share-milker’ owns the cows but not the farm, sharing with the farm owner the returns on the milk and/or butter-fat produced in exchange for the use of his grazing and facilities.
Morrinsville (at the base of the Coromandel Peninsula) to keep us all together and then another on a farm in Waitakere (west of Auckland City). In between the two we moved briefly back into my grandparents’ house in Grey Lynn.

We lived in a ramshackle old farmhouse at Waitakere for three years. Now only a thirty minute drive from downtown Auckland, Waitakere township (store, school and railway station) was then in the ‘wop-wops’ at the end of a winding dirt road – and the farm a further eight kilometres on from the township. From a child’s perspective the house and the farm, the creek, the bush and the waterfall (Mokoroa Falls) were playground heaven; for my mother, isolated and plagued with back pain, it was probably housekeeping hell. Cooking was done on a coal range which also heated the water. There was a flush toilet (along with an old copper and tubs for laundry) in a wash house behind the house, but we generally used a long-drop toilet to save water. When the tank water inevitably ran out at the house in late summer, we washed at the cowshed, with water pumped up from the creek. From a health perspective, the farmhouse was very damp and inadequately heated and I was continually sick with bronchitis through the winter months.

The move when I was seven to a standard new three-bedroomed weatherboard-and-tile house with all the mod cons on a quarter-acre section in Papatoetoe (south of Auckland City and now part of Manukau City) must have been a great relief to my mother, and the large garden, sloping down to a willow-lined creek with orchard and wasteland beyond, again provided a great playground for us children. While the house was being finished, we once again stayed with my grandparents in Grey Lynn.

I lived in the Papatoetoe house for ten years. A small house by present-day standards for what became a family of six children after the birth of my half brother when I was ten, it seemed spacious enough by 1950s’ standards, and even stretched to accommodate my aunt, uncle and three cousins for some weeks when they moved back to Auckland from up North. My aunt and uncle slept in a caravan beside the house and we cousins ‘top and tailed’ (five girls in three beds in one bedroom and three boys in two in another, with the eldest boy on a divan in the sunroom) – an example of serious overcrowding by present-day standards. Like most pre-1970s’ houses in Aotearoa/New Zealand it was also un-insulated and very cold in winter, and I continued to be plagued by bronchitis.

From the age of twelve weekends and holidays were spent at the family bach at Algies Bay on the Mahurangi Peninsula (an hour and a half north of Auckland). The bach was formerly a transit house for returning WWII soldiers, sold for removal to make way for the
building of Auckland International Airport. It provided a base for extended family to come
together, for fishing and gathering shellfish, for swimming and sailing – and an existence
more governed by tides than time. The bach became another important family ‘node’.

A year and a half renting the upstairs half of an old house in Parnell (Auckland City) with
a girlfriend followed leaving the family home and beginning work as a journalist at eighteen.
Then came eight years overseas living in a range of rented accommodation in Melbourne,
Johannesburg, Nairobi and Paris, and included a year driving across the African continent in a
VW Combie van with my then partner. We ate, slept and washed outside the van as often as
in. As with most of the people in the villages around us – and many Coromandel participants
in particular – outdoor spaces were as much living space as any actual structure.

We returned to New Zealand at the end of 1976 with plans to live a communal and
sustainable rural existence. This was an era of communes and Ohu, of concerns about
squandering the world’s finite resources. But work kept us in Auckland and we bought a
house in Grey Lynn, where my two sons have grown up. The communal ideal remained
strong however, and led to a ten-year involvement in a co-operative farm (Waterfall Farm
north of Warkworth) an hour and a half from Auckland, where many weekends were spent
working and living together with the ten other shareholders and our several children. Again
the bush, paddocks and river provided a wonderful playground for the children.

I still live in the Grey Lynn house, which I share with four house-mates. It has always
been home for more than myself and my own children, now settled in places of their own. 5
And I am still involved in a co-operative rural venture, although for the past twenty years this
has been a Trust on the Coromandel, rather than Waterfall Farm. Before building our present
house there (complete with all mod cons), ‘home’ was a one-roomed A-frame dwelling, with
electricity but no running water, the kitchen in a separate caravan, the toilet a long-drop and a
‘bush bath’ for washing – similar to many other informal housing situations on the Peninsula.

There has been no conscious decision to recreate childhood and inter-generational
connections to Grey Lynn and the Coromandel, but never-the-less it has happened. I now

4 A government-sponsored scheme from the 1970s in which groups wishing to live communally and rurally
could lease unalienated Crown land.
5 An elderly couple knocked on the door in 2005 and said they had lived in the house for five years from 1951.
They had bought it cheap, they said, because it was tenanted, and in those post-war days you could not evict
tenants. For two years they had had to share the house with the encumbent tenants (two rooms for each family
and shared cooking and bathroom facilities). Bill talked of the improvements he had made, taking out an old
coil range, putting in power points, an inside toilet, a hot water cylinder (there had been no running hot water)
and “a bath that didn’t graze your backside.” Previously water had been boiled up in the copper outside in the
wash house and carried it in to fill an old concrete bath, he said. This was less than sixty years ago...
6 Water from a spring in the bush filled the bath and a fire lit underneath heated it.
spend my time between my Grey Lynn and Coromandel homes and have a deep sense of belonging in both places.

The montage below provides a visual representation of the housing history outlined above.

Figure 0.1 A housing history

This montage includes photographs of: (top) the house on the farm in Morrinsville, at the base of the Coromandel Peninsula, and my grandparents home in Grey Lynn; (middle) at home in Papatoetoe, and van-as-home crossing the African continent; (bottom) the house which has been home for the past thirty-three years in Grey Lynn and building the Coromandel house twenty years ago


CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

...research can have an important role to play in actually shaping values, and it should not therefore be relegated to a purely technical role of helping to decide between competing options that seek to operationalise fixed and pre-existing values.

(Nutley, Walter, & Davies, 2007:11)

Introduction

In this introductory chapter I describe the scope of the research and methods used to capture 'realities' of informal housing and build up a montage (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a) of the phenomenon. The goal is to contribute to the wellbeing of Aotearoa/New Zealand by furthering understanding of the nature of inequalities which affect health and wellbeing and exploring the implications of these for those living in informal housing.

This study builds on previous research which has established that economic and social disparities, including poor housing, have implications for health and wellbeing. The aim is not to try and quantify the effects of such disparities, nor is it to provide definitive answers; as Weiss (1987) says, social science research tends to reveal new complexities, not simplify problems. Rather, the aim is to play a role in 'actually shaping values' (Nutley et al., 2007 above) by adding to dominant discourses around housing and health new 'stories' or narratives of the experiences and perspectives of people living in informal housing. Allowing voices from those on the margins\(^7\) to be heard challenges what Bruner (2003:103) calls "the

\(^7\) Smith and Pitts (2007:8) note who is 'on the margins' is relative: "...marginalisation is not necessarily an objective fact but a reflection of power in particular circumstances."
tyranny of the single story”, its stereotypes imposing “an ontological hardening on our various versions of the real world.”

It has been suggested that researchers exploring issues of marginalisation need to work from “a position of solidarity vis à vis the subjects of research”, and that “social justice is the only tenable stance” when addressing “issues of homelessness and housing stress” (Kearns, 1994:2). This view is also reflected in some wider thinking about the ultimate purposes of qualitative research. Gergen and Gergen (2000:1034) for instance, suggest qualitative research has a role as “a force of resistance and social justice”; and Denzin, co-editor of the 2005 Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research (Denzin, 2005:951, 936), calls for a “commitment to praxis [and]...justice” in research, noting that “all inquiry is...moral and political”. This investigation of informal housing is undertaken from a social justice stance and a ‘position of solidarity’ with the participants. However this does not mean data has been selected to ‘fit’ this stance: data collection and analysis have been systematic and differences and contradictions in narratives explored. Important information or perspectives have not been excluded or inappropriately weighted; nor have conclusions been drawn which are not justified by the data.

Terms central to the topic – ‘informal housing’, ‘health’ and ‘wellbeing’ – are defined in this Introduction and the chapter closes with an outline of themes examined in subsequent chapters.

This research

The way we talk about issues and the way in which we conceptualise them are fundamental to the outcome of social policy and to the issue of who benefits. (Bryson, 1992:30)

The focus of this research is on capturing ‘realities’ of informal housing in Aotearoa/New Zealand from the perspectives of those living in informal dwellings. In the on-going discourses around housing – supply and demand, affordability, ‘make-overs’, ‘leaky buildings’, buying and selling and capital gains – their voices are largely absent.

Where we live affects our physical and emotional wellbeing, and numerous studies show a strong association between poor housing and poor health (for instance Dunn, Hayes, Hulchanski, Hwang, & Potvin, 2004; Howden-Chapman et al., 2007; Human Rights Commission, 2004; Thomson, Petticrew, & Morrison, 2001). Not only is housing the biggest
single expense for most New Zealanders, but it contributes to social and economic inequalities which in turn affect health status (Human Rights Commission, 2004).

What are the housing and health needs of those living in informal housing, and how can they be met? Only if the perspectives of those in informal housing are heard and recognized as justifiable will they be deemed worthy of policy consideration (Bryson, 1992 above). This research is thus concerned with participants’ perceptions of their informal housing and how these, coupled with their sense of home and place within the wider physical and social world, are seen to impact on their health and wellbeing (Eyles, 1985). It endeavours to broaden existing housing and health discourses to include perspectives from people on the margins.

Forty participants were interviewed to gain an understanding of their experiences and the mechanisms which propelled them into a range of un-permitted and makeshift informal dwellings on the Coromandel Peninsula and in Auckland. This is not intended to be a statistically representative sample of those in informal housing, but rather to portray the diversity of dwellings and people living in them.

I interviewed twenty-five participants on the Coromandel who had made their homes in garages, sheds, caravans, encampments, buses, house trucks, vans and a shipping container, as well as in structures more closely resembling a house (although lacking basic facilities). Some participants were living on land they owned or had rights to, and in dwellings they owned; others paid nominal rent for their dwellings and/or the land they lived on. Those interviewed in the Auckland conurbation (fifteen, including participants from Auckland, Waitakere and Manukau cities), lived in garages, ‘sleep-outs’, caravans or vans, or camped out in commercial buildings, car parks, abandoned buildings, a band rotunda, bus stops and doorways. While many Coromandel participants saw their living situations as permanent, most Auckland participants viewed them as temporary. Interviews with a range of key informants provided background context and extended my understanding of informal housing.

While extensive overseas research on ‘rough sleeping’ and some New Zealand studies (Amore, 2007; Mora, 2002; No Doubt Research Limited, 2004; O’Brien & de Haan, 2000) have increased understanding of issues faced by rough sleepers, little is documented about people living in informal housing (Kearns, 2004). How widespread is the phenomenon?

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8 Some participants had recently moved into mainstream housing, allowing for participant reflection on the effects of improved housing.
What are their demographic characteristics? What are their motivations, their experiences and perceptions?

To consider these questions this research includes six major dimensions. Firstly, housing in Aotearoa/New Zealand (past and present) is explored through pertinent texts to provide a contextual background. Secondly, relevant literature is reviewed and dominant media discourses are examined. Thirdly, key informants in local territorial authorities and social agencies in Coromandel and Auckland are interviewed to gain background understanding and ‘authority’ perspectives of the phenomenon. Fourthly, interviews with forty people living in informal housing are conducted and thematically analysed to gain participants’ perspectives; and two self-report health surveys (SF-36 and GHQ-12) are administered and analysed. Fifthly, thirty-four poems combining participants’ words with observations from field notes are written and recorded on CD to gain and give a deeper understanding of participants’ lived experiences – to convey a sense of the phenomenon of informal housing not captured in statistics or the thematic analysis. Sixth, and lastly, policy implications of the findings are considered, along with further avenues for research. The socially constructed cultural patterns of participants’ narratives often vary considerably from interpretations by outsiders (particularly those with authority over them), bringing about misunderstanding and frustrations. These ‘cultural collisions’ (here the term includes dissonances between the values of participants and ‘mainstream’ New Zealand, the way these play out in everyday living, and the clashes with authorities which can eventuate) are explored throughout the thesis.9

Participants’ housing – temporary, alternative or informal?

The term ‘informal housing’ (as in non-conventional or not conforming to formal rules) is used to describe the living spaces of participants. *Random House Dictionary* (1978) defines informal as “not according to prescribed, official or customary forms”; *Chamber’s Dictionary* (1993) as “not of a formal or conventional nature”. Participants’ housing situations neither

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9 In *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, Fadiman (1997) graphically documents cultural collisions between Hmong refugees who believe the most common cause of illness is the loss of the soul to an evil spirit (and the most effective cure animal sacrifice) and the staff of the local county hospital. While it would be hard to find belief systems further apart than those of the animist Hmong and the Californian hospital medical staff, a parallel process of ‘cultural collision’, of misunderstandings and talking past each other, occurs in Aotearoa/New Zealand, when marginalised people attempt to deal with mainstream institutions: as in the case of the Hmong, both sides have felt “wounded, but neither side seemed to know what had hit it or how to avoid another crash” (Fadiman, 1997:x)
fitted 'prescribed, official or customary forms', nor were they ‘of a formal or conventional nature’ – they were informal and non-conventional.

The term ‘temporary’ housing has been used by Statistics New Zealand (1996; 2002a) and some local authorities (Thames-Coromandel District Council, 2004, personal communication) to categorise housing such as caravans and garages, and most New Zealanders in conventional housing would consider such dwellings ‘temporary’. However, ‘temporary’ has been discarded as a description of participants’ housing because often neither the structures nor tenure were temporary.

The term ‘alternative’ was also considered and discarded. One definition of the term ‘alternative’ in Chambers Dictionary (1993) is “considered by some as preferable to the existing state or form of something, very often with the connotation of being less conventional, less materialistic…” It could be argued that ‘alternative’ accurately describes the ‘less conventional, less materialistic’ housing options of many participants, particularly on the Coromandel Peninsula. But not all participants saw their dwellings as ‘preferable’ to conventional housing; and ‘alternative’ has also come to be associated with communes and ‘alternative’ life-stylers. Only one participant was living communally; and while some expressed having consciously chosen an ‘alternative life-style’, for others, alternative ‘choices’ were largely governed by lack of money.

None of the participants lived in ‘houses’ in the sense of permanent dwellings. But does this mean they were homeless because they were houseless? ‘Homelessness’ is variously defined in the literature. Here, following Tosi (1996), it includes three distinct groups: those sleeping rough, the temporarily homeless and those inappropriately or insecurely housed. A few participants fell into the first category; others, living short term in informal housing, into the second; and almost all could be considered as fitting into the third broad category of the inappropriately or insecurely housed ‘homeless’. But while none of the participants’ housing would meet the requirements of the Building Act for permanent dwellings, most participants did not consider themselves ‘homeless’, or indeed inappropriately housed. In their investigation of rural homelessness in Britain, Milbourne and Cloke (2006:92) argue that although “many people who would be defined normatively as homeless do not accept that label for themselves” they should nevertheless be defined as homeless for research purposes.

10 The change in the “temporary dwelling” Census dwelling classification to “moveable dwelling, for example caravan, boat, tent etc” or “other” in the 2006 Census (Statistics New Zealand, 2006:1) acknowledges the inadequacy of the term ‘temporary’ to describe many informal dwellings.
In this study, however, participants’ own accounts of their housing status as ‘not homeless’ are accepted.

Having discarded the terms ‘temporary’, ‘alternative’ and ‘homeless’ to describe participants’ dwellings, the term ‘informal’ was chosen. Haarhoff (1984) uses it to describe the non-conventional dwellings which sprang up around African cities in response to rapid urbanisation – housing produced outside of building industry institutions, frequently breaching existing legislation and generally unacceptable in terms of prevailing middle-class housing mores. The dwellings of the participants in his study were similarly ‘produced outside the institutions of the building industry’, ‘breached existing legislation’ (such as the Building Act, 2004, the Local Government Act, 2002, the Health Act, 1956 and camping bylaws) and contravened mainstream ideas of acceptable housing. Following Haarhoff, ‘informal’ is thus used to describe the dwellings (both fixed and mobile), in which participants lived.

‘Informal housing’ spans the ‘temporary dwelling’, ‘makeshift shelter’ and ‘rough sleeper’ dwelling categories of the 1996 and 2001 Censuses and some structures (those contravening existing legislation) in the ‘house’ and ‘bach/crib’ categories (Statistics New Zealand, 1996; 2002a). In 2006 Census dwelling classifications changed, giving respondents a choice of describing their dwellings as ‘house’, ‘moveable dwelling’ or ‘other’. The informal dwellings of participants could thus have been enumerated across these three categories in 2006, as well as in the ‘private dwelling in a motor camp’ category filled in by enumerators themselves (Statistics New Zealand, 2006: 1).

Health and wellbeing – essentially subjective concepts?

Visits to general practitioners (GPs) and hospital admissions, morbidity and mortality statistics are widely used as objective measures of population health, while self-report health questionnaires such as the SF-36 and GHQ-12 provide subjective measures of health status and mental and emotional wellbeing. The Quality of Life 03 survey (North Shore Council et al., 2003) used indicators of life expectancy, low birth weight, infant mortality, teenage parents, diseases, access to GPs, mental health and emotional wellbeing, health status, and modifiable risk factors.

This research is based on a holistic view of health and wellbeing encapsulated in the World Health Organisation (WHO) definition of health as a ‘state of physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or illness’ (World Health
Organization, 1946). Here health, as is often the case (Anderson, 1999; Faull, 2002; White, 1999), is subsumed within the general concept of wellbeing.

Wellbeing includes psychological wellbeing (autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others and purpose in life); social wellbeing (social integration, social contribution, social coherence, social actualisation and social acceptance); and subjective general wellbeing, characterised by a high level of satisfaction with life (Carr, 2004). The relative importance for subjective general wellbeing of different aspects of social and psychological wellbeing will vary from individual to individual; but wellbeing can arguably be summed up in the broad definition used by Benton and colleagues in a study of ninety Māori families living in Auckland: “the ability to do (or be) certain things that...[one has] reason to value” (Benton et al., 2002a Vol.3:2).

Following Blaxter (2004), health and wellbeing are seen as essentially subjective concepts, defined by participants’ own perceptions. The degree to which participants are represented as ‘healthy’ or ‘well’ depends on their own subjective evaluations, communicated in the interviews and self-report health surveys. Wilkinson (1999a:5) notes that self reported or ‘subjective’ health measures are “no more prone to measurement error than objective measures...[and] self reported health is highly correlated with and predictive of future morbidity and mortality”. (Concepts of health and wellbeing are further discussed in Chapter Eleven, Sense of Health and Wellbeing.)

Listening to voices from the margins

...narrative gives shape to things in the real world and often bestows on them a title to reality.

(Bruner, 2003:8)

This aim of this research is to understand and communicate participants’ perspectives, to give credence to their ‘realities’. For as noted above (1992), social policy decisions depend on which voices are deemed worthy; and policy making and policy implementation, to enhance wellbeing on a sustainable basis, must involve “direct and in-depth consultation with those whom the policies are designed to benefit” (Benton et al., 2002b Vol.1:vi).

The thirty-four poems presenting narratives of participants’ experiences and perceptions are an integral part of this investigation of informal housing and complement the thematic analysis. They have been recorded on the CD accompanying this thesis. Listening to the
spoken word allows meaning-making in ways that differ from reading the written word, thus helping to broaden understanding of the phenomenon of informal housing.

Chapter outlines

This thesis looks at the aspirations of those living in informal housing, their views of home and health, and how these interrelate with wellbeing. I have begun by disclosing my own housing background in the Prologue so that the reader can situate the researcher within the context of this exploration of informal housing. In this introductory chapter key terms have been defined, while Chapter Two provides a context for the present study with a brief account of housing and health circumstances – historical and current – in Aotearoa/New Zealand. A review of the relevant literature follows in Chapter Three. Chapter Four explores media discourses around housing and health and Chapter Five outlines theoretical underpinnings and methods used in both data collection and analysis. Chapter Six describes the characteristics of the forty participants and their informal living situations in tables, prose and photographs. Chapters Seven to Thirteen present participants’ perspectives on the pathways which led them into informal housing, their sense of home and place and of health and wellbeing, perceived advantages and disadvantages and potential pathways out of informal housing, and issues of public health and compliance. ‘Cultural collisions’ emerging in the context of each of these themes are discussed. The thirty-four poems in Chapter Fourteen combine participants’ perceptions with observations from field notes, providing other ‘windows’ into the lifeworlds of those living in informal housing. The final chapter, the Discussion, explores the implications of the findings in terms of the literature and housing policy in Aotearoa/New Zealand. A glossary of Māori words used in this study is included on p.x and a list of abbreviations on p.xi)

Concluding comments

As Nutley and colleagues (2007) note, the constraints of written language tend to make the presentation of written material linear. While the chapters are to some extent free-standing, they are arranged logically so that they also build on each other (see Figure 1.1, below).
Figure 1.1 (above) shows the interconnectedness of the chapters and how this research sits within the broad social, political and economic contexts (historical and present day) of Aotearoa/New Zealand, including government policies and dominant housing and health discourses. It acknowledges the influence of the researcher and previous research on the findings, which are also determined by the specific context of this research – the methodology adopted and the demographics of these particular participants.

This introductory chapter has laid out the aims and scope of the research, defined key terms and outlined the contents of the thesis. The following chapter, *Background to Informal Housing*, locates the research within historical and current contexts impacting on housing and wellbeing in Aotearoa/New Zealand.
Introduction

Housing is about people’s lives....Decent and appropriate housing supply...is the cornerstone to a socially inclusive society.

(Stewart, 2001:1)

Shelter is a basic human need. Warm, dry housing, providing protection from the elements and space for eating, sleeping and social interactions, is widely accepted as fundamental for both physical and mental health. Successive New Zealand governments have recognised this. Sixty years ago, the then Government declared:

...the close connection between happiness, health and housing needs little proof, and one of the principal tasks of the next decade should be the provision of a decent house for every family.

(Firth, 1949:Forward)

Yet forty years on, the Housing Commission was documenting the plight of people living in a variety of informal housing situations, in makeshift shelters and camping grounds, and in overcrowded dwellings (National Housing Commission, 1988). Lack of decent, affordable housing continues to be a significant issue. So does the poverty underlying it. According to Ministry of Social Development (2006) figures, twenty-five percent of the population is living in some degree of hardship (with eight percent in severe hardship). These are the people struggling to find and maintain adequate housing. Māori, Pacific and sole parent families are

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11 The shortage is not just a problem of housing supply. Saville-Smith (2007) notes Aotearoa/New Zealand has more than 100,000 houses—the holiday homes of the well-to-do—which remain empty for all but a few weeks of the year.
disproportionately disadvantaged. There is a shortfall in both affordable private rental accommodation and social housing (six percent of housing is classified as state or local authority housing) for those on low incomes (Housing New Zealand Corporation, 2005); and home ownership, long the New Zealand dream, has become increasingly beyond the financial grasp of many (DTZ Research, 2004). Housing New Zealand Corporation (HNZC) Board Chairman, Pat Sneddon, talks of a 'disjunct' between the needs of people to be properly housed, and the resources available for this to happen (Sneddon, 2009, personal communication).

This background chapter on housing in Aotearoa/New Zealand provides a context for the accounts and the analysis of informal housing experiences which follow. Recurring themes are seen to link past and present.

Current context – the backdrop to informal housing

Adequate housing is fundamental to the health and well-being of families and communities. For this reason all New Zealanders must have access to quality, affordable housing.

(Housing New Zealand Corporation, 2005:22)

The right to adequate housing is laid down as a universal right in Article 25 of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, to which New Zealand is a signatory (Human Rights Commission, 2004), but the New Zealand government has no statutory obligation to house people (Human Rights Foundation et al., 2003). Although successive governments have reiterated the right of all New Zealanders to 'quality, affordable housing' (and the Local Government Act 2002 places responsibility on local government to meet housing, along with other needs, to ensure the wellbeing of citizens), Article Eleven of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights enshrining this right has not been incorporated into New Zealand law. The New Zealand Bill of Rights 1990 (Ministry of Justice, 1991) confines itself to guaranteeing civil and political rights; and The Human Rights Act 1993, provides protection against housing discrimination (New Zealand Government, 1993:Section 53) but does not guarantee the right to be housed. While 64,000 households are accommodated in state houses and 249,000 people maintain private rentals with the help of an accommodation supplement (Housing New Zealand Corporation, 2005:24), tens of thousands of people remain inadequately housed.

12 However, as Easton (2008) notes, the most common poor household is "a couple with children who are of Pakeha ethnicity, who own their own home with a mortgage, and depend upon wage income".

13 A Private Members Bill introduced in 1991 to make the Government responsible for housing those in need.
Formative discussions with social service agencies in Auckland and on the Coromandel highlight the lack of appropriate, affordable housing. Major Campbell Roberts, National Director of Social Services for the Salvation Army, estimates a 20,000 affordable housing shortfall in Auckland. He spoke of the many inadequately housed people who approached the Salvation Army for help: of a woman and three children living on a porch with nothing but a cardboard wall on one side, and a family paying $200 a week for a dwelling where the floor had rotted through; of the scores of families living in garages, or doubled up in overcrowded situations (Roberts, 2004, personal communication). Case histories from the Auckland City Mission were similar – a young woman and her baby living in a tent in the backyard of a property inhabited by another family member; families crammed into garages and shared accommodation; and the many who are literally homeless, living in cars or parks: “the address of one Mission client was ‘the third palm tree on the left in Myers Park’” (Richard Larkin, 2006, personal communication).

After years of not coping with high rents, of ‘sofa-surfing’ and ‘doubling up’, many people opt for diverse informal accommodation, which is affordable.

Somebody goes into rental accommodation and finds they can’t meet the costs. They run up debt, get thrown out, or move; they go into another rental situation and the same thing happens, because they never could afford to rent in the first place...If they can’t get into State housing, where else is there to go? (Roberts, 2004, personal communication)

People on low incomes on the Coromandel also struggle to find affordable housing. Mike Noonan of the Coromandel Independent Living Trust and Jude O’Connor of Te Ahi Kaa highlighted the number of people who approached their organisations looking for affordable accommodation. “People will have five children, another on the way and don’t have a bathroom. A lot of families are living in caravans and sheds” (Noonan, 2005, personal communication). O’Connor (2004, personal communication) spoke of an overall lack of rental accommodation, with what was available often being outside the resources of those on benefits. However, Coromandel participants appeared to have more access to informal housing options such as old farm sheds and unobtrusive buses and caravans than their Auckland counterparts, who might instead end up sleeping rough.
Auckland conurbation population and housing demographics

The fifteen Auckland study participants lived in Auckland, Manukau and Waitakere cities, which, with North Shore, make up the Auckland conurbation (Figure 2.1 below).

Figure 2.1 Map of Auckland, Manukau, and Waitakere Cities

Source: adapted from Statistics New Zealand (2006) Territorial Authority Boundaries

Statistics (Table 2.1 below) show Auckland housing is more expensive than for Aotearoa/New Zealand generally, with higher than average weekly rents and annual spending on housing, along with higher than average household spending. While median incomes for Auckland and Waitakere cities are also higher than the national average, gross incomes for the bottom quartile in Auckland, Waitakere and Manukau cities are lower. Coupled with population growth greater than the national average (which has increased housing demand and housing costs), this has resulted in more stress for low income families.
Table 2.1 Auckland Demographics

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Auckland</th>
<th>Manukau</th>
<th>Waitakere</th>
<th>New Zealand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population 2006</td>
<td>404,658</td>
<td>328,968</td>
<td>186,444</td>
<td>4,027,947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pop. increase 2001-2006</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household size</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Av. weekly rent</td>
<td>$294</td>
<td>$250</td>
<td>$254</td>
<td>$225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% in own dwellings</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>66.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Av. household spending</td>
<td>$54,376.4</td>
<td>$54,376.4</td>
<td>$54,376.4</td>
<td>$49,722.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median income</td>
<td>$28,100</td>
<td>$24,200</td>
<td>$26,100</td>
<td>$24,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Av. spending on house operation (home ownership, rates and related services, household energy)</td>
<td>$6,536.4</td>
<td>$6,536.4</td>
<td>$6,536.4</td>
<td>$6,359.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: compiled from Statistics New Zealand Data from the 2006 Census of Population and Dwellings and the 2007 Household Expenditure Survey (Auckland region)

The region’s population grew by 12.4 percent to 1,318,700 in the five years to March 2006, but the number of occupied dwellings increased by only 10.9 percent, to 437,700 (Collins, 2006). This has contributed to the prevalence of informal housing, rough sleeping and over-crowding and has major population health implications. Rough sleeping considerably increases health risks (Hwang, 2001; Shelter, 2000), and overcrowding is implicated in health problems such as meningococcal meningitis, tuberculosis and cellulitis (Baker, Milosevic, Blakely, & Howden-Chapman, 2004).

14 The average number of people per dwelling in the region rose from 2.97 to 3.01 in the five years to March 2006 (Collins, 2006).
Coromandel population and housing demographics

The twenty-five Coromandel participants interviewed for this study lived in the Coromandel and Te Rerenga areas (Figure 2.2 below).

Figure 2.2 Map of Coromandel and Te Rerenga

Annual average expenditure on housing and household spending were considerably lower than for Auckland (and the Aotearoa/New Zealand average), but so was the median income (see Table 2.2 below). No figures were available for rents. While the population increase from 2001 to 2006 was lower for Coromandel town than the national average, the population increase in the surrounding Te Rerenga area, as in the Auckland region, was considerably higher than the national average.
Table 2.2 Coromandel/Te Rerenga Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Coromandel</th>
<th>Te Rerenga</th>
<th>New Zealand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>1,476</td>
<td>4,173</td>
<td>4,027,947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population increase 2001-2006</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household size</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage in own dwellings</td>
<td>56.3</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>66.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average household spending</td>
<td>$51,277.2</td>
<td>$51,277.2</td>
<td>$49,722.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median income</td>
<td>$19,000</td>
<td>$20,200</td>
<td>$24,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Av. spending on house operation (home ownership, rates and related services, household energy)</td>
<td>$6,708</td>
<td>$6,708</td>
<td>$6,359.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: compiled from Statistics New Zealand data from the 2006 Census of Population and Dwellings and the 2007 Household Expenditure Survey (Rest of North Island)

All of the Coromandel participants lived in the Coromandel/Colville ward (Coromandel town and part of Te Rerenga).

Figure 2.3 Map of Coromandel/Colville Ward

Coromandel/Colville ward statistics (Thames-Coromandel District Council, 2006:7–8) show that of the 2,877 residents (1,188 households):

- 21 percent were under the age of 15 and 16 percent over 65
- 27.2 percent of residents were Māori
- average family income was $29,004
- 38 percent of households had income from wages/salary/self employment
- 41 percent of 2,133 respondents were not employed (21.5 percent were on unemployment, Domestic Purposes Benefit, sickness benefit or Accident Compensation and 16.3 percent were superannuitants)
- 10.6 per cent of households had no motor vehicle
- a majority of renters paid between $150-$174 per week

Low average family incomes and levels of paid employment, coupled with high numbers of children, superannuitants and Māori, suggest that participants came from a relatively disadvantaged population.

**Housing trends – making it harder for those on low incomes**

From the 1970s, house prices rose steadily, with an average 3.5 percent annual increase in real terms over the fifteen years to December 2004. In the three years to 2005 they increased exponentially – Quotable Value New Zealand figures suggest a New Zealand-wide increase of 53 percent (cited by Collins, 2009). While this trend changed in the latter half of 2008 in response to a global recession, house prices in Auckland and on the Coromandel were still higher in January 2009 than 2005. As house prices have risen, home ownership rates have gone down, from 73.8 percent in 1991 to 67.8 percent in 2001; and to 65 percent in 2004. In Auckland the drop was steeper, down to 62 percent. The corresponding major growth in the numbers renting nationwide has been in the private rental market, partly due to the selling off of some of the more desirable state housing (Howden-Chapman & Carroll, 2004a).

Figure 2.4 below illustrates the steady decrease in home ownership and concomitant rise in the numbers of those renting.
Figure 2.4 Housing Tenure 1986 – 2006

(1) 'Tenure of household' refers to the nature of the occupancy of a household in a private dwelling, at the time of the survey. It does not refer to the tenure of the land on which the dwelling is situated.
(2) This is a new category, introduced in the 2006 Census.

Source: (Statistics New Zealand, 2007)

While some people deliberately choose to rent rather than buy, home ownership is still a strong aspiration for most New Zealanders. The HNZC (2005) identified high rents relative to income as a major barrier to home ownership, along with house prices rising faster than household incomes, increased competition between first home buyers and property investors, and increased levels of consumer debt and student loans. HNZC estimates only fourteen percent of Auckland households in the $44,000-$55,000 income bracket can afford to service a ninety-five percent mortgage on an entry-level home (Housing New Zealand Corporation, 2005). The housing market is “out of kilter” with people’s capacity to buy, says Sneddon: “The cost of a house used to be three to three-and-a-half times an average annual salary; now it can be seven to eight times” (Sneddon, 2009, personal communication). With rising house prices also translating into higher rents, it is not surprising that some people, like the participants in this study, have opted for informal accommodation which is affordable.

In search of informal dwelling statistics

Just how many people are living in informal housing is difficult to quantify. The 1996 Census identified around one percent of private dwellings (7,338) as ‘temporary accommodation’, with 11,208 people living in tents, caravans, mobile homes, rough shelters or other temporary dwellings. There was an apparent drop to 5,268 in the 2001 Census and a rise to 10,353 in the 2006 Census. These fluctuations could be due at least in part to changes in enumeration procedures. In 1996 for instance, in some areas enumerators rather than respondents categorised a dwelling as ‘temporary’ or not, while in 2001 all respondents...
categorised their dwellings themselves (Statistics New Zealand, 2004, personal communication). In 2006 respondents also categorised their own dwellings, but dwelling category changes do not allow for comparisons with 2001 figures. Census dwelling category changes in 2006 to ‘house’, ‘moveable dwelling’, ‘private dwelling in a motor camp’ or ‘other’ (Statistics New Zealand, 2006:1) mean informal dwellings could have been enumerated across all of these categories in 2006.

All of the informal dwelling categories listed below in Table 2.3 are represented by participants in this study.

Table 2.3 Informal Dwellings enumerated in 1996, 2001 and 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Temporary private dwellings</th>
<th>1996 census</th>
<th>2001 census</th>
<th>2006 census</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caravan, tent, cabin or mobile unit in a motor camp</td>
<td>3,414 (46.5%)</td>
<td>3,042 (57.9%)</td>
<td>1,485 (14.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile units not in motor camp</td>
<td>3,924 (53.5%)</td>
<td>1,386 (26.4%)</td>
<td>6,465 (62.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makeshift dwelling or shelter</td>
<td>822 (15.6%)</td>
<td>2,391 (23.1%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roofless and/or rough sleeper</td>
<td>6 (0.1%)</td>
<td>12 (0.1%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary private dwelling not further defined</td>
<td>12 (0.2%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>7,338 (100%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>5,268 (100%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>10,353 (100%)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: adapted from Statistics New Zealand Census figures

While Table 2.3 above shows only 3,042 ‘temporary’ dwellings in motor camps and 1,386 mobile units outside motor camps in the 2001 Census, and conversely, 6,465 outside and 1,485 inside motor camps in 2006, many more New Zealanders are likely to be living in camper vans, buses and caravans and travelling around through the warmer months and using motor camps as a winter base. The New Zealand Motor Caravan Association, for instance, has 28,000 members (15,000 registered vehicles), although it is unclear how many are living fulltime in their mobile homes (McGavin, 2004, personal communication). Other people living in motor camps more or less ‘temporarily’ include some making a lifestyle choice, seasonal workers and those on low incomes unable to find other accommodation. Motor camps are used by organisations such as the Salvation Army for emergency accommodation (Thorner, 2004, personal communication).
A further 7,152 households in the 2001 Census (2006 figures not available) were in the ‘bach, crib or holiday home’ category. It is not possible to know what percentage of these are informal dwellings. While most baches, representing what Belich (2001:527) describes as “a modern populist engagement with the New Zealand landscape” for city dwellers, are used for holidaying, others provide year-round low cost accommodation for those wanting to live away from cities and towns. Some Coromandel baches are very simple and lacking basic utilities.

The following table shows a breakdown by age and gender of people living in temporary/informal housing (excluding baches) according to the 2001 Census.

Table 2.4 Numbers living in informal dwellings (excluding baches) enumerated in the 2001 Census*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0-19 years</th>
<th>20-34 years</th>
<th>35-49 years</th>
<th>50-64 years</th>
<th>64+ years</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>702</td>
<td>696</td>
<td>1242</td>
<td>1182</td>
<td>477</td>
<td>4299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>585</td>
<td>795</td>
<td>615</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>2816</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1352</td>
<td>1281</td>
<td>2037</td>
<td>1797</td>
<td>648</td>
<td>7115</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 2006 figures not available

Source: adapted from Statistics New Zealand Census figures (cells randomly rounded to base 3)

Table 2.4 above shows the largest numbers of those enumerated in informal housing were in the 35 to 64-year-old categories. There were slightly over one-and-a-half times as many males as females, with the gap becoming increasingly pronounced from the age of thirty-five.

Undercounting

It would seem those living in informal accommodation are under-enumerated. Some dwellings are missed entirely and others mistakenly classified as vacant; some people have no usual residence, are in transit at the time of the Census, and/or do not want to be found, fearing information they give may be used against them (Statistics New Zealand, 2002b). According to 1996 Census figures for instance, there were no rough sleepers in Aotearoa/New Zealand, with only six listed in 2001 and twelve in 2006. Yet rough sleeper counts carried out by the Auckland Rough Sleepers’ Initiative in 2004, 2005 and 2007, found around a hundred in Auckland City’s CBD alone, many of whom had been on the streets for several years (Auckland Rough Sleepers Initiative, 2004; 2005, 2007).

It is difficult to know how great the undercount of people in informal dwellings is. While they are arguably more likely to get missed on Census night, post enumeration surveys – which estimate an overall undercount – do not sample individuals in ‘temporary’ or ‘remote’ dwellings “for practical reasons” (Statistics New Zealand, 2002b). The overall undercount
was estimated at 2.2 percent or 85,000 people in the 2001 Census (Statistics New Zealand, 2002b) and 2.0 percent or 81,000 people in 2006 (Statistics New Zealand, 2008).

No Census forms were delivered to my Coromandel house for either the 2001 or the 2006 Censuses. Although up a long drive, the house is neither a temporary dwelling, nor particularly ‘remote’ by Coromandel standards. A discussion with the enumerator delivering forms to my Grey Lynn house for the 2006 Census (February 28, 2006), also highlighted how easily informal dwellings in the city could be missed: it was up to the person answering the door to say whether there is another dwelling on the property, she said. Only dwellings with their own kitchen were of interest; and because many informal dwellings such as caravans, garages and ‘sleep-outs’ were being lived in illegally, it was likely, the enumerator agreed, that they would not be admitted to. But, she said, “I’m just a collector, not an enforcer” (Census Enumerator, 2006, personal communication).

Census figures are important for policy making and planning at both central and local government level and for the allocation of funds to organisations using population-based weightings (Statistics New Zealand, 2002b). Where those living in informal accommodation have been undercounted, the implications for what are arguably a high-needs group could be considerable, with less money available for those who need more in terms of social services.

Whatever the actual size of the undercount, Census figures can at best provide only a partial guide to the number of people living in informal housing and in overall housing need.

**Estimating overall housing need**

Twenty years ago the Royal Commission on Social Policy estimated between 60,000 and 100,000 people were living in inadequate, temporary or substandard accommodation (Royal Commission on Social Policy, 1988). This figure has not decreased and net population increases higher than the national average in Auckland and on the Coromandel (see above) have meant increased housing need in both areas.

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15 It was not easy to arrange to be enumerated in 2006, either. After half an hour talking to someone in the South Island on the 0800 Census help number, an impasse was reached because although I gave my Coromandel RD postal address and exact location on State Highway 25, I did not know my property lot number. Nor could the help line tell me who the Coromandel area Census manager was. I finally located the Census area manager through the Coromandel Information Centre and forms were delivered for the seven people staying on the night of March 7 (and to two adjacent properties which had also been missed out), along with dwelling forms.
Net population gain statistics are also only part of the picture – for instance in a group of Waitakere City census area units, a net gain of 312 for the Māori population between 1991 and 1996 disguises the fact that a total of 4,068 Māori shifted in and out of the area during that time (Benton et al., 2002b, Vol.1:22), thus further increasing housing need. The Māori population is traditionally mobile, moving both within the urban environment and between urban and rural bases (Belich, 2001; Benton et al., 2002b, Vol.1). A net inflow on the Coromandel, as many Māori have shifted back to family land from the city, has put pressure on existing housing and increased informal housing (Mikaere, 2003, personal communication).

Numbers on waiting lists for social housing are another indication of overall housing need. HNZC figures for January 31, 2006 show 11,135 people were on official waiting lists, with another 932 enquiries in process. This figure does not represent the total number of people waiting to be housed by HNZC, only the primary applicants (Housing New Zealand Corporation, 2006, personal communication). Over half of these (6,857, with 403 inquiries in process) were in the Auckland area. Nor does everyone in need of housing apply for a state house. Sneddon suggests that estimates are “fairly accurate at the high need end (3500-4000)” but “beyond that it’s guesswork because people self-determine if they are going to be in the system” (Sneddon, 2009, personal communication). Several Auckland participants said they had not applied for a state house because long waiting lists meant there was no point. One lived in the Henderson area (Waitakere City) where, for instance there were 738 on the waiting list and 70 awaiting processing; another lived in the New Lynn area (also Waitakere City), where there were 700 on the list and 102 in process in January 2006 (Housing New Zealand Corporation, 2006, personal communication). Some Coromandel participants also said they had not bothered applying, because there were only two state houses in Coromandel town and both had long-term tenants.

Census data, HNZC and social service agency statistics, best ‘guesstimates’ and anecdotal information all point to a continuing shortage of affordable, appropriate housing, although it is difficult to know the full extent of housing need.

\[16\] Many move in with relatives. One key informant (2004) gave an example of a sole parent and children in a two-bedroomed rental house with her sister (who had mental health problems) living downstairs in the basement – and their aunty, partner and six children camped out in the garage part of the same basement.
Historical context – housing a nation

In most districts, traditional building materials – raupo, muka, ponga, earth sods, nikau branches – continued to be used into the 1880s. (King, 2003:243)

At the time of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840 the Māori population was around 250,000 and the European population 2,000 (Belich, 2001). In less than fifty years half a million settlers had arrived and the Māori population had been decimated through disease, war and land alienation.

The first Pākehā settlers lived like Māori in raupo huts with dirt floors, and in tents. Una Platts, in her book on the early history of Auckland, paints a picture of early settlers living in tents and “warres”, protected by “breakwinds” (Platts, 1971:20). These dwellings were soon replaced by rough-sawn wooden shanties and houses. This was the beginning of the housing of a nation. Threads from these early beginnings, as raupo gave way to weatherboard (King, 2003; McLean, 2005a), link through to present-day informal housing. So too, for Māori, do issues of land alienation.

With the development of towns and cities came slums, and the poor living “in hovels and shacks” (1981:267). Although improvements in housing standards were seen as a necessary step to improve public health (Howden-Chapman, 2004), by and large slum clearance did not happen. James Belich writes of a “strange reluctance to attack the city slums known to harbour...disease, and a preference for inculcating healthy habits” in the feckless poor (Belich, 2001:175). This tension between structural and individual determinants of health is a continuing theme.

Improving health through housing

It was fears about health which resulted in a focus on housing following the bubonic plague scare of 1900 (Olssen, 1981:261). District health councils were set up to improve sanitation and the living conditions of both Pākehā and Māori. Following on from the Liberal Government Workers’ Dwelling Act of 1905 and the Advances to Workers Act of 1906 (McLean, 2005b), successive governments attempted to improve housing through state housing schemes and cheap loans to workers (Ferguson, 1994). In 1919 the influenza
epidemic again focused attention on inner city over-crowding and the Housing Act (1919) authorised the state to build houses. However few were built (Olssen, 1981), and housing need remained acute, with much existing housing stock derelict and over-crowded. More recently overcrowded housing has been implicated in a meningococcal meningitis epidemic and continuing high rates of asthma and respiratory disease have highlighted the problems of cold, damp housing. Health has once again become a primary rationale for improving housing (Howden-Chapman et al., 2007).

Home ownership has been encouraged as the way to house the nation (Ferguson, 1994). Ninety-five percent housing loans were made available through the Massey Reform Government’s (1912-1928) State Advances Corporation and there were rehabilitation loans to returning servicemen after World War I. By 1926 fifty percent of workers owned their own homes (Atkinson, 2005).

Housing was a central plank of the first Labour Government’s (1935) policy. Here there was an emphasis on social housing to complement private home ownership. A Housing Construction Branch was established in the State Advances Corporation to build state houses which would “embody modern, comfortable New Zealand” (Dalley & McGibbon, 2005:282). The first was completed in 1937 and thousands followed. Money was also lent to local authorities to construct housing. However “the poorest and most destitute still could not afford decent housing” (Olssen, 1981:277), and construction slowed during World War II.

Responses to post-war shortage

Lack of construction during the war meant housing was in very short supply post-World War II – a situation made worse by a rapidly growing population and “symbolised in the late 1940s by overcrowding in Freeman’s Bay slums and by transit camps in Auckland’s Victoria Park and the Domain” (Dunstall, 1981:404). The experiences of my mother and aunt, living in boarding houses in Auckland with small children, (see Prologue) were commonplace. Supply continued to lag behind demand, with 26,000 families waiting for state houses in 1949 – 15,000 in Auckland alone (Dalley & McGibbon, 2005).

17 Much of the blame for the higher Māori death rate during the 1919 influenza epidemic which killed 4.2 percent of Māori – a death rate seven times that of the Pākehā population – was laid at the door of damp and overcrowded houses, many of which still had earthen floors (Atkinson, 2005:249).

18 In Auckland 35 per cent of all inner-city housing was described by the City Engineer as totally unsatisfactory; and a government survey in the late 1930s showed 27,000 houses needed demolishing and another 55,000 needed urgent repairs.
The 1949 National Government brought a shift from Labour’s universal approach of providing state homes for ordinary New Zealand families to targeting those on low incomes. Whereas Labour had built state houses to rent, National sold homes to tenants and made money available for private construction – to the extent that by the mid-fifties a third of all houses built were financed by government loans (Dalley, 2005). This change in direction was accepted by the Second Labour Government and three percent building loans and capitalisation of a family benefit continued to facilitate private home ownership. However this did not mean an end to government-built housing. The strands of state housing and private construction funded with government loans meant 52 percent of all new dwellings were state funded in some way at the peak of state housing activity in 1961 (Dunstall, 1981). Altogether the state built about 100,000 new houses and flats from the late 1930s to the early 1970s – about a quarter of all new housing.

In the fifty years from 1921 to 1971, inhabited dwellings increased from 260,000 to 800,000 and huts of one room decreased from four percent to one percent (Belich, 2001).

Governments in retreat

Housing pressures eased with the end of the post-war baby boom, the discontinuation of assisted immigration from Britain and a continued net outflow of New Zealanders to Australia. Around 150,000 more people left New Zealand than arrived between 1976 and 1983. Governments retreated from general involvement in the construction of new homes, focusing assistance instead on those in financial need and private institutions became the prime source of mortgage money for house construction. Some social housing stock was sold off.

However, access to housing once again became a major issue with economic recessions in the seventies and eighties which saw a rise in unemployment to 100,000 in early 1988 and 216,000 in 1992 following oil price shocks. The situation was exacerbated by the neo-liberal restructuring of the eighties and nineties which included changes in tax policies, with tax cuts for the rich off-set by higher taxes on the poor and cuts in social spending (Easton, 2008). The sharp move away from “a social citizenship model of the welfare state” to a minimal safety net (Dalley & McLean, 2005:376) was only partly turned around by the 1999-2008 Labour Government. Despite a return to income-related rents for those in social housing, an accommodation supplement for those on low incomes in private rentals, a commitment to more social housing (both through HNCZ and community partnerships), those New
Zealanders surviving on low incomes have seen their housing options shrinking along with their incomes. For instance, from 1987 to the mid 1990s the equivalent disposable income of beneficiaries fell by an average of twenty percent (Dalley & McLean, 2005) and Easton (2008) and St John (2008) note a continuing tendency towards income inequality. While high and middle income groups made significant gains from 1982-2004 the incomes of those in the bottom twenty percent barely moved in real terms.19 Māori have remained disproportionately disadvantaged, with housing options for many Māori (including those interviewed for this study) severely limited.

Continuing Māori disadvantage

King (2003:244) notes that ‘Māori housing’ has long been “synonymous with poor housing”, with their sub-standard accommodation seen as contributing to their poorer health. In 1938 the Māori death rate per 1000 was 24.31, compared with 9.71 for Pākehā, and the Māori infant mortality rate 153.26 per 1000 live births, compared with 36.63 for Pākehā (King, 1981:281). Although the gap has decreased, Māori mortality rates remain higher than Pākehā, with Māori life expectancy on average eight years less (Robson & Purdie, 2007).

While by 1940 1,592 dwellings had been constructed for Māori, many were “little more than sheds, and scarcely anything was done for urban housing”. The Native Department estimated 1200 homes were needed in Auckland alone (Dalley & McGibbon, 2005). More than a third of Māori were in houses “unfit by minimum Pākehā standards” and half were without safe water supplies (King, 1981:282). By 1951 the number of occupied whare and huts had halved from fifteen years earlier to 2,275 and tents and camps had dropped to 568. But a third of all Māori housing was still overcrowded (King, 1981:282) with forty-four percent lacking a flush toilet and thirty percent hot water, ten years later in 1961 (Belich, 2001).

In the cities, Māori migrating from rural areas (Māori went from being 83 percent rural in 1936 to 83 percent urban in 1986) often ended up in “inner city slums where multiple occupancy was the only way to cope with exorbitant rents” (Belich, 2001:473). Although many were subsequently housed in state houses and through State Advances and Māori Department loans, Māori housing remained – and remains –more overcrowded than Pākehā housing (Belich, 2001).

The goal of the Working for Families package introduced in 2004 was to progressively raise incomes for families with children, and it has; but families dependent on a welfare benefit (including 250,000 children) are excluded from significant in-work payments (St John, 2008), thus furthering income inequalities.
Māori were disproportionately affected by the neo-liberal restructuring, economic deregulation and benefit cuts of the 1990s (Humpage, 2002). Reverse migration saw many Māori city-dwellers responding to economic recession by returning to family land in rural areas (Belich, 2001; Kearns, 2004; National Housing Commission, 1988), leading to an increase in informal rural Māori housing (Scott & Kearns, 2000). In 1989 the Housing Commission documented cases of families living in makeshift dwellings and shelters (see above); twenty years on surveys of Māori housing (Te Ropu Whariki, 2006) show overcrowding and substandard rural housing are common. While the economic up-swing of the past decade and government packages such as Working for Families appear to have improved conditions for Māori and Pākehā alike (Blakely, Tobias, Atkinson, Yeh, & Huang, 2007), on-going adverse economic and spiritual effects over time stemming from the alienation of large tracts of Māori land (Belich, 2001; King, 2003; Sorrenson, 1981) have continued to aggravate Māori cultural and economic marginalisation and limit housing options. Both urban and rural housing need amongst Māori – and informal housing – is likely to further increase in response to the current (2009) global recession.

Pacific parallels

The housing problems which faced Pacific Island immigrants from the 1960s (particularly in Auckland) parallel those of the Māori rural-to-urban migrants from a decade earlier. Like their Māori counterparts, many Pacific people moved into overcrowded, sub-standard inner city dwellings when they arrived. By 1976, 60,000 Pacific Islanders were living in Aotearoa/New Zealand, with 200,000 (many New Zealand born) by 1996.

As more state houses were built, Māori and Pacific were ‘pepper-potted’ amongst Pākehā, in keeping with the official line of integration and assimilation. Yet overcrowding has remained a problem for many Pacific families, as for Māori – the problem has merely moved to the suburbs, with Pacific and Māori largely squeezed out of the inner city as ‘Yuppies’ (young, upwardly mobile) and ‘Dinkies’ (double income, no kids) have moved in: “as the suburban dream faded for some privileged New Zealanders, it became compulsory for others” (Phillips, 2005:353).

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Suburbanisation and beyond

Suburbanisation, driven by speculators and builders, has been part of the New Zealand housing mix from the 1880s (Ferguson, 1994). The post-war baby boom, coupled with assisted immigration, produced an increase in population of nearly one million from 1949-1965 – with an associated increase in housing stock. Most of these new houses were built in the fast-developing suburbs surrounding the major cities. Financed by State Advances loans and building societies, they were seen as the panacea for overcrowded, unhealthy inner-city living (Olssen, 1981).

From the building of the first state house in 1937, the suburban bungalow became the family ideal. Private ownership made it more ‘ideal’, encapsulating as it did “the Pākehā ethos of possessive individualism, equality, [and] cultural homogeneity” (Dunstall, 1981:404). Ironically though, the reality of widespread residential differentiation, with the wealthy and the poor living in separate suburbs, in fact reflected “a growing divergence of life chances” (Dunstall, 1981:404), exposing the myths of equality and cultural homogeneity. The phenomenon of marked residential differentiation has continued, though the desirability of suburbia over inner city living has been challenged. So too has the Kiwi own-your-own-home ethos.

From the 1990s to the present day fewer people have been signing up for mortgages. Escalating house prices have meant only the affluent can afford to buy a home (Dalley & McLean, 2005). Rents, too, are beyond the reach of many. Numbers receiving the accommodation supplement, introduced in 1991 in an attempt to make private rental property affordable for those on low incomes, have escalated to more than a quarter of a million (Housing New Zealand Corporation, 2005).

Given the continuing lack of ‘decent, affordable housing’, it is unsurprising that many, like the participants in this study, have decided to live in informal housing.

Concluding comments

Looking at issues of housing and health since the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840, recurring themes – demand for housing continuing to outstrip supply, issues of affordability and substandard housing, continuing Māori disadvantage, and the advantages of state versus private housing provision – link past and present. Governments have taken more, or less,
responsibility for housing provision; built houses to rent, or sold them; made cheap loans available, or withdrawn them; built state houses, or subsidised private landlords.

Also unchanged from the time of early European settlement to the present day, have been the stated intentions by successive governments\textsuperscript{21} of the need to improve housing to improve health – and the inability, in spite of these stated intentions, to ensure ‘a decent house for every family’. The result has been minimal available social housing with demand far exceeding supply, falling home ownership rates and a shortage of appropriate affordable private rental accommodation. The response from many, including the participants in this study, has been to opt for informal housing.

This chapter has explored the background – current and historical – of housing in Aotearoa/New Zealand, providing a context for the personal accounts and analyses which follow. Relevant academic literature on housing, health and wellbeing, and the possible connections between them is reviewed and critiqued in the Literature Review, Chapter Three, which follows.

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\textsuperscript{21} In opening the Public Health Association of New Zealand conference in Auckland in July 2007, then-Prime Minister Helen Clark spoke of the direct links between housing and health and the need to ensure decent housing for all; and at the August 2007 Housing Affordability Conference in Auckland, then-Housing Minister Chris Carter spoke of moves to solve the challenge of housing affordability (including a Housing Affordability Bill) “reinforcing that tradition of a government committed to housing.”
CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In the absence of adequate and affordable housing, health is endangered... without a place to call “home”, people are... essentially disenfranchised.

(Keams, Smith, & Abbott, 1991:369)

Inequalities in health result from a complex interplay of genetic, biological and socioeconomic factors (Karlsen, Nazroo, & Stephenson, 2002). This research is located within theories which examine the role socioeconomic factors – particularly ‘the absence of adequate and affordable housing’ – play in determining health and wellbeing.

New Zealanders have experienced increasing prosperity and health (measured by life expectancy) over the past fifty years (Ministry of Health, 1999a; 1999b). Yet despite these gains, people with lower socioeconomic position, or SEP (the social and economic factors influencing position in a society’s hierarchy), continue to have poorer health (Blakely, 2002; Hill, 2008; Howden-Chapman & Tobias, 2000). Those in the top decile have a life expectancy eight years longer than those in the bottom decile (Salmond & Crampton, 2000). Internationally too, research shows those who are poorer are likely to have poorer health outcomes (Davey Smith & Hart, 1998; Galobardes, Shaw, Lawlor, Lynch, & Davey Smith, 2006; 2006b; Graham, 2000).

This chapter reviews research into links between socioeconomic circumstances and health status, including possible mediating factors. Particular attention is paid to housing as a determinant of health and wellbeing, both in terms of physical structure and the wider social and economic context. Numerous studies highlight multiple connections, both direct and
indirect. Direct connections come from the characteristics of the house itself and indirect connections from the house as “point of access to the outside world” (Mackenbach & Howden-Chapman, 2002:161). As Roberts (1987:23) notes, “housing is not just another commodity. It is a fundamental need for human existence”.

Some people lack housing altogether. Changing economic and social conditions have seen homelessness grow since the early 1980s (Thoms, 1987). While there is considerable research on the health effects of homelessness (especially homelessness in terms of rough sleeping), there appears to be little on informal housing. It could be that those in informal housing have fallen into what Midgely and colleagues (1998) conceptualise as a ‘marginal area’ – a gap in research created where the focus is either on a narrowly defined group (such as rough sleepers), or a broad group (such as all of those inadequately housed).

Socioeconomic determinants of health and wellbeing

...few now seriously challenge the fundamental importance of socioeconomic factors for health status.

(Howden-Chapman & Crampton, 1997:1)

Social inequalities in health can be defined as systematic health differences between various socioeconomic groups (Whitehead, 2007:473). While there is debate over the extent to which these are the result of underlying structural inequalities or individual failure to take responsibility for health, socioeconomic factors are widely accepted as major determinants of health (Blakely, Fawcett, Atkinson, Tobias, & Cheung, 2005; Blaxter, 2004; Davey Smith & Hart, 1998; Graham, 2000; Hill, 2008; Howden-Chapman & Cram, 1998; Howden-Chapman & Tobias, 2000; Kawachi & Kennedy, 1997; Lynch, Davey Smith, Kaplan, & House, 2000; Lynch & Kaplan, 1997; Wolfson, Kaplan, & Lynch, 1999).

Historical insights about the importance of relative SEP for health and wellbeing have come into focus across the OECD (Organisation of Economic and Community Development), including Aotearoa/New Zealand (Blakely et al., 2007; Crampton & Howden-Chapman, 1997; Dew & Kirkman, 2002; Galobardes et al., 2006; 2006b; Graham, 2000; Howden-Chapman & Tobias, 2000; Kawachi & Kennedy, 1997; National Housing Commission, 1988; Regidor, 2004) with published work on health inequalities in Aotearoa/New Zealand “appearing on a significant scale” from the 1980s (Howden-Chapman & Tobias, 2000:1). The comprehensive New Zealand Census Mortality Study linking census and mortality data for the entire New Zealand population from 1981 shows a clear gradient in mortality by
income, education and occupation, with the highest mortality in the most disadvantaged groups and the lowest mortality in the most advantaged groups (Blakely et al., 2005). This study supports international findings showing socioeconomic factors are major determinants of health.

Socioeconomic policies impact on housing options and household expenditure, both of which can have lasting health effects (Davey Smith, 1996). Research in Aotearoa/New Zealand has highlighted direct and indirect adverse health effects from insufficient money for medical care or adequate food (Cheer, Kearns, & Murphy, 2002; Waldegrave, King, & Stephens, 2004), household conditions such as cold and damp (Howden-Chapman et al., 2007), dust mites (Cunningham, 2004), overcrowding (Baker et al., 2000), and neighbourhood characteristics (Witten, Penney, Faalau, & Jensen, 2006).

Numerous international studies show adverse living conditions and low SEP in childhood associated with poorer health in adulthood, irrespective of adult SEP (Blaxter, 2004; Davey Smith, Hart, & Blane, 1998; Dedman, Gunnell, Davey-Smith, & Frankel, 2001; Galobardes et al., 2006b; Lynch, Kaplan, & Salonen, 1997; Wadsworth, 1997a; 1997b). Health effects include higher rates of respiratory and coronary heart disease (Wadsworth, 1997a; 1997b) and many adult behaviours detrimental to health (Lynch et al., 1997). Results from both the longitudinal British national childhood developmental study (Thomson et al., 2001) and a retrospective cohort study by Coggon and colleagues (1993) suggest adverse health effects from poor housing in later life. Similarly, in the US poor housing in childhood has been shown to impact on adult health status (Dedman et al., 2001). In Aotearoa/New Zealand, data from the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study and the Christchurch Health and Development Study also show adults socioeconomically disadvantaged as children have poorer adult health outcomes (Melchior, Moffitt, Milne, Poulton, & Caspi, 2007). Ritchie Poulton, director of the Dunedin study, states that “all physical health measures at 26 years, except systolic blood pressure, showed a graded relation with childhood socioeconomic status” (Poulton et al., 2002:1642). Poulton and Caspi (2005) call for further research to better understand the associations between childhood socioeconomic position and adult health.

The extensive research findings highlighting the effects of socioeconomic disadvantage on health status raise questions about the relative role of SEP in the health status of adults living in informal housing; and they raise concerns about the later health status of children who are currently living in informal housing.
Place as a determinant of health and wellbeing

Place involves an interactive link between social status and material condition and can be used to interpret a range of situated health effects... (Kearns & Gesler, 1998a:6)

Geographical areas also reflect inequalities in SEP and health (Blackman, Eason, Melaugh, & Woods, 1989; Crampton, 1998; Macintyre, 1998; Salmond & Crampton, 2002). Macintyre notes that from the mid-nineteenth century “it was obvious...that place influenced health” and that differences in disease rates “were not simply because different types of people lived there” (Macintyre, 1998:1). The response in Britain was to deal with sewage and provide clean water and better housing for the poor and responses in New Zealand were similar (Atkinson, 2005; King, 1981; Olssen, 1981). However, geographical inequalities in health remain (Salmond & Crampton, 2002). NZ Dep 91, 96 and 2001, based on aggregated characteristics of individuals in a geographical area, provide graphic area-based measures of relative deprivation in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Crampton, 1998; Crampton, Salmond, & Sutton, 1997; Salmond & Crampton, 2002), with those living in more deprived areas shown to have poorer health and higher rates of hospitalisation (Crampton, 1998).

Recent literature suggests that neighbourhood characteristics may in part explain differences in health outcome differences between areas (Ellaway, Macintyre, & Kearns, 2001; Howden-Chapman, 2004; Lochner, Kawachi, Brennan, & Buka, 2003; McCulloch, 2001; Witten et al., 2006). Taylor and colleagues (1997) review the way unhealthy environments – those that are unsafe and undermine social ties – “get under the skin”, in contrast to a healthy environment which “provides safety, opportunities for social integration, and the ability to predict and/or control aspects of that environment” (Taylor et al., 1997:411). An Aotearoa/New Zealand study of socioeconomically varied Auckland neighbourhoods identifies access to amenities, a sense of belonging and ‘neighbourliness’ as characteristics of a healthy neighbourhood (Witten et al., 2006).

British research shows less social integration, less perceived control and more financial strain in low income neighbourhoods (Feldman & Steptoe, 2004). The same study highlights significant urban-rural differences: feelings of personal control were more limited amongst participants living in the city than in rural areas, reinforcing feelings of helplessness and alienation, and dependency on external agencies. However McCray and Day (1977), in an earlier study into the housing values, aspirations and levels of satisfaction with their housing of thirty-nine rural and forty urban low-income respondents, found few significant rural-urban
differences. The fact that participants in this study are from two distinct geographical areas, one urban and one rural, presents opportunities to consider possible urban-rural differences in an exploration of the interface of place and informal housing as well as the role perceptions of ‘place’ might play in the health and wellbeing of participants (Williams & Patterson, 2008).

Research on place and health includes the impact of ‘therapeutic landscapes’. Various authors highlight the role for health and wellbeing of places which are perceived as healing (Frumkin, 2003; Kearns & Gesler, 1998b; Milligan, Gatrell, & Bingley, 2004). Frumkin (2003) cites studies showing speedier recovery amongst post-operative patients and lower blood pressure and anxiety levels through contact with nature, while Milligan and colleagues (2004) investigate nature as an antidote to the stresses of urban life. In describing the establishment of ‘alternative’ communities (and a raft of informal dwellings) on the Coromandel in the 1970s, King (1990: 124) writes of the “renewal” for the individual of “the uncontaminated natural environment”. From a public health perspective however, not all ‘natural’ environments are seen as healthy. Significant environmental health risk factors still exist in many Aotearoa/New Zealand rural communities, such as cold, damp houses, un-monitored water supplies, and children playing in farm-polluted streams (Webber, 2004:44).

The literature suggests the effects of place on health are variable. In contrast to instrumental models of environmental effects, where place is seen as interchangeable so long as it has the properties necessary for health and wellbeing, Williams and Patterson (2008:116) argue that “relationships to specific locales” can be a “central organising facet of...individual and group identities”. Thus while the informal housing of participants may be ‘unhealthy’ from an instrumental perspective, the health-giving properties of ‘therapeutic environments’ could mean that where participants have perceptions of their wider living environment as ‘therapeutic’, these perceptions may mitigate the effects of the material deprivation of their housing.

Continuing disparities and mediating factors

Individual capabilities crucially depend on, among other things, economic, social and political arrangements.

(Sen, 1999:53)

Income levels and disparities in income are widely accepted as the key SEP indicator affecting health (Galobardes et al., 2006b; Howden-Chapman et al., 2002). From 1982 to
2004, Aotearoa/New Zealand experienced the largest growth in inequalities in the OECD (Perry, 2007); and while life expectancy has improved across all socioeconomic groups, systematic health inequalities have remained (Blakely et al., 2005; Crampton, 1998; Hill, 2008; Howden-Chapman & Tobias, 2000).

Sen (1999) notes that how income impacts on health and wellbeing is mediated by a range of political, economic and psychosocial factors. Thus, while there is “an excellent argument for beginning with whatever information we have on the distribution of incomes...[there is] an equally good case for not ending with income analysis” (Sen, 1999:72). Among the mediating factors identified in the literature are cultural norms, discrimination, relative income differences and stresses associated with relative deprivation. There are also protective personal (social, psychological, behavioural and bio-physical/genetic) and community (social and structural) factors which can in turn modify the stress process (Israel, 2004).

Blakely and colleagues (2007) show that ethnic differences in population health in Aotearoa/New Zealand remain even when income differentials are controlled for. The adverse health impacts on Māori of colonialism and racism have been widely documented (Ajwani, Blakely, Robson, Tobias, & Bonne, 2003; Benton et al., 2002b, Vol.1; Harris et al., 2006a; 2006b; McCreanor, 2008; Reid & Robson, 2007). Colonialism is not confined to the past, state Reid and Robson (2007:4) - it is a “constant contemporary”, accompanied by institutionalised, interpersonal and internalised racism and heavily implicated in health inequalities. Tuffin (2008) highlights the on-going nature of colonialism evident in racist discourses over the past twenty years.

In a New Zealand Medical Journal editorial, Blakely and Dew (2004) suggest that culture, defined as created and shared explanatory systems about the world and ways in which groups act in keeping with these understandings, could also impact on health. Mediating factors, they note, include differences in understanding of ‘health’ and medicine as well as cultural norms. There is support in the literature for this suggestion. For instance Cheer and colleagues (2002) aforementioned study exploring health issues relating to lack of adequate income notes that “culturally proscribed priorities” such as “kinship imperatives” increased both financial shortfalls and over-crowding for Pacific families. Over-crowding has been linked to a range of health problems such as meningococcal meningitis, tuberculosis and cellulitis (Baker et al., 2000).

There is evidence that in addition to absolute differences in income, relative differences are also important, both in terms of material circumstances and the meanings people attach to
these circumstances (Easton, 2008; Kaplan, Oamuk, Lynch, Cohen, & Balfour, 1996; Kawachi & Kennedy, 1997; Osler et al., 2002; Sen, 1999; Wilkinson, 1997a; 1997b; 1999b). Some findings have been conflicting: a study by Judge and colleagues (1998) found ‘very little support’ for an association between income inequality and inequalities in population health status;\(^{22}\) and a systematic review of ninety-eight aggregate and multi-level studies by Lynch and colleagues (2004:5) also found little support for “the idea that income inequality is a major generalisable determinant of population health differences”.\(^{23}\) However, a more recent analysis of income and health data for 134 countries from 1970-1995, with a refinement of raw inequality data into annual time series of internationally and inter-temporally consistent Gini coefficients, confirms earlier analyses and shows a “strong, consistent, statistically significant, non-artifactual correlation between national income inequality and population health...with some evidence that this relationship is causal” (Babones, 2008).

There is conjecture over the factors feeding into this correlation. Wilkinson (1997b:1727) writes of “the psychosocial burden of relative deprivation”, the stress of “low control, insecurity, and loss of self esteem” (Wilkinson, 1997a:593) and the “chronic social stress of low status itself” (Wilkinson, 1999b:531). Not only, he argues, do the physiological effects of chronic stress adversely impact the endocrine, immune and central nervous systems (Wilkinson, 1997a:592), “but the processes which produce the inequalities lead to poorer social relations as well” (Wilkinson, 1999b:534). Stewart-Brown (1998) argues the emotional distress generated by income differentials increases susceptibility to physical and mental illness and health compromising behaviours.

The present study provides insights into possible mediating factors in terms of the relationship between informal housing and health and wellbeing. Awareness of relative deprivation, for instance, is heightened in an urban setting such as Auckland, compared with a rural environment like the Coromandel Peninsula. This may help explain differences in levels of reported health and wellbeing between the two samples. Similarly, differences in cultural norms and diverse understandings of ‘health’ will impact on of ‘realities’ of participants in this study.

Kawachi and Kennedy (1997) stress the spill-over effects of relative deprivation – the frustration, stress and family disruption which lead to a breakdown in social cohesion. They

\(^{22}\) Judge and colleagues (1998) postulated variable quality income data and a publication bias in favour of positive and novel findings explained the difference in findings.

\(^{23}\) Although there was ‘strong evidence’ of direct health effects in some US states (Lynch et al., 2004).
and others see social cohesion as another key mediating factor between income disparities and health inequalities.

Social cohesion/social capital as determinants of health

That social cohesion enhances wellbeing is now a well established fact.
(Kawachi & Kennedy, 1997:1037)

Studies show a strong interaction between material and psychosocial factors (Kawachi & Kennedy, 1997; Kawachi, Kennedy, Lochner, & Prothrow-Stith, 1997; Veenstra, 2002; Wilkinson, 1997a, 1997b). Numerous studies have linked social cohesion (defined by Spoonley and colleagues (2005) as cooperative social interaction amongst individuals, groups and institutions, and operationalised in terms of social participation and community levels of trust), and health status. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, Tepania-Palmer (2007:11) cites the negative impact on Māori social cohesion of urbanisation as “a major contributor to variability in the state of Māori wellness”. It appears to be among the factors linking income and health, “along with variations in access to material resources and life opportunities...[and] psychosocial processes related to relative perceptions of position on the socioeconomic hierarchy” (Blakely, Kennedy, Glass, & Kawachi, 2000:318).

The term social capital, defined by Greiner and colleagues (2004) as the resources individuals and communities have through their social connections, is often used interchangeably with social cohesion (2006). Wilkinson (1999b) and others note mortality and morbidity rates appear to be lower where social cohesion/social capital is greater, and vice versa (Kawachi, Kennedy, & Glass, 1999; Lindstrom, Merlo, & Ostergren, 2002; McCulloch, 2001; Reidpath, 2003; Veenstra, 2002); although in a review of articles linking social capital to public health, Carlson and Chamberlain (2003) conclude lack of conceptual development compromises their usefulness as an explanation of health disparities. There is likely to be some co-mingling with other socioeconomic determinants of health, such as income levels, housing, education and employment. Veenstra’s (2000) study of thirty Canadian health districts shows a co-mingling of social capital and income inequality, for instance. While there was a strong relationship between both variables and age-standardised mortality, the relationship between social capital and mortality was weaker when income inequality was controlled for, and vice versa. This lends credence to Kay’s (2006) assertion that social capital is only beneficial for health when combined with other forms of capital,
such as financial capital: "A high level of social capital will by itself achieve nothing" (Kay, 2006:172).\(^{24}\)

There is criticism of the focus on social cohesion/social capital as an explanation of health inequalities. Various authors caution against a 'shallow' horizontal definition of social cohesion/social capital which ignores the role of hierarchical political, economic, legal and social relations in structuring environments and the degree to which positive informal relationships may occur (Kay, 2006; Lynch et al., 2000; Muntaner & Lynch, 1999). Muntaner and Lynch (1999:59) argue the focus on social cohesion can lead to "a community-level version of "blaming the victim'", making communities responsible for their poorer health. Furthermore, Kay (2006), warns against a discourse of social capital investment being used by the 'haves' to justify lack of monetary investment in the ‘have-nots’ to alleviate structural inequalities.

The literature on social cohesion/social capital foreshadows that the extent to which study participants were part of a socially cohesive community (or not) and their degree of access to social capital would be likely to impact on their health and wellbeing – irrespective of their standard of housing. However, as Kay argues above, while social cohesion and social capital are important for population health and wellbeing and may help mitigate the effects of poor housing, they do not offset the negative impact of low SEP on health. Socioeconomic inequalities remain a key factor in poor health outcomes.

**Dealing with socioeconomic inequalities**

Reducing health inequalities and improving public health in the 21st century requires strategic investment in neo-material conditions via more equitable distribution of public and private resources.

(Lynch et al., 2000:1200)

Socioeconomic disparities and social inequalities in health are by definition at least in part socially produced and thus potentially avoidable (Howden-Chapman & Cram, 1998; Whitehead, 2007).\(^{25}\)

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\(^{24}\) While social capital/social cohesion is positively linked to health outcomes through collective socialisation and information networks enforcing healthy norms, Greiner and colleagues (2004) point out these can also work against health and wellbeing; if the norms of the community are not health-promoting, strong social cohesion can have a negative effect on health – a Kansas public health survey confirmed the strengthening of both healthy and unhealthy norms and behaviours.

\(^{25}\) Research shows that universal programmes are more effective in reducing inequalities and more sustainable than those targeting the poor (Goodin & Le Grand, 1987; Whitehead, 2007).
The Aotearoa/New Zealand Labour-led Government of 1999 to 2008 had a stated aim of reducing inequalities to achieve more equitable outcomes (Bromell & Hyland, 2007), and housing was seen as an important component. In 2007 the then-Prime Minister declared that the provision of good housing had “as great a contribution to make to health status as the health system itself” (Clark, 2007). Housing conditions, tenure and household amenities all relate to SEP – a major determinant of health (Galobardes, Lynch, & Davey Smith, 2007; Shaw, 2004).

Not only is housing the single most expensive budget item for most New Zealanders, but it also contributes to social and economic inequalities which in turn affect health status (Human Rights Commission, 2004). The supply and cost of housing is strongly influenced by government actions (Bierre, Howden-Chapman, Signal, & Cunningham, 2007; Thorns, 1987; Wilkes & Wood, 1984) and current shortages in Aotearoa/New Zealand in the supply of affordable, appropriate housing reflect in part “the impact of changing economic policies after 1984 on the housing sector” (Thorns, 1987:6). Government could arguably increase the supply of affordable housing and reduce inequalities through different housing market and taxation policies. As Howden-Chapman and colleagues (1996:181) note: “the strong association of housing with health indicates there may be high payoffs from the provision of readily available good housing.” However, a government is unlikely to commit to measures which make good housing readily available for those on low incomes without considerable electoral support, and results from the 2005 New Zealand Values Survey suggest this is lacking: around two-thirds of respondents believed people were poor because of personal deficits and more than half (fifty-five percent) were not in favour of any increase in taxes for subsidised mortgages or state-owned houses for those in housing need (Carroll, Casswell, Huakau, & Howden Chapman, 2008a). These findings have implications for government housing assistance aimed at achieving more equitable social and health outcomes.

Housing as a determinant of health and wellbeing

...housing is best viewed as a catch-all term for the myriad and multidimensional ways in which our conditions of living – physical, proximate, emotional and social – can affect health.

(Shaw, 2004:414)

The focus of the present study is on the many ways various ‘physical, proximate, emotional and social’ aspects of informal housing might impact on participants’ health and wellbeing.

26 Because housing is a capital asset as well as providing shelter, home ownership also plays an important role in intergenerational wealth inequalities (Thorns, 1987:11).
As Shaw notes, housing is related to health in a myriad ways which, when added together, make it a key social determinant of health. Housing is both a reflection of social inequalities and “a crucial nexus for the operation of a wide range of socioeconomic factors that fundamentally shape the character of everyday life” (Dunn et al., 2004:12).

Just as the concept of underlying structural inequalities leading to health inequalities is being revisited, so too are connections between poor housing and poor health (Barwick, 1992; Bonnefoy, Braubach, Moissonnier, Monolbaeve, & Robbel, 2003; Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2004; Cheer et al., 2002; Dunn, 2000, 2002; Howden-Chapman, 2004; Howden-Chapman et al., 2007; Hyndman, 1998). A raft of government reports since 2000 again emphasise connections between housing and health (Howden-Chapman, 2004).

There is good evidence linking specific housing conditions with both physical and mental health (Blackman & Harvey, 2001; Dunn, 2002; Dunn & Hayes, 2000; Dunn et al., 2004; Evans, Wells, Chan, & Saltzman, 2000a; 2000b; Howden-Chapman, Crane, Baker, Cunningham, & Matheson, 2004; 2007; Kearns & Smith, 1994; Krieger, 2002; Marsh, Gordon, Pantazis, & Heslop, 1999; Thomson et al., 2001). Reviews of the relevant literature (Wilkinson, 1999a), ‘life course perspectives’ showing poor housing conditions in childhood are bad for adult health (Coggon et al., 1993; Dedman et al., 2001; Marsh et al., 1999; Spencer, 2001), and studies noting improvements in health following housing improvements (Blackman & Harvey, 2001; Smith, Alexander, & Donna, 1997; Thomson et al., 2001) all illustrate connections between poor housing and poor physical and psychological health. Marsh and colleagues (1999:ix) suggest a “dose-response” relationship:

Greater housing deprivation at one point will lead to a greater probability of ill-health and a sustained experience of housing deprivation over time will increase the probability of ill-health.

Thomson and colleagues (2003) identify the main housing factors linked by research to variations in health as indoor air quality, dampness, dust mites and allergens, temperature, and housing type and design. Other factors include housing costs, area effects and housing tenure.

Ineichen (1993), when considering housing impacts on health, includes effects on physical, mental and emotional health and associations between housing and poverty. It is difficult to separate out the effects of poverty and poor housing on health when most of those

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27 An example is the Ministry of Health’s Reducing Inequalities in Health which clearly identifies housing as an important determinant of population health (Ministry of Health, 2002).
in poor housing are poor (Thomson & Petticrew, 2004; Thomson et al., 2001; Wilkinson, 1999a).

There has been a pattern of rising housing unaffordability in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Cox & Pavletich, 2008), despite the countering effects of income-related rents for some low income families (Perry, 2007). Shaw and colleagues (1998) link reduced access to affordable housing in Britain to an increase in health inequalities, while Howden-Chapman and Cram (1998) identify housing costs as the single largest cause of poverty in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Increased housing costs can result in less money for food, heating and medical care – and increased stress (Cheer et al., 2002; Waldegrave et al., 2004; Waldegrave, King, & Stuart, 1999). In a survey of 400 low income Aotearoa/New Zealand households, Waldegrave and colleagues (2004) found forty-four percent paid forty percent or more of their after-tax income on housing and that severely constrained “their ability to meet nutritional, health and medical needs” (Waldegrave et al., 2004:149). Similar report findings from in-depth interviews with seventeen low-income Pacific families (also in Aotearoa/New Zealand) are reported by Cheer and colleagues (2002), with families having to forgo buying food in order to cover housing costs and utilities bills.

Bullen (2004:75) notes that awareness of links between poor housing and poor health in Auckland has grown since a 1930s’ Auckland City Council survey documenting overcrowding and “the desperate living conditions of many of the poorest families”28, with a series of subsequent housing surveys and reports, including a 1970s’ survey linking poor health amongst Pacific and Māori communities to poor housing and overcrowding, and a series of surveys in the 1990s exploring associations between various housing stressors and health (Crothers, Kearns, & Lindsey, 1993; Friendship House, 1997; Mortenssen, 1988; Otara Housing and Health Local Solutions Project, 1999).29 Findings from the above, combined with those from a study of 200 Auckland children linking over-crowding with meningococcal disease (Baker et al., 2000), led to the Healthy Housing Development Programme, aimed at improving health through housing improvements. Initial evaluation has shown significant health benefits, including fewer hospitalisations (Bullen, 2004), with subsequent evaluation highlighting other health-promoting outcomes such as participation in housing decisions and strengthened community networks (Bullen et al., 2008).

28 Bullen suggests this was arguably the first housing and health research undertaken in Auckland.
29 The reports made recommendations for the increased provision of adequate housing and a 2001 report commissioned by the Auckland City Council suggested a survey to ascertain housing need and collaboration with councils across the region to ensure an adequate supply of affordable housing. However a change in council subsequently deemed housing was ’not core business’.
While many studies have attempted to show poor housing causes poor health, it has been difficult to do more than show correlations (Frumkin, 2003; Howden-Chapman & Carroll, 2004b; Shaw, 2004; Thomson et al., 2001; Wilkinson, 1999a). As Wilkinson (1999a:1) notes in a summary of the research evidence, while correlations are clear, “attempts to prove that poor housing actually causes ill health have often failed, and the research field is characterised by weak and sometimes contradictory, empirical findings.” In their review of studies of health improvements following housing interventions (including re-housing, refurbishment and energy efficiency measures), Thomson and colleagues (2001) note confounding variables limit the generalisability of findings. These include multiple deprivation and the direction of cause and effect, with difficulties unravelling the effects of housing quality from SEP and existing physical and mental health status. Nevertheless, Thomson and colleagues (2001; 2003) conclude there are likely to be some improvements in mental health and possibly small improvements in general physical health and wellbeing after housing improvements. In their own later prospective controlled one-year study of fifty households who had moved to improved housing however, Thomson and colleagues (2007) could find no positive health effects following housing improvement and reiterate the complexity of the housing-health relationship and the need to consider “the wider context within which housing improvement occurs and to investigate the processes through which health effects may, or may not, arise” (Thomson et al., 2007:213). In a review of housing interventions to improve health in the United States between 1990-2001, Saegert and colleagues (2003) conclude that “changes in residents’ knowledge, attitudes and behaviour...public policy; and community norms”, along with changes in the household environment, “can all contribute to improvements in housing-related health outcomes.”

The conflicting evidence on the efficacy of improving housing to improve health may depend on the level of housing deprivation of those surveyed. In an Australian survey of 1768 respondents, the authors conclude that for the general population, “there is little reason to expect that changes in housing circumstances affect wellbeing, probably because the changes in question are changes from a relatively good situation to a better situation” (McDonald & Merlo, 2002:21). However, a similar British survey of 5500 households (10,000 people) using longitudinal data from seven year waves (1996-2002), provides “robust evidence of a dynamic relationship between housing conditions and health” with improved housing linked to improved wellbeing (Prevalin, Taylor, & Todd, 2008:691).

But what makes housing healthy? Reviewing the literature on housing for families, Bratt (2002:13) identifies “a bundle of characteristics” which make up a healthy house: on a
physical level it should be ‘decent and safe’, and provide enough space so a family is not overcrowded; and on a psychosocial level, it should provide stability, security and opportunities to create a positive sense of self and empowerment. Dunn and Hayes (2000) differentiate between ‘material’ dimensions (which include shelter, a controlled physical environment, housing costs and opportunities for wealth generation), and ‘meaningful’ dimensions (home as a refuge where one can exercise control, a space for social relationships, and a reflection of self identity and social status). Any of these physical or psychosocial dimensions may impact on health status.

Although Dunn and colleagues (2004) note that recently socioeconomic dimensions have become an ‘emergent stream’, and Perkins, Thorns and Winstanley (2008) note greater methodological attention to qualitative analysis, most housing and health research has concentrated on the health effects of physical housing aspects such as dust mites, toxins, lack of space, and cold and damp (Baker, Goodyear, & Howden-Chapman, 2003; 2004; Cunningham, 2004; Howden-Chapman et al., 2004; Howden-Chapman et al., 2007; Howden-Chapman & Tobias, 2000; Howden Chapman et al., 2008; McNicholas, Lennon, Crampton, & Howden-Chapman, 2000). Aotearoa/New Zealand has both high seasonal mortality (Isaacs & Donn, 1993) and amongst the highest asthma rates in the world (Cunningham, 2004), along with household temperatures which are cold in winter by international standards (Isaacs, Camilleri, & Pollard, 2004). A landmark randomised controlled trial of 1800 homes by Howden-Chapman and colleagues (2005; 2007) establishes that insulating older houses increases household temperatures and improves occupants’ health and wellbeing in terms of self reported health, fewer GP visits and fewer days off school or work; and a subsequent housing, heating and health study of 409 additional households shows children with asthma are healthier with more effective, non-polluting heating (Howden Chapman et al., 2008).

Links between housing and mental health are also well recognised (Dunn et al., 2004), with reported improvements in mental health following re-housing (Blackman & Harvey, 2001; Evans et al., 2000a; 2000b; Kearns, Smith, & Abbott, 1992). Kearns and colleagues (1992) for instance note that in an urban study of 279 households in marginal housing in Aotearoa/New Zealand, people who were re-housed reported improved mental health. Evans and colleagues (2000b) suggest poor housing affects underlying psychosocial processes, diminishing motivation, increasing helplessness and damaging self esteem. Exploring the concept of housing stress30 amongst inadequately housed tenants from Auckland and Christchurch, Kearns and colleagues found stress increased with “a perceived lack of control,

30 Defined by Kearns as the ‘psychological condition’ resulting from an inadequate household-housing fit.
or powerlessness, in their circumstances” (Keams et al., 1991, 1992)\textsuperscript{31}, while Dunn (2002) found that respondents in a Canadian survey of 526 households who reported less sense of control and social support also reported poorer health. Howden-Chapman and Tobias (2000:137) note the importance for wellbeing of “a sense of control over personal circumstances...in housing”. Security of tenure is a key factor in the ability to feel a sense of control over housing circumstances.

The research evidence clearly shows associations between housing and health and “supports the argument that good quality housing has a role to play in both physical and mental health” (Wilkinson, 1999a:2)\textsuperscript{32} This present study explores the extent to which participants in Auckland and Coromandel considered their informal housing ‘healthy’. It also examines the physical attributes of participants’ living conditions, the role of other health-impacting factors such as housing costs and tenure – and the mediating role played by perception in the housing-health relationship.

Perception as a mediating factor

Perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of their living situations are likely to play an important mediating role. Research shows an association between perceptions of living situations and health status. For instance Fuller and colleagues (1993), in a survey of 2017 representative households in Bangkok, found little relationship between objective indicators of housing quality, crowding and health; however subjective aspects (particularly housing dissatisfaction and a felt lack of privacy), were shown to have detrimental health effects, with “psychological distress influencing physical health”. Similarly, Ellaway and colleagues (2001) found links between perceptions of the local residential environment and self-reported health in four socially contrasting Scottish neighbourhoods in the 1990s; a later British study found neighbourhood perceptions were associated with physical functioning (Feldman & Steptoe, 2004); and of a random Swiss sample of 3870 people who had moved, those who perceived an improvement in their housing reported an increased sense of wellbeing (Kahlmeier, Schindler, Grize, & Braun-Fahrlander, 2001). Hummon (1992:225) also, in a review of research investigating levels of community attachment, notes that while some

\textsuperscript{31} Kearns notes that while stress has been shown to adversely affect both physical and mental functioning (see above), it may also produce positive outcomes if “successful coping strategies and behaviours eventuate” (Kearns, 2006).

\textsuperscript{32} Wilkinson suggests we stop spending so much time trying to prove causality: that we accept housing plays a role in physical and mental health and get on with it.
studies show higher levels of neighbourhood satisfaction where housing and neighbourhood quality are better, levels of home ownership are higher, and there is easy access to nature,

...at the same time considerable evidence exists to show that community satisfaction is influenced by people’s perceptions of their environment, and that such perceptions account for more variation in community sentiment than do independently measured objective conditions.

But whatever the mediating roles of perception and psychosocial factors in explaining health inequalities, these do not discount the impact of structural inequalities (Davey Smith, 1996).

Housing tenure and policies

Home is an encompassing category that links together a material environment, in this case the physical structure of a house, with a deeply emotional set of meanings to do with permanence and continuity.

(Dupuis & Thoms, 1998:26)

In a comprehensive study of ninety Māori families living in Auckland, Benton and colleagues (2002a, Vol.3), found security of tenure was one of the ‘critical success factors’ for a sense of wellbeing, providing a sense of ‘permanence and continuity’. Security was also a dominant theme in a study by Dupuis and Thoms (1998) exploring meanings of home amongst fifty-three older Pākehā home owners. International research shows homeowners have the lowest mortality, followed by those in privately rented accommodation (Shaw, 1999; Sundquist & Johansson, 1997; Woodward, Shewry, Smith, & Tunstall-Pedoe, 1992). Security of tenure could play a part in this, providing a sense of permanence and continuity and reducing stress levels – although another explanation could be that tenure is here a ‘proxy indicator’ of income and social status (Shaw, 2004).

Dupuis and Thoms (1998:26) argue that attitudes towards tenure and concepts of home in Aotearoa/New Zealand need to be understood in the context of a “long-standing preoccupation with land and home ownership”. Common housing tenure metaphors uncovered by Gurney (1999:1711) in British housing discourse identified positive aphorisms (‘home-as-castle’, ‘an investment in the future’) associated with home ownership; and negative aphorisms (‘money down the drain’, and ‘dead money’) associated with renting. Attitudes in Aotearoa/New Zealand, where home ownership lies “at the centre of home

33 Wellbeing was self-defined and summed up as people having the 'ability to do (or be) certain things that they have reason to value'. (This broad definition also informs the present study).

34 However for most people home ownership comes with mortgage indebtedness. A British study by Nettleton and Burrows (1998b:731) shows the "profound psychosocial consequences" of this, including increased visits to GPs by men, and they suggest the "spectre of mortgage debt may also contribute to...insecurity".
making” and is “a central objective in the lives of most New Zealanders” (Perkins & Thoms, 1999:128), are similar. For instance Benton and colleagues (2002a, Vol.3) note respondents equated renting with a lack of security, as well as seeing it as a barrier to accumulating a deposit for a home of their own. Home ownership was regarded as “the best means of providing financial security, building an asset base and providing improved living conditions and a better future for children and families” (Benton et al., 2002a, Vol.3:1). Of interest in this study on informal housing is how participants might construct meanings around house and home and whether home ownership was also a goal for them.\(^{35}\)

Aside from New Zealanders’ ‘preoccupation’ with home ownership, Dupuis and Thoms (1998:26) emphasise its “economic, ideological and political importance to New Zealand’s development”. Government policies have long supported a home ownership model. Not only is housing a crucial component of social policies concerned with health and wellbeing (Davidson, 1994), but it is also a key component of the overall economy (National Housing Commission, 1988:xiii). Successive governments have manipulated tax, credit and production policies to regulate both the economy as a whole and the housing market, determining the supply and quality of housing, along with tenure options (Bierie et al., 2007; DTZ Research, 2004).\(^{36}\) Thus lack of adequate, affordable housing is rooted in macroeconomic considerations (Burt, 1992; Dickey, 2000; O’Flaherty, 1996). The support for home ownership through subsidised mortgages for low-income families and the building of state houses from the 1930s supported government macroeconomic goals of full employment through support of the building industry (McLeay, 1992). A change from the 1970s, with a progressive lessening of direct government involvement in housing “on the assumption that the housing market left unfettered could best meet the housing needs of New Zealanders” (DTZ Research, 2004:7), culminated in major institutional changes in the 1990s\(^{37}\) with a linking of housing and welfare policies, and the disappearance of ‘housing need’ from the policy equation (DTZ Research, 2004; Waldegrave & Sawrey, 1994). While the coming to power of the Labour-led Government in 1999 saw a policy shift back to a focus on housing need (DTZ Research, 2004), a decade later many still lack adequate, affordable housing.

\(^{35}\) Concepts of housing and home are explored in detail in Chapter Nine, Sense of Home and Place

\(^{36}\) In his monograph comparing and contrasting housing policies in Sweden and Aotearoa/New Zealand, Davidson (1994) shows how two small democracies, both initiating extensive housing programmes as part of their welfare states, have nevertheless ended up with very different results by using different government policies to address issues of housing supply. The emphasis in Aotearoa/New Zealand has been on home ownership, while in Sweden it has been on social housing.

\(^{37}\) Campbell outlines details of these in his thesis on the restructuring of New Zealand housing policy from 1990-1998 (Campbell, 1999).
Various factors are seen to contribute to this. The Centre for Housing Research (DTZ Research, 2004) has identified key issues as escalating house prices; the high percentage of income going on housing costs; changes in the social housing sector and the regulatory framework, and financial market deregulation; and declining home ownership, combined with an increase in private rental accommodation. Reliance on small scale private investors to provide affordable rentals for 450,000 households is likely to be unsustainable with costs to the taxpayer of $800 million annually in accommodation supplement payments, and a similar write-off to landlords in tax credits for interest payments and expenses incurred (2007).

One result of the lack of adequate, affordable housing, in spite of successive governments' stated intentions, has been an increase in homelessness.

Homelessness

The cost of homelessness and poor housing can be counted in wasted lives and wasted resources.

(Shelter, 2000:9)

Numerous studies have demonstrated homelessness (variously defined) is bad for health (Hwang, 2001; Public Health Commission, 1993; Shelter, 2000; Singer, 2003; Trevena, Nutbeam, & Simpson, 2001). Shelter (2000) notes the homeless in the UK are much more likely than average to have chronic respiratory, joint and digestive problems and skin complaints, and to die prematurely; and they are also eleven times more likely to have mental health problems. Several studies have investigated the two-way links between homelessness and mental health (Hubbard & Law, 2002; Kearns et al., 1991; Peace & Kell, 2002; Peace, Kell, Pere, Marshall, & Ballantyne, 2002a; 2002b). Just as it appears the stresses associated with homelessness may precipitate mental health problems, so too can mental health problems be a pathway into homelessness.

The term 'homeless' is variously defined in the literature (O'Brien & de Haan, 2000). It commonly includes three distinct groups: those ‘sleeping rough’; the temporarily homeless; and the incipient homeless and those inappropriately housed (O'Brien & de Haan, 2000; Tosi, 1996). The United Nations definition (Hwang, 2001) differentiates between the ‘absolute homeless’ (those without physical shelter who sleep out of doors, in vehicles and buildings not intended as dwellings for humans) and the ‘relative homeless’ (those who have shelter, but where basic standards for health and safety are not met). Salamon and MacTavish (2006) write of ‘quasi-homelessness’, in describing residents of the USA’s 8.8 million mobile homes.
in the country’s 50,000-60,000 trailer parks – on the grounds that they tend to have less security than those in mainstream housing and are more likely to end up absolutely homeless. The term ‘homeless’ is thus used in the literature to cover a wide range of living situations and includes people who do not necessarily consider themselves homeless (Cloke & Milbourne, 2006).

In a report prepared for the Auckland City Council, Gravitas Research and Strategy Ltd (2005) distinguish between primary homelessness (those sleeping rough); secondary homelessness (people in emergency or temporary accommodation), and tertiary homeless (people with insecure tenure, unsafe and inadequate accommodation). Homelessness can also be defined in terms of transitional, episodic and chronic: the chronically homeless have literally no ‘home’ to live in and are on the streets or in shelters, while the transitional or episodic homeless have unstable housing arrangements and lack a permanent place to stay (Amore, 2007; Whyte, 2004).

Homelessness can be viewed as a process, rather than a state (Breakey, 1997), with the homeless population made up of many types of people who are often in and out of ‘permanent’ housing. In their series of in-depth interviews of forty homeless people in Baltimore, Belcher and Scholler-Jaquish (1991) also take a temporal approach, defining three stages of homelessness – marginal, recent and chronic. Similarly, in a study of homeless people in rural Britain, Cloke and Milbourne (2006) distinguish between ‘settled’ and ‘transient’ as they track the housing histories of forty participants.

It is difficult to accurately assess homelessness, both because of the relative ‘elusiveness’ of this population (Chan, 2005; Fisher, Turner, Pugh, & Taylor, 1994; Whyte, 2004) and the elusiveness of an agreed-upon definition. Similarly, it is difficult to assess the numbers of those in informal housing (see Chapter Two, Background). There is a relatively low reported prevalence in Aotearoa/New Zealand compared with the US, Canada, the UK or Australia – only 0.16 percent (around 6400) according to the 2001 Census (Chan, 2005:4).

In-depth, semi-structured interviews with twenty-nine homeless people (rough sleepers) in Toronto identified poverty, unemployment, low benefits and lack of affordable housing as macro-level factors for homelessness, combined with personal vulnerability from childhood abuse/neglect and mental health symptoms (Morrell-Bellai & Boydell, 2000). Similar themes emerge in the retrospective life histories of ‘streeties’ (rough sleepers) interviewed in

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38 The nearest equivalent to trailer parks in Aotearoa/New Zealand would be caravan parks and camping ground
Auckland (O'Brien & de Haan, 2000), Wellington (Amore, 2007) and Christchurch (Mora, 2002).

Homelessness is considered an urban problem. While homeless people are visible in cities, there is a perception that no homelessness exists in rural areas (Cloke, Milbourne, & Widdowfield, 2000; Kearns, 2006). There is a denial of the existence of social problems in ‘arcadia’: the homeless are ‘out of place’ in ‘rural space’, argue Cloke and colleagues (2000). Kearns (2006) notes people living precariously in rural Aotearoa/New Zealand are less likely than their urban counterparts to be identified in media reports or by welfare agencies as homeless. Yet there is absolute homelessness amongst those in serious housing need in rural areas.

Of nearly 600 families in Northland on the HNZC waiting list in 2007, thirteen were literally homeless, 182 were living in buses/house trucks and 226 were temporarily sharing accommodation (McLoughlin, 2007). Chan (2005) includes people living in cars, tents or in parks, garages or sheds and houses that are damp, cold, or generally substandard, amongst the homeless. Roberts (2004, personal communication) too incorporates those living in cars, tents and garages, arguing a definition of homeless “must be related to the normal expectations of the general population.”

Thus, according to many definitions of homelessness, those living in ‘informal housing’ could be seen as ‘homeless’. Whether or not informally housed participants in this study considered themselves to be so will be explored in subsequent chapters. So too will the extent to which poverty, unemployment and mental health issues coupled with a lack of affordable housing (identified above as precursors to homelessness) were factors which led participants into informal housing.

Informal housing

...substandard dwellings both old and new, condemned houses, cowsheds, sheds, garages, woolsheds, temporary shelters such as tents, lean-tos made of tin and tarpaulin, old buses and caravans...others have dirt floors, no power and no running water...

(Maori Women’s Housing Research Project (N.Z.), 1991:19)

Informal housing, for the purpose of this research, has been defined as ‘housing produced outside of building industry institutions, frequently breaching existing legislation, and generally unacceptable in terms of prevailing middle-class mores about housing’ (Chapter One, Introduction). People living in informal dwellings such as those listed in the quote
above would be considered ‘homeless’ in terms of many definitions, but as noted above, some may well not see themselves as homeless.

The Māori Women’s Housing Research Project highlights the prevalence of informal housing in rural areas, and Peace and Kell’s (2002) investigation of the housing problems of the mentally ill and surveys of urban housing need (Crothers et al., 1993; Friendship House, 1997; Mortennsen, 1988; Otara Housing and Health Local Solutions Project, 1999) expose the prevalence of informal housing in urban areas. Yet there is a dearth of literature focusing on informal housing per se.

Informal housing in rural areas – particularly Māori informal housing – has been largely subsumed within investigations of rural housing need in general, such as the National Housing Commission (1988), the Māori Women’s Housing Report (Maori Women’s Housing Research Project (N.Z.), 1991) and a 2006 report on Ngapuhi39 housing need (Te Ropu Whariki, 2006:66). The latter documented the phenomenon of whanau “choosing to live in sub-standard accommodation” as a way to “manage or reduce regular rental or mortgage costs, to avoid debt, or to help when saving for a deposit when purchasing a home”.

Literal homelessness has been clearly shown to be bad for health – and it is presumed other forms of ‘precarious’ housing are too (Keams et al., 1992). For instance, the Māori Women’s Housing Research Project (1991) notes40 the ‘detrimental effects’ on both mental and physical health of living in informal and sub-standard housing, while the major concerns of key informants in the Whariki study (above) were “the social and health impacts of poor housing conditions on young people and whanau” (Te Ropu Whariki, 2006:66).

‘Reverse migration’ has already been identified as a factor in increased informal rural housing amongst Māori in particular (Chapter Two, Background). There was also an increase in informal housing associated with the establishment of a number of ‘alternative’ or ‘intentional’ communities in rural areas from the 1970s (Jones & Baker, 1975; King, 1990; Sargisson, 1990; Young, 1979) – including government-sponsored ‘Ohu’ (Young, 1979:24), where groups wishing to live communally and rurally could lease unalienated Crown land.41 A 1990 report commissioned by the then-Housing Corporation of New Zealand on multiple

39 Ngapuhi are a Northland (north of Auckland) Maori tribal grouping.
40 In group discussions with 3000 women and 214 individual interviews.
41 Land was made available to groups of not less than eight people to lease for 21 years at 4.5 percent per annum of the unimproved value of the land, with right of renewal. Of thirty-eight approved groups (February 1976) eight had been allocated land, ten were negotiating, ten searching and ten had disbanded; by 1979 only three were still in existence (Young, 1979:24).
ownership and low cost housing on the Coromandel Peninsula identified 147 ‘houses’ involving 330 people in thirteen separate communities on the Peninsula. The report described their informal dwellings, their motivations, value systems and ‘narratives of self’. Living in a simple, sustainable way, close to nature was a common theme (Sargisson, 1990). Similarly, King and others (1990), describing communal living on the Coromandel, stress conservation and ideals about natural living as motivations. King (1990:123) writes of the desire “to establish a natural conservation-oriented lifestyle in which we could care for the land”; Dare (1990:129) of “a love of the land and a wish to preserve and care for it”; and Jude (1990:129) of “love of the bush environment and the tranquility”. Sutherland sees the “general motivating force” being one of rejecting “the pressures of the conventional society, where it seemed easy to get caught up in the pursuits of material wealth” and “a real interest in seeking a simple, uncomplicated existence on the land” (Sutherland, 1990:130). Similar themes emerge in a book by Jones and Baker (1975) looking at both rural and urban alternative communities around Aotearoa/New Zealand. While the report by Sargisson surveyed a cross-section of informal community housing, the other references provide anecdotal snapshots.

This study extends Sargisson’s investigation of informal housing in alternative/intentional communities to look into ‘realities’ of informal housing for those living in the wider society. There is no mention of adverse health effects associated with the do-it-yourself informal housing of community members in Sargisson’s report (1990) – in fact respondents stressed benefits to their health and wellbeing. In his study of informal housing in South Africa, Haarhoff (1984:9) identifies a sense of control in providing one’s own housing as a possible reason for this: when dwellers felt in control of the design and management of their housing “both the process and the environment produced stimulates individual and social wellbeing”. Autonomy from the constraints of conventional housing provisions could also be beneficial, he suggests, in allowing people to produce housing that “better matched their needs within the limits of what they could afford” (Haarhoff, 1984:8). He also suggests informal housing could be seen as a solution to shortages of affordable housing.

The benefits of having a sense of control and autonomy over their housing (and affordability) are similarly likely to have relevance for the health and wellbeing of those living in informal housing in Aotearoa/New Zealand.
Concluding comments

This chapter and the preceding Background provide a context for the following investigation of informal housing which will build on and broaden understanding of housing and health issues raised in the literature reviewed. Housing has been revealed as both an indicator of more general socioeconomic circumstances and a key social determinant of health and wellbeing. While direct links between some specific housing factors and health outcomes have been shown, as Shaw (2004) suggests, housing is perhaps best viewed as a ‘catch-all’ term for the ‘myriad and multidimensional ways’ our living situations potentially affect health and wellbeing.

Most research into socioeconomic disparities and health and wellbeing has been at a population level. Critically reflecting on issues around SEP has led to an understanding of SEP as an important determinant of health. Similarly, exploring concepts of social cohesion/social capital has increased awareness of mediating influences at a population or community level. However, as Sen (1999) points out, while the above are important in understanding health inequalities, there are many other potential mediating influences on personal health and ‘the ability to be healthy’. Ethnographic studies to unpack population-based statistics in order to better understand the roles played by ‘choice’ and ‘constraint’ in the lives of those in ‘inadequate’ housing have been called for by Milne and Kearns (1999); the possible effects of ‘therapeutic environments’ on health and wellbeing have been signalled by Kearns and Gesler (1998b), amongst others; and Blakely and Dew (2004) have suggested building on ‘cultural capital’ to improve health and wellbeing. The in-depth interviews with the forty participants in this study will allow for a closer consideration of these and other possible mediating factors.

Specific literature relating to the themes which emerged through an analysis of in-depth interviews with key informants and participants will be dealt with in more depth in the thematic chapters. The next chapter, Media Discourses, provides further context for consideration of participants’ ‘realities’ and ‘alternative discourses’ in its examination of dominant housing and health discourses and the role of the media in maintaining and reinforcing these.
CHAPTER FOUR

MEDIA DISCOURSES

Introduction

As the role of media in society has grown, the proportion of what we know from direct (as distinct from mediated) experience has shifted to the point where mass media strongly shape our personal and collective social realities.

(McCreanor, 2008:93)

Media discourses inform how we think about things. They help construct and maintain prevailing attitudes and models of the world. ‘Discourse’ (from the Latin discursus, meaning running to and fro, intercourse or argument) is here used to denote an account, or a narrative. Discourses connect events “in a meaningful way for a definite audience...[offering] insights about the world and/or people’s experiences of it” (Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997:xvi). Discourses in this sense “are vehicles for prevailing sentiments in a society...[and] contain our shared meanings about other groups” (Crowley & Mitchell, 1994:11). Dominant societal discourses are reflected and shaped through the media, fuelling public debate and feeding into policy making. As McCreanor (2008:93) notes, they also reinforce existing power relations, through their “criteria or values that identify events or people as newsworthy.”

This chapter explores some of the dominant media discourses around housing and health, and includes a survey of housing stories published in the New Zealand Herald (New Zealand’s largest, and arguably most influential, newspaper) for the decade-plus leading up to the beginning of this study in 2002. Auckland and the Coromandel both come within the Herald’s circulation area, and the survey period was chosen to provide background for the
participant interviews which began in April 2003. Cultural collisions (both implicit and explicit) reflected in a range of media coverage about housing are highlighted.

In the decade until 2000, dominant housing discourses in the Herald appeared to be around houses as capital investment, full-time hobby and status symbol. Most housing stories had little to do with social issues and disadvantage. There was a change from 2000, when stories about the lack of affordable housing, substandard housing and health related problems began to appear. These became increasingly more frequent after 2002 (outside the survey period), especially articles highlighting the lack of affordable housing, and the need to provide it (e.g., The great housing headache, March 29, 2007 and Housing: the big squeeze, April 24, 2007), with Herald editorials calling for action (e.g. Open doors needed in housing, April 24, 2007). At the end of 2007 the Government passed the Affordable Housing Bill, designed to encourage the provision of low-cost housing.

This investigation of housing and health discourses in the mainstream media in the twelve years leading up to participant interviews provides a context, along with the exploration of current and historical housing ‘events’ and statistics in Chapter Two, Background, for the accounts and analysis of participants’ personal experiences presented in following chapters.

Background

If media discourses help construct and maintain prevailing attitudes, what are New Zealanders’ attitudes around housing, health and disadvantage? According to the 2005 New Zealand Values Study more than eighty percent of respondents thought it should be central Government’s responsibility to provide a decent home for everyone, while eighty-two percent were willing to pay higher taxes for better health services. But less than half (forty-five percent) were willing to pay increased taxes for subsidised mortgages or social housing, with a majority believing people were poor because of laziness and lack of motivation (Rose, Huakau, Sweetsur, & Casswell, 2005).

Housing, health and morality appear to be seen as interconnected (Shaw, 2004). Just as in 1903 a series of articles in the Herald denounced over-crowded ‘foul dens’ in the city for their adverse impact on health and morality (Tennant, 2000) almost a hundred years later a report in the Herald (October 1992) about Habitat for Humanity’s community housing programme in Aotearoa/New Zealand quoted a Habitat spokesman predicating their community housing projects on the grounds that they were necessary for family wellbeing, the preservation of Christian family values and to avoid anarchy; and while a 1907 Society for the Protection of
Women and Children report equated the impermanent material fabric of a dwelling with lack of permanence in human relations and a concomitant undermining of morality (Tennant, 2000), so too media reports in the 2005 election campaign (see for example, the televised Leaders' Debates, (TVNZ, 2005) spoke of 'moral decline' and linked housing provision with the preservation of family values.

Links made in the media between housing and health also span the century. In 1918 poor housing was seen by the media as a causal factor in the high influenza epidemic death rate; and causal links are now drawn between overcrowded housing and diseases such as meningococcal meningitis. However, notwithstanding evidence of socioeconomic determinants of health, discourses of individual responsibility have tended to prevail.

Health discourses

Healthy behaviour has become a moral duty and illness an individual moral failing. (Crawford, cited in Blaxter, 1997:752)

Health promotion lessons around taking personal responsibility have gained wide acceptance, with an escalating discourse of "health as self-discipline and illness as a failure to regulate oneself" (Peterson 1994, cited in King & Watson, 2001:409). Blaxter (1997:753) illustrates the shift in emphasis from "factors external to the individual to individualized risk factors" in her analysis of articles in medical journals.

Mainstream media discourses have reflected and reinforced these 'lessons', portraying disease and injury as largely the result of 'bad' lifestyle choices. We have been exhorted to change 'unhealthy' personal behaviours and to take responsibility for our health through eating the right foods and exercise, through vaccination and screening programmes. The latest diet findings and the benefits of exercise have been presented as 'facts' about health, alongside articles on the lifestyle accoutrements – the health supplements, health foods and drinks, and the exercise apparel – considered necessary for 'health'. These have all become part of the "complex health matrix...inscribed in contemporary western societies' 'look better, feel better' obsession" (2001:410).

The media also reflected and reinforced public expectations of ready access to comprehensive health services and treatments, with frequent articles 'exposing' shortcomings

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42 This commodification of health was evident in health columns in New Zealand newspapers and magazines (e.g. the weekly health section of the Herald, Linda Wharton's column in the Herald on Sunday, and Noel O'Hare's column in the New Zealand Listener magazine).
in service delivery and holding out promises of miracle cures. Greaves (2000:1576) writes of the media-fuelled obsessive pursuit of health as a form of madness, with health and happiness “held out as a promotional package to which all good citizens are expected to aspire”. One could add ‘home beautiful’ to Greave’s comment above; just as health has been commodified, so too has ‘home’.

Housing discourses

In the mainstream media, homes have largely been presented as commodities to buy and sell and make a profit from, or to make-over and impress with. New Zealanders are “house-obsessed”, writes columnist Douglas Jenkins (2005:20), and very aware of the role homes play in “individual self-image”. Apart from real estate and lifestyle sections of daily newspapers, beautiful houses were featured in a plethora of glossy magazines surveyed (Home Beautiful, NZ House & Garden, Your Home and Garden, Home and Entertaining, Urbis, Belle – Designed for Living, New Zealand New Home Trends, Interiors and Handyman Home Improvement Essentials). These, along with television home improvement and ‘make-over’ programmes, have all fuelled a ‘look good, make your dreams come true’ fantasy for those with disposable incomes.

As well as ‘home beautiful’, home has often been presented in the media as a ‘haven’. This ideal became established in Western society in the nineteenth century (Tennant, 2000) and re-emerged strongly after the Second World War. Shaw (2000:165) quotes a 1949 radio broadcast in which ‘home’ was portrayed as “the last refuge of sanity [from]... political falsehood, national and international strife, emotional emphasis and moral decline.” At the same time, however, other discourses challenging ‘home as haven’ were appearing in the work of seminal New Zealand writers such as Alan Curnow, Janet Frame, Frank Sargeson, and Robin Hyde. For them home did not mean security; rather it was something stifling to be escaped from, revolted against. Hyde wrote of “four walls and a roof on top” getting in the way of “ever having a home in this world” (Hyde, cited in Jones, 2000:89); and Frame of home as a place where love grows “timid and fearful”, children are emotionally scarred and adults are emotionally strangled (Sargeson, cited in Jones, 2000:106).

While present day media stories of child abuse, domestic violence and home invasion confirm for some home is anything but a haven, the underlying implication is that these acts are aberrations, and that home should in fact be a haven.
Survey of *New Zealand Herald* housing stories

Documentary analysis was undertaken of all *Herald* articles filed in hard-copy form in the staff library under ‘Housing’ from January 1990-October 2002. The original idea of a quick scan of the files to get ‘a feel’ for what was considered important about housing by New Zealanders (at least as written about in the *Herald*), in preparation for the interviews, subsequently turned into a more thorough examination of around a thousand articles read to determine their content, sorted into categories and counted. However, this was not an exhaustive systematic survey; nor, while some of the articles were photocopied and later re-read to further explore discursive elements, was a discourse analysis carried out. The purpose of the survey remained the same: to provide contextual information to inform the interviews and analyses of participants’ narratives. Survey findings are summarised below.

Housing discourses in many forms made the news from 1990-2002 – Mega-house up for auction...House prices rising...Home ownership benefits...Leaky building syndrome fears... Until 2000 the majority of stories presented house-as-commodity (see Table 4.1 below), with a change from mid-2000 to more about housing social issues in the wake of 1990’s neo-liberal reforms which disproportionately affected those on lower incomes (see Background).

Table 4.1 Housing stories *New Zealand Herald* 1990-October 2002 (yearly averages)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story categories: house-as-commodity and housing social issues</th>
<th>'90-94 (60 months)</th>
<th>'95-mid 2000 (66 months)</th>
<th>mid2000-Oct 02 (28 months)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>House-as-commodity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House prices, buying/selling, costs</td>
<td>40.6</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building industry, building permits</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislation, court cases</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design and lifestyle</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homes destroyed/near misses</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrity and other houses</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems in buildings</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>34.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home improvements</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total house-as-commodity stories</td>
<td>88.7</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>91.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Housing social issues</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(including homeless, substandard, pensioner, rural (especially Māori), market rents, health problems, affordability.)</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total housing stories</td>
<td>96.1</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td>139.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*excluding advertising supplements

43 This was the period, as previously noted, leading up to the participant interviews. The October 2002 cut-off also coincided with a new electronic filing system which would have interrupted the continuity of the survey.  
44 Less stringent building requirements and cost-cutting on the part of builders led to a raft of leaking homes.  
45 Anecdotally, housing headlines in the *Herald* from 2006 appeared more likely to be about affordability; and from 2007, following the collapse of the world financial markets, about falling house prices, negative equity and fears of mortgagee sales (although ‘leaky home syndrome’ was still featuring at the beginning of 2009).
The table above shows increased media coverage of both housing generally and housing as a social issue towards the end of the period surveyed. In the 1990-1995 and 1995-2000 periods social issue housing stories made up only 8.3 percent and 12.6 percent of the total respectively. This rose to 52.6 percent from mid-2000-October 2002. Thus from 2000, more than half of all housing stories in the *Herald* were about social issues, and the percentage of stories reflecting house-as-commodity discourses correspondingly decreased.

From 1990-1995 there were 37 housing social issues stories filed from the *Herald*. During the same period there were 203 stories on house prices, house sales, how to sell and buy and costs of building a house; 66 stories on the building industry, developments and numbers of permits; 53 on legal matters (including front page coverage of the *Great Ohakea Airbase Overspend*); 38 on design and life-style; 34 on homes destroyed (or near misses); 25 on celebrity and eccentric homes; 23 on construction problems in buildings; and an average of seven supplements (2-12 pages) a year with stories on home improvements, ideal homes and building and buying homes (not included in the table above).

From 1995 to mid 2000 there were 34 housing social issue stories, with the number of stories on house prices, sales, costs and buying and selling, dropping to 93. Conversely the number of home improvement stories in news/features rose from 4 to 40: between 1998-1999 a regular half-page column ran in the Saturday Features section; design and lifestyle stories also rose to 44; the number of building industry stories halved to 33; those on legal matters dropped to 44, stories on homes destroyed/near misses to 19, and eccentric and celebrity houses to 21; the number of stories about problems with buildings was just one less, at 23.

From mid-2000 to October 2002 there was a drop-off generally in the number of housing stories (perhaps as a result of a shrinking in the over-all size of the *Herald* and a higher advertising/editorial ratio), although the number of stories concerned with social issues increased, and has continued to do so. Social issue stories were the biggest single category of housing stories (114), including stories about homelessness, emergency housing, poor Māori rural housing, the effects on health and the need for decent affordable housing for all (although 12 of these were angled around protests from residents not wanting low-cost, temporary or emergency housing in their area). Problems with buildings were also reported, primarily stories about leaky building syndrome (81). House prices and house sales story numbers were once again relatively frequent (61), with 21 in both the design/lifestyle and...
building industry categories. There were 14 celebrity homes and 'eccentric home' stories, 11 on legislation and court cases and one home improvement story.

In terms of their placement in the newspaper, tragedy (or near tragedy) – houses falling off cliffs (or about to) – and scandal (Ohakea Air Base) made the front pages. So did the occasional story about prices and building problems, particularly leaky buildings. From 2003 to 2008 (outside the survey period) articles about the lack of affordable housing and leaky building syndrome in particular have received prominent display as well as increasing in number.

Figure 4.1 below clearly shows the rise in the number of housing social issue stories over the survey period, although house-as-commodity discourses remained predominant up until October 2002. The dramatic rise in ‘problems-in-buildings’ stories in the latter period reflects the preoccupation with ‘leaky building syndrome’.

**Figure 4.1 House-as-‘commodity’ and housing social issues stories 1990-October 2002**

Discourses and power

It was instructive to consider the thousand-plus articles surveyed in terms of van Dijk’s (1994) observation about media discourses sustaining existing power imbalances through

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48 A survey of Herald stories over the past five years would be likely to show proportionately more social issue stories
...maintaining and legitimating such unequal access patterns to discourse and communication, and thus to the public mind: who is allowed (or obliged) to speak or listen to whom, how, about what, when and where and with what consequences.

(Van Dijk, 1994:109-110)

The disproportionate ‘voice’ and attention given to the very small percentage of New Zealanders affected by leaky building syndrome, for instance, appears to be an illustration of existing power imbalances ‘maintained and legitimated’ by the news media through unequal access to discourse and communication. Those affected by leaky building syndrome can be seen as ‘us’ – respectable home-owners at the higher end of the housing market. In contrast, those in informal housing whose dwellings may equally leak every time it rains, are ‘them’ – and generally not even in the housing market. Until mid-2000, almost no voice was given to those on the margins in informal, over-crowded and/or sub-standard housing; these people were overwhelmingly represented by politicians, local government, church and other community group leaders as the ‘other’, and as a ‘problem’ creating difficulties, or requiring some fixing. In contrast, the property owners affected by leaky building syndrome were themselves given a voice as well as being represented by others – and the buildings and the policies which had led to leaky building syndrome were seen as the problem, not the occupants.

The relatively few housing stories highlighting social issues (see Figure 5.1 above) were presented in terms of concern, promises or defences from politicians, condemnation of market rent policies and pleas for government money for housing for the poor from church and other community leaders, warnings about health implications of poor housing from researchers, statistical reports of the numbers of people affected, the problems posed for councils by substandard, illegal housing, and some stories on initiatives to build cheap houses for the poor.

Acknowledging ‘problems’

Only one article in the survey period, a major feature for Housing Week prepared in conjunction with the then-New Zealand Housing Corporation (September 1990) appeared to

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49 Saville Smith (2008, personal communication) notes that problems with ‘leaky building syndrome’ surfaced in 1997 in the Eastern Bay of Plenty: “but these are poor people in small houses and people with low amounts of investment (high for them, but low by New Zealand standards), so no one gave a tinker; the problems that led to those homes being leaky were exactly the problems that lead to a $400,000 home in Auckland leaking…but it wasn’t taken up until it became a political problem…”

50 Not only were there no interviews or comments from any of the people being spoken about, but there appeared to be little attempt to present their realities or personalisation of their plight – in spite of the fact that the Herald, like other news media, thrives on ‘human interest’ stories.

51 Apart from social services personnel, one academic, Robin Kearns, was quoted.
investigate housing disadvantage. It recognised that “poor housing is linked to things like poor health, mental stress and lack of educational achievement”. Thus issues were named, but there was no investigation of the extent of the problem, or the perspectives of those disadvantaged by inadequate housing – and when a story the following month (October 3 1990) talked of housing needs being researched over the following five years, it was in terms of how builders, banks and home appliance manufacturers could meet demand once it was known. Other articles about social housing issues in 1990 came in the lead-up to the election, with reported statements from the Labour Party that it would put more money into housing and from the National Party that it would sell off state housing stock.

Stories from 1991 included the defeat of then-Opposition MP Jim Anderton’s Private Members Bill to make government responsible for housing those in need, and cited a figure of 70,000 families lacking decent housing (May 1991); a report on Dr Robin Kearns’ research showing that when people in a housing crisis moved into a state house their mental health improved (May 25 1991); a Budget article outlining impacts on housing and negative spin-offs for the poor (July 31 1991) – and the suggestion of using a shipping container to house homeless youth in Newtown, Wellington (December 12 1991).

Social issues housing stories from 1992 and 1993 included a report from the New Zealand Council for Christian Social Services warning that a change to market rents (offset by an accommodation supplement) would lead to homelessness, housing shortages and discrimination (February 20 1992); and reports from social service agencies highlighting the hardship and distress the switch to market rents was causing (June 16 1992). There were also stories about the Christian Housing Ministry, Habitat, which aimed to stabilise family life by providing affordable and decent housing for low income people (October 1992 and February, March and August 1993); and Shelter, a community project designed to get poor people into their own homes (November 24 1992). This latter story used the example of an unemployed Mangere man and his family, but included nothing about his personal experiences – his problems, hopes, wants, dreams.

Through 1994, articles quoting various Christian and other social service agencies about the deteriorating housing situation following government reforms included calls for government intervention. The results of a survey were published showing 49,000 households

52 Those in serious housing need were seen to include: “• People living in overcrowded housing through no fault of their own. • People living in substandard housing, lacking basic amenities, or housing in a condition likely to aggravate mental and physical health problems. • People living in emergency accommodation or forced to share with other households. • People with excessive housing costs – who are paying 50 per cent or more of their net income for housing.”
had serious accommodation problems (February 3 1994). Again, there was nothing from the perspective of those coping with the problems of poor housing. A 1995 article (January 10) outlining the findings of a report into serious housing need, prepared for the Minister of Housing the previous year and obtained under the Official Information Act, stands out against this trend. It began with the personal story of a man and his five children who were living in a caravan park, rather than the statistics. Similarly in 2001 (June 6) the plight of a family, who had been living for four years in a garage they paid $180 a week rent for, was highlighted. These were among the few examples during the survey period of putting faces to the statistics, and giving a voice to those experiencing the housing difficulties.

People as ‘problems’

In fact, those affected tended to be seen as ‘problems’.53 A story about 40 families living in substandard housing in the Hauraki District (December 15 1992) was presented in terms of this being a problem for the Council, rather than the people concerned; similarly a March 31 1998 story concerning the growth of an ‘illegal shanty town’ at Ahipara focussed on the problems it was causing, and on a forthcoming investigation by the Far North District Council. Again there was no discussion from the point of view of the people living in the shanties; and a report of a fatal tent fire in Northland (April 21 1993) was presented as much in terms of regulations as personal tragedy. Similarly, an August 1993 story linking sub-standard housing on the East Coast with scabies, TB, asthma, rheumatic and arthritic conditions highlighted the public health problem, rather than the human experiences of those living in such conditions. An August 11 2000 story about Aotearoa/New Zealand’s decade-long epidemic of deadly meningococcal disease being driven by household crowding (citing a major study from the Institute of Environmental Science and Research, Auckland Health Protection Service and the University of Auckland) again appeared to portray those affected as public health “problems”. There were no reports from the point of view of those coping with the over-crowded conditions, no investigation of the reasons for the overcrowding.

Inadequate housing as the ‘problem’

Homelessness hit the headlines in 1995 with stories from church groups having to turn poor Wellington families away from crowded emergency housing while more than 400 state houses lay empty (September 25 1995); and again on December 16 1997, with Hamilton

53 Keams (2006) notes how media reports about those ‘living precariously’ in rural areas tend to present them as having ‘abdicated responsibility’.
statistics from social service agencies. There were follow-ups on February 25, March 7 and 27, 1998, showing little change and calling for research. A story of the tragedy of a Matauri Bay (Northland) mother, whose three children lost their lives when fire burnt down her ramshackle home, was followed by one about the offer of a new house for her from an Auckland builder (November 12, 1997). There was however no discussion of the substandard conditions many families were living in. Eight months later (July 15, 1998), a brief four-paragraph story quoted a report by Parliament’s Social Services select committee, which noted that more than 1300 families in Northland and the East Cape were living in seriously substandard housing; and on December 16, 1999, a study by the Centre for Research, Evaluation and Social Assessment (CRESA) showing at least 26,000 New Zealand children living in seriously over-crowded households was quoted, but without further investigation of the ramifications of overcrowding for these children, for their families, or Aotearoa/New Zealand as a whole.

Stories about housing ‘solutions’ included regular news stories about Habitat’s newest low-cost housing projects and three investigative articles in 1997 and 1998 about ‘cooperative’ solutions to the housing shortage (including one by myself, February 12, 1998). There were also stories about residents fighting Nimby (‘not in my backyard’) campaigns against proposed solutions, such as ‘cluster’ state housing and boarding houses or hostels in their area (September 6, 11 & 19, 2000).

In 2001, the end to market rents for state housing was acknowledged as ‘critical to [the] offensive against poverty’ in an article by poverty researcher and writer, Charles Waldegrave, with an accompanying piece by another researcher into housing issues, Alan Johnson, about “the other 60,000 Auckland families who qualify for a state house but aren’t lucky enough to have one” (November 30, 2001). However, in other articles, there appeared to be a return to perceptions of ‘people as the problem’: anomalies were highlighted which allowed ‘Top digs for $70 a week’ in up-market Auckland suburb Remuera (December 7, 2001), and a Ponsonby (also an up-market area of Auckland) couple paying only $6 rent for their three-bedroomed Housing New Zealand unit (December 14, 2001). Another article (December 8, 2001) reported speculation from the Opposition that many of the thousands joining the queue for a state house following the end to market rents would “move into cars and garages to get priority”.

54 The Herald, while the largest daily newspaper, is only one of many mainstream media sources which collectively feed into the ‘circulation and construction of the public interest’. Others, such as the NZ Listener (a weekly national magazine of news, reviews and commentary), focussed more on investigation and analysis. For instance the Listener followed up the 1997 Northland house fire tragedy where three children died reported in the Herald (see above), with Dwelling in misery, “a sorry story of political failure to combat the rural poverty of Northland and the East Coast” (Watkin, 1997).
Here again the emphasis was on people as potential ‘problems’, rather than the shortage of affordable housing being the problem. It is interesting to note that since housing affordability became a major issue affecting ‘ordinary’ New Zealanders (after the survey period), the housing market, rather than the people unable to afford to buy houses, has been portrayed in the Herald and other media as the ‘problem’.

Cultural collisions

The articles on housing in the New Zealand Herald 1990-2002 reflect both implicit and explicit ‘collisions’ between mainstream discourses of housing and the realities of those on the margins (more likely to be implicit given the lack of media space accorded to the narratives of those outside the mainstream). Housing coverage revealed implicit assumptions that ‘home’ equalled house or flat; that home represented both capital investment and status symbol; and that home was (or should be) a haven and the centre of family life. Many of these assumptions collided with the ‘realities’ of those in inadequate housing situations (overcrowded, substandard, informal) increasingly reported on through the period surveyed. However there were examples of more explicit collisions outside the survey period in a range of media.

Discourses of home-as-haven and the centre of ‘good’ family life were eloquently summed up by the hero of the Australian movie The Castle (shown on TV One in 2005), fighting to save his house from demolition to make way for an airport extension: “It’s not a house, it’s a home – it’s got everything: people who love each other, great memories, a place for the family to come back to”. Here there is a clear distinction drawn between ‘house’ and ‘home’. Can an informal dwelling such as a tent or caravan qualify as a home? According to some reports, yes. “Home is where the heart is and I’m lucky enough to live there”, a Māori woman talking about family life in a tent in Northland told a Mana Tangata reporter (National Radio, November 2, 2004). And until March 2005 (when it was closed down by the Manukau City Council), various caravans and lean-tos were ‘home’ to thirty-two families living in Greenacres Caravan Park in South Auckland (Herald reports and TV 3 60 Minutes documentary, Greenacres, March 2005).

Media reporting of the Greenacres controversy, because it gave a voice to those on both sides of the conflict, made cultural collisions explicit. Several residents presented narratives emphasising their sense of safety and the feelings of belonging and neighbourliness they experienced at the caravan park. To them Greenacres was home, while to local residents and
those in authority it was an eyesore and unsafe – a “boil on the backside of the South Auckland Police” (60 Minutes 2005). While much of the media coverage of Greenacres was presented in terms of a ‘straightforward’ collision between ‘law-breaking’ and ‘unsafe’ caravan park residents and upholders of ‘law and order and safety’ (including police, the city council and the electricity supply company), the cultural collision over house and home between the narratives of residents and mainstream discourses was captured in the documentary commentary:

It’s hard to believe that any New Zealander could call this place home. Surely closing it down is the best thing that could happen. But it’s actually not that simple. You just have to ask the people who have made this their home and they’ll tell you they’ve found some kind of dignity here. They’ve got their own hopes and dreams.

(Scott, 2005)

Such cultural collisions were also graphically presented in two documentaries, Bastion Point Day 507 (Mita, Narbey, & Pohlmann, 1980) and Bastion Point. The Untold Story (Morrison, 1999), which screened on Māori Television (May 25, 2008) to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the removal by police and the military of 222 Ngati Whatua and their supporters from land they were occupying at Bastion Point overlooking Auckland’s Waitemata Harbour. While not wanting to collapse difference (Ngati Whatua were reclaiming ancestral land that was rightfully theirs, and Greenacres residents were merely renting space in a caravan park), nevertheless there are similarities in terms of overwhelming forces of law and order being brought to bear on marginalised people living in informal housing, and the demolition of their dwellings.

Both the Greenacres and Bastion Point controversies can be seen in the light of Douglas’ (1992) cultural theory of risk, where situations which challenge mainstream discourses are deemed to be dangerous. There are echoes, too, in the recounting of the earlier eviction of Ngati Whatua from their informal dwellings on their land on Auckland’s Tamaki Drive foreshore in 1951, with their old homes, meeting house and church demolished and burned (Bastion Point. The Untold Story 1999). While there may well have been health and safety issues, their dilapidated dwellings were considered unsightly – especially with a drive along Tamaki Drive planned for the Royal Visit of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953. Here, as with Greenacres Caravan Park, the residents and their dwellings did not ‘fit’ with mainstream perceptions of housing, and a mainstream discourse of ‘risk’ justified their removal.

55 The advent of Māori Television has allowed the airing of a wider range of cultural discourses.
56 Ngati Whatua who had been evicted told of their pain and suffering and a Pākehā commentator spoke of the sound of the women and children wailing as their homes burned being indelibly etched in his memory almost half a century on – a stark contrast to dispassionate accounts in the New Zealand Herald (Bastion Point. The Untold Story 1999)...

MEDIA DISCOURSES 73
Similar cultural collisions emerged from the narratives of study participants and key informants, along with different conceptions of what constitutes risk. These are explored in following chapters.

Role of the media

Crowley and Mitchell (1994:17) sum up the role of the media in society as variously, “profitable industry, instrument of state policies, vehicle of social and political critique, anchor of emancipatory possibilities”. There is also the conviction that the media should play “a central role in the construction and circulation of the public interest” (Crowley & Mitchell, 1994:18). How well did the New Zealand Herald, in its coverage of housing stories from 1990-2002, fulfil these various roles?

When considering the coverage of housing stories, the Herald’s role as ‘profitable industry’ is clear. There frequently appeared to be a lack of clear differentiation between ‘real estate’ and housing news/feature stories, for instance, especially in the earlier period surveyed. Advertising and articles were often linked, with most discourse focussed on the state of the property market and individual house prices, how to improve your house (and therefore its value), and building industry initiatives. The emphasis appeared to be on stories which would bring in advertising revenue, and catered to those New Zealanders who owned houses and were renovating them, or buying and selling.

In terms of its role as ‘instrument of state policies’, articles flagged new policy initiatives and explained the working of new legislation – including why market rents for state houses and accommodation supplements were going to work so well. They also highlighted ‘illegal situations’, such as the shanty town at Ahipara, substandard houses in Hauraki and overspending on renovations at the Ohakea Air Force Base.

Although only a minority of stories dealt with social housing issues, homelessness, poverty, and health issues associated with poor housing, these issues were raised, providing some instances of ‘social and political critique’; and in terms of providing ‘an anchor for emancipatory possibilities’, there were stories looking at affordable housing alternatives and organisations which were providing housing – as well as stories from politicians and church and community leaders calling for decent housing for all.

How well did the Herald coverage of housing issues play ‘a central role in the construction and circulation of the public interest’? It is tempting, because of the relative lack
of housing stories dealing with disparities and other social issues pre-2000, and the benefits of hindsight, to conclude ‘not very well’; that it was in the public interest to have more information much sooner, for instance, about the negative impacts of the then-National Government’s 1990s’ housing reforms and the growing need for affordable housing. There was a lack of analysis about the situations and statistics which were reported, with little ongoing debate and few alternative viewpoints presented. In stark contrast, investigations, personal stories, analysis and calls for action over ‘leaky building syndrome’, which affected a relatively small number of people, were on-going. The answer would seem to depend on ‘whose public interest’? Certainly mainstream interests of the majority home-owning population were catered for in the many stories about house prices, buying and selling and costs, design, lifestyle and home improvement articles, as well as stories exposing housing problems such as leaky building syndrome (at least for Auckland home-owners). However I would argue, along with HNZC (2005), that ‘adequate housing is fundamental to the health and well-being of families and communities’; and that it is in the public interest for all New Zealanders to ‘have access to quality, affordable housing’. Although largely absent in the period surveyed, the Herald’s role in ‘the construction and circulation’ of this issue has grown enormously in the past seven years.

Concluding comments

It has not been the purpose of this chapter to provide a definitive survey of media discourses around housing and health; nor to provide systematic discourse analysis of those articles mentioned. Rather, the survey of Herald housing coverage, and other articles, reports and commentaries mentioned, are intended to provide further context for the exploration of the phenomenon of informal housing. For as Hinchman and Hinchman (1997) note, the insights offered by media discourses shape ways of seeing and understanding, as well as reinforcing dominant societal discourses.

This chapter highlights health-as-commodity (health-as-lifestyle, self-responsibility and moral obligation) and home-as-commodity (housing as capital investment, home beautiful and keystone of ‘family’ values) as dominant media discourses. The emphasis has been on personal responsibility and personal solutions. However, as the housing affordability crisis has affected increasing numbers of ‘ordinary’ New Zealanders, housing affordability has become a ‘mainstream’ rather than ‘marginal’ housing discourse (along with problems of negative equity), and the media focus has shifted from one of personal responsibility to the role of market forces largely outside the control of the individual. By 2007 affordability was...
the major housing discourse in the Herald and high on the political agenda of both major political parties. While Herald articles from 2003 onwards were outside the period surveyed for this thesis, it would be instructive to track the changes in narratives which led to this. Cultural collisions between mainstream 'home-as-house' and 'house-as-commodity' discourses and participant discourses of 'home' become apparent in the following chapters. So too does the central role affordability plays in informal housing.

The next chapter, Methodology and Methods, sets out the theoretical paradigms which inform this study, connecting strategies for inquiry and methods of data collection and analysis.
CHAPTER FIVE

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Introduction

Research is purposive knowledge generation. That is, we set out explicitly to create knowledge in relation to a specific set of problems or challenges.

(Smith & Pitts, 2007:4)

All research is aimed at collecting data to expand knowledge (Coolican, 1999; Smith & Pitts, 2007, above). What data is collected, how it is collected, and how it is analysed, depends on underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions, or paradigms. The researcher is guided, constrained – and restrained – by the paradigm or interpretive framework he or she operates within and from (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b). As Nightingale and Neilands (1997:76) note, “decisions we make at an ontological level about the nature of our world determine both the forms of knowledge we hold and the methods we use to analyse that world”. The first part of this chapter explores how an applied ethnography framework, underpinned by a broad phenomenological and hermeneutic approach, has informed the structure and process of this qualitative study. The reasons for choosing a qualitative, as opposed to a quantitative methodology are discussed, followed by an explanation of how qualitative research, and in particular an applied ethnographic approach, can both provide rich data and potentially feed into policy making to benefit marginalised communities.

The research design, including preliminary investigations, choice of participants and the data collection processes, is then outlined. Principal research tools were key informant interviews and in-depth and follow-up interviews with a small but diverse group of
participants in informal housing, in order to generate rich narrative data about their values and experiences. These were complemented by two self-report health surveys. The role of interviews and surveys in qualitative research is discussed, and researcher impact on the data collection process, coding and analysis, is considered.

How the interview and survey data were analysed and interpreted to arrive at the findings of this study is described in the third part of the chapter, along with criteria for judging the quality of the study (differing from the validity, reliability and objectivity checks for quantitative research), and a consideration of ethics.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible…to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a:3)

The term qualitative implies an emphasis on the qualities of phenomena – on processes and meanings – rather than quantitative measurements of amount, intensity or frequency. While quantitative studies measure and analyse causal relationships and associations between variables, qualitative research emphasises “the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a:8).

A variety of methods are used to collect a range of data which become ‘texts’ for interpretation: interviews, case studies and life stories; personal experience, observations and introspection; historical, literary and cultural texts; recordings and photographs. The qualitative research process has been described by Banister and colleagues (1994:3) as: “…an attempt to capture the sense that lies within [and]…an exploration, elaboration and systematisation of the significance of an identified phenomenon.” While a survey can provide a ‘numerical description’ of a phenomenon of interest, it does not give access to ‘meaning’ (Smith & Pitts, 2007).

Both qualitative and quantitative research can be viewed as a collection of interpretive methods or practices. Representations of the world are always mediated (Banister et al., 1994). While quantitative methods are characterised by hidden assumptions about the nature of reality and knowledge which determine research questions and findings (for instance, that
there is a world ‘out there’ which can be objectively researched), in qualitative research underlying paradigms are explicitly acknowledged.

This study uses an applied ethnographic framework, informed by a phenomenological innatist approach (we can only know the world through our senses) and a hermeneutic social constructionist approach (what exists, and our knowledge of it, is defined by social practices and forms of symbolic action). It is bound within the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm which posits “a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological proceedings” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a:20).

From a constructivist-interpretivist perspective, there are no universal truths. Truth is always historically, culturally and socially created (Ezzy, 2002). But this does not condemn us to complete relativism. Ezzy (2002:2) speaks of “the lived reality of half-worked through truths”; and Packer (1985:1086) of a “sensibleness that can be found to be present or absent in a course of action or an account of that action”.

Rather than attempting to be definitive, this study seeks to feed different perceptions into the debates around housing provision and the role of housing in health and wellbeing. As Nutley and colleagues (2007) say, social research seldom offers definitive answers. The meaning or ‘sense’ that is made of particular phenomena becomes part of an ongoing debate.

Both quantitative and qualitative methods have their place in health research. They provide different answers, uncover different ‘realities’ – and combining the two can provide a more complete picture. For instance in Cornwell’s work (1984) on the health of families in the East End of London, a survey picked up the ‘public’ account, with complex ‘private’ (and sometimes contradictory) beliefs accessed through in-depth interviews. The choice of method depends on the questions asked, and these questions in turn depend upon the context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b). The current research question (capturing ‘realities’ of those living in informal accommodation and implications for health and wellbeing) and the context (little known about this disparate and hard to access group) determined a mainly qualitative approach. In-depth interviews, complemented by two self-report surveys, have been used to access ‘private’ and ‘public’ accounts. These, combined with key informant interviews, field notes, a close reading of background data, photographs and poetry, have been used to gain and give a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of informal housing; to “make more understandable the worlds of experience” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a:19).
The poems in this study were written to present/re-present participant narratives – to provide more windows into their ‘lifeworlds’: their thoughts, feelings and lived experiences. As Bruner (2003:27) notes, “a narrative models not only the world but the minds seeking to give it its meaning”. The use of poetry in ethnography has been described as ‘evocative representation’ – “a striking way of seeing through and beyond social scientific naturalisms” (Richardson, 2000:931). The poems have been written to more fully represent the participants and the phenomenon of informal housing. They also represent a personal response to the research process and participants’ narratives. The photographs included offer another form of representation and interpretation, a way to “integrate seeing into the research process” (Harper, 2000:729).

Qualitative research has been likened to montage (or bricolage or quilt-making), with several ‘images’ superimposed to create the final picture. The interpretations “build on one another” and the process “creates and brings psychological and emotional unity to an interpretive experience” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a:5). The narratives-as-poems, together with the photographs, the interpretation of background data and analysis of interviews and self report surveys, make up this ‘montage’ of informal housing.

**Ethnography**

Ethnos, a Greek term, denotes a people, a race, a cultural group...Ethnography, then, refers to a social scientific description of people and the cultural basis of their peoplehood...

(Vidich & Lyman, 2000:40)

Ethnography, a methodology borrowed from anthropological research, is sometimes seen as synonymous with qualitative research (Chambers, 2000:852), even though it is only one of several qualitative methodologies. The ethnographic approach taken in this study is neither simply a Malinowski approach of a “native point of view” (although the voices of the participants are central), nor one that merely “reports problems” (Chambers, 2000:858). Here an ethnographic approach is used to explore the phenomenon of informal housing and to describe and interpret the ‘lived experiences’ (defined by Denzin and Lincoln (2000a:8) as the intersection of ‘individual belief and action with culture’) of people in informal housing; to investigate their behaviours, beliefs and choices around housing and health; and to examine the discrepancies and breakdowns (Agar, 1994, 1996; Chambers, 2000) – the dissonances and collisions – with ‘mainstream’ Aotearoa/New Zealand beliefs and behaviours which emerged through participants’ narratives. There is a focus on exploring how “people fashion
culturally meaningful expressions from fields of experience” (Chambers, 2000:856-7). Here ‘culture’ refers to created and shared explanatory systems about the world and ways in which groups act in keeping with these understandings (Macdonald, 1999). ‘Cultural collisions’ which emanated from dissonances in beliefs and values between participants in informal housing and mainstream Aotearoa/New Zealand, and the way these played out, increase understanding of the phenomenon of informal housing.

The above definition of culture contains the idea of “patterns of culture, regularities that transcend individual variations” (Macdonald, 1999:113). Initial analysis of participants’ narratives suggested that while ‘patterns of culture’ based on shared ethnicity have at times contributed to cultural collisions, various ‘patterns of culture’ appeared to be at play in other instances. Elliott (2005:127) notes that narratives are not only shaped by the social world, but also “through the cultural repertoire of stories to which each individual has access.” Hence cultural collisions arise when the ‘cultural repertoire of stories’ differs. To further understand these incompatibilities and conflicts, participant narratives will be considered in the light of aspects of anthropologist Mary Douglas’ cultural theory of risk, which suggests a tendency to link societal harms with behaviour which contravenes societal norms (Douglas, 1966, 1992); and sociologist Robert Merton’s work on deviance (Merton, 1957, 1996). Merton posited a typology of modes of individual adaptation — conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism and rebellion — as responses by individuals when the means are lacking for many to achieve societal goals of ‘success’ (Merton, 1957, 1996). Cultural collisions which surfaced from the data are explored throughout the thesis in terms of ‘patterns of culture’ (ethnic and otherwise) and perceptions of ‘risk’ (Douglas, 1992); and in Chapter Fourteen, Demographics in Poetry, these are considered in terms of Merton’s typology of deviance. As Chambers (2000:856) notes, applied ethnographers “have become increasingly interested in such matters as how social groups collide and...in the cultural meanings that result.

As an ‘outsider-ethnographer’, my emphasis in this study has been on learning from participants rather than ‘studying’ them (Rice & Ezzy, 1999). Participants have been approached as ‘key informants’ and have generously given time to explain things I did not understand. In the process I have become more keenly aware of ‘contested meanings’ and ‘cultural collisions’. Chambers (2000:858) views the outsider status of the ethnographer as a particular strength: the ethnographer, by being an outsider, is in a better position to “expose more tacit dimensions of culture” and to “unravel communicative disorders between groups

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57 From a hybrid Marxian-Weberian viewpoint, social and structural relations between groups can be seen to depend on the control of resources within a society; and the effective control of resources and exercise of this control exploits, dominates, alienates, and excludes other less advantaged groups (Lynch & Kaplan, 2000:20).
than are members of the groups themselves” he says. Fadiman (1997:x) also notes the advantages of outsider versus insider status: “if you stand at the point of tangency, you can see both sides better than if you were in the middle of either one.” I thus make no apologies for having interviewed some participants from ethnic backgrounds and social circumstances which differed from my own. While the ‘outside ethnographer’ may initially understand much less of a situation, the “blunder and breakdowns” which result can “yield rich data and point toward communicative resolutions” (Chambers, 2000:858). Thus, while there are undoubted disadvantages to being an ‘outside ethnographer’, there are also advantages from an applied ethnography viewpoint.

The tension in ethnography between a deconstructionist framework, with the “human subject” understood in terms of positioning “in and through competing discourses” and a humanistic framework, where “the integrity of the subject is taken to be both a starting and end-point of analysis”, has been described by Frosh (2007:639 cited in Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008:225). While the role of context and competing discourses in the ‘constructed’ nature of participant ‘realities’ around informal housing is acknowledged and explored in this thesis, the emphasis is on the ‘integrity of the subject’ in terms of both the presentation and representation (or interpretation) of participants’ narratives. This thesis is about discerning and attempting to present their experiences and their perspectives (to ‘capture their realities’) in order to uncover differences which lead to ‘cultural collisions’; and to discover possible ‘solutions’ which may fit with and build on existing cultural values and resourcefulness. 58

Applied ethnography

For basic research, the ultimate measure of significance is a research product’s contribution to theory and disciplinary knowledge. The most immediate measure of the significance of applied research is its contribution to decision making.

(Chambers, 2000:851)

Applied research focuses on a population that is at least in part defined by some larger social ‘problem’ (Chambers, 2000). While only some of the participants in this study viewed their informal housing as a ‘problem’, informal housing is perceived as such by territorial and government authorities who try to control it through legislation and enforcement; by the

58 However while motivated by a wish to improve the situations of those living on the margins in informal housing, this study is not motivated by a desire (implicit in many urban ethnographic studies of last century) to facilitate “moral reform” or “social adjustment”. (Vidich & Lyman, 2000:48 & 51)
health sector due to links between housing and health; and by many in the general population, because informal housing does not conform to mainstream ideas of 'proper' housing.

This study both seeks to make a contribution to disciplinary knowledge and to contribute to discourses and decision-making in the fields of housing, health and wellbeing. In examining the socially constructed cultural patterns of those living in informal housing (which vary considerably from interpretations by outsiders – particularly those who have some authority over them), and exploring areas of 'cultural collision', it seeks to provide an 'ethnocentric antidote' to mainstream stereotyping. While outside the scope of this study, research into the culture of the institutions with which participants engaged as clients would give a fuller understanding of some of these collisions, and potentially a better chance of negotiating satisfactory solutions. The applied ethnographic framework is underpinned by a general phenomenological and hermeneutic approach.

Phenomenology

Phenomenological research is the description of the experiential meanings we live as we live them...it attempts to describe and interpret these meanings to a certain degree of depth and richness.

(van Manen, 1990:12)

Phenomenology (from the Greek word *phainein*, to show) sees meaningful experience as the basis of all knowledge. It is a “science of consciousness”, the study of situations in everyday life from the viewpoint of the people experiencing them, with clear descriptions revealing the structure and meaning of phenomena as they are experienced (Hein & Austin, 2001:4). People construct ‘lifeworlds’ in which they make assumptions about everyday life (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000:488): thus to understand people’s behaviour requires understanding their lifeworlds and the meanings and interpretations they give to their actions.

Phenomenology takes the innatist view that all products of human life (including research) are symbolic creations of the human mind. ‘Facts’ are given form and content by consciousness (which is subjective and selective), depending on certain experiences and perspectives (Eaker, 1972).59

From a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world we live in as human beings. And since to know the world is profoundly to be in the world in a certain way, the act of

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59 This contrasts with the beliefs of ‘realists’ or empiricists, for whom the starting point for knowledge is the “data” of the external world.

DEMOGRAPHICS & DESCRIPTIONS 83
researching – questioning – theorising is the intentional act of attaching ourselves to the world, to become more fully part of it...

(van Manen, 1990:4)

Taking a phenomenological approach has meant attempting to ‘walk in the footsteps’ of participants, both during the interview process and subsequent analysis. Writing the poems has been part of this phenomenological approach, combining an attempt to ‘walk in participants’ footsteps’ with an ‘intentional act of attachment to the world’ (van Manen, 1990, above).

There is no one way to conduct phenomenological research; different methods are adapted to different situations; nor is there one ‘school’. Phenomenology broadly divides into empirical and hermeneutic phenomenology (Hein & Austin, 2001). With empirical phenomenology, the researcher tries to put aside preconceptions and biases to be as open as possible to the experiences of the participants and attempts to describe these experiences without interpretation. In contrast, with hermeneutic phenomenology, being aware of one’s own lived experience and presuppositions is seen as a way of increasing understanding of the phenomena being investigated (Hein & Austin, 2001). This study leans towards a hermeneutic approach, attempting to ‘walk in the footsteps’ of participants, as well as attempting to interpret the meaning of their experiences.

While phenomenology describes “how one orients to lived experience”, hermeneutics describes “how one interprets the “texts” of life” (Hein & Austin, 2001:4). Thus the descriptions of lived experiential meanings in the thematic analysis and the poems are presented within an historical, cultural, economic and social context, including my own relevant ‘lived experiences’, presented in the Prologue.

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the “critical theory of interpretation”.

(Rundell, cited in Rice & Ezzy, 1999:10)

Hermeneutics (from Hermes, messenger of the Greek Gods), shares with phenomenology the assumption that social life creates history and society and that people create their individual lives within a reality which has meaning for them. Understanding human life comes from interpreting these meanings, with human actions interpreted like a text. Sometimes the terms phenomenology and hermeneutics are used interchangeably (van Manen, 1990).
In this study “hermeneutics” is used in a general sociological sense (Ezzy, 2002) to mean on-going interpretation of participant stories or narratives, a concern with meaning, and an understanding that any meaning is contextual and will change depending on different historical, personal and social circumstances. This is a much less specific use than that described in Packer’s (1985) analysis of Heidigger’s three ‘modes of engagement’—ready-to-hand, unready-to-hand, and present-at-hand—which concludes the ready-to-hand mode (being in the moment and aware of the action we are engaged in holistically) is the best starting point for ‘hermeneutic’ inquiry. Working with such a constrained definition presents problems, as the ‘ready-to-hand’ mode is difficult to access. The use of the term ‘hermeneutic’ in this study is congruent with a more general approach which considers action and social interchange in “the rich complexity that we all, in our everyday dealings, know them to have” (Packer, 1985:1092).

Hermeneutic interpretation is an on-going cyclical process, with “preexisting interpretive frameworks” determining the sense people make of their experiences, and “in turn shaping the development of new, interpretive frameworks” (Ezzy, 2002:6). Interpretations change across time and place and differ depending on the experiences, beliefs and histories of the individuals and groups holding them. The presentation – and representation – of them also varies, “their slant and believability depending on the circumstances of their telling” (Bruner, 2003:24) and interpretations made by the researcher. While participants’ own terms and interpretations are primary, the researcher is central to the sense that is made of a particular phenomenon (Banister et al., 1994). As Elliott (2005) notes, the analysis of participants’ narratives is in itself a narrative:

> Researchers make selections, have opinions about what is significant and what is trivial, decide what to include and what to exclude, and determine the boundaries, or beginnings and ending of their accounts

(Elliott, 2005:13).

Positivists contrast such interpretation with ‘truth’, which is seen as certain and invariable and independent (Coolican, 1999; Greenwood & Levin, 2000). But all ‘truth’ is relative and it is the very ‘variability’ of interpretation, with meaning constructed in interaction between researchers and participants, which is the strength of hermeneutics (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

The hermeneutic process is viewed by van Manen (1990) as a dynamic interplay of six research activities: turning towards a phenomenon which seriously interests one; investigating

60 Most interviewing for instance is inappropriate because this encourages the participant to adopt a reflective attitude, taking them out of the ‘ready-to-hand’ mode (Packer, 1985).
lived, rather than conceptualised, experience; reflecting on the essential themes of the phenomenon; describing it in written form; maintaining a strong scholarly relationship with the phenomenon; and a balance between a consideration of the parts and the whole. All of these have been steps along the path of this study and provide an overview of the method.

The method

‘Turning towards a phenomenon of interest’ – in this case informal housing – was the first step. One of several research areas suggested by the Housing and Health Research Programme, informal housing was of interest because little was known about this phenomenon, research could potentially bring beneficial outcomes for this group on the margins, and field work could be carried out in two geographical areas I had a strong affinity with (and potentially greater ease of access to a hard-to-find population).

Background exploration

The researcher considers his or her personal experiences and converses with others who have lived the phenomena of interest; reads what others have written about it; examines the words that are used to describe it; and follows other clues found in poetry, literature, painting or music as a means of discovery. (Hein & Austin, 2001:9-10)

A literature search and background exploration included not only published journal articles, books and reports about housing and health, but also relevant central and local government legislation, Census data, poetry, novels, films, television programmes and magazine and newspaper articles. An analysis of all housing stories published in The New Zealand Herald, the daily newspaper with the biggest and widest circulation in Aotearoa/New Zealand between 1990-2001 revealed mainstream housing discourses. Interviews with local government officials and people working in the areas of housing and health provided both general information and accessed ‘provider’ attitudes. Insights gained on a field trip to Alice Springs, Australia, (October 2003) to look at initiatives in Aboriginal housing and health enabled a better understanding of the Aotearoa/New Zealand context and the cultural collisions which emerged through analysis of background material, key informant and participant interviews.
Defining the territory

The geographical areas chosen in which to carry out field work – Auckland and the Coromandel Peninsula – gave an urban and a rural sample, allowing for the emergence of possible urban/rural differences. No form of informal housing was excluded; in fact, when it became apparent several Coromandel participants may well have been sleeping rough in an urban environment which did not provide a range of baches, sheds and caravans to sleep in, or land to park buses and vans on, the sample broadened out to include some rough sleepers in Auckland. A decision was also made to include a few participants who, while they had recently been living in informal housing, were not in informal housing at the time they were interviewed. This allowed for useful insights as these participants compared the relative advantages and disadvantages of their previous informal and present mainstream living situations.

Only English-speaking participants were included in this study. While this excluded many living in informal housing in Auckland, it is hard enough to glimpse the ‘lifeworld’ of another without having to work through an interpreter. I would also have liked to represent some of the informal housing situations in the city heard about anecdotally from key informants (such as the Chinese family sleeping on the floor of their take-away bar; the Tongan family living in caravans after their house was condemned and demolished; the Māori woman, her partner and six children crammed into the basement garage of her niece’s rented two-bedroom house), but for reasons of confidentiality and/or fears of repercussions, this was not possible.

Accessing the participants

People living in informal housing are, almost by definition, outside the mainstream. Many lack a permanent postal address or telephone number. In the city they are likely to be largely invisible in garages and caravans out of sight behind houses; in rural areas they may live in hard-to-reach locations at the end of four-wheel-drive tracks, in the bush, across rivers or estuaries. Some are on the move in vans and buses. The goal was for maximum variation sampling (Rice & Ezzy, 1999) which included a wide range of participants in terms of demographics and types of informal accommodation.

Meetings with social service agencies, health professionals and kaumatua highlighted numerous instances of informal housing and produced support in principle; but confidentiality and privacy concerns often translated into no access to participants in practice. (Kaumatua on
the Coromandel also initially questioned why a Pākehā was going to interview Māori participants, but were reassured when they understood this was not a study about Māori housing needs specifically — although inevitably some Māori would be among those interviewed — and that the researcher was a ‘local’.

The decision was made to begin interviewing on the Peninsula, as accessing participants there was likely to be easier than in Auckland, due to personal contacts. Two initial contacts set a process of purposive snowball sampling in motion, leading to suggestions of further participants, and those to others. But even with people’s willingness to participate, isolated settings, coupled with the lack of telephones and/or ‘free-wheeling’ lifestyles, often made arranging meetings times (and then actually meeting), problematic. To make initial contact sometimes required several visits — and then appointments might not be kept. (This also happened with Auckland participants, but less frequently.)

There was no equivalent snowball sampling process in Auckland. Sampling in the city was opportunistic, with most participants accessed through personal contacts (for instance one was the daughter of a work colleague of my sister; another, the friend of a friend of one of my sons; another, the daughter-in-law of a client of a social work friend...) and through the Auckland City Mission and the Methodist Mission. Several times potential participants had second thoughts about participating after initially agreeing.

There were twenty-five Coromandel participants and fifteen in Auckland. Interviewing new participants ceased when a wide range of living situations and mix of participants (taking into account age, gender, ethnicity and family circumstances) had been accessed and the same themes began to emerge. Difficulties accessing participants and time constraints also limited the number of Auckland interviews.

Initial in-depth interviews were followed up six to twelve months later with shorter more structured interviews with thirty-two of the participants (the remaining eight were not contacted, either because they could not be found or because of time constraints). The

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61 Breakey (1997) suggests the need for flexibility and open-ended times frames on the part of researchers working with people who do not lead conventionally structured lives — and do not use time as an anchor point.

62 An example of this was a woman who approached me after a Housing and Health Research Programme presentation and spoke of the high numbers of people living in informal housing in Manukau City, including her son (whom she suggested I interview), his partner and their baby. However, while her son and his partner agreed to be interviewed, her husband was opposed, because he felt ashamed they were living in an unlined garage lacking basic amenities. Olivia James, then-CEO of Otara Health, noted Pacific people’s reluctance to be interviewed because of shame, not wanting to draw any attention to their families when some members might be overstayers and a general distrust of mainstream institutions (James, 2004, personal communication).

DEMOGRAPHICS & DESCRIPTIONS
purpose of the second interviews was to ascertain if and how living situations had changed. Transcripts of the initial interviews and the poems which had been written were shared with individual participants for their comments and input at these follow-up interviews.

Interview settings

Most interviews took place in the ‘homes’ of participants: in garages and baches and sheds, caravans, a house-truck, buses and vans, outside a tent, in an encampment and in HNZC units. The Auckland City Mission, the Methodist Mission, the basement kitchen of an inner city hostel and the lobby of a downtown hotel were other interview settings. Although I preferred interviewing them at their ‘home’ (allowing observation of participants’ living situations and interaction with them ‘at home’) the setting was ultimately the choice of individual participants.

Interviews were conducted one-on-one, except for the five couples in the study who were interviewed jointly. The one-on-one interviews proved easier to do and generally provided richer data than those with couples, where responses sometimes seemed circumscribed by the presence of the partner. All except three of the initial interviews were audio-taped. Too much background noise precluded taping in two instances, and the third did not wish to be taped. Verbatim notes were taken of these and all of the short, follow-up interviews.

The SF-36 and the GHQ-12 self-report health questionnaires were administered with all except eight of the forty participants at the time of the initial interviews, and three at a subsequent time. This overcame any comprehension difficulties and ensured surveys were completed.

The interviews

The aim of a good in-depth interview is to obtain the story or interpretation of the person being interviewed.

(Ezzy, 2002:68)

Interviews are a key ethnographic method for generating texts. They can be seen as a conversation with a purpose; a way of obtaining ‘stories and interpretations’. Whereas structured interviews ask the same set of questions in a standardised manner, with limited response categories to allow for statistical analysis, in-depth interviews seek to “understand the complex behaviour of members of society without imposing any a priori organisation that
may limit the field of inquiry” (2000:653). The in-depth ‘unstructured’ initial interviews used in this study allowed the narratives of participants, including their behaviour and experience, opinions and beliefs, feelings, knowledge and sensory impressions, to emerge (Britten, 1995).

An interview can be defined as a “speech event in which meanings are negotiated and reformulated” (1986:43). The interviewer is a co-participant in the discourse, with the context — the setting, how the interviewer presents him or herself, the language and culture of the participant, the level of trust and rapport established (Fontana & Frey, 2000) — all impacting on the content of the ‘negotiated reformulation’. Most participants were interviewed within the comfort zone of their own place and an interview environment based on ‘trust and rapport’ was established. Yes, I came as a university researcher; but I also came as someone linked to other people participants knew and trusted. I took a cake I had baked, they made tea (apart from in occasional interview settings such as a hotel foyer), and together we explored their particular informal housing situation and housing and health issues in general.

Participants were approached as ‘key informants’, rather than as ‘victims’ with ‘problems’. The Information Sheet they received (see Appendix A) set a tone of open inquiry, and open-ended questions led to glimpses into their ‘lifeworlds’ and their observations on housing and health.

While the exact questions asked at the initial interviews and their order were determined by the flow of each interview, all participants were asked about their housing histories (including where they had grown up and in what sort of housing), how they came to be living in informal housing, the attributes of this housing and their access to basic utilities; about their health and wellbeing (past and present); their experiences of their informal housing and possible impacts on their health and wellbeing; and what their ‘ideal housing’ might look like. Participants were also asked for their views on the current lack of affordable housing, including particular challenges and possible solutions. Basic demographic details were also collected.

The initial in-depth interviews lasted between forty and ninety minutes, with the follow-up interviews six-twelve months later around half an hour. As noted above, the purpose of the more structured follow-up interviews was primarily to ascertain if the housing or health status of the participants had changed, as well as providing an opportunity to give interview transcripts to participants for their feedback. In fact few made any comments about the

DEMOGRAPHICS & DESCRIPTIONS 90
content of the transcripts. Changes (or lack of them) in participants' living situations are discussed in subsequent findings chapters.

All except one of the interviews were conducted between April 2003 and April 2005. A reflexive interview undertaken with myself by a research colleague in December 2004 - subjecting the researcher to the same objectivising gaze as the research participants (Bolam, Gleeson, & Murphy, 2003) - afforded me an increased understanding of the interview process.

Despite the feeling of mutuality generated in the interview process, were participants still inevitably placed in a subordinate role (Oakley, 1981); in an oppressor-oppressed situation? It has been argued that the researcher-researched relationship resembles by definition an oppressor-oppressed relationship: the oppressor defines the problem, the nature of the research, and in part the interaction (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). While it is true I have defined the nature of the research, I have been open as to whether informal housing in general, or theirs in particular, was a 'problem' or not; and in terms of the quality of interaction, it seemed that in many cases we broke through the researcher-researched binary to have what felt like a satisfying and productive discussion/conversation between equals. While I wanted information, they wanted to have their stories heard. As Fine and colleagues (2000:115) have found,

many [participants]...both recognised and delightfully exploited the power inequalities in the interview process. They recognised we could take their stories, their concerns, and their worries to audiences, policy makers, and the public in ways that they themselves could not, because they would not be listened to.

All of the interviews were transcribed by myself. This allowed for another mode of engagement and more familiarity with the data. Nuances which may have been missed during the interview process became clearer in the act of hearing again the voices of the participants.

Professional experience

I had no professional experience in the field of housing before commencing this study. However, a background in political science and journalism has made me cognisant of macro issues around housing provision; and volunteer work as a Lifeline counsellor, and work with the Auckland City Mission has led to a familiarity with the micro issues (including stress),

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63 A final interview with an Auckland participant who had been living in a city caravan park took place in early 2007.
associated with a lack of adequate, affordable and secure housing. My experience as a journalist and counsellor has been invaluable in establishing rapport with the wide range of people from varying backgrounds interviewed in this study. It has helped me enter into the lifeworlds of the participants and to understand that mine is only one of many perspectives — that home and health have different meanings for different people; that people have varying priorities in their lives; and that there are many ways of living a ‘good’ life that the person themselves values.

Analysing the texts

The problem is that your brain can become so focused on seeing what it expects to see, that it misses things that are obvious but unexpected.

(Wiseman, 2004:13)

In his book *Did You Spot the Gorilla?* Wiseman outlines the results of repeated experiments where people watching a thirty second film clip – including scientists – failed to spot a man dressed as a gorilla and beating his chest at the camera, because they were intent on counting basketball passes between three of the six basketballers in the film (Wiseman, 2004). I realised I might also have missed the gorilla, and uncovering deeper meanings from transcripts would require approaching analysis with a wide, soft focus. Van Manen writes of the role of thoughtfulness in research as “a heedful, mindful wondering about the project of life, of living” (van Manen, 1990:12). ‘Gorilla spotting’ and ‘thoughtfulness’ are two qualities I have been mindful of in fulfilling the last of van Manen’s research tasks: ‘reflecting on essential themes and describing them in written form while maintaining a strong scholarly relationship with the phenomenon and balance between a consideration of the parts and the whole’.

Qualitative content analysis techniques were used to analyse participants’ transcripts, to look through these “window[s] into experience” (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). Qualitative thematic or content analysis is “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005:1278). It is particularly appropriate in a case such as this, where there is limited existing theory or research literature on the phenomenon under investigation. “Researchers avoid using preconceived categories...instead allowing the categories and names for categories to flow from the data. Researchers immerse themselves in the data to allow new insights to emerge...” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005:1279). Such an
approach is very appropriate when one is does not want to 'miss the gorilla'.

Transcripts were read and listened to repeatedly to acquire a sense of the whole. Passages that seemed to capture key thoughts and concepts were then highlighted and, after closer examination, initial thoughts, impressions and analyses were noted. ‘Open’ codes emerged which were then sorted into categories, or “meaningful clusters“ (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005:1279). Open coding can be seen as “a brainstorming approach to analysis ... open[ing] up the data to all potential and possibilities contained within them. Only after considering all possible meanings and examining the concept carefully is the researcher ready to put interpretive conceptual labels on the data” (Corbin & Strauss, 1996:151). Thus coding and analysis went beyond ‘conventional content analysis’ to a second level of ‘directed content analysis’, in order to develop a nuanced understanding through further examination of the categories in the light of the context, the research literature and my own understandings of the topic (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Hsieh and Shannon note that while an advantage of open coding over conventional content analysis is that coding is based on participants’ unique perspectives “without imposing preconceived categories or theoretical perspectives”, it may not lead to the development of “a nuanced understanding of the lived experience” which more directed coding approaches may. As Corbin and Strauss (1996) note, “[to] simply accept what we are told and never question or explore issues more completely forecloses on opportunities to develop more encompassing and varied interpretations” (Corbin & Strauss, 1996:81). This more selective coding uncovered central ‘stories’ around which the research data is organised in following chapters. Some early coding using a computer assisted data analysis package was discarded in favour of a more ‘organic’ connection with the data. Coding was cross-checked by my two supervisors who read through all of the transcripts and discussed their interpretations with me iteratively.

Writing continued the analytic process, with verbatim quotes from participants describing themes and used as examples of concepts, theories and ‘negative cases’ (Ryan & Bernard, 2000): “Like coding, writing involves looking at events and interpretations in a variety of ways until a story emerges from the creative engagement of researcher and participant” (Ezzy, 2002:52).

Hermeneutic engagement is cyclical, dealing with changing meanings and uncertainty:

An initial understanding becomes refined and corrected by the work of interpretation; fresh questions are raised that can be answered only by returning to the events studied and revising the interpretation

(Packer, 1985:1091).

DEMOGRAPHICS & DESCRIPTIONS
Chapters were written and rewritten as categories, themes and ‘cultural collisions’ presented themselves and continued to be refined. Not all of the themes which emerged from the data could be explored in depth; decisions had to be made about what to focus on. Given the aims of this applied ethnographic thesis – to capture realities of those living in informal housing (with a focus on ‘cultural collisions), and to feed voices from the margins into mainstream discourses – priority was given to telling ‘stories’ that had not already been told. Thus for instance, while poverty is clearly acknowledged as a central component of each of the findings chapters, poverty has not been investigated as a theme in itself, as the role played by poverty in both inadequate housing and poorer health outcomes has already been well documented. Writing the poems was another form of ‘creative engagement’ and brought greater depth of understanding.

Poetry encourages the mind to think and engage with a topic in a different way from prose. As Richardson (2000:931) notes, “trying on different modes of writing is a practical and powerful way to expand one’s interpretive skills, raise one’s consciousness, and bring a fresh perspective to one’s research.” Again, working directly from transcripts and field notes, many different stories could have been told about each participant. The focus was on pieces of verbatim text which, as poetry, would tell different aspects of the informal housing story, adding to the developing montage.

Glesne (1997), Ohlen (2003) and Furman (2006) have documented standardised methods used to ‘condense’ participants’ transcripts into poems, and Furman (2006) has outlined further experimentation with different poetic forms. The process of creating these poems was less formalised and similar to earlier work by Poindexter (1997) and Clarke, Febbraro, Hatzipantelis, and Nelson (2005): phrases and sentences from the transcripts which illustrated unique perspectives/life events of a participant and/or themes from the analysis were noted, along with descriptions from field notes. These were then arranged into stanzas which remained true to the flow and meaning of participants’ narratives (Clarke et al., 2005); and whether phrases and sentences were used verbatim or paraphrased, as in Richardson’s (1997) poem Louisa May’s Story of her Life, the ‘voice, diction and tone’ of the participants were retained.

There are many ways the data could have been analysed, many competing interpretations. Like Jim Holstein (1998, cited in Gergen & Gergen, 2000:1032) I have tried “to be mindful of the constructed, the ephemeral, the hyperreal, while not giving up on empirical analysis of

DEMOGRAPHICS & DESCRIPTIONS
lived experience...” While it may not be possible to present an ‘objective, uncontested account’, it is still possible to present a useful interpretation.  

Hermeneutics is concerned with meaning “as a sensibleness that can be found to be present or absent in a course of action or an account of that action” (Packer, 1985:1086). This analysis has sought a ‘sensibleness’ in its interpretation of the meanings embedded in the experiences and views of participants and in the conclusions which have been drawn.

Reflexivity

We can...take reflexivity to broadly mean the active process of reflection that researchers using qualitative methods go through so as to document how the research process in general, and often themselves in particular, construct the object of research. (Bolam et al., 2003:2)

Qualitative research literature recognises the need for a reflexive analytic stance in which the constructive role of the researcher is documented (Bolam et al., 2003). This study, informed by a general hermeneutic and phenomenological approach, fits into a constructivist paradigm in which researchers and participants alike are seen to “construct versions of the facts according to a host of schemata, pressures, socially accepted values...” (Coolican, 1999:210). Thus methodological precautions are needed to inform readers of the researcher’s role in constructing what they are reading. As Billig (1994) and others note, how to position oneself in the text is a problem: how on the one hand to avoid sanitising the text of the self, yet on the other to make sure a self-absorbed self does not lose sight of the ‘other’ (Rosaldo, 1989). This is not an auto-ethnographic study, with my personal history ‘saturating’ the ethnographic enquiry (Gergen & Gergen, 2000). Along with Hertz (1997) I believe my primary obligation is to tell the stories of the participants. And at the same time, I am aware that their stories have been constructed in dialogue with myself and that the analysis of their stories (in prose and poems) is my construction – another ‘narrative’ which “needs to be understood within the context of the audience...for whom it is produced” (Elliott, 2005:4).

The difference between ‘confessional tale’ and ‘auto-critique’ approaches to reflexivity is highlighted by Bolam and colleagues, (2003). In the former, reflexivity is seen as principally explaining the impact of the researcher on the research process. An auto-critique reflexivity goes further, drawing attention to the constructive nature of the research process itself. In order to encompass this extended reflexivity, but not to become “paralysed in an increasingly

64 Albeit one from a Pākehā settler researcher standpoint (Jones & Jenkins, 2008).
self-referential methodological angst that loses sight of the analytic object" (Bolam et al., 2003:3), I have tried to strike a balance between confessional tale and auto-critique approaches. Thus biographical material has been included and the transcript of a taped interview of myself coded and analysed along with participants’ transcripts. This has allowed for reflection on both the interview process and the difference in ‘insider-outsider’ roles when collecting and analysing data (Bolam et al., 2003). It has also allowed me to access my lifeworld in a different way, highlighting areas of similarity and difference between my narrative and the narratives of participants.

Criteria for judging study

The essence or nature of an experience has been adequately described in language if the description reawakens or shows us the lived quality and significance of the experience in a fuller or deeper manner.

(van Manen, 1990:10)

This study does not aim to give a definitive overview of all possible permutations of informal housing; rather it has endeavoured to listen to and understand the life experiences and perspectives, the needs and aspirations of a range of people living in informal housing in Auckland and on the Coromandel. It is indicative rather than definitive. But it is also comprehensive, consistent and rigorous.

Criteria for judging qualitative research are not the internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity which are benchmarks for rigorous quantitative research. Instead they are trustworthiness and authenticity: credibility rather than internal validity, transferability rather than external validity, dependability (paralleling reliability) and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This is a methodological rigour of a different kind, but rigorous none-the-less.

In this study, issues of ‘trustworthiness and authenticity, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability’ have been dealt with through methodological, interpretive and ethical rigour: purposive sampling; careful transcribing of interviews and checking transcripts out with participants; systematic coding which has been cross-checked with my academic supervisors; linking interpretive analysis to concrete observations and statements from the data and making sure the explanations fit with the descriptions – that they are credible; and a disclosure of orientation so the reader can put the analysis into perspective (Rice & Ezzy, 1999). In a qualitative study such as this, empiricism’s validity,
generalisability and reliability do not apply, because there is no one correct observation. Any observation depends on context (of both the researcher and the participant), while 'objectivity', rather than denoting neutrality, signifies the orientation of the researcher towards the object – describing it and interpreting it, while remaining 'true' to it (van Manen, 1990).

Triangulation, the use of mixed research methods, is another way of ensuring rigour in qualitative research: “triangulation allows the research to develop a complex picture of the phenomenon being studied, which might otherwise be unavailable if only one method were utilised” (Rice & Ezzy, 1999:38). The term triangulation is discarded by Richardson (2000) in favour of 'crystalization', to better reflect the role that different theoretical standpoints, data sources, methods, and researcher input play in ensuring rigour in qualitative research. The image of the triangle carries with it the assumption that there is a fixed point or object which can be ‘triangulated’, whereas the crystal “combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach [and]...What we see depends on our angle of repose” (Richardson, 2000:934).

Crystalization better describes the elements and processes which have gone into creating this montage of informal housing. These include drawing on various theoretical approaches (phenomenology, hermeneutics and applied ethnography); using multiple information sources (participant interviews, key informant interviews, relevant published data); employing different research methods (interviews, self-report questionnaires, observation); using different modes of interpretation (thematic, hermeneutic, poetry); and cross-checking with academic supervisors to ensure this study is ‘trustworthy and authentic, credible, dependable and transferable’.

Given the applied ethnographic focus of this thesis, criteria of utility need also to be considered (Chambers, 2000). Accessibility (knowledge available in an appropriate manner for those with a stake in change) is thus also an important criteria for judging this research; so too are credibility, relevance and responsiveness, and what Chambers (2000) calls ‘prospect’ – possibilities for moving forwards. Details of actions to fulfil utility criteria so far undertaken are outlined in Appendix E.

DEMOGRAPHICS & DESCRIPTIONS 97
Ethical considerations

We can never fully know what consequences our work will have on others. We cannot control context and readings. But we can have some control over what we choose to write and how we write it.

(Richardson, 1997:117)

‘First do no harm’ has been a guiding principle. The ethical code of the Association of Social Anthropologists of Aotearoa (1987) specifies that a researcher’s primary responsibility is to their research participants and this has been a fundamental consideration. As Ezzy (2002) notes, many research participants are vulnerable and relatively powerless. This is particularly the case where participants are living in precarious, and/or illegal situations.

This study has been subject to the consideration and approval of the Auckland and Waikato Ethics Committees as well as having the support of local health organisations and kaumatua. Academic research norms of informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, lack of deception and accuracy (Christians, 2000) have been extended to embrace “a concept of care” and an intention that accounts of participants’ lives might “stimulate positive change in the social world” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a:25).

The principles of the Treaty of Waitangi are acknowledged as pertaining to all aspects of Aotearoa/New Zealand life (Orange, 1989) including rights to self-determination for Māori. Seventeen of the forty participants identified as Māori and I am aware of ethical considerations regarding my role as a Pākehā researching Māori. However, while the participation of non-Māori in research relating to Māori is challenged by some (the Kaupapa Māori research framework for instance brings into question any role for Pākehā), others argue the importance of Pākehā becoming skilled ‘bicultural’ researchers and focussing, along with Māori researchers, on improved conditions for Māori – and in fact see Pākehā research involvement as a partnership responsibility under the Treaty of Waitangi (see Humpage, 2002:23-26; Tolich, 2002 for discussion). I concur with this view. To quote Māori academic Ranginui Walker (1990): “The Māori as a minority of 12% of the population of three million, cannot achieve justice or resolve their grievances without Pākehā support. For this reason, Pākehā are as much part of the process of social transformation in the post-colonial era as radical and activist Māori” (cited in Humpage, 2002:25).
Cultural safety guidelines (adapted from the Nursing Council of New Zealand) requiring researchers involved with another culture to 'undertake a process of self-reflection on their own cultural identity' and to be aware of 'the impact of this in encounters with others' have been followed (Nursing Council of New Zealand, 1996; Tolich, 2002). I have reflected on the 'realities' and attitudes I brought to each research encounter, approached encounters with flexibility and respect, and acknowledge the impact of historical, political and social processes on the health and wellbeing of participants.

No interviews were conducted without informed consent. All participants were given an Information Sheet (Appendix A) outlining the goals and processes of the research at the time of initial face-to-face contact, and had the opportunity then, and subsequently, to ask any questions about the research and/or our respective roles within it. All participants signed a Participant Consent Form (see Appendix B) which guaranteed their right to withdraw from the research at any time and ensured anonymity.

Several participants wanted to be identified. As Eggleston (1997) notes, this is a contentious issue: is it the task of the researcher or the participant to decide what is best for the participant? A decision was made not to identify informal housing participants because, although unlikely, some participants could have been subject to harassment from local authorities over non-compliance issues; thus pseudonyms have been used. In-depth interviews, where trust and empathy have been established, can lead to participants being very open about their lives and subsequent dilemmas about what and what not to write; "about how to say what needs to be said without jeopardising individuals and feeding perverse social representations" (Fine et al., 2000:116-117). There has been a fine balance between avoiding potential harm and representing the complexities of informal housing as authentically as possible.

Fine and colleagues (2000) note a temptation, in the desire to write a thesis which will have impact, to be drawn to, and code for, the extraordinary and the bizarre. "We recognize how careful we need to be so that we do not construct life narratives spiked only with the hot spots" (Fine et al., 2000:118). This is a pitfall I also have tried to avoid.

Categorising people and their experiences, (thus implying that all those in the same category share the same experiences), is another potential pitfall (Ezzy, 2002). Categorising participants is unavoidable in a study such as this; it is part of the process of making meaning.

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65 The term 'culture' in this study is not confined to ethnic differences.
from the data. But the categories are not meant to be mutually exclusive, and it is important to keep in mind that all the individuals do not share all of the characteristics assumed by a categorisation. Over-generalisation and simplification are acknowledged difficulties (Ezzy, 2002).

Concluding comments

This chapter has discussed how an applied ethnographic framework, underpinned by a phenomenological and hermeneutic approach, has informed the structure and process of this qualitative study, building up a montage of the phenomenon of informal housing; and how such a methodological approach provides rich data and can potentially benefit marginalised communities – in this case people living in informal housing – by feeding other ‘realities’ into mainstream discourses (Appendix E).

The research design, including choice of participants and data collection processes, has been described and the role of interviews and surveys discussed. How narratives were analysed and interpreted to arrive at the findings of this study has also been examined, including researcher impact on data collection, coding and analysis. Criteria for judging the quality of the study and a discussion on ethics concluded the chapter.

The next chapter, Demographics and Descriptions, presents demographic information about the participants and their informal housing.
CHAPTER SIX

DEMOGRAPHICS & DESCRIPTIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this research is to attempt to understand the phenomenon of informal housing through the narratives of participants living in informal housing and other relevant data. Little is known about people living in informal housing. What are their demographic characteristics? What are their living situations? This chapter presents demographic information about the forty study participants and their living circumstances. As a qualitative study this is not intended to be a statistically representative sample, but rather to show the diversity of informal accommodation and those who live in it.

The twenty-five participants interviewed on the Coromandel Peninsula lived in garages, sheds, baches, caravans, tents, buses, house trucks and a shipping container, as well as in 'houses' lacking basic facilities. Some were on land they owned or had rights to, and in dwellings they owned; others paid nominal rent for their dwellings and/or land. The fifteen participants interviewed in the Auckland conurbation lived in garages, 'sleep-outs', caravans or vans, or camped out in abandoned buildings, car parks and parks. Some had recently moved into flats or hostels.66

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66 This allowed participants to make useful comparisons about 'informal' versus mainstream housing options.
Four tables set out basic statistical details such as gender, age and ethnicity and indicators of SEP such as tenure, employment status and educational qualifications. The fifth table shows participants' temporary/permanent connection with their informal housing. These statistics paint only a partial picture. Photographs of some of the participants' informal housing situations help bring the statistics to life. As Denzin and Lincoln (2000b:635) note, photographs constitute “different ways of recording and documenting...social life.”

SEP Indicators

Individually and in aggregate, across the life course, time and place, a vast number of studies have shown how socioeconomic disadvantage is related to poorer health. (Galobardes et al., 2006b:99)

Income, education, occupation/exclusion from the labour market, housing tenure and access to a car are all socioeconomic indicators used in health research, along with access to basic amenities. Galobardes and colleagues (2006b) question whether lack of access to basic amenities is still an applicable SEP indicator in industrialised countries, because so few people are without them; yet many participants in this study lacked access to basic amenities.

Socioeconomic deprivation is one approach to measuring SEP (Salmond & Crampton, 2000). The New Zealand Index of Deprivation takes into account household income, employment, educational qualifications, access to a car, presence or absence of a landline telephone, home ownership and degree of crowding, in its mapping of areas of relative disadvantage in New Zealand (Crampton, Salmond, & Kirkpatrick, 2000). It is used by Government to determine the population-based funding formula for District Health Boards, capitation formulas for primary health care services and for funding other social sectors (Salmond & Crampton, 2002). While the mean Deprivation Score (DEPSCORE) for the total population was 1.61 in 2004 (Ministry of Social Development, 2006:53-54), calculations showed individual DEPSCORES of five or above for many of the participants in this study suggesting significant socioeconomic deprivation.

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67 As noted above, SEP is an important indicator of health status.
68 However Galobardes et al. (2006b) note access to a car may not be a useful indicator of SEP in rural areas in industrialised countries where cars are owned out of sheer necessity. This would appear to be the case on the Coromandel where other transport options were lacking.
69 Information on household income was not collected as part of this study, but other indicators of SEP outlined above are given in the demographic tables below.
Ethnicity – self identification

[Ethnicity] is a complex socio-cultural construct which cannot be ignored if policies
designed to address disparities are to be effective. (Benton et al., 2002b, Vol.1:12)

Apart from three Pacific participants, the remaining thirty-seven variously identified as
Pākehā, (eighteen), Māori (fifteen), Māori-Pākehā (three) or simply ‘New Zealander’ (one).
For the purpose of this study ‘Pacific’ describes people of Pacific Island descent; ‘Māori’
describes people of Māori descent who identify as Māori (‘Māori’, originally meaning
‘normal, usual, ordinary’ (Williams, 1985), was used by the indigenous people to describe
themselves as a distinct ethnic group after the arrival of Europeans); and ‘Pākehā’ (derived
from the Māori word ‘pakepakehā’, meaning fair-skinned people) describes New Zealanders
of European descent who are ‘no longer European’ (King, 1999).

Participant demographics

The following four tables (Tables 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, and 6.4) show demographic characteristics,
dwelling type, tenure, household composition and access to utilities for Coromandel and
Auckland participants. They highlight both the diversity of the participants and their living
situations. The tables give demographic information for participants at the time of the first
interview. In some cases where participants were living immediately prior to the interview is
included. The names used are not the real names of participants.

Table 6.1 (below) shows that of the twenty-five Coromandel participants, thirteen were
female and twelve male, ranging in age from twenty-two to seventy-four. Most were in their
thirties (nine), forties (six) and fifties (seven), with one each in their twenties, sixties and
seventies. Thirteen identified as Māori, eight as Pākehā, two as Māori/Pākehā, one as Pacific
and one as a New Zealander (Rangi stated that although both of his parents were Māori, he
had no cultural ties and saw himself simply as ‘a New Zealander’). Eleven participants were
in paid employment, while one was self-employed. Two were superannuitants, one received a
student allowance, four the sole parent benefit, three a sickness benefit and one the
unemployment benefit, while two were financially supported by their partners. Educational
qualifications ranged from none (eight participants) to tertiary qualifications (four) and school
leaving ages from thirteen to eighteen years. Sixteen of the participants owned their
dwellings, three were living rent free with extended whanau and six were paying nominal rents. Length of tenure ranged from two months to thirty years.

Table 6.1: Demographic table – 25 Coromandel participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Ethn</th>
<th>Tenure</th>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Empld</th>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Left</th>
<th>Ed Quals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anaru</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>own</td>
<td>5 yrs</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>study allowance</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arama</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>own</td>
<td>2 yrs</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arani</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>own</td>
<td>8 yrs</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred</td>
<td>70s</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Pākehā</td>
<td>own</td>
<td>30 yrs</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>superann</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hemi</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>2 mths</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>school cert.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Pākehā/ Māori</td>
<td>rent</td>
<td>1.5 yrs</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Pākehā</td>
<td>rent</td>
<td>9 mths</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>superann</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Pākehā</td>
<td>own</td>
<td>2 yrs</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>tertiary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kere</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>buying</td>
<td>3 mths</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kingi</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>own</td>
<td>1.5 yrs</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>unemploymnt</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marama</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>own</td>
<td>1 yrs</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mere</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>own</td>
<td>4 mths</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>sole parent</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>tertiary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mikaere</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>2 yrs</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>sickness</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mona</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>own</td>
<td>1 yr</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>sole parent</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Pākehā</td>
<td>own</td>
<td>4 yrs</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>school cert.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pete</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Pākehā</td>
<td>rent</td>
<td>1.5 yrs</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rangi</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>NZer</td>
<td>rent</td>
<td>3 yrs</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>sickness</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>tertiary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roha</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>2 mths</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>tertiary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ross</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Pākehā</td>
<td>own</td>
<td>2 yrs</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tane</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>buying</td>
<td>3 mths</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tarata</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>rent</td>
<td>8 yrs</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>sole parent</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terry</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Pākehā</td>
<td>own</td>
<td>9 yrs</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>sickness</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Pākehā</td>
<td>own</td>
<td>11 yrs</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Val</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td>own</td>
<td>2 yrs</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiki</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Pākehā/ Māori</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>1 yr</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>sole parent</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>school cert.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key to abbreviations: Ethn: ethnicity; Tenure: type of tenure; Length: length of tenure; Empld: whether in paid employment; Benefit: type of social benefit; Left: age at which left school; Ed Quals: educational qualifications; and school cert: previously a basic year eleven school leaving qualification.
Table 6.2 (below) shows household composition and access to utilities for Coromandel participants. Half of the twenty Coromandel households had no mains electricity, eleven had no running water, fourteen no inside shower, and sixteen no inside flush toilet. Three households had no access to a motor vehicle and three had no access to a telephone. While six households had a landline and twelve a pre-pay mobile phone, this latter figure can be misleading as several participants said they could not afford to keep their phones regularly charged. Participants' dwellings included a shanty, sheds, an old house, baches, converted garages, an encampment, buses, a caravan, a house-truck, a shipping container and a tent.

Eight of the households included children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Dwelling type</th>
<th>Household composition</th>
<th>Mains electricity</th>
<th>Running water</th>
<th>Inside toilet</th>
<th>Inside shower</th>
<th>Phone</th>
<th>Car</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anaru</td>
<td>tent</td>
<td>1 adult</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>mob</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arama/Val</td>
<td>converted garages</td>
<td>1 cpl, 2 chn</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>landline</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arani</td>
<td>bach</td>
<td>1 cpl</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>landline</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred</td>
<td>shanty</td>
<td>1 adult</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hemi/Roha</td>
<td>garage</td>
<td>1 cpl, 4 chn</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>landline</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean/Pete</td>
<td>sheepshed</td>
<td>1 cpl</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>landline</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>bus</td>
<td>1 adult</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kere/Tane</td>
<td>bus</td>
<td>1 cpl, baby due</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>mob</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen/Ross</td>
<td>housetruck/caravan</td>
<td>1 cpl, 2 chn</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>mob</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kingi</td>
<td>encampment</td>
<td>1 adult + casuals</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>mob</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marama</td>
<td>bach</td>
<td>1 cpl, 3 chn</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>mob</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mere</td>
<td>garage</td>
<td>1 cpl, 3 chn</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>mob</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mikaere</td>
<td>caravan</td>
<td>1 adult, 1 child</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>access</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mona</td>
<td>shed/container</td>
<td>1 adult, 2 chn</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick</td>
<td>bus</td>
<td>1 adult</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>mob</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rangi</td>
<td>garage</td>
<td>1 adult</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tarata</td>
<td>caravan</td>
<td>1 adult, 1 child</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>mob</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terry</td>
<td>bus</td>
<td>1 adult</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>mob</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>bus</td>
<td>1 adult</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>access</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiki</td>
<td>bach</td>
<td>1 adult, 2 chn</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>mob</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of the fifteen Auckland participants (Table 6.3 below), seven were female and eight male, ranging in age from fourteen to sixty-eight years. Most were in their twenties (six), with three in their thirties, three in their forties and one each in their teens, fifties and sixties. Ten identified as Pākehā, two as Māori, one as Pākehā/Māori and two as Pacific. Two were in paid employment; one was a superannuitant, five received the unemployment benefit, five a sole parent benefit, and one a sickness benefit. Educational qualifications ranged from none (six participants) to tertiary qualifications (four), and school leaving ages from fifteen to eighteen.

Table 6.3: Demographic table – 15 Auckland participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Ethn</th>
<th>Tenure</th>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Empld</th>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Left</th>
<th>Ed Quals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aaron</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Pākehā n/a</td>
<td>rents</td>
<td>1.5 yrs</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>sickness</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>tertiary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alison</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>rents</td>
<td>3 yrs</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>sole parent</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>school cert.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chrissy</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>rents</td>
<td>4 mths</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>sole parent</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>school cert.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Pākehā n/a</td>
<td>rents</td>
<td>3 mths</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>unemploymnt</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>school cert.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daryl</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Pākehā own</td>
<td>1.5 yrs</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>tertiary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Pākehā n/a</td>
<td>rents</td>
<td>1 mth</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>unemploymnt</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>tertiary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Pākehā n/a</td>
<td>rents</td>
<td>3 mths</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>sole parent</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>school cert.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Pacific n/a</td>
<td>rents</td>
<td>3 mths</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>unemploymnt</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Pākehā n/a</td>
<td>rents</td>
<td>4 mths</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Pākehā own</td>
<td>rents</td>
<td>5 mths</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>superann</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neil</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Pākehā own</td>
<td>1.5 yrs</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>tertiary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paddy</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Māori n/a</td>
<td>rents</td>
<td>8 yrs</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>unemploymnt</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rona</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Pacific rents</td>
<td>9 mths</td>
<td>part-time</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>sole parent</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sean</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Pākehā n/a</td>
<td>rents</td>
<td>3 mths</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>unemploymnt</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Pākehā n/a</td>
<td>rents</td>
<td>4 mths</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>sole parent</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key to abbreviations: Ethn: Ethnicity; Tenure: Type of tenure; Length: Length of tenure; Empld: Whether in paid employment; Benefit: Type of social benefit; Left: Age at which left school; Ed Quals: Educational Qualifications; and school cert: previously a basic year eleven school leaving qualification.

DEMOGRAPHICS & DESCRIPTIONS 106
Of the fourteen Auckland households (Table 6.4 below), nearly half had no mains electricity, four no running water, seven no inside shower, and seven no inside flush toilet. Ten households had no access to a motor vehicle and six lacked a telephone. While one household had a landline and seven a pre-pay mobile phone, as on the Coromandel, several participants said they could not afford to keep their phones regularly charged. Dwellings included garages (rented), vans (owned), a caravan (rented), a parking building, commercial premises, parks, hostels and HNZC accommodation. Tenure length ranged from one month to eight years.

Five households included children.

Table 6.4: Utilities table – 14 Auckland households (15 participants)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Dwelling type</th>
<th>Household composition</th>
<th>Mains electricity</th>
<th>Running water</th>
<th>Inside toilet</th>
<th>Inside shower</th>
<th>Phone</th>
<th>Car</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aaron</td>
<td>gardens</td>
<td>1 adult</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>/HNZC unit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alison</td>
<td>garage</td>
<td>1 adult, 2 chn</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>mob</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chrissie</td>
<td>various</td>
<td>1 adult, 1 child</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>/HNZC unit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>rough</td>
<td>1 adult</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>mob</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>/hostel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daryl</td>
<td>van</td>
<td>1 adult</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>mob</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave</td>
<td>parks</td>
<td>1 adult</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>/hostel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna</td>
<td>garage</td>
<td>2 adults, 2 chn</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>access</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>/Sean</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>parking</td>
<td>1 adult</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>building</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>rough</td>
<td>1 adult</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>mob</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>van</td>
<td>1 adult</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>mob</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neil</td>
<td>van</td>
<td>1 adult</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>mob</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paddy</td>
<td>rough/com</td>
<td>1 adult</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>mob</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>premises</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rona</td>
<td>HNZC</td>
<td>1 adult, 3 chn</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>house</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>caravan</td>
<td>2 adults, 2 chn</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These four demographic tables are followed by a series of montages (Figures 6.1 and 6.2) depicting some of the informal housing settings of participants.
Figure 6.1 Informal housing on the Coromandel
Figure 6.1 Informal housing on the Coromandel continued
Figure 6.1 Informal housing on the Coromandel continued
Figure 6.2 Informal housing in Auckland
Photographs as ethnographic record/demographics

The photographs above (Figures 6.1 and 6.2) are presented as ‘empirical data’ (Harper, 2003), to illustrate the variety of informal housing structures and settings participants lived in – to ‘represent, illuminate and document’ (Bolton, Pole, & Mizen, 2001:505) the phenomenon of informal housing.\(^{70}\) The Coromandel photographs\(^{71}\) show a variety of living situations, including buses, lean-tos, caravans, a house-truck, sheds, garages, baches, and encampments, with outdoor washing facilities and long-drops the norm. In several instances the surrounding environment – bush and sea – is visible, and in a few the participants. The Auckland photographs\(^{72}\) show garages, parks facilities and a caravan park where participants lived.

The photographs expand the range of basic demographic information about participants and their informal housing structures presented in the tables (above) and form part of the ethnographic record (Harper, 2003) of participants’ informal housing. Their presentation in the form of a series of montages underlines the role of these photographs in helping to build up, along with the background information already presented and the thematic analysis and poetry which follow, a ‘montage’ of informal housing.

Informal housing tenure

Most participants’ dwellings would have been considered ‘temporary’ by central and local government authorities – and by the majority of New Zealanders. Yet while none of the Auckland participants regarded their informal accommodation as permanent, almost half (twelve) of the Coromandel participants saw their living situations as permanent. As Table 6.3 (below) shows, this was the case whether participants owned (or had rights to) the land they lived on or not. Participant commitment was more likely to be to land and place than the structure they were living in.

\(^{70}\) As Bolton and colleagues observe, visual data is an efficient way of conveying information to the reader “who in everyday life is used to interpreting visual signals” (Bolton et al., 2001:516).

\(^{71}\) These were taken at the time of the first interviews, with the consent of the participants.

\(^{72}\) Because several Auckland photographs taken at the time of the first interviews were misplaced, a few photographs were taken subsequent to the survey period.
Table 6.5: Coromandel participants’ relationships with Land\(^1\) and Structures\(^2\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRUCTURE</th>
<th>LAND</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>On own land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with structure viewed by participants as permanent</td>
<td>4 structures on Māori land to which occupants have claim (5 participants)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with structure viewed by participants as temporary</td>
<td>2 structures on European title land (2 participants)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 All but one of the participants viewed their relationship with the Coromandel as permanent
2 None of the structures was a permitted legal dwelling
3 Between first contact and first interview this participant moved from a caravan temporarily into a rented flat, then into a garage by the second interview

Concluding comments

This chapter has presented demographic information about the study participants and their housing situations in a series of tables and photographs. These highlight the diversity of participants and their living situations and provide a context which allows increased understanding of participants’ perceptions of their informal housing, health and wellbeing presented in the following chapters.

The next chapter, *Pathways into Informal Housing* looks at participants’ perceptions of the factors which led to their informal housing situations.
CHAPTER SEVEN

PATHWAYS INTO INFORMAL HOUSING

Introduction

Participant narratives revealed various factors which had led them into—and kept them in—informal housing. These include lack of financial resources, low incomes and debt; saving for a home of their own; 'life-style' choices to return to Māori land and whanau and/or to live rurally in an environmentally sustainable way; a desire for greater independence; illness, family breakdown and violence; addictions, incidents and natural disasters.

Robinson (2006:107) writes of homelessness (in which definition he includes informal housing) being “triggered by a particular event or incident that people struggle to cope with because of personal vulnerabilities and inadequacies in available support and provision.” Lack of money and debt, violence, crime, family breakdown and mental illness have previously been noted as triggers for homelessness in New Zealand (Elliot, 1998; Kearns et al., 1991; O’Brien & de Haan, 2000). These can also be pathways into informal housing. Situations already identified as leading to informal housing include Māori reverse migration, coupled with a shortage of rural housing (Kearns, 2004; National Housing Commission, 1988; Te Ropu Whariki, 2006), and a desire to live simply in tune with the environment (Jones & Baker, 1975; King, 1990; Sargisson, 1990). Thus values as well as ‘disasters’ can be seen as pathways into informal housing.

In a study of Turkish migrants in Germany, Gutting (2006) shows how people in objectively similar conditions choose different housing pathways, depending on their personal and social values and their ‘narrative identities’. Narrative identities can be defined (Elliott, 2005:127) as “the product of an interaction between the cultural discourses which frame and
provide structure for the narrative, and the material circumstances and experiences of each individual”. Connections have also been shown between “ontological narratives of self” and “finding and/or creating a home” in the stories of respondents in a study of forty-one Christchurch households (Winstanley, Thorns, & Perkins, 2002:820). The personal and social values and ‘narrative identities’ of participants in objectively comparable situations in this present study similarly determined different housing choices.

This chapter identifies some of the choices and triggers (within the context of personal and social values and underlying structural constraints) which led participants into informal housing in Auckland and on the Coromandel Peninsula.

Structural constraints and individual choice

Risk...does not strike in some random manner. Traditional and systematic inequalities...affect the degree to which certain groups are in danger of falling over the precipice...these inequalities are not simply economic but refer to a broader portfolio of formal and informal resources.

(Forrest, 1999:34)

Individual housing choices cannot be separated from the underlying political, social and economic contexts in which they are made (Forrest, 1999 above). This context includes the rise of neo-Liberalism and changing pattern of the welfare state (including decreased provision of social housing), changes to the global economy, and an increasing lack of adequate affordable housing (see Chapter Two, Background) 73 It also includes a history of alienation of Māori land.

Participants’ pathways into informal housing can be seen in terms of a series of ‘choices’ framed by individual life circumstances and belief systems, within the context of underlying social and economic inequalities. Those with lower SEP generally have fewer housing options and are more likely to end up ‘over the precipice’ (Forrest, 1999 above). Most participants were limited in their choices by ‘traditional and systemic inequalities’. However, in the same way Blaxter (1997) found that people tended to blame themselves for poor health status and rarely talked about structural determinants in a study investigating perceptions of health inequalities, so too participants in this study seldom identified underlying structural inequalities as the causes of poor housing. (There were some exceptions: for instance,

73 The collapse of financial institutions world-wide in 2008 and the ensuing economic recession is part of the new 'context' determining housing 'choices'.

PATHWAYS INTO INFORMAL HOUSING 116
Auckland participant Aaron blamed economic and social policies, and Coromandel participants Arani and Tarata named alienation of Māori land and low incomes as root causes of their informal housing. Most participants instead talked in terms of individual agency. Some, like Marama, presented their informal housing situations as their absolute choice.

I've got a lot of places to live. I can go and rent in town and things like that. I can move back up to Mum’s, but I don’t want to. I like it here.

(Marama)

Others participants, like Dave, portrayed themselves as making the best choice within the context of limited options.

Is it a lifestyle choice? It’s more about making the best with limited resources…it’s a lifestyle and I’ve had to make the best of it.

(Dave)

It is difficult to quantify ‘choice’ – to determine the extent to which participants freely chose to live in informal housing; and the extent to which, like Dave, they were making the best of limited options. Most participants framed their informal housing within narratives which accentuated positive aspects of their experiences. This thesis accepts participants’ accounts of their housing choices, as it accepts their accounts of health and wellbeing; it is about their perspectives, their realities. Nevertheless, it is interesting to consider Blaxter’s (1997) observation that because accounts of health and wellbeing are accounts of social identity, it is not reasonable to expect people to devalue that identity. Accounts of housing are also about social identity.

While most Coromandel participants may have made clear choices to live on the Coromandel, it is unclear how many participants would have chosen to live in their buses, sheds, caravans, baches, tents, vans and garages if they had had the money to build or rent an ‘appropriate’ dwelling in the place they wanted to live. On the one hand Jean, living in an old rented bus in the bush, said she could ‘not improve on her bus’ – and even if given the money to have a small house built in the same place, said she did not think she would. Nor, when asked in a follow-up interview nine months later if she would prefer a Housing Corporation house to her bus if one was available on the same site and for the same low rental, Jean did not think so.

I don’t think so…it would have to be very rustic…the fact that the Housing Corporation owned it would be an interference. This is enough space for one person

Aaron and Paddy also spoke of an increase in informal housing/rough sleeping because of the closure of boarding houses in Auckland's CBD in the wake of the property boom.
and I have panoramic views with windows all around. This has become a way of life and I enjoy it.

(Jean)

On the other hand Tarata, who had just moved from the caravan she had lived in with her daughter for eight years to a rental flat in town, was clear this was preferable to her caravan.

I'd rather pay $110 rent and have running hot water and decent facilities than pay no rent and live like that... I'd just had enough of it, that's all... Washing, we used to have to bring our washing to town and stuff like that or do it down the creek, whichever. And to me they lived like that in the early 1900s but not today. No, I'd just had enough, so I moved to town.

(Tarata)

Tarata saw her choice to live in the caravan as the best way she could save money for her 'real' housing choice – a home of her own on family land.

In terms of simple definitions of choice – the ability to “pick out as being the best between two or more alternatives” (Concise Oxford English Dictionary, 1999); or to make “an unforced selection of a preferred alternative from two or more options” (Stancliffe, 2001:92) – Tarata and most other participants can be seen as choosing their informal housing situation. But ‘choosing’ is circumscribed by wider economic, social, and political contexts and individual capabilities (Sen, 1999). Sen writes of the “processes that allow freedom of actions and decisions” and the “opportunities that people have, given their personal and social circumstances” (Sen, 1999:17), which determine levels of individual choice. People with lower SEP, like most participants in this study, tend to have fewer choices.

Degrees of choice and its value are difficult to measure. As Dowding and John (2009:223) note, choice “might be valued instrumentally: for what it brings; or it might be valued intrinsically: for what it is”. Choices are valued differently for different reasons by different people at different times. For instance choice can be valued for the “amount of utility we would gain from the choice we make”, or because “it allows autonomy, or at least leads people to believe that they are autonomous” (Dowding & John, 2009:222 & 224). Thus Jean valued her bus not only because of the ‘amount of utility’ (“peace and beauty” and “low rent”) it afforded her, but because she felt living there was her autonomous choice – an ‘ex-army wife’, she felt she had previously had no choice (“No, never a choice, never a choice”), but that now she did. Tarata’s decisions to live in the caravan to save money for her own home, and subsequently to shift into a flat in town, because she ‘had had enough’ of the privations of living in the caravan, can be seen as ‘instrumental choices’, valued for their utility. Some participants stressed the intrinsic nature of their choices (they valued having a
choice); however most participants talked of the advantages of their choices, such as saving money and affordability.

Complexities of choice

Many factors fed into participants’ housing choices, although affordability was almost always an issue. In an investigation of ‘housing tradeoffs’ made by low-income urban households, Murray (1997) found affordability at the top of the ‘choice hierarchy’. Other research has also identified affordability as the key constraint in housing choice (Ancell & Thompson-Fawcett, 2008; Carroll, Witten, Lin, & Kaiwai, 2008b). Apart from cost, quality and size, location has also been shown to be an important determining factor (Carroll et al., 2008b; Clark & Onaka, 1985; Saville-Smith, 2004). A study of forty low-income households found “place and family connections” were the primary drivers of housing choice, leading to “a variety of dwelling-related problems” (Saville-Smith, 2004:54). For most Coromandel participants, particularly Māori participants, location and family connections were also frequently the primary drivers. Participants knew they had the option of renting a flat or house in the city, but chose instead to live on the Peninsula, knowing the lack of available and affordable mainstream housing – and their own limited financial resources – would probably mean living in informal housing. For Auckland participants, location and family ties, although still a determining factor, were less frequently primary drivers of their informal housing.

Pathways into informal housing

Location and family/whanau ties

Most Māori participants on the Coromandel had returned to live on ancestral land to which they felt strongly connected. Eleven had spent time on the Peninsula as children, some born there and others moving back with their parents (in some cases into informal housing) as part of the trend of ‘reverse migration’ which followed the economic downturn and economic restructuring of the late 1980s. They themselves had subsequently left the Peninsula for work and training, but had returned to bring up their own children close to whanau. Roha, living in a garage with her partner and four children, spoke of the importance of living on ancestral land, close to whanau:

Our boys get to grow up where they come from and are educated in a way that we always intended for them to be educated and um, living close amongst their
whanau...for us and our children, living here, whether it be in a Skyline garage\textsuperscript{75} or two storeys, beautifully architecturally designed house, really matters not at the moment.

(Roha)

Marama too, living with her partner and three children without basic utilities in a half-built ‘house’ on family land, talked of the importance of location and family connections which drew her there.

From here I can see everything. I can see all my family, all the way up the hill. And I can see where my son’s buried, see all the beach and that...what’s going on.

(Marama)

Two Pākehā participants (Fred and Ross) had also spent childhood years with their parents on the Peninsula (both in informal housing), with a third, Nick, returning because of nostalgic childhood memories.

We’d play in the creeks and go fishing. That was my first introduction to the Coromandel and at that time of your life you’re quite impressionable and of course I loved it...

(Nick)

Three other Pākehā participants (Ross and Karen, and Terry) had bought large tracts of regenerating bush, satisfying desires to live environmentally sustainable lives. They talked of working with the environment rather than exploiting it, of protecting it and helping the regeneration of the native bush. Terry also talked of the healing aspects of her land which had attracted her:

You know this land is healing... it has a healing aspect itself, just the land itself. I think you might have noticed that when you walked on the land.

(Terry)

Many Coromandel participants, given their location choice and limited financial resources, saw informal housing as their ‘best option’. The willingness of Māori in Northland to “risk becoming homeless for the sake of being at home” has been noted by Kearns (2006:259). On the Coromandel, Māori and Pākehā alike were prepared to live in various informal housing situations to be able to live on land to which they felt a deep spiritual attachment. “It’s getting to the point now where suddenly Pākehā New Zealanders are finding they’ve got a spiritual connection to the land,” commented Coromandel participant, Anaru.

While choosing to live in Auckland did not limit housing options in the same way, still location played a role in keeping some Auckland participants in informal housing. Alison, for

\textsuperscript{75} A common and relatively inexpensive brand of pre-fabricated garage made with sheets of thin steel.
instance, living in a West Auckland garage with her two children, said she would not consider moving elsewhere (even if it meant turning down an affordable HNZC house) because she had to be close to her ‘Nana’, whom she spent time with every day. While the garage was unsatisfactory, the disadvantages were also mitigated by being next door to the grandmother of one of her children; (the grandmother provided baby-sitting support.) Paddy, sleeping in a commercial building in the CBD, made it clear he would only live in inner-city Auckland, irrespective of housing options in other areas.

However, for most Auckland participants, lack of money played a greater role in their informal housing ‘choice’ than location or family ties, and low incomes and debt often kept participants there, both in Auckland and on the Coromandel.

Low incomes and debilitating debts
Alison had looked at renting a three-bedroomed house in West Auckland, but rents were more than she could afford on her low income, trapping her in her garage: “I’ve done budget after budget and I just can’t do it,” she said.

Like Alison, Mona, on the Coromandel, also spoke of having insufficient income to rent a house and of debilitating debts before she moved into her informal accommodation. Life was much easier, she said, after she moved with her two sons into a bus, and then a small shed and shipping container.

People might look at this lot and think it’s a hard life, but I don’t feel it, it’s not hard at all. It’s a lot easier with no complications and no bills to pay.

(Mona)

Tarata, also on the Coromandel, spoke of the inevitability of debt for low income earners.

...low income earners getting more and more in debt with everyday electricity bills, telephone bills, whatever...a lot of people have tried and tried to get ahead but you always get the government departments chucking in a bill here and chucking in a bill there...when you’re on a low income you can’t afford those... Debts are going to accumulate if you ask me, for life to go on and just to live.

(Tarata)

Debts keep many people in informal housing. Donna was unable to cover rental costs in Auckland after deductions to pay off debts.

Altogether I get $432, and $150 comes off a week for bills. I’m paying off a computer76, clothing I’ve bought for me and the kids off the Home Direct truck, then

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76 This is an example of not understanding the hidden costs of door-to-door products: “The computer cost $3500, then I found out with insurance and time payment fees it equals $6,500. I found that out about a month after I
BayCorp for my Telecom bill, then there's Chriscos. And I’m paying $5 a week for a booster seat for the kids. The other thing is a first aid box – it comes in very handy. That leaves me with $250-$270 [a week].

(Donna)

Accumulating debts forced Rona and her three children into a number of informal housing situations in Auckland before they got a Housing Corporation house. She talked of the terrible stress of being in debt.

We were moving twice a year from one rental place to another because we were always in debt. On top of the rent we had to pay the water and the power and it was a struggle. I don’t know, it was awful, absolutely awful.

(Rona)

Informal accommodation can mean the difference between not enough money to cover outgoings and having some discretionary income. Paddy gave up rented accommodation in Auckland for life on the streets because he was tired of having no money left to spend after covering his bills.

Every time I paid rent I just about had nothing to spend in the end, you know? So that’s mostly why I went on the street. I was paying rent, but what’s the use of living when you’ve got nothing to spend?

(Paddy)

Escaping household expenses

For other participants who could afford to live in a house and chose not to, freeing themselves from the costs of rates, mortgages, home maintenance and utilities was a factor in their decision to opt for informal housing. Jean and Pete owned a house, but rented it out, and over the years lived in a number of informal housing situations.

Jean: Yeah, and when you hear people saying about substandard, I can understand why they say substandard living, but this is how I like to live. You know, I didn’t like having a bill every month for the power or the telephone.

Pete: Or the rent or the rates, that sort of thing...

Jean: Because it’s such a headache trying to find the money to pay for those sorts of things, whereas it’s just so easy to be without.

(Jean and Pete)

May lived in her van. Like thousands of older New Zealanders, she had swapped the comforts of a house for life in a mobile home (McGavin, 2004, personal communication),

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77 A debt collecting agency.
78 A savings scheme to ensure extra money at Christmas.
giving her both freedom to travel around and freedom from financial and other responsibilities.

It all just becomes astonishingly simple. It gives incredible freedom, and freedom from stress around ‘oh my gosh, I’ve got to pay for da, da, da this month, and maybe I’ll only be able to pay half of it’. I don’t have the stress...

(May)

For others the principal benefit of such a housing trade-off was more free time. Fewer expenses meant less time needing to be spent on earning an income, as Tom found when he moved into a bus.

It’s a lifestyle choice. Keep the expenses right down and you have more free time.

(Tom)

For several participants (eleven in Coromandel and one in Auckland) money saved on rent and other household expenses meant money towards buying or building a house.

Saving for a home

Daryl decided to live in his van rather than pay rent for a flat so that he could save money to buy a house of his own.

On Monday I’m going on a salary of $55,000. I imagine I will be able to save four hundred to five hundred a week. That will be alright, ay ...[I’ll] put it towards a deposit for a house.

(Daryl)

For those on low incomes the journey towards home ownership is long. Terry, who had been living in her bus for nine years, hoped to have her cabin built in another seven, by the time she was sixty.

[I] just sort of go with it, a little bit at a time. Like I’ve got the piles and paid for them, right? So what I’ll do next, when I need bearers, I’ll go down to the timber place and I’ll get bearers and I’ll book them up, you know, and I’ll pay them off... It will be a slow process, but that’s just how it’s going to be.

(Terry)

Tarata already had her timber, milled from trees her father had planted on the family farm. Money saved living in a caravan rent free for eight years had gone towards the milling and treatment of the timber. But she was still some years off having enough money to build, she said.

Money not always motivation

While lack of financial resources was generally a big part of the informal housing mix, it was
not always so. For May, who owned her own home and a rental property, living in and travelling around in a van was more about freedom than saving money. Nick too owned his own house, but lived in a bus in a motor camp close to his work because he appreciated the flexibility and convenience this gave him. (It meant he too could also travel around and take his home with him.)

It comes down to personal values and what you aspire to. I live quite comfortably...[and] you are conscious about not accumulating all the junk you would have if you got a bigger place because you’ve got nowhere to put it. So you keep the things that you need and anything you don’t need you don’t have... they don’t lead necessarily to quality of life.

(Nick)

Unlike May and Nick, neither Kingi nor Anaru owned houses or had sufficient financial resources to build or buy one. But nor did they want to own a house (although Anaru talked of one day building a small ‘gottage’ for sleeping and safe storage of fishing gear). Kingi felt ‘closed in’ by houses.

Live in a house? I can’t do that. Every time I go to my daughter’s place ...I get this real closed-in feeling. I haven’t got big open spaces to look at.

(Kingi)

He had a vision of building communal accommodation on the family land where he had set up an encampment.

I want to go back to the communal thing. I don’t need a bit of land and a house – that’s not our way. Everyone wants individual ownership, but that’s not our way.

(Kingi)

Here there is a sense of what King (2003:506-7) calls the “I-am-we ethos of tribal culture in which the corporate self was more important than individual identity”. Even if he was offered a house with no strings attached he would not take it, said Kingi:

No, because it would be leaving the family out...and the rest of the family would say ‘how come you got that house? Where’s our house?’ You don’t want to put yourself in that situation so the talk comes back to you.

(Kingi)

Anaru, content to come and go from his tent with a multi-million dollar view on family land, also had visions of communal development which could benefit the whole whanau.

79 Garage/cottage
Addictions and incidents

Chaos caused by addictions and crime was a factor affecting some participants and a trigger for their informal housing. For instance Paddy said he regularly gambled away his benefit at the Sky City Casino, while John talked of betting on horses to pay off a loan – and losing the bets and the family’s Housing Corporation house because of non-payment of rent. John had ‘walked away’ from his job and his family and was sleeping in an inner city car park.

I’ve got a lot of problems, gambling, betting on the horses... I was not paying the rent, all those sorts of things…

(John)

Sean and Donna lost their rental property after he was implicated in a local incident involving a firearm.

We had a three bedroom house. My mum’s [rental] house...We had a bit of an incident and we had to move out in a hurry.

(Donna)

Unable to get together money for a bond and advance rent, Sean and Donna were living with their two children in the garage of his mother’s Housing Corporation house.

Illness

Illness can be another precursor to informal housing, and was for several participants. Aaron, severely depressed, lost his job and his Auckland flat and ended up with nowhere to live:

I had to leave the place I was in and I was not able to find another place quickly enough. Housing has become more and more difficult, especially in Auckland...I was undergoing severe depression and suicidal behaviour for which I was getting treatment.

(Aaron)

Rangi had to leave the Coromandel home and studio (it had featured in House and Garden magazine, he said) he had rented for many years, after being diagnosed with bi-polar depression.

I got more and more into debt and I had a very bad period of depression. It sort of culminated in me losing the house, I had to part with it.

(Rangi)

Job loss and medical expenses following his cancer diagnosis also saw Dan unable to pay his rent in Auckland.

Because of the radiation therapy and the mind-numbing sickness etcetera, I was just unable to keep on working. I started living off my savings and assets...
He lost his accommodation and ended up on the street with $114.35 and “nowhere, as far as I was aware, legitimately to turn.”

Family breakdown and violence

Family breakdown and leaving the family home (usually coupled with financial difficulties) is another pathway into informal housing. Lisa kept running away from home, school and foster care in Auckland until finally her mother told her she had had enough.

   My mum told me I can’t go back. She said she is going to put all my things outside and whatever I haven’t picked up by the end of next week she’s going to put out in the rubbish.

(Lisa)

Domestic violence fed into the family breakdown which eventually led to Susan, pregnant with her fifth child, living in a caravan in an Auckland caravan park with two of her four children and her sister.

   All of us stayed in a caravan together, it was pretty cramped... It was $135 a week. There are lots of caravans there and a mix of single people and families. The people were nice and friendly but the caravans were not very nice. There were heaps of fleas in the caravans. We were always getting bitten. We got moved from one caravan because it started leaking from the roof. The second one was okay.

(Susan)

City caravan parks provide cheap (usually temporary) accommodation for people with few other options (Salvation Army, 2004, personal communication). Some are saving to get into a home, others have been evicted several times and have a bad rent record “Some say it is good, but personally I think it is because they don’t have other choices” (Key Informant, 2006, personal communication).

Natural disasters

There is little ‘choice’ involved in natural disasters, another precursor to informal housing (although usually temporary, until homes are once more habitable and damage is repaired). When floodwaters swept through Wiki’s Coromandel house, she and her children moved first into a caravan, and then a very basic bach with no electricity or running water, because her house was deemed unfit to live in.

   The foundations were undermined and unless the house is shifted or the river fixed, they say it is unsafe to live in.

(Wiki)
In Wiki's case the house was uninsured and she had no money for costly structural repairs.

The house didn’t have a permit so you get no insurance. I bought the kitchen unit and everything myself to put in – but that’s all damaged now...

(Wiki)

As Forrest (1999) observes, groups with fewer resources because of underlying inequalities are ‘more in danger of falling over the precipice’. They are more likely to end up in informal housing or sleeping rough.

Concluding comments

This chapter has identified participant pathways into informal housing. Participants’ narratives reflect their marginal position with respect to housing markets. While some participants appeared to actively opt for informal housing, others seemed to end up in informal housing almost by default, in response to certain events. As the literature on homelessness notes (Elliot, 1998; Kearns et al., 1991; O'Brien & de Haan, 2000), pathways into informal housing included insufficient income, natural disasters, illness, violence, crime and family breakdown; but they also included choices to return to live on family land or to live in an environmentally sustainable way, a desire for freedom from financial and other responsibilities and more independence. Most participants were limited in their housing choices by lack of money, a shortage of available, affordable housing, and high building costs. Opting for some form of informal accommodation appeared in many cases a ‘sensible’ course of action.

In terms of cultural collisions, the very existence of informal housing is at variance with mainstream values (and often government regulations) around what constitutes adequate housing. Such dwellings are seen as incompatible with norms of appropriate housing, and those living in informal housing situations are likely to be seen as at risk from a public health perspective – and often in some sense ‘lacking’ because they do not conform to the norm. Douglas (1966; 1992) has noted a tendency to connect societal harms with behaviour which contravenes societal norms – and a propensity to blame those who are in breach of these norms.

For participants whose values were aligned with mainstream values around housing, being in informal housing situations was distressing; they tended to see their informal housing as a temporary incongruity while they sought/waited for ‘proper housing’. Many Auckland participants were in this situation. Other participants, particularly on the Coromandel, whose
values and norms around housing (and their garages, shacks, encampments and buses) clashed with mainstream housing norms, did not consider their informal housing inadequate; nor did they think of themselves as being ‘at risk’. While some of this group viewed their informal housing as a temporary situation, (perhaps while they saved to build a house of their own), others viewed their informal dwellings as permanent.

Coromandel participants were generally less dissatisfied with their informal housing than their Auckland counterparts. There are several possible explanations for this. More Coromandel participants felt they were positively choosing to live where they were; they lived in a beautiful environment; many had supportive networks of friends and whanau; and most had personal values and narrative identities which allowed them to frame informal housing as fine, and/or as a satisfactory step on the way to home ownership (Gutting, 2006). Many also already owned, or had rights to, land. They valued their housing choices both instrumentally, for the benefits they perceived; and intrinsically, because they felt they had a choice (Dowding & John, 2009). In contrast, many Auckland participants did not view their informal housing situations as a ‘choice’, but rather the result of a series of unfortunate circumstances. Nor did they own property (apart from May). Most Coromandel participants also had more discrete housing options to choose from, such as rent-free or nominal-rent garages, sheds, buses and caravans tucked away in paddocks, which meant they did not, like some Auckland participants in similar situations, end up sleeping rough.

Low SEP, coupled with a lack of affordable housing (Housing New Zealand Corporation, 2005) was a factor in their informal housing situations for almost all participants, and at the top of the ‘housing decision hierarchy’ (Murray, 1997) for many. However, while Coromandel participants expressed hope, many Auckland participants expressed resignation. In Forrest’s (Forrest, 1999 above) terms, Coromandel participants in general perhaps had ‘a broader portfolio of formal and informal resources’ than many of their Auckland counterparts.

Personal values and ‘narrative identities’, as Gutting (2006) notes, frame the housing decisions people make. They also frame their perceptions of their housing. The next chapter, *Echoes of a pioneering past*, considers participants’ narratives through the lens of our pioneering past, highlighting continuities of self reliance, adaptability and independence.
CHAPTER EIGHT

ECHOES OF A PIONEERING PAST

Introduction

A hut tucked below a ridge among tall kanukas, a bath with a fire underneath, a long-drop toilet and some tubs in a clearing constitutes the lifestyle that people have left the city to live. It is the lifestyle that belongs to our colonial history…

(Sargisson, 1990:62)

The pioneer experience, particularly “the immigrant voyage and the adaptation of inherited values and habits to a new environment”, was shared by all New Zealanders in the past; by both Māori voyagers and the successive waves of European immigrants who over time became Pākehā (Oliver, 1981:448). Adaptation to the environment was essential for survival, especially when living in isolated, wild areas, notes Oliver.

Many Coromandel participants lived in ‘wild areas’, requiring adaptation to the environment. Living under canvas and tarpaulins, in caravans, buses and house trucks, in sheds, garages and baches, they were close to nature in the raw; so too were those Auckland participants sleeping ‘rough’ or in makeshift shelters or vans.

Most Coromandel participants had provided their own informal housing. Some had constructed basic dwellings, while others adapted pre-existing garages and sheds, or moved caravans, buses or house-trucks onto sites in isolated areas. In Auckland too, while a frequent response to the lack of affordable housing has been families doubling up (Baker et al., 2000), participants in this study had housed themselves in garages, caravans, vans, and various ‘rough sleeping’ and makeshift shelter options.

Haarhoff, writing in an African context, notes the extraordinary ingenuity and resourcefulness people displayed in making their own living arrangements in the face of
housing lack and few financial resources (Haarhoff, 1984). So too did many study participants. This ingenuity and resourcefulness in providing their own informal housing can be viewed through the lens of our pioneering past, expressing itself in the present day Aotearoa/New Zealand Do-It-Yourself (DIY) ethos (King, 2003). Their approach was quintessentially DIY, irrespective of age, gender or ethnicity.

However, theirs was more than the suburban DIY home decorating and maintenance culture of painting, replacing leaking tap washers or fixing broken window panes which King (2003) sees as linking us to our pioneering past. On the Coromandel participants’ resourcefulness showed itself in the construction of informal dwellings ‘from scratch’ and the adaptation of existing structures into homes. Although less evident amongst Auckland participants, the DIY pioneering ethos also showed in the narratives of some Auckland participants.

A ‘pioneering’ lens is only one of several lenses through which the phenomenon of informal housing could be viewed. It could also be viewed through a lens of poverty. Lack of money, along with other limited resources, was a constant for many pioneers (Belich, 2001) as it was for participants in this study. Underlying structural inequalities and poverty have already been acknowledged as key determinants of informal housing and other studies have focused on these (for instance, Benton et al., 2002b, Vol.1; Cheer et al., 2002; Maori Women’s Housing Research Project (N.Z.), 1991; National Housing Commission, 1988; Te Ropu Whariki, 2006). Debt, illness, family breakdown, family ties or environmental concerns are also all potential ‘lenses’ as these were also part of participants’ narratives. However, narratives stressing self reliance, adaptability and independence were dominant, particularly amongst Coromandel participants, and appear to have been less considered in the literature.

This chapter examines the ingenuity and resourcefulness displayed by many participants within the context of Aotearoa/New Zealand’s pioneering past and present. The relatively fewer examples amongst Auckland participants reflect the different realities of an intensive urban environment and a low density rural environment.

Pioneering past and present

The DIY housing of Coromandel participants in particular can be seen as both relic and reminder of the pioneering past. When ready-made dwellings did not exist, you had to build your own. First Māori then early Pākehā settlers used whatever materials were at hand to provide shelter for themselves and their families. As the Pākehā settlers became established,
their basic DIY constructions were usually replaced by small timber dwellings (often also DIY) and then larger family homes, with separate sleeping and living quarters. Towards the end of the nineteenth century Māori as well as Pākehā began to replace traditional materials with pit-sawn timber and corrugated iron, though King (2003) notes Te Puea Herangi of Waikato was still using ponga (tree fern) walls and thatching in conventional cottages in the 1930s.

The manuka and earth sods, raupo (rushes), nikau (palm) and ponga used by Māori (King, 2003), and the “calico shelters, raupo whare and V-shaped huts [of the early Pākehā settlers in Auckland]... designed so that a man could build one on his own” (Graham, 1981:123), can be seen as forerunners of the kanuka and car-case ply, tarpaulin and corrugated iron constructions still evident on the Coromandel Peninsula today.

The do-it-yourself nineteenth century dwellings of Coromandel pioneers have been well described by Catherine Delahunty (1992) in her short stories about the lives of early Pākehā settlers on the Peninsula. Those of ‘counter-culture’ community members on the Peninsula a century later have been chronicled by Sargisson (1990) in her report for the then New Zealand Housing Corporation. Like King (1993), who sees the pioneering spirit reflected in the low-impact baching and camping on the Coromandel of the 1950s and 1960s, Sargisson also sees it in the DIY dwellings of nine communities established on the Coromandel from the mid sixties. Jones (1975:85), writing on New Zealand counter-culture communities in general, saw the rural communities epitomising the pioneer spirit – but with a difference. These were “new pioneers” who “disturbed the ecology as little as possible”, and were “not enclosed in the idea of a family territory”. He saw a move back to the land and into the bush as “a move into the New Zealand part of things”. The idea of the quintessential New-Zealand-ness of life lived simply on the land was also put forward at a government level with the establishment of ohu (rural communes) in the 1970s. Matiu Rata, then Minister of Lands and leading proponent of the ohu movement, connected them with the earlier aspirations of New Zealand settlers: ohu would provide an opportunity for New Zealanders to “recapture a satisfaction based on cooperation, mutual assistance and communalism....which motivated both the first Māori and the first European settlers of this land...[and] to experience the earth, the country” (cited in Jones & Baker, 1975:131-132). The few ohu which ever got off the ground have long since disappeared.80

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80 Even by 1979 only three remained in existence – one of these on the Coromandel (Young, 1979).
Pioneering participants

A DIY car-case ply, sheet metal and corrugated iron dwelling housed one family of four for eleven years. The emphasis was on simplicity, use of readily available local materials, ease of construction and the small cost involved — as it was for most Māori and Pākehā providing shelter for themselves and their families 150 years earlier.

We just added on bit by bit...The whole lot of it was built out of that Japanese mahogany that was used for car cases...corrugated iron on the roof and you know, just sheet metal from the car-case place itself around the outside and painted...[It cost] under a thousand dollars. It was really cheap. I think the dearest thing was the roof.

(Arama and Val)

Kanuka cut from the bush provided framing for another DIY car-case ply and corrugated iron dwelling. Again, simplicity, ready availability of materials at minimal or no cost and being able to construct it oneself were important factors.

[It was] just one room...made out of green kanuka with car-case ply cladding. It wouldn't have cost a hundred dollars. [The] framing and all that was native, straight out of the bush. It was only car cases that we had to pay for. [The] corrugated iron, well that was all second hand.

(Jean & Pete)

A cowshed and cattle race were converted into a communal encampment, using tarpaulins and old timber. The tarpaulins were the only cost involved, said Kingi. For Fred, a nikau whare preceeded a self-built one-roomed bush shanty. Trees on the land provided the timber. Corrugated iron and nails were the only cost.

I had to make a sort of a nikau thatched place where I could sleep so I could be handy to build the building. I built the shanty myself. It was one room, thirteen by nine feet. The floor was earth...I bought corrugated iron and nails mainly. I split my own timber and that and used a blanket for the doorway (laughs)...I had an old window given to me. It had three panes. It did the trick.

(Fred)

Pete, describing life in a Coromandel community where he lived with his wife for twenty years and built three ‘houses’ during that time, talked of building them all by hand.

[We had] no machinery, no vehicles, no power tools. We did everything by hand – we had no chainsaws.

(Pete)

These examples of a pioneering present on the Coromandel echo the pioneering past. They were simple, DIY dwellings of minimal cost ‘that a man could build...on his own’ using local materials. The ability to provide shelter at low cost is clearly stated. Other examples
were the readily available existing structures – the buses, garages and caravans, a refrigerated container, cowshed and sheep-shed – which Coromandel participants adapted into dwellings. Adaptability, says Graham (1981) can be seen as the keystone of the pioneer experience.

Adaptability

Old buses originally used for passenger transport made homes for six Coromandel participants. Apart from the advantages of being low-cost and moveable to different sites they were seen as relatively spacious and easy to heat in the winter.

I can’t improve on a bus. I have really warm bedding, and I keep warm with the potbelly. I don’t care how big it is, how small it is, because of all the windows you’re outside.

(Julie).

Not everyone wants a house, you know. A bus is a good space and it’s easy to warm.

(Terry)

Their compactness could pose limitations for some, making buses perhaps more suitable for sole habitation – though among the participants living in buses were a couple and a mother and two children.

You can’t just spread out. And I can only pace up and down this aisle so many times – I’d quite like to go round the room actually, rather than up and down the aisle (laughs). And I’ve got grandchildren who like to come and stay with me and it would be a lot easier if I had a little cabin.

(Terry)

When buses started to rust and lose their water-tightness, a corrugated iron roof in one instance and a tarpaulin in another, provided protection from the elements and extended their life.

The bus is getting past it – I can’t bog up the holes anymore. I lost some ventilation through the ceiling hatches with the new Warehouse [tarpaulin] roof, but it’s better than being wet.

(Tom)

We used to wake up with wet blankets from condensation, and then we got this big black tarp that Dad got to put up.

(Tarata)

Caravans often provided bedrooms which were used in conjunction with other structures to house family members. Similarly, a shipping container became a bedroom for a mother
and her two children. Shifted on site along with a small shed and lean-to, there was no problem with keeping warm and dry.

I tell you we have never had to put on a gas heater. That’s a freezer steel container. Well insulated. People come into my room and they say, ‘shivers, you got a heater on in here?’ There’s good ventilation, I always leave one of the windows open when I go to bed. It’s the best thing I’ve ever slept in in my life.

(Mona)

Old steel-sheet prefabricated garages and farm sheds also provided low-cost ready-made housing.

Sometimes these informal basic dwellings were seen as ‘permanent’ living situations. Four of the participants – Pete and Jean living in a sheep-shed, Julie in her bus and Tom in his – expressed complete satisfaction with their current dwellings and had no wish to ‘upgrade’.

Well we’re happy as sand...as pigs in shit really. I mean, there’s nothing we want. We’ll stay here for as long as we can really, it’s so handy.

(Jean & Pete)

This is not everybody’s cup of tea; in fact I had some friends from Rotorua and they stayed in a motel. [But] I love it.

(Julie)

More often, though, these informal dwellings were viewed as temporary – even if ‘temporary’ stretched to thirteen years or more. Like the pioneers of the past who upgraded from basic DIY shelters to small timber dwellings and then larger houses with separate living and sleeping quarters, most of the Coromandel participants had plans to eventually build their own houses. While a standard three-bedroomed house was seen as beyond their financial reach (and not necessarily desirable) by most, they aspired to owning their own home and had worked out ways to make this possible.

Just a small cabin. I, um, figure I have to do it before I’m sixty. I’ve bought the piles already...I’ve got them, so maybe this year I might start putting them in. I could probably knock up something pretty basic for ten grand, yeah.

(Terry)
I’m determined to get a house... My father planted the trees... Um for my timber it’s cost me about six thousand dollars to get it milled and treated... About two years ago I started up an automatic plan to Coromandel Timber.81 I’m about just on three grand in credit at the moment and that’s to pay for my floor and my roof... I still have to pay for the piping, the wiring... I’ll just work away at it. Ten thousand would finish my house.

(Tarata)

We have grander plans than the house-truck and the caravan indefinitely... We want to use what we have on hand: the rock, the earth — there’s this beautiful bright red mud which is nice. So the house when it’s created will probably take some time and not be a kind of instant, ‘next year we’re going to move in’ kind of thing. The house-truck and caravan is something we envisage being five years or so, I suppose.

(Karen)

Three Auckland participants living in their vans had, like their Coromandel counterparts, adapted them for living purposes at minimal cost.

I built the back in myself. The total cost, including the van was just over three thousand dollars.

(Daryl)

Daryl’s conversion was very basic. Neil spent more time and money:

I went to my uncle who’s a cabinet maker and basically spent about two months there getting my own materials but using all his equipment. Bits came from here and there...

He had not done cabinet making before, but:

In Form One and Form Two82 I was the best wood-worker and I’ve always had a feel for all practical things... I did it all in a kauri veneer and the bed folds up for the surf board or the mountain bike to sit on; there’s a little garden for succulents and it’s lined in the top.

(Neil)

As with many Coromandel participants, all three Auckland participants living in vans regarded them as an affordable temporary life-style choice.

Coromandel participants had more possibilities for unobtrusive informal living than Auckland participants. In a rural area there are spare farm sheds, garages and derelict farm cottages; and tents, caravans, buses or vans can be tucked away out of sight. Some Auckland participants, who on the Coromandel may well have found a shed or caravan to house themselves, spent time sleeping ‘rough’. They used carparks, band rotundas, gardens and grandstands to sleep in, along with caravans and garages, vans and cars. When Dan ended up

81 Tarata was talking about a ‘lay-by’ system, often used in the past to pay off clothes and furniture over a period of time, in contrast to the more usual ‘hire purchase’ agreements (have now, pay later) of the present
82 Aged around eleven and twelve years, at Intermediate School.
with no job, no flat, no money and nowhere else to stay, he found a doorway to sleep in, close to the central police station for safety reasons.

I chose to stay within cooee distance of the police station because nobody else ever did. So I was perfectly safe at night. And I stashed my gear within cooee distance of the police station so I never got anything stolen.

(Dan)

When Dave had nowhere else to stay he set himself up in the Cornwall Park band rotunda.

Basically I got a tarpaulin from the Warehouse, used that to erect a temporary shelter, mainly as a wind break and because of rain, and I used the same tarpaulin to cover my sleeping bag and backpack...and I basically rolled it up into a cocoon to get shelter for the night.

(Dave)

He later moved to the Auckland Domain grandstand:

The only trouble with the grandstand is that it’s where the pigeons tend to live. So unless you’re right at the back you get pigeon droppings so you have the hygiene aspect to worry about.... I can go a couple of days without a shower but more than that and I become unpleasant to myself.

(Dave)

Hygiene was a concern for several participants in the city. Public toilets and swimming pool facilities provided places to wash and shower, and to wash small amounts of clothing. Others used facilities at friends’ houses. May, travelling around in her van, had “a little shower bag” for outside use.

I could have a shower in my van, but why use up that much space for something one uses for five minutes a day?...a portaloo takes up space too. When I bought my van it came with one of those little portaloo things, but I much prefer a little pee bucket to a portaloo. I just rinse out my bucket and it is absolutely fine.

(May)

Primitive conditions

Echoes of the pioneering past were evident in a general acceptance of primitive conditions. Many participants lived in dwellings without insulation, electricity or running water and used an outside toilet – on the Coromandel, often a long-drop – or made do with a bucket or portable toilet. Julie, referring to the life she and a fellow participant lived in their buses in the bush with no electricity or running water and using open-air toilets, linked herself explicitly to Aotearoa/New Zealand’s pioneering past: “We’re really pioneers,” she said.
Wiki, without running water or electricity in her rented bach and using a long drop, also spoke of a connection:

My stepmother came and she reckoned I was still living in the old days. She thinks I’m mad, but I’m used to living like this.  

(Wiki)

The acceptance of ‘primitive conditions’ on the Coromandel may have been linked to the fact that such conditions were a norm in areas on the Coromandel where participants lived and/or were similar to childhood living conditions. Several participants spoke of the similarity between their present living situations and childhood experiences. Ross, for instance, lived in a caravan and car-case house as a child.

We had a caravan and we built a little lean-to off that... [Then we] built a small house...from car-case and demolition material...which was fairly home-madey sort of one bedroom size rather than three bedroom...with a caravan for the children.  

(Ross)

Kingi likened life in his encampment to camping: “It’s just like camping...you go to the beach, and you camp...” Many New Zealanders have experienced (and have fond memories of) camping holidays, of spending time without basic utilities.

Some participants made a distinction between themselves and ‘softies’ who lived in houses.

I mean, it just depends on the person, I guess. If you think you can go out and do it, well do it; and if you can’t, well don’t live like this, (laughs) you know.  

(Marama)

If they can’t come home after work and turn on a shower, then they’re not interested, whereas I mean, it doesn’t bother me.  

(Val)

Well, you know, a lot of people wouldn’t put up with the living conditions I’ve put up with for a long time but I, you know, they don’t bother me 'cos I, you know, put it down to experience.  

(Mere)

While Marama and Val appear somewhat contemptuous of ‘softies’, with Mere there are overtones of having to endure. She’s ‘put up with’ her living conditions ‘for a long time’. Similarly, Wiki (above) may be ‘used to living like this’; but she does not say she likes it, even if she accepts it.
Some participants made a virtue of tough conditions. Not having flush toilets, running water and electricity, used fewer resources; and outdoor life was ‘good for you’ (see Chapter Eleven, Health and Wellbeing). Karen and Ross spoke of their physically demanding environment as “hard work” and “healthy”.

It’s a very healthy environment. It’s hard work which, you know…. there’s not really a lot of need to try and go to the gym once or twice a week (laughter). It’s a fairly demanding kind of lifestyle.

(Ross)

They saw their ‘primitive’ and isolated living situation, three kilometres up a rough 4WD track, being good for their children as well as themselves.

I think for them it’s a bit of an adventure where we are and it’s quite demanding so they’re quite robust, our kids…they can kind of cope with anything. They’re not worried whether it’s a long drop toilet or a flush toilet or a compost toilet, it doesn’t matter. None of that’s really a worry, they just cope with it.

(Karen)

Whether, like their pioneering forebears, participants saw living in tough conditions as unavoidable and something to be endured, or ‘a good thing’, all spoke about resilience, of becoming resourceful and adapting to their living situations. Rangi talked about not needing much space because he “just about live[d] outside in the summer”. Nor, he said was it a problem living without hot showers and other utilities: “I can improvise. I can adapt very easily.”

For Ross, nothing was a problem:

Basically you can do anything. It is just a matter of applying yourself and concentrating on those problems and eliminating them.

(Ross)

Some Auckland participants also spoke of the resourcefulness they had developed. Aaron, describing his time sleeping in gardens, said: “You become very resourceful”; and Neil, living in his van and parking it in different locations around the city, talked of having “found a resourcefulness” in himself and a sense of security: “it’s a different kind of security [from living in a house]”.

Patterns past and present

“Rhythms, patterns and continuities drift out of time long forgotten to mould the present and colour the shape of things to come”, writes King (2003:505) quoting Arthur Schlesinger Jnr.
‘Rhythms, patterns and continuities’ from the pioneering past which King identifies – the
‘bach’ culture, (which he sees as expressing a desire to live simply on the margin between
land and sea and in ‘wild places’), a rejection of the power of ‘authority’, and a pervasive DIY
mentality – are clearly visible in the dwellings and/or lifestyles of the Coromandel
participants. Most participants were literally ‘living simply’ on ‘the margin between land and
sea’, many growing vegetables and/or raising a few livestock, fishing and hunting.

[We’re] close to beach, family – and these are farms so there’s pork and mutton and
beef. Yeah... [and] we all just go fishing straight out there. There’s heaps of fish out
there, all sorts of seafood. It’s so easy – pipi, oysters, kina, cockles,83 they’ll all out
there...I mean you can’t really starve here – there’s something wrong if you do.
(Marama)

It’s right on the water. I can bring my boat right up – that’s pretty nice. It’s good soil.
I have had good gardens...It’s good fishing. It’s got everything...I think where I feel
best is when I’ve got my own vegetables and catching fish... and can shoot a rabbit or
a goat...it’s quite easy to become self sufficient in food.
(Tom)

Nice fresh air...food’s right at my doorstep. Mussels everywhere, oysters on the rocks
just down here, pipi just across there, scallops around the corner, and paua if I want to
get them. I catch fish all the time, right off the point; or if I take the boat out I can get
more, but what’s the use? I can only eat one fish [at a time].
(Anaru)

Anaru was critical of what he regarded as younger Māori becoming soft and losing the
survival skills of the past.

Unfortunately a lot of our people haven’t been brought up how we were. Like if you
suggest to someone, ‘oh put a garden down’, they’re absolutely flummoxed (laughs),
they don’t know what the hell you’re talking about...the next generation down from us
[have] gone in the consumer way (laughs). It’s unfortunate, I do say this, two of our
biggest iwi in New Zealand now are Ngati Pak’nSave and Ngati Warehouse84
(laughter). If those two closed down, our people would die...
(Anaru)

Fred, who lived alone in his one roomed shanty, is at the far end of a pioneering-past-as­
present continuum. Cooking over an open fire which kept him warm, he collected his water
from the nearby stream (“I’d only to walk a few yards and get a bucket of water from a
running stream, a clear running stream”) grew a few vegetables and hunted. He had returned
to the Coromandel and built his bush shanty after working ‘down country’ as a farm labourer
and stockman for eleven years. His contact with the ‘outside world’ was limited to his weekly

83 All types of shellfish.
84 Pak’nSave is a major supermarket chain and The Warehouse a chain of department stores specialising in cheap
imported goods.

ECHOES OF A PIONEERING PAST 139
walk to town to collect supplies ("down the ridge along a fence line to the main road, then the main road to the store") and occasional chats with neighbours.

In *Roughnecks, Rolling Stones & Rouseabouts*, writer John A. Lee (1989) writes of the world of 'unstandardised men', of the characters and swagmen of no fixed abode who abounded until the end of the Second World War. Fred, walking once a week to the store to collect his supplies, sugar sack on his back, can be seen as such a man, post World War II. Auckland participants like Paddy and Dave, at times of 'no fixed abode' and sleeping rough, can also be viewed as 'unstandardised men'.

Other Coromandel participants, such as Kingi and Anaru, fit the tradition of the 'crews' of semi-nomadic sailors, whalers, labourers, lumbermen and goldminers of over a century ago, whom Belich (2001) writes about. Tom, too, came and went from the Coromandel, working on building projects around the North Island. The type of work may have changed, from goldmining and whaling to the construction of hydro power projects and shearing, but the process of mainly men living semi-nomadic working lives, remains. Mobility, writes Graham (1981), was 'a notable feature' of the pioneering past, as was a fierce independence.

Independence was a value strongly expressed by most Coromandel participants, whether Māori or Pākehā, male or female, along with other characteristics of the pioneering past – practicality, an ability to make do and survive in tough conditions, the liking of solitude, the lack of emphasis on material possessions and the rejection of city values. Tom, Marama and Anaru (above), all portray such characteristics. These were less evident in the narratives of Auckland participants, although Dave regarded himself as “a real Kiwi”, urban-style.

I’m a trader, a facilitator, researcher; part quartermaster and part scrounger. I’m an urban backwoodsman, using old skills of camp craft and survival and the number eight wire philosophy. You’re looking at a real Kiwi...I am self-sufficient and independent. I’m living off the land but I’m not bleeding it.

(Dave)

Here Dave presents an urban parallel to the ‘living off the land’ of Coromandel participants. He talked of his food gathering skills.

I go down to Foodtown, look in the discount bin, find out from the retail staff when they do their mark-downs, what time, what day. You can get $20 of goods for $5. I get a banana box of seconds for $3-4...and I have a special arrangement with a fruit and

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85 Such values were immortalised in Kiwi culture in the 1960s by Barry Crump in *A Good Keen Man* (Crump, 1960), which sold 275,000 copies. While Crump portrayed them as being part of the quintessential Kiwi 'bloke', participants' narratives in this study show them to be part of the narrative identities of both genders.

86 Another supermarket chain.
vegie shop. Anything they can't sell they throw in a bag for me. I might walk away with two carrier bags or a sack.

(Dave)

Paddy also talked of the city in terms of freely available food – and free electricity.

Oh, a lot of stuff is free, a lot of stuff is free... The Mission’s free, they give food parcels out, free... [and] my mate used to work for the power board. He just hooks the wires up down the back streets, Beach Road and that, where all the loose wires are, and makes us a stove (laughs). He hooks underground cables to the electric frying pan – all those twelve thousand volts going through. Does the trick.

(Paddy)

Thus, just as Coromandel participants, like their pioneering forebears, used freely available resources from land and sea to house and feed themselves, Dave and Paddy found and used those in their urban environment. Dave gathered food from unsold left-overs at supermarkets and greengrocers and ‘milked’ seminars and special offers rather than cows.

It is a case of being resourceful. I’ve set up a company and various nom-de-plumes and created business cards, set up a web address...you use the internet to register for seminars through internet cafes. Sometimes it will be two or three in a day, sometimes I could have a week’s schedule full out...There’s food, there’s alcohol, there’s products, there’s services. Like this morning at the Stanford. You get special invitations...Sometimes they give away anything from sports bags, memory sticks, cameras, other equipment...Some of them you sit down to a banquet-style breakfast. I’ve been to a couple of VIP ones in Auckland, you basically have an all-day smorgasbord. You eat very, very well.

(Dave)

Dave got his blood pressure and diabetes tested at fairs and availed himself of free vouchers through the Casino’s rewards scheme. Access to such resources required dressing appropriately.

If you shower regularly and wear a decent set of clothes – no track suits or running shoes – you can go into the Casino for instance, join up their rewards scheme, they will send you out a brochure every month with $10 worth of vouchers for nothing.

(Dave)

When collecting his mail from his post office box (he used several pseudonyms to get access to a range of trade shows) Dave also picked up extra free offers and invitations left on the ground by other box holders who did not want them. Like the Coromandel participants fishing, gathering shellfish and growing food in their rural environment, Dave and Paddy were ‘hunter-gathering’ in their urban environment. So too was Aaron, who collected ‘found

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87 Auckland City Mission.
88 Dave arranged for me to interview him in the foyer of the Stanford Plaza hotel on an afternoon following a promotional seminar he had attended there.
objects’, recycling discarded fridges, furniture and bric-a-brac into useful items for other people in the city with limited resources, while Rona grew food to feed herself and her children in the garden surrounding her NZHC house.

I grow a lot of vegetables...mainly tomatoes and Chinese cabbage, broccoli, not so much cauliflower because the kids aren’t keen on cauliflower; sweetcorn and watermelon, and spinach, lettuce, things for salads. I planted things the kids and I eat. It’s pretty good...

(Rona)

Cultural collisions

While tents, caravans, vans and shacks are all acceptable as holiday accommodation – and in fact idealised and mythologised as part of the great Kiwi summer holiday tradition, along with long-drops, no electricity and washing in buckets, catching fish and cooking it outdoors – such a lifestyle is seen as strictly ‘holiday’; a break from ‘real life’ lived in proper houses and working at real jobs. Those living such a lifestyle year-round collide with mainstream sensibilities. They are considered ‘dangerous’, not, as poet and visionary James K. Baxter suggested, ‘because they covet other people’s property and careers, but because they do not’ (Baxter cited in King, 1993:21). While most participants would have liked a more comfortable dwelling, the required trade-offs were considered too great. The DIY ethos is celebrated and encouraged when it comes to painting and decorating a house, but this does not stretch to making your own from car-case ply or kanuka cut from the bush; or spending your time gathering the resources around you to live, rather than working for the money to buy them. The independence, self-reliance and resourcefulness shown by many participants in finding or making their own accommodation, whether in the city or the bush, collided with both regulations and ‘acceptable’ notions of housing and health.

Concluding comments

This chapter has examined, through a lens of Aotearoa/New Zealand’s pioneering past, the ingenuity of participants, particularly on the Coromandel (a pioneering, natural lifestyle is more difficult to achieve in a city, like Auckland), in providing their own housing. In highlighting the resilience, the flexibility and resourcefulness of many participants living in informal housing I do not want to downplay the role of underlying structural inequalities which keep many trapped in low SEP with few financial resources; or the role played in informal housing by the lack of appropriate affordable housing (Housing New Zealand
Corporation, 2005); individual ‘choice’ is circumscribed by wider economic, political and social contexts (Sen, 1999). Neither do I wish to romanticise ‘poor housing’. Forty years ago Ana Westra was accused of ‘false sentimentality’ and presenting a picture of ‘earthly paradise, rather than second class citizenship’ with her controversial Washday at the Pa photographs (Brookes, 2000a). The representations of informal housing situations from participants’ narratives presented in this chapter are not designed to suggest ‘earthly paradise’; but they are designed to highlight different life-style ‘choices’; to raise questions about the primacy of mainstream materialist values and to extend discourses around home and health.

A strong pioneering mentality was evident, particularly in the inventiveness of participants in making their own living arrangements in the face of a lack of housing and few financial resources, and using buildings and materials that were close at hand. The adaptability, acceptance of ‘primitive’ conditions, and independence (of Coromandel participants in particular) are all echoes from our pioneering past. These qualities were also apparent in the narratives of some Auckland participants, while examples of Lee’s (1989) ‘unstandardised men’ were evident on both the Coromandel and in Auckland. Interestingly, narrative identities of independence amongst Coromandel participants, including a rejection of mainstream materialist values and government authority, did not appear to be compromised by a dependence on the State in terms of unemployment, sickness or sole parent benefits. Thirteen of the twenty-five were being supported by the State (and twelve of the fifteen Auckland participants).

Fine and colleagues warn there can be a tendency to either represent historically oppressed groups as “victimised” and “damaged”, or as “resilient and strong” (Fine et al., 2000:125), thus failing to capture the complexities of human beings (who are in part all of these things), or their living situations. This representation through the lens of the pioneering past (and present) has indeed focussed on participants’ presentations of resilience and strength. But this is not to deny the difficulties of primitive conditions and hardship associated with much informal housing, nor participants’ narratives which reflect these. The ‘pioneering’ lens, as previously stated, is only one of several lenses through which the phenomenon of informal housing could be viewed, and is underpinned by lack of financial resources and hardship now, as it was in the past (Belich, 2001). Participants’ informal housing could equally be seen as

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89 By the New Zealand Maori Council who criticized Westra’s depiction of ‘the old days and the bad old ways of living – about the “unspoilt” Maori living in his backblocks pa’ (cited Brookes, 2000b:221).
90 By James K Baxter, (cited Brookes, 2000b:222)

ECHOES OF A PIONEERING PAST 143
an example of them having ended up ‘over the precipice’ (Forrest, 1999) due to their marginal position with respect to housing markets.

The next chapter, *Sense of Home and Place*, explores concepts of home and place and the various perceptions of ‘home’ which emerged from participants’ narratives.
CHAPTER NINE

SENSE OF HOME AND PLACE

Introduction

Houses are not just physical shells but also emotional and symbolic places filled with meaning for their occupants.

(Thorns, 2004:40)

Sociologists, psychologists and others have long puzzled over the meaning of ‘home’. In fact ‘home’ has multiple meanings, contingent upon individual perception and changing personal experiences (Gurney, 1997). The term encompasses a “multitude of meanings from the concrete to the metaphoric” (McIntyre, 2006:6) and includes both home-as-dwelling and home as geographical locality. Home-as-dwelling is a basis for survival, associated with shelter, eating, sleeping and social relationships. It is also an ‘emotional and physical place filled with meaning’. So central is the place of home in our lives that Bachelard (1994) finds in the house a “metaphor for humanness” (vii). Not only, he writes, is our home “our corner of the world...a real cosmos in every sense of the word”, a place where “we take root day after day” (4), but it is a “psychic state” (72), the repository of our memories and dreams, the “topography of our intimate being” (xxxvi). In terms of home-as-geographical locality, ‘symbolic linkages’ between people and place/land include ties through family linkage, history, spiritual relationships and ownership (Low, 1992). In this sense ‘place’ refers both to a particular location and the factors that contribute to its unique character (Lutts, 1985). Low and Altman note a sense of place can also be seen as a process, with attachment developing through living and/or working in/on a place. Thus ‘place’ is a “space that has been given meaning through personal, group or cultural processes” (Low & Altman, 1992:5).
In an investigation of the concept of home amongst twenty-two postgraduate students in Britain aged twenty-two to twenty-nine years old, Sixsmith (1995) found a wide variation in types of places that constituted home, some of them physical structures, and others locations not associated with any physical structure. ‘Home’ incorporated personal, social and physical modes of experience, could be a number of places simultaneously for an individual, and either transitory or constant in nature: “…it seemed that a home is home depending on the extent to which it fulfills the person’s requirements, their changing objectives and circumstances” (Sixsmith, 1995:281).

Similarly, DeMiglio and Williams (2008), investigating ‘sense of place’, found it depended on individual circumstances and varied over time: “…it is largely based on individual experiences with place and influenced by a number of factors including time, place characteristics and demographic variables such as cultural background, personal history and residential status” (DeMiglio & Williams, 2008:27).

The Concise Oxford Dictionary (2002) defines ‘home’ as “the place where one lives permanently; a house or flat; a place where something flourishes, or from which it originated”; and ‘place’ as “a particular position or point in space; a location; a person’s home”. ‘Home’ also carries connotations of belonging (as in ‘feeling at home’) and of family (Brookes, 2000a). Common phrases such as ‘it’s good to be home’ or ‘homesick’ encapsulate these three elements of home – structure, location and family/belonging.

Home and place were often used interchangeably by participants in ways which included all of the above senses. The terms were used to describe participants’ informal housing structures and their location (country, city, town, suburb, street, rural area or particular property), and also places where participants ‘flourished’ and/or had been born. Many participants, particularly on the Coromandel, had strong symbolic linkages with the land they were living on. Some of them also expressed a sense of attachment as ‘process’ – the places they were living had become ‘home’ because of the work they had put into them.

This chapter explores concepts of home and the many meanings of home (both dwellings and geographical localities) for the participants in this study.

Conceptualisations of home

Conceptualisations of home include the taken-for-granted meaning of home-as-house which underpins shared mainstream realities – including government policies – and more
encompassing meanings of home as geographical ‘place’ (Maori Women’s Housing Research Project (N.Z.), 1991; Saville-Smith, 2004; Te Ropu Whariki, 2006).

For most New Zealanders home equates with house – a detached house surrounded by a garden (Brookes, 2000a). But ‘home’ may be only loosely related to actual dwellings, particularly for Māori. Land, or whenua, is what is generally considered ‘home’ by Māori, with turangawaewae (a place to stand) relating ‘home’ to ancestral links to land, and papakainga, spiritual connections to place. “These are the foundational Māori home, bound as they are to place and people...” (Te Ropu Whariki, 2006:22).

Mainstream Pākehā concepts of land and home as ‘commodity’ have been contrasted with more holistic Māori concepts of home (Davey & Kearns, 1994; Saville-Smith, 2004). However, Dupuis and Thorns (1998) note that for Pākehā too, home ownership can be more than ‘commodity’ and ‘realisable asset’. It also often provides a sense of ‘ontological security’, “a sense of confidence and trust...a security of being” (Dupuis & Thoms, 1998:25). This ontological security is tied in with a sense of permanence and continuity established through ‘routines and practices’ and ‘familial relationships’ which are associated with “the specific material environment of the home” (Dupuis & Thoms, 1998:43). Low and Altman (1992:7) emphasise that places are “repositories and contexts within which interpersonal, community, and cultural relationships occur and it is to those social relationships, not just to place qua place, to which people are attached”.

Connections to family are an important component of ‘home’ for many. The Māori Women’s Housing Research Project Report (1991:15) notes that for Māori home is overwhelmingly about connections to place and family; Saville-Smith (2007) speaks of the continuing importance of the family home as a ‘node’ for adult family members (Pākehā and Māori) to continue to relate to both physically and symbolically; and Brookes (2000a) writes of a nostalgic longing for “home”, with fantasies of happy families and traditional family life.

In their review of the literature on ‘home’ and ‘place’, Perkins and Thoms (1999:124) note that home as ‘symbolic entity’ is often viewed nostalgically as “a secure and peaceful place”. This nostalgic view ignores the fact that home can also be a place of fear and violence (Shaw, 2004). There is a tension between ‘home as haven’ and bedrock of family, and the negative experiences of home for some. (Interestingly, Tomas and Dittmar (1995) note that experiences of abuse at home do not necessarily diminish the ‘quest’ for home, as the concept of home as somewhere safe and secure survives.)
Home as ‘symbolic entity’ is a strong theme in Aotearoa/New Zealand, with symbolic meanings often over-riding taken-for-granted meanings. Keams and Smith (1994) have called for a deconstruction of taken-for-granted notions of ‘home’ and ‘homelessness’ because strong symbolic connotations can mean some people who are adequately housed feel little sense of belonging or being ‘at home’; while others, who are ‘homeless’, feel very much ‘at home’.

‘Belonging’ is often expressed in terms of ‘feeling at home’, of ‘having a place in the world’, thus reflecting the importance of the experience of home for sense of identity and wellbeing. Place identity can be seen as an aspect of personal identity (Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1995), with attachment to place playing a role “in fostering self esteem, self worth and self pride” (Low & Altman, 1992:10). A healthy sense of identity is important for health and wellbeing – in fact personal identity and health status are ‘mutually reinforcing’ (Keams & Gesler, 1998b). Hodgetts (2008:3) notes how “self and world are co-constructed within everyday life”, with home an important means “through which identity is defined”.

Home and place for participants

Home was portrayed by participants as providing shelter and a sense of connection and belonging. At a fundamental level it was somewhere to eat and sleep – “a place to lay your head”, as Coromandel participant Terry said. Home was also seen as a base from which to interact with the wider community, socially and economically – “a place where I can put together some clothes so I can go out and get a job,” said Auckland participant Dan. Coromandel participants used the term to describe their dwelling, the particular piece of land they were living on, the Peninsula as a whole, and in some cases, another area where they had grown up and/or their family lived. For Auckland participants ‘home’ was more likely to be limited to their dwelling, with some also referring to Auckland, or where they had grown up, as ‘home’.

Feeling ‘at home’

A sense of feeling ‘at home’ came through in the majority of participants’ narratives, although less strongly in those of Auckland participants. Only four of the Coromandel participants considered the structures they were living in as ‘not home’ (but rather somewhere they were staying until they had built their own home), while almost half of those informally housed in

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91 Geisler and George (2006) have documented this amongst Native Americans who felt homeless despite being in housing which was adequate in normative terms. They argue that homelessness in this sense is related to landlessness.
Auckland felt where they were living was ‘not home’. These participants generally equated home with house. In line with the taken-for-granted definition of ‘home’, they were not living in a house therefore they were not ‘at home’. Donna, for instance, saw the suburban garage she was sharing with her partner and two small children as definitely ‘not home’.

I consider home to be where it’s my own house, where the kids have their own room, me and Sean have our own room, where there’s nobody else, just us four, that’s what I consider home.

(Donna)

For Alison too, home was a house:

Somewhere safe and warm for my kids – a three bedroomed house with manicured lawns...

(Alison)

She spoke of ‘going back to the garage’ rather than ‘going home’ when returning to the suburban garage she had lived in with her two children for four years.

And for Mere, the Coromandel garage she was living in with her partner and three children was just a stepping stone towards having her home.

We’ve got all our plans, we’ve had all that done...it’s just your basic three bedroom home, something we can build on to later on....

(Mere)

Dave, moving around between sleeping in parks and hostels in Auckland, was the only participant who said he felt nowhere was ‘home’ (and nor could anywhere be home because of lack of security of tenure):

You can’t call anywhere home these days. All it is, is a residence in transition, because the conditions in the environment are changing, you are changing.

(Dave)

Here Dave appears to be equating home with a sense of continuity and permanence, of security; and if that is lacking, then there is no ‘home’.

Conversely for Paddy, sleeping rough in Auckland’s CBD, certain areas were ‘home’ because he had hung out there over the years with mates.

On the street, yeah... certain areas, because you know a lot of people you’ve been on the streets with? It would most probably be around the areas that you move in, see. I don’t know if I can get something better than that...

(Paddy)
While Paddy appeared to feel ‘at home’ on the street and had no other sense of home,\(^2\) for Dan, no places on the street had felt like home when he was rough sleeping – they were just “locations” to sleep. In contrast, the room he had just rented did feel like home, even though he had only been there a week.

I’ve got the key to the door. It’s here in my pocket. I’ve got a key that says that’s my room, it’s my place.

(Dan)

Most Coromandel participants expressed a sense of belonging, of being ‘at home’ on the Peninsula whether, like Anaru, they had family ties/had grown up there, or not.

This was always home...my grandfather’s house, over there by the cow shed, I was brought up there.

(Anaru)

Neither Mona nor Tom had grown up on the Peninsula,, but never-the-less the Coromandel had become ‘home’ for them and their children.

I love it here, I don’t know what it is but it’s... the place. It welcomes me, um, with open arms. Like if I leave Coromandel and go away for two days, as soon as I hit that coast well it’s a feeling that I’ve never felt anywhere and it’s always continuing. And the feeling it’s like, yeah you’re home.

(Mona)

This place is home. I’ve been around Coromandel off and on for twenty years. The boys were born here...grew up here. It feels like home. Coromandel feels like home...and this land feels like, it feels like family land.

(Tom)

It had also become home for Nick, who contrasted the sense of belonging he felt in Coromandel with a lack of sense of belonging where he had previously lived.

You can walk up town and you still know people and you talk to people in the Four Square\(^3\) and the bookshop and you know a lot of the people as you walk down the street to say hello to and you don’t have that in the city.

(Nick)

Of all the Cormandel participants, only Rangi saw himself as unattached, even though he had lived on the Peninsula for ten years.

I’ve always been rather nomadic by temperament. I mean I could...If somebody said ‘here’s a ticket to Morocco’, I’d be off.

(Rangi)

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\(^2\) He said he had lost all connection with his family and family land “up North”: “There’s nothing up there for me...I haven’t been up there for a long time...it’s too late.”

\(^3\) Grocery shop chain.
Home on the move

Three Auckland participants were living in mobile vans and one Coromandel participant was in a mobile bus. All thought of their vans/bus as home. Melba contrasted her ‘cocoon’, which was not ‘rooted into one place’ and allowed her freedom, with the home she still owned, but no longer lived in. Nick called his bus his “little capsule on Earth”.

It’s my manifestation, what I’ve created, what I’m happy with...ultimately I want to travel around for a while – I can do that and the living space I’ve developed and am comfortable with, I can take it anywhere...You’ve got this mobile thing, but as soon as I step through the door, all the constants are there. Pull the blinds and you wouldn’t know where you were. And it will be home wherever I go, wherever I drive and pull up, it’s home.

(Nick)

In spite of the mobility, here there is a strong sense of permanence and continuity which made his bus ‘home’ for Nick. 94

For Daryl, living in his ‘van-home’ meant he more consciously did the things he wanted to do:

I realise a home is just somewhere you go to just because that’s your home. Like you don’t necessarily have any point to go there other than that’s just where you go.

(Daryl)

Here Daryl appears to be equating home with house, but without the emotional attachments and interactions which others would consider made a house a home – and which made his van “home for now.”

Several Coromandel participants, while not living in mobile vans, moved around on the Peninsula. Some Māori participants, for instance, moved between different pieces of family land, staying in a variety of informal dwellings. Kere and Tane had been living in a bach in the bush on land belonging to his family and then moved into a bus on land belonging to her family. They had not decided which piece of family land they would eventually settle on.

Home as dwelling

Participants’ narratives, especially on the Coromandel, revealed home for most of them was not just a house; it could be any sort of structure. Terry summed up the views of several

94 Nick’s experience of feeling ‘at home’ wherever he was in his bus because of his sense of familiarity, routine and comfort, highlights a phenomenological conception of ‘home as existential state’ (Seamon 1997 cited in Hodgetts, 2008).
Coromandel participants when she said: “not everybody wants a house you know.” Many spoke of feeling safe, feeling comfortable, of belonging in their informal dwellings.

Home to me is my bus... I go through the door of my bus. It’s a familiar environment. It feels comfortable, it’s home.

(Nick)

I don’t need a big house... You just need the basics – a place that’s solid enough with shelter for your kids to sleep in and a proper stove...

(Mona)

And just as home was not necessarily a house, several participants made it clear that having a house did not necessarily make it a home:

A home is a home, a house is a house. If you treat a house like a home, it becomes a home. I love my house. It’s my home. I call this house my castle.

(Rona)

A house became “home” when there was a sense of belonging and emotional ‘ownership’. For most participants their buses or caravans, sheds or garages were home as much because of this sense of belonging and emotional ownership as the fact that they were living in them. Julie talked of how her rented bus was her home, both because she felt comfortable in it and because she had put something of herself into it.

A house is not a home. I’ve put work into here. I’m decorating it; I’m hand-sewing the curtains. This is my home, as long as I don’t look at it through someone else’s eyes. People think, ‘how could she live here?’, but I love it. I don’t have to pretend anything. This is the place I can be myself.

(Julie)

Julie was clearly aware that her bus did not fit with the taken-for-granted meaning of home and joked about the reactions of friends who came to visit, but would not stay:

I said to stay here and you know, ‘oh, my creature comforts’...You know, ‘we’re ever so house and garden, Number Seventeen’...

(Julie)

For some participants, the house-home where a parent or grandparent lived provided a stable sense of home. It remained a reference point – a ‘node’ – a home they could go back to stay at when in transition, as well providing a sense of emotional stability and belonging. A number of Coromandel participants circled around these ‘nodes’.95 Marama had returned to her parents’ home to live several times, including a year spent living in a shed beside the

95 Saville Smith (Saville-Smith, 2007, personal communication) notes the importance of the continuity provided by such nodes when families are highly mobile.
family home with her partner and three children before shifting into caravans (still close to her parents’ house). When she had moved into her own home (half – literally – of an unfinished house with no utilities), the family home remained an important node: the children went there in the morning before school, the family showered there each day, drinking water was collected from there, washing done, and mobile phones charged up.

Hemi and Roha were living in a garage adjacent to her parents’ house while in ‘transition’ between rented accommodation and having their own house built. They ate a lot of their main meals “at Mum and Dad’s”; and being close was “awesome as well in terms of childcare”.

I mean we’re lucky in that we can utilise their home and like if we need extra space the girls can go up there.  

(Roha)

Other participants, while not relying on the family home for day to day living, still expressed strong attachments. Auckland participant Alison spoke of her Nana’s home (where her mother also lived) as home, rather than the garage she had lived in for three years.

It’s the house that we lived in for quite a long time...I feel most comfortable there, with my Nana and my Mum.  

(Alison)

Here family and the sense of belonging, of being ‘comfortable’, made her Nana’s home ‘home’ in a way the garage she lived in with her two children was not.

Home as haven

The idea of home as haven, as a safe space, was commonly expressed. For May, a home was a haven “from the storms of life”. Thus her van, which she perceived as a safe haven, a “cocoon”, fulfilled her definition of home: “It’s my home, my home on wheels”. In contrast, she never thought of the house she grew up in as home, because it was not a haven.

I could never, in all the writing I did about my childhood, call the house we lived in ‘home’, because home to me means a haven.  

(May)

Nor did Dave have any sense of the family home he had grown up in as “home” because it had not been “safe”.

I lived in the family home in Epsom for thirty years, but cut all contacts and ties for emotional survival.  

(Dave)
The current lack of any home of his own, or family home from the past with which he could relate to as ‘home’ either in real terms or symbolically, appeared to have left Dave with no sense of ontological security, no sense of ‘home’. In contrast Aaron, while feeling little sense of home in the HNZC unit he was currently living in, said he had felt ‘at home’ and ‘safe’ in the gardens he slept in over several years because the gardens had provided him with a haven: “nobody knew I was there”.

I actually got more sleep when I was living on the street than where I am. (Aaron)

The majority of Coromandel participants, Māori and Pākehā, had sought ‘haven’ by removing themselves from the stresses of city life. Anaru returned to live in a tent on family land after working in cities around the North Island and Australia’s Gold Coast.

Here I was, rushing around like an idiot trying to earn money, getting myself all hostile because I was driving a cab and you know when you are driving drunks around twelve hours a night; and you’re thinking, ‘maybe we’ll buy a bach or something here in Australia’....And I thought,’ I’ve got a place like that at home; what am I doing here?’ (Anaru)

Home as place

For Coromandel residents especially, ‘home’ often had little to do with any particular structure, denoting rather an area of land to which participants expressed a strong emotional/spiritual attachment. This could be ancestral land, or a piece of land to which they had no family ties, but felt a deep sense of belonging (see above). Some participants also expressed a sense of attachment to a much wider geographical locality – Coromandel or Auckland – rather than a particular piece of land.

Anaru spoke of belonging to the land, of being tangata whenua, and having some feeling of ‘ownership’ (in the sense of kaitiaki, or guardianship) because of that.

This is our land you know, we were born from the land... this is our mother earth, we always claim it. We were created from it. (Anaru)
Most Māori participants, either obliquely or explicitly, spoke of the importance of the land and their ties with it. Roha expressed it in terms of people-land continuity across the generations.

[The mountain] which is just up behind us is the ancestral home for my whanau and we used to walk it as children. It's awesome...[and] our children’s whenua are buried just down below.

(Roha)

Some Pākehā participants also expressed a strong visceral and spiritual connection with the land they were living on. Terry said it had taken her “seven years to find the right piece of land” on the Coromandel, and talked of the “healing aspects” of the land and the “spiritual nourishment” from living there.

Home away

Some participants felt they had more than one home. For Rona in Auckland and Val on the Coromandel, home was strongly both the Pacific islands they had come from as well as their present dwellings and locations.

This IS home, and it’s a nice home; but then home is home, where my parents, my sisters and brother are still, where we all grow up, you know? And I think I'll never forget Samoa. Samoa will always be home. And this will always be my home here.

(Rona)

Home is my island – it always will be. Home is where I live, but home will always be home. This is my home, with my children, and the one before was my home. But home is where your heart is, and it’s always back home. That’s why I like here, because it reminds me of home – the trees, the water, the friendly people. I’ve found my roots.

(Val)

Like other participants who still identified their family home as home, these ‘homes’ across the ocean carried connotations of family, the familiar, and a ‘heart connection’. ‘Home is where the heart is’ may be an overused aphorism in making sense of home, but it encapsulates much of the emotional and symbolic meaning of ‘home’ in its broader senses.

Owning home

Many of the participants, like most New Zealanders, wanted to own their own house-home. Several of them already did. Pete and Jean owned a house in a provincial town but said they preferred to live in the sheep-shed they were renting.
We've still got a three-bedroomed house with a bathroom and toilet (they laugh)...it's in town. I don't want to be in town, I'd much rather be out in the country. I don't like having neighbours right next door...

(Jean)

Four of the participants owned houses which they chose not to live in; another nine owned homes on land to which they had rights (private title, Māori land or trust), although these homes were informal dwellings rather than houses. Many in Auckland and on the Coromandel spoke of the sense of security ownership would provide.

I would like to own my own home because it's a greater sense of security and something I can apply myself to. Like it would be nice to have a garden.

(Aaron)

Alison, also in Auckland, said she wanted to build up an asset for herself by paying her own mortgage rather than someone else's, through renting.

I want to own it [a house]. I want to have something that is an asset later on in life, not just keeping renting all the time – paying off somebody else's mortgage.

(A Alison)

This was also a theme for some Coromandel participants. For instance Mona said she would probably have had "her own house by now" if she hadn't been paying rent for so many years. However, most Coromandel participants did not want to take on the stress of the size of mortgage which would be required to build a regular, permitted house. They preferred to own a home they felt they could afford. Tarata spoke of a sister who had had a house with a mortgage, but "wouldn't go there again".

It bought her that far down. That was through Housing Corp too. She couldn't afford it – not just the mortgage, but everything that went with it – the rates, the insurance, the water rates. She'd had enough. She just couldn't afford it.

(Tarata)

Although she was determined to own her own home (and was well on the way to doing so), it would be a home she could afford, she said. The experience of her sister, and watching her mother struggle, had 'put her right off'.

I don't want to pay a mortgage for the rest of my life. My mother has put me right off that because she's had to do it hard all her life. She can't even afford to pay her rates and her water bills at the moment. There's no way I'm going to be living like that when I'm my Mum's age.

(Tarata)
While many participants wanted to own their own home, Auckland participant Daryl expressed no desire to do so.

I’ve never been interested in owning property. I can’t say why. I’m not interested. If I won lotto I still wouldn’t own a house. I’m not interested (laughs). If someone said here, have a house, I’d probably turn it into cash or something, I don’t know…

(Daryl)

For many participants, actual ownership did not appear to make their current dwellings or the land they were on any more home, or not owning them any less home. What made them home was security of tenure and/or a sense of emotional ownership.

Cultural collisions

The most prominent cultural collision emerging from participants’ narratives is between mainstream (represented by the media, public health and government authorities) and alternative (represented by a majority of the participants) views about what constitutes a home. It is clear that what is ‘appropriate housing’ is in the eye (or heart and mind) of the beholder. Many participants considered their informal housing entirely appropriate, even though it contravened mainstream ideas of appropriate housing. Some participants were well aware of the collisions in perception: Julie, for instance, living in a rented bus, felt it was an appropriate home – so long as she didn’t view it through someone else’s eyes. Where participants were planning to ‘upgrade’, many of the structures they had in mind were not houses which would meet building regulations. Terry, for instance, was working towards building her own place and moving out of her bus, but it was only going to be “a little cabin”, and without electricity or an inside toilet: “It’s a non-issue really,” she said. The compliance implications of such collisions in perception are discussed in Chapter Thirteen, Health, Home and Compliance.

Five participants were embroiled in competing claims to certain areas of blocks of Māori land. Here there was a collision of ‘rights to occupy’. One participant blamed this collision on the “Pākehā concept of land”.

Pākehā come and say ‘Oh you own this piece and you own this piece’, which was never the case, it was communal land. If you wanted to build here, you’re here, you’ve got a family, okay build yourself a house. Now you’ve got people turning up, some of them have been born in Australia and England, they can come back and start telling you what you can’t do on this land. People will come out of the woodwork we’ve never met in our lives you know, who didn’t even know their grandparents...: ‘Oh no, no we’ve got pieces here, we don’t want [that]…’ and then they’ll happily go back to Auckland. It should never be like that.
Anaru appears to be presenting this conflict at least in part as Pākehā perceptions (and laws) about land being taken on by Māori and causing conflict. The collision between viewing land in terms of ‘realisable asset’ and ‘individual ownership’ (with connotations of ‘dominion over’) versus land being held ‘in trust’ for generations to come (with connotations of kaitiaki or guardianship), has generally been presented in the literature as a Māori-Pākehā cultural divide, with implicit and explicit moral judgements, depending on which side of the divide the commentator is sitting. This divide can be summed up simplistically as: ‘communal is good and protects the land/individual is bad and exploits the land’, versus ‘individual is good and develops the land/communal is bad and neglects the land’; and ‘communal is spiritually aware and caring/individual is spiritually bankrupt and selfish’, versus ‘communal is material poverty and bad for the economy/individual is material prosperity and good for the economy’. Participants’ narratives show that Māori and Pākehā in this sample fell on both sides of the divide, with Coromandel participants tending towards the communal, and Auckland participants the individual.

Concluding comments

Most participants’ narratives presented their informal dwellings (particularly on the Coromandel) as ‘home’, even though most of them fell far short of both mainstream perceptions of, and legal requirements for, appropriate housing. In noting that participants felt ‘at home’, again I do not want to romanticize ‘poor housing’. Rather, the representations of ‘home’ from participants’ narratives illustrate factors which transform a dwelling into a home, however ‘poor’ that dwelling may be (Brookes, 2000a), raising questions about the acceptance of mainstream materialist values, and extending discourses around ‘home’ and wellbeing.

Most Coromandel participants appeared to be less ‘materialistic’ in their attitudes towards housing and land than Auckland participants and less ‘house-obsessed’ than mainstream Aotearoa/New Zealand. How much this is an indication of less materialistic values, and how much rather a reflection of different coping strategies in response to ‘systematic inequalities, formal and informal’ (Forrest, 1999), is unclear.

96 See Chapter Four, Media Discourses.
Also unclear is the degree to which participants were content with their housing (or lack of it). Inconsistencies surfaced in participants’ narratives. For instance Paddy spoke of being very satisfied and ‘at home’ on the street – but later said he would love a house or flat if he was offered one and it fulfilled the requirements of being not too expensive and close to the CBD, where he felt at home. Such ‘inconsistencies’ reflect that ‘home’ has multiple meanings, emotional and symbolic as well as lexical, and that these meanings are ‘contingent upon individual perception and changing personal experiences’ (Gurney, 1997). Because home can be seen as a ‘metaphor for humanness itself’ (Bachelard, 1994), it is not surprising participant narratives should reveal inconsistencies – although Denzin & Linclon (2000b) note that whatever the area under investigation, people are likely to be inconsistent in their reporting of actions, intentions and perceptions.

In terms of urban-rural differences, most Coromandel participants appeared to have a stronger ‘sense of place’ than their urban counterparts – and this could in part account for the sense of kaitiaki or stewardship which many felt (DeMiglio & Williams, 2008). Auckland participants appeared more oriented towards having a flat or a house to live in than Coromandel participants (although many of the latter were working towards building their own ‘houses’). This could be because Coromandel participants tended to already feel ‘at home’ in their informal dwellings. It could also be a reflection of the lack of house or flat renting options on the Peninsula, and the relatively easy access to inexpensive informal dwellings. In Auckland informal housing options were less obvious and doubling up or sleeping rough – or renting a house or flat – seemed the only options.

This chapter has looked at conceptualisations of home in Aotearoa/New Zealand and the many meanings of home (as dwelling and geographical area) presented in participants’ narratives. As Sixsmith (1995:277) found, “different types of home exist...[and] different meanings of home co-exist”. Most participants expressed a strong sense of home, regardless of the fact that they were ‘homeless’ in terms of not having a house (Kearns, 2006). Participants’ narratives revealed ‘home’ could be any sort of shelter, and depended upon individual perception. Sometimes ‘home’ had nothing to do with structure, denoting rather an area of land to which participants expressed a strong emotional/spiritual attachment. This could be family land, or a particular piece of land to which they had no ancestral ties, but felt a deep sense of belonging. Some Coromandel participants expressed this in terms of the healing nature of the land, touching on the concept of place as ‘therapeutic landscape’ (Kearns & Gesler, 1998b), a concept explored in Chapter Eleven, Sense of Health and Wellbeing. ‘Home’ could also mean a parent’s or grandparent’s home and/or somewhere the participant
was born/grew up, as well as their current living situation. Generally Coromandel participants expressed a greater sense of belonging and attachment to where they were currently living, while for many Auckland participants 'home' was something, somewhere, yet to be attained. For instance for Auckland participant, Alison, her garage could never be home, even though she had lived there with her children for four years, because 'home' for Alison was a three-bedroomed house. Conversely, the garage Coromandel participants Val and Arama lived in was home because it was 'comfy'; and even though the garage Hemi and Roha lived in with their children was only a temporary measure until their house was built, nevertheless it was 'home' – because they lived in it and because it was in the area where Roha had grown up and where her family lived (Maori Women's Housing Research Project (N.Z.), 1991; Saville-Smith, 2004). Thus, as MacIntyre (2006) notes, participants' narratives show home encompasses a multitude of meanings from the concrete to the metaphoric.

The next chapter, Pros and Cons and Pathways Out, looks at participants' perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of their informal living situations and the implications of these for pathways out of housing disadvantage.
CHAPTER TEN

PROS, CONS AND PATHWAYS OUT?

Introduction

This chapter explores participants’ perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of their informal housing and ways their housing situations could be improved. It looks further at value systems and coping mechanisms which seem to have allowed many participants to be satisfied despite the difficulties, and how these values and coping strategies, coupled with a lack of suitable housing alternatives, may provide barriers to ‘pathways out’ of informal housing.

Most participants spoke more of advantages than disadvantages to their informal housing, especially those on the Coromandel. This could in part be explained by the fact that, as noted previously, housing is closely connected to self identity – which it is not reasonable to expect people to devalue (Blaxter, 1997). Accentuating the positive could also be viewed as a coping strategy, with participants ‘making the best’ of less than adequate housing. Kearns (1994:3) notes that conditions which would be distressing for some (especially where they perceived a lack of control or powerlessness in their circumstances) could produce positive outcomes for others “because successful coping strategies and behaviours eventuate”. Many participants displayed remarkable resilience in the face of hardship.

The stressing of advantages could also simply reflect a genuine satisfaction with their informal housing. As Sargisson (1990) found with informally housed members of alternative communities on the Coromandel, “a simple dwelling with a life lived close to the environment was overwhelmingly preferred”, and respondents espoused “the right to self determination regarding our quality of living and lifestyles” (Sargisson, 1990:62,12).
It is clear from participants’ perceptions presented in the previous two chapters (Pioneering Echoes and Sense of Home and Place), that many participants portrayed their informal housing as satisfactory. However, others in similar housing circumstances did not. There are inherent difficulties in establishing “absolute definitions of what is and what is not adequate housing for different groups within the population” (Keams, 1994:5). Different groups have different views about what is adequate – and research has shown that perceptions of housing (Fuller et al., 1993:1417) and neighbourhood (Ellaway et al., 2001) as adequate or inadequate, irrespective of ‘objective measures’, determine impacts on health.

There are also inherent difficulties in separating out participants’ perceived advantages and disadvantages of their housing from the context of place and family.

**Coromandel perceptions**

There’s a price you pay for living in paradise…

(Roha)

**Advantages**

Sargisson’s report (1990) noted major advantages cited by respondents were not going into debt, living sustainably, and being free to ‘do their own thing’. Some variation of this was voiced by many Coromandel participants. Their informal housing was seen as ‘the price they paid for living in paradise’.

“Very few bills, beauty, isolation” was Karen’s summary of the advantages of her family’s house-truck-caravan accommodation; “I live in utter peace and with beauty...and the rent is miniscule,” said Julie. Nick spoke of the main benefits of his caravan park site being cheap rent and attractive surroundings:

It’s a nice site, tucked away, overlooking the sea with all nice bush around it, so I’ve got what people are currently paying several hundreds of thousands of dollars to have, I pay $65 to have.

(Nick)

In all the above instances it was the indirect consequences of their housing choices rather than features of the structures themselves which were referred to as advantages, although other participants spoke of the advantages of small, easy-to-keep-warm buses, vans and house-trucks over houses.
Saving money and keeping out of debt were the advantages most frequently cited by participants. Any disadvantages of his bus were outweighed by not having to pay rent, said Tane, “because that’s money we just can’t afford.” Tarata too talked in terms of the trade-off between a less-than-ideal caravan and ‘no bills to pay’:

People might look at this lot and think it’s a hard life, but I don’t feel it, it’s not hard at all. It’s a lot easier with no complications and no bills to pay.  

(Tarata)

Either the weekly rent they paid was minimal (ranging from $20 for Rangi’s converted garage and $40 for Julie’s bus to $65 for Nick’s caravan park site), or there was no rent to pay. None of the participants had a mortgage, although Tane and Kere were paying off the old bus they had bought. Many stressed the advantages of not having to pay rent or utility bills. Again, the emphasis was on the indirect consequences of participants’ housing choices: the benefits of cheap rent, few bills and beautiful surroundings, rather than advantages in the structures themselves. As has been noted, Murray’s (1997) investigation of housing tradeoffs made by low income households similarly found that affordability was more important than the quality and size of the structure in terms of choice, while Saville-Smith’s (2004) study emphasised the importance of family connections and place over dwelling. Ten households (eleven participants) had no electricity bills and only four households (seven participants) had landlines to pay for.

Tarata lived in her caravan for eight years to save money to build her house and pay off debts. She talked of the way “debts accumulate”, and of “low income earners getting more and more in debt with everyday electricity bills, telephone bills, whatever.” Mona spoke of ‘bills on top of bills’ when she was renting a house. Living in her small shed and shipping container on a patch of farmland she paid $40 rent a week for, with no electricity, water or phone bills, meant far less stress and enough money to cover other living expenses.

I find I’m a lot more at peace with myself more than anything. When I was living in rentals I had bills on top of bills, I wasn’t getting nowhere. I didn’t own anything, only the furniture I had in those houses. I’d pay out $8,000 a year on rentals and walk out with nothing.  

(Mona)

Roha spoke of many Māori on the Coromandel opting for informal accommodation because of the low costs involved.

Knowing a lot of the whanau and people who do live in less than well-built houses, it’s like I said before, it’s often weighed up by whether there’s less cost involved in
living in such houses. Because that can mean their wellbeing is much better because they’re struggling less.

(Roha)

Several participants stressed the sense of freedom which not having to find money for utility bills, not being tied to a house or having to pay out money for mortgages or rent – and living on the Coromandel – brought. “It’s a lifestyle choice,” said Tom: “keep the expenses down and you have more free time”; and Anaru:

It’s great; I can do what I want, I’m my own boss...Look at the view, how can you beat that? Nice fresh air...food’s right at my doorstep.

Anaru

The advantages of being able to live in an environmentally sustainable way were also stressed; and the advantages of connections to whenua and whanau.

There’s no disadvantages that I can think of, just advantages with Mum and Dad being so close. I mean it’s that being close to whanau, you know, and living in a kind of a communal lifestyle.

(Roha)

Disadvantages

As noted above, it is difficult to separate out the advantages/disadvantages participants saw in their informal housing per se from the overall context of their lives and living environments, although when it came to disadvantages, the focus tended to be on the housing structures rather than indirect factors. Here problems associated with a lack of basic facilities were most frequently named, especially by participants with children.

I think the thing I find ‘the hardest being in a smaller space, is the domestic looking after of the children, washing clothes, going to the bathroom...in a house you just nip out of one door into another whereas in the bush it’s a bit of a trek to the compost toilet and of course if it’s in the middle of the night and it’s raining that’s awkward. Luckily they don’t often need the toilet...

(Karen)

Life would just be so much easier if we had our own toilet, our own shower and bathroom, especially through the winter. So you know the kids are all bathed nice and early, in the afternoon, while it’s still warm because you know you can’t be carting them in and out of the cold

(Mere)

Mere, who lived with her three children and partner in a garage adjacent to her mother’s house, was also aware of the social limitations this posed for her eldest daughter:
Yeah, because D's ten, she can't bring friends home because you know, you know, and um...

(Mere)

For Tom, whose children were older, there was also a difficulty when his teenage sons brought friends to Coromandel to stay – "city boys from families with a fair bit of money":

This is too primitive for them – even coming into the bus is a bit much. They like electricity. And asking me where the toilet was and being asked to piss in the long grass...

(Tom)

Lack of space was another factor many found a disadvantage. Mikaere, living in a caravan with his thirteen-year-old son, wanted a "bit bigger space, so I can get out of his face...and he can get out of mine". Mere spoke of the lack of privacy and room for her children, which came with living in a garage; and Terry of not being able to spread out or have room for grandchildren in her bus.

This is a wee bit small. It's a good space, it's easy to warm up, but you just can't spread out...It makes it a wee bit awkward. And you know, I've got grandchildren who like to come and stay with me and it would be a lot easier if I had a little cabin.

(Terry)

Auckland perceptions

Advantages? None that I can think of, no. I can't see why anyone would want to live in a shed...

(Sean)

Advantages

In contrast with Coromandel participants, few Auckland participants saw advantages in their informal housing. The participants who did were those who felt they were making a choice to live as they did. This included the three participants living in vans (Daryl and Nick worked in the city and parked their vans in different places around the city and May, a superannuitant, travelled around the country); and one participant (Paddy) who had spent six years rough sleeping. Once again though, the advantages they saw tended to be in the trade-offs – saving money, freedom of movement – rather than their accommodation per se.

'Freedom' was the major advantage these participants cited: freedom to come and go as they pleased, as well as freedom from paying rent, rates and electricity bills, allowing them to save money. May spoke of her van as her "passport to freedom" both in terms of being
independent and able to come and go as she chose, and giving her freedom from financial
stress.

The economic advantage for me is that I have the rent of my house. It gives incredible
freedom, and freedom from stress around ‘oh my gosh, I’ve got to pay for da da da da
dthis month’, and maybe I’ll only be able to pay half of it. I don’t have the stress.

(May)

She spoke of many older New Zealanders living in motor-homes finding the same advantages:

I know a lot of motor-home people who have sold their home to buy their mobile
home and they feel more secure financially because they have less financial
pressure...they’re not trapped then in that dreadful dilemma of health issues and
vehicle issues and family issues that drain finances. And if they are fortunate to have
a home, renting their home provides them with, you could almost call it luxuries, but
they’re not...

(May)

Paddy and Aaron, who had both spent years in various rough sleeping situations, also talked
of a sense of freedom and independence this gave. “I felt free. I just felt free, ay. You can do
anything you want,” said Paddy. While Paddy saw himself as consciously choosing to sleep
rough, Aaron saw his years of sleeping in gardens as the result of no other housing options.
But despite this Aaron also spoke of a sense of freedom and a ‘type of independence’ which
went with this:

The independence of not having to be somewhere, not having to pay rent, not having
to worry about certain types of bills.

(Aaron)

Daryl and Neil both talked of being able to save the money they would otherwise be spending
on rent – Daryl to buy land and build a house, and Neil to spend on alternative health care and
air fares: While they spoke of their vans being a little damp and cramped, they saw far more
advantages than disadvantages to their mobile accommodation at this stage of their lives;
living in their vans was a satisfactory, though temporary, choice.

No other Auckland participants identified more advantages than disadvantages with their
informal housing.

Disadvantages
Like some Coromandel participants, the three Auckland participants living with children in
garages found the small spaces difficult. “It’s cramped, very cramped,” said Donna; and her
partner Sean:
We’re living in a shed, you know and it really sucks...we’re all in here together and that’s just ridiculous.

(Sean)

For Alison too, their garage space was “too small” and her two children “live[d] in each other’s faces.” The rain was so loud on the roof she could not hear the television, and the place was “a freezer in winter” and “an oven in summer”.

I hate living here. It’s too small. If friends come over I get embarrassed because no matter how tidy it looks, how clean I try and get it, it’s never going to look nice. [My daughter] wanted her friends to come over the other day, and I said that was fine; and she said, ‘Not to be mean, mum, but can you make sure the garage is really, really tidy?’ And I just said ‘Yeah Babe, I’ll make sure the garage is really nice and tidy.’ Little things like that, you know…

(Alison)

Here Alison touches on an issue raised by several participants in Auckland and on the Coromandel – feeling judged, both by their children, who were beginning to look at their housing through ‘outside eyes’, and others; and in some sense ‘excluded’ because their informal housing did not fit mainstream norms, and was thus unacceptable.

Social exclusion/inclusion

Social exclusion, or marginalisation, affects the ability to fully participate in society, impacting on wellbeing. The process can lead to loss of self-efficacy, insecurity, and loss of self esteem, “[which] are among the psychosocial risk factors known to mediate between health and socioeconomic circumstances” (Wilkinson, 1997a:593). Media representations (Chapter Five, Media Discourses) show that those who are informally housed or homeless are often seen as strangers, as not part of ‘our’ community. They become marginalised, excluded, estranged. Radley and colleagues (2005) write of the literal ‘estrangement’ of rough sleepers (in terms of geographical displacement), where they are moved on by the police. The same process of estrangement, of exclusion, can happen to those in informal accommodation. Those participants living in vans (or sleeping rough) were also at risk of being ‘moved on’, while others faced threats of eviction because of non-compliance issues. Mona was dealing with non-compliance complaints from the local council which meant she might have to move on, even though, from her perspective, her shipping container and shed provided a perfectly adequate home. However, there is a more subtle level of estrangement, of exclusion, where some participants felt they were seen as ‘out of place’ because they did not ‘fit’ with mainstream norms. One Auckland participant talked of not being considered ‘part of society’ if you were not housed.
If you don’t live inside four walls they say you’re not part of society. That’s not really fair because living in the streets is just another way of living for people who are less fortunate.

(Lisa)

Informal housing can equally be regarded as ‘just another way of living’. But how others see those in informal housing and how they see themselves become intertwined and can impact on the ability to participate fully in society, adversely affecting SEP and health (O'Brien & de Haan, 2000; Peace, 2001).

Auckland participants were more likely to feel ‘excluded’ than those on the Coromandel. Neil, living in his van in the city, spoke about feeling ‘socially uncomfortable’ and becoming more socially reclusive:

I found it quite socially uncomfortable for a long time. I wouldn’t say where I lived. But after a while I said ‘I live in my van’...and people would say, you know: ‘oh, oh, really’, kind of embarrassed for you, or ‘what’s wrong?’

(Neil)

Alison was aware of the socially-excluding aspects of living in a garage. She spoke of feelings of shame and embarrassment, and never invited friends over.

It’s so, it’s quite embarrassing sometimes. I can’t entertain. I used to have so many friends when I used to be renting with my sister and that. Now I’ve become this little hermit that doesn’t really socialise that much.

(Alison)

She was also aware of the impact on her ten-year-old daughter in term of peer acceptability.

My ten-year-old said to me the other day, ‘Can you not say garage, come on let’s go back to the garage’? I’d actually never thought about it, but I say ‘Come on kids, let’s go back to the garage’; it’s not, ‘come on kids, lets go home’. And she said, ‘can you say home in front of my friends, don’t say garage?’

(Alison)

On the Coromandel, Mere also spoke of her eldest daughter’s ability to socialise with her peers being affected by their garage living. But generally Coromandel participants felt more of a sense of inclusion and belonging, while Auckland participants often felt more of a sense of exclusion. This could in part be because informal housing was more of a ‘norm’ on the Peninsula, with so many people visibly in similar situations, than it was in the city. In Auckland participants were more keenly aware that they differed from the norm of living in a ‘proper’ house or apartment.
Coromandel participants, Māori and Pākehā, also felt a strong sense of connection to place, which most Auckland participants lacked. As Marama said, everything around her was “family things”; and Roha talked of her ties to the area in which she was building a house with her partner: “The majority of Dad’s family all reside here. We were all brought up together.” Another Māori participant, (Mona) although lacking such ties, talked of her place ‘welcoming her with open arms’.

Some Auckland participants, like Alison, had important family ties. Others had grown up there and had no wish to live anywhere else: “I’ve always lived in Auckland,” said Aaron, “it’s my city”. In contrast May, moving around in her van, talked of finding ‘comradeship’ and a ‘sense of community’ with fellow travellers – more she said, than many people felt in the suburbs “waiting for their children to come visiting”.

You perhaps chum up with a few people and decide to go off together for a week here or there. So that’s very friendly...[and] we keep in email contact. That’s good.

(May)

Those participants who had spent time sleeping rough in the city felt varying degrees of inclusion/exclusion and belonging. They too chose to be in places where there was a sense of connection and ‘community’. Lisa talked of her ‘street brothers’ looking after her; and Paddy of feeling at home where there were people he knew and hung out with. But all felt there was a stigma attached to those without homes to go to.

It means like, you know I walk into a shop and I’ve got my bag over my back and they check me out as a streetie and I’ll be ignored for twenty minutes...Most people think you must be a loser or a no-hoper when you are on the street.

(Aaron)

He also spoke of the “impossibility” of finding a flat to rent when you did not have an address: it was already difficult when you were male, over a certain age and gay; but try answering a newspaper advertisement for a flatmate when you were homeless as well, he said. Dan, suddenly homeless and jobless, faced similar prejudices when he was applying for jobs:

If you don’t have a telephone or an address you can’t do squat in this town. They want CVs and ‘oh, yes, we’ll give you a ring.’ Basically it was no, no, no, no, no.

(Dan)

Thus Auckland participants were more likely to feel a sense of social exclusion because of their informal housing than Coromandel participants, and to be adversely affected by it.

97 Discussed in Chapter Nine, Sense of Home and Place.
Moreover, more of them spoke of trying to find a house or flat to live in, and the difficulties of that process.

Coping strategies

As has been noted, living conditions which would be distressing for some could produce positive outcomes for others because of the development of ‘successful coping strategies’ (Keams, 1994). Analysis of participants’ narratives shows participants used a number of different strategies to cope with their informal housing situations. A propensity to highlight the advantages of their informal housing can be seen as one such coping strategy. Others include participants differentiating themselves out as ‘better’ than others in similar situations, minimising difficulties and the use of humour.

Hodgetts and colleagues (2006) suggests that, as George Orwell proposed in Down and Out in Paris and London in 1933, ‘homelessness’ is a process of social exclusion, requiring the development of alternative identities/strategies. This same phenomenon can be seen in the case of those ‘othered’ by the mainstream on account of their informal and/or inadequate housing’, their ‘alternative identities’ shaped by the social world and “cultural repertoire of stories” available (Elliott, 2005:127). Analysis of participants’ narratives reveals the development of identities such as the ‘pioneer’, ‘self-sufficient man/woman’, ‘eco-warrior’, ‘adventurer’, ‘battler’ or ‘brave victim’, which can be seen to have given meaning and coherence to their lives, enabling them to maintain a positive self-identity in the face of adversity and/or social exclusion. Coromandel participants tended towards ‘pioneer’, ‘self-sufficient man/woman’, ‘battler’ and ‘eco-warrior’ narrative identities, with ‘brave’ (and not-so-brave) victim’, ‘battler’ and ‘adventurer’ more common amongst Auckland participants. Dave combined elements of several to reframe his sleeping rough/boarding house existence with an ‘alternative identity’ combining “a modern-day knight of chivalry living by a code of conduct” and “urban backwoodsman” amongst others.

I’m a trader, a facilitator, researcher; part quartermaster and part scrounger; I’m an urban backwoodsman, using old skills of camp craft and survival and the number eight wire philosophy.

(Dave)

Such narrative identities are not mutually exclusive; nor are they fixed. They are context-dependent and may shift over time (Elliot, 1998).
Apart from the development of positive self identities, seeing themselves in a separate category from others in similar situations (who from a mainstream perspective were all part of the ‘excluded’) surfaced as another coping strategy. Elliott (2005:130) describes this process of people demarcating a position for themselves “distant from that of others who are described as deviant”. In Auckland Dave, for instance, differentiated himself from others in his situation whom he saw as people who were not really in “that desperate need...bludging off others or bludging off the system”. On the Coromandel, Mona, living in her shed and refrigerated container, distanced herself from other “scraggly people”. Rangi, living (like dozens of other Coromandel residents) in what was clearly an old prefabricated garage, preferred to see it as a ‘shack’ – perhaps because living in a shack better fitted his identity as an artist.

Here there is another layer of the exclusion process at work, with initial division by the housed into “us” (the housed) and “them” (the un-housed) further differentiated into the un-housed who are ‘okay’ and/or deserving and those who are not – in this instance by someone un-housed who considered themselves ‘okay/deserving’. Thus both the excluding (in this case the housed) and the excluded (the un-housed) differentiate between those who are okay/deserving and those who are not. Nick, living in a Coromandel camping ground, also put himself in another category from others living in the camping ground.

[They’re] not the same as me. They are going to come and go, these people. They’re going to be transient. I’ve been here four years. It’s an integrated part of my lifestyle. (Nick)

And Paddy made a distinction between streeties like himself who ‘really’ belonged, and the ‘out-of-towners.

They make trouble. They’re out-of-towners. I’ve known Auckland all my life...that’s just another thing we have to deal with. (Paddy)

Minimisation was another coping strategy. Many Coromandel participants in particular minimised what other people might consider disadvantages of their living situations – lack of running water, leaking roofs, cold and damp. It might be more convenient to have running water inside, said Rangi, but “you get used to it. It’s a matter of filling up lots of buckets, buckets and bottles.” And yes, it was “a bit cold and damp in winter,”

...but as I say, in summer it’s lovely. Very cool, and ah... it’s nice, I just about live outside in summer. (Rangi)
Arama and Val similarly talked about it being ‘a bit’ cold and damp in winter, partly because of the many leaks, but they had a fire, they said, and “it really is lovely in summer”. Some participants minimised the disadvantages of their informal accommodation by stressing how much worse off others were. Said Wiki, living in a very basic Coromandel bach which lacked water and electricity “there’s people out there worse off than I am.” And Alison, living in a suburban garage in Auckland:

This is like a mansion compared to some of the living situations people are in – even though it’s not. It’s a garage, but it’s got four walls. And my heart goes out to people who really don’t have any houses at all to live in.

(Alison)

Yet other participants downplayed the adverse effects from their lack of facilities because they could cope in situations others would find too difficult. For instance, Mona could see how not having water could be a disadvantage for some people but:

I mean it just depends on the person I guess. If you think you can go out and do it, well, do it; and if you can’t, well don’t live like that, (laughs) you know.

(Mona)

Terry talked of ‘city women’ coming to stay on the Coromandel and not being able to cope:

A lot of women come from the city and they can’t cope if there’s no hot shower, there’s no running water toilet; you know they can’t quite cope with having to trek up through the bush a little way and then squat over a hole in the ground. I don’t understand why they can’t cope with it myself (laughs), but there are a lot of people like that.

(Terry)

Many Coromandel participants made fun of their lack of facilities. Humour is used universally as a way of coping with and minimising misfortune. Rona joked about the ‘cliché’ of their life in a garage; Terry, with only one gas ring for cooking, laughed that luckily most of her food was “a one-pot job” – and that at least she didn’t have to worry about power cuts.

Other people have power cuts, you know. The closest I came to a power cut was the other day when I ran out of candles and I only had about three four-inch stubs to go (laughs) – that’s as close as I come...

(Terry)

Val and Anaru joked that the buckets catching water from the many leaks in their roof provided them with fresh water:
We had buckets all over the place when it rained... (laughs) we had fresh water every day – well, at least when it rained...

(Val)

Such humour was less evident in the narratives of Auckland participants, though Alison said that when friends who had “just had a brand new house built” asked her if she had a deposit for her house yet, she would joke, “well no, but I’m minus $18 in my bank though...”

The range of successful coping strategies outlined above, along with the major trade-off advantages participants saw in their informal housing situations militated against them taking pathways out of informal housing – if such pathways were available.

Levels of satisfaction-dissatisfaction

While lack of income and debt played a role in almost all informal housing situations both in Auckland and on the Coromandel, Coromandel participants generally appeared less disempowered by their circumstances than their Auckland counterparts. They also expressed less dissatisfaction with their housing. On an informal housing dissatisfaction-satisfaction continuum (from ‘not okay’, through ‘just okay’ and ‘fine for some time’ to ‘completely fine’), most Coromandel participants were in the ‘fine for some time’ and ‘completely fine’ categories. For instance Arama and Val were content living in their cobbled-together garages: “It’s cosy and comfy – and warm”; Jean said she “couldn’t improve” on her bus; and Mona, living in her small shed and shipping container was also content: “You just need the basics – a place that’s solid enough with shelter for your kids to sleep in and a proper stove,” she said.
Tables 7.1 and 7.2 (below) sum up differences in levels of satisfaction with their informal housing situations for Coromandel and Auckland participants.

**Table 5.1 Continuum of informal housing dissatisfaction-satisfaction: Coromandel**

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<tr>
<th>Not okay</th>
<th>Just okay</th>
<th>Fine for some time</th>
<th>Completely fine</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Mikaere</td>
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<td>Anaru</td>
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The table above shows that while two Coromandel participants were ‘not okay’ and two only ‘just okay’ with their informal housing choices, thirteen presented as ‘fine for some time’ and a further eight ‘completely fine’, with no plans to move from their informal housing.

In contrast, none of the Auckland participants were ‘completely fine’ with their informal housing, and most appeared to be at the ‘not okay’ and ‘just okay’ end of the dissatisfaction-satisfaction continuum (see below). For instance Sean felt a garage might be an okay short-term measure for one person, but definitely not for a family of four:

> We’re living in a shed, you know, and it really sucks. We’re all together in here and that’s just ridiculous... If I was by myself, you know...like I used to stay in here before when I was by myself, you know and it was alright you know, but when it’s me and the missus and two kids...

(Sean)

The table below shows five of the Auckland participants were ‘not okay’ with their housing and five only ‘just okay’. The remaining five saw their informal housing as ‘fine’ in terms of a temporary measure. None were ‘completely fine’.
Coromandel-Auckland differences in participants’ levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with their informal housing were reflected in findings from follow-up interviews that only three Coromandel participants had changed their informal housing situations while most of those in informal housing in Auckland at the time of the first interviews had moved into mainstream housing by the time of the second.

Pathways out? – Coromandel

Lack of affordable house/apartment options and limited financial resources were key factors which had led participants into informal housing (Chapter Seven Pathways In). Coupled with participants’ desires in terms of location, these factors also severely restricted pathways out for those wanting them. Not everybody did: for instance Jean and Pete owned a house but chose to live in a sheep-shed – they were ‘happy as pigs in shit’, they said; and Arama and Val were ‘comfy’ in their garages-house and had no wish to ‘upgrade’ further.

For most participants, however, low incomes and/or problems with debt, made finding mainstream rental accommodation or buying/building a house seem out of the question. Many were also wary of any long-term financial commitments, and instead preferred their own low-cost informal housing solutions. Kingi talked of people who had lost their homes because they couldn’t keep up mortgage payments. Others spoke of the stresses involved in home ownership.

My mother has put me right off that because she’s had to do it hard all her life. She can’t even afford to pay her rates and her water bills at the moment. There’s no way I’m going to be living like that when I’m my Mum’s age.

(Tarata)

While many Coromandel participants were working towards building their own homes, and most Māori participants on the Coromandel had family land available for building on, most did not have in mind houses with building consents. The costs were too great they said. For instance how, asked Rewi, could you save for a house on $9.50 an hour, even if you had land...
you could build on? Several Coromandel participants suggested a solution was for communities to ‘bind together and provide housing’:

... because a lot of the land out here is family owned so if you could get together a project whereby you could find funding to build houses on family land and they could be eventually owned by the people who were building them, it would probably be ideal...

(Roha)

One such scheme was already underway on the Coromandel, with several houses built (2004). Three participants spoke of initial involvement with this scheme. Funded by HNZC and Te Puni Kokiri, it was similar to a Northland Māori initiative (Te Ropu Whariki, 2006), providing training and work for local people who would build the houses, with sweat equity reducing the cost to individual families.98 The participants initially interested in the Coromandel housing project also talked of problems with red tape, requirements and restrictions imposed which had seen most of the fourteen families originally interested dropping out.

Like, we wanted to build energy efficient homes you know, we couldn’t through... with Housing Corp because they won’t let you build a concrete based floor...because it was all this thing that’s bound up with the Papakainga land, being able to build on Māori land. So they want to be able to come and remove your home from the property.

(Mere)

Anaru identified restrictive lending policies which meant banks would not grant mortgages over communally owned land, as a barrier to pathways out. However, building on family land was itself identified as an obstacle by several Māori participants – because it was family land...

Building on family land, you know, you’ve got different sections of the family saying ‘I want that part, I want this part, your part’s better than this’.

(Hemi)

It’s just the land, aye; that’s the biggest problem. A lot of us here have gone though a course on mud-brick homes. They don’t cost much to build, and they last better than wood. The biggest problem is sorting out the land. Families fighting families – that’s the worst problem in Māoridom, the multiple ownership. I know that for a fact with my own brothers and sisters.

(Kingi)

98 Affordability in Northland was still an issue however, with a dissonance between programmes such as the Papakainga Housing Scheme encouraging Maori rural home ownership and the financial resources of Maori to raise and maintain mortgages and carry out maintenance (Te Ropu Whariki, 2006).
High compliance and infrastructure costs were also identified as barriers to pathways out of informal housing, although most participants who were planning to build were not planning to comply. Along with thousands of dollars for building and resource consents, development contributions and possible reserve contributions came prohibitive costs for roading, water and sewage and electricity – quite apart from actual construction costs.

Like, for our power alone, ’cos we’re in the process of finishing off our pricings for our house, and um… for our power alone to go up to our house, it was $12,000 and that’s just for the cable, that’s not even installed.

(Mere)

Most Coromandel participants just wanted a helping hand to upgrade or finish their existing informal accommodation, or to build low-cost housing for themselves. Said Arani: “They need to help people who are helping themselves.” Tarata, who already had all the timber for her house, said she could go for a $100,000 mortgage through HNZC, but only wanted $10,000, (which she could not borrow), because that was all she needed to put up the sort of house she had in mind; Anaru spoke of $20,000 being sufficient to put up a ‘gottage’ (combination garage and living) “like they advertise on TV”; For Terry ‘ten grand would be enough’.

I could probably knock up something pretty basic for ten grand, yeah...just sort of go with it, a little bit at a time. Like I’ve got the piles and paid for them, right? So what I’ll do next when I need bearers, I’ll go down to the timber place and I’ll get bearers and I’ll book them up, you know, and I’ll pay them off. It will be a slow process, but that’s just how it’s going to be.

(Terry)

Marama already had half her house built, “for eight grand, not counting the big ranch slider and window” but did not have enough money to finish the other half. She did not want to borrow the money to do this, even if she could, because

I don’t want to get myself into debt that I can’t get myself out of. I’ve always been a person that don’t like bills, so...(laughs).

(Marama)

While most Coromandel participants were already in homes they themselves owned and many had plans to upgrade to something better, for Auckland participants, renting was generally the only option.
Pathways out? – Auckland

Lack of affordable rentals was a problem many faced. Alison felt trapped in her garage.

Of course I’d love to have my own three-bedroomed house but with a car, a student loan and pretty much fending for myself...I can’t afford to move into a liveable house. 

(Alison)

As Sean and Donna found, even an accommodation supplement ‘does not help much when you’ve got a whole lot of bills to pay off’. This situation makes most accommodation ‘unaffordable’. Getting together money for a bond was another obstacle.

We’ll move out as soon as we find a place. It’s just getting a bond together. Yeah, like this house we looked at, like they want three or four week’s rent and then two weeks in advance.

(Sean)

For Auckland participants, HNZC was a frequent pathway out of their informal housing situations. Several participants, like Rona, had got HNZC housing after years in various informal housing situations – and she looked forward to one day being able to buy the house.

You really have to try hard. You can’t just go once and then just sit down, you have to keep going, keep pushing...[I went] every day. I think eventually they could see how determined I was. The hard work I did to get this house...My goal, my dream, is that one day I would like to own this home.

(Rona)

However, others who wanted HNZC accommodation did not think it was even worth going on a waiting list. Alison, for instance, did not consider HNZC an option because she’d “heard the waiting lists are just astronomical” and that “priority is given to migrants anyway”. Several participants expressed this view. They felt the government needed to provide more social housing, or ways to help them into their own homes.

While the advantages many Coromandel participants saw in their informal housing situations worked against the likelihood of them following pathways out, most Auckland participants were not similarly constrained. They often found few advantages in their current situations. Three Auckland participants spoke of discomfit and a sense of shame being motivations to move out of their current situations into appropriate housing.

If I didn’t feel a sense of shame there would be no motivation to get off the streets. You have to feel there has to be something better, that this is not enough, in order to move forward.

(Dan).
I want to make myself uncomfortable now so that I have a hope of moving away.

(John).

It meant I didn’t fall into a trap. I retained the desire to make my life better. Whereas if it became too easy...I lose that incentive.

(Aaron)

For Aaron, that meant not staying with friends when he lost his flat and ended up sleeping rough. Relying on friends would have made it too easy to stay in the same situation, he said. But motivation was only part of the pathway out for these three participants, who were all adequately housed at the time of the second interviews. The other major piece was their involvement with a social service agency – in this case the Auckland City Mission – which provided a basic level of support and care and facilitated access to other agencies. These included mental health services, addiction services and government agencies such as HNZC and WINZ providing participants with the help needed to sort out underlying problems which had contributed to their lack of adequate housing. Another non-government organisation, the Sisters of Mercy, had helped Chrissy get her HNZC unit for herself and her baby daughter. She would have got a place without their help, she reckoned, but “it would have taken a lot longer”:

Sister M helped me, and helped me get some stuff for this house and I’m very grateful. And that’s why I’m doing these courses as well, getting me started and I’m loving it and I can’t wait for my next lot next term.

(Chrissy)

Both Chrissy and another participant, Rona, were attending life-skills and pre-employment courses run by the Sisters for single mothers. Agencies recognise that the mere provision of a roof over someone’s head is not a sufficient pathway out of informal housing (Gravitas Research and Strategy Ltd, 2005; Robertson, 2004, personal communication); the underlying situations which led to informal housing and homelessness also need to be addressed, so that people who are housed can maintain their tenure.

Several Auckland participants, including Rona (above) wanted to own their own home. Aaron spoke of wanting the security he saw owning his own home would give him (“and I would like to have a garden”); Daryl, living in his van, was saving money for a house; and Alison dreamed of having her own home.

If I had $20,000-$30,000 I’d slap it down and get a house built. I want to move into a really nice house but the thought of having a deposit – it seems like it’s never going to happen...I want to have a beautiful three-bedroomed house with an en suite in my bedroom, preferably a double garage, immaculate lawns. I want to have something
that is an asset later on in life, not just keeping renting all the time – paying off somebody else’s mortgage.

(Alison)

Making housing more affordable and loans more available were suggestions made by several participants to help people into their own homes. Tom suggested a solution could be “simple cheap housing...put together by the community and the owner” and “land being more readily available to people who are not so financially well off”.

It would be so fantastic if that could happen – we’ve got lots of room. It seems that land, the price of land has been out of reach for people...it would be better if it was a set price actually, and whatever you did with it could go up – you know, your house prices could go up, but land prices stay the same. Yeah, in rural areas, simple houses and land available would be great. Give people the sense of being home, having their own place. If you’re bringing up your family and creating your own home at the same time, it’s pretty healthy.

(Tom)

Cultural collisions

Self esteem is found in having little in a society that equates self-esteem with the ownership of expensive goods. Many take pride in a simple dwelling that they have built themselves in a society where one goes into debt for life for a ‘real’ house.

(Sargisson, 1990:6)

In the quote above, Sargisson alludes to a collision in value systems between mainstream consumer society, and people living twenty years ago in informal housing in communities around the Peninsula who were ‘opting out’. A similar collision was evident in many of the Coromandel participants’ narratives – a collision between a value system where self esteem equated with ‘making do with little’ and one concerned with ‘the ownership of expensive goods’. Even where Coromandel participants were living in, or planning on building, their own ‘houses’, those they had planned were ‘simple dwellings’ – and not ‘real houses where one goes into debt for life’. Not only were en-suite bathrooms and double garages to house the family cars not part of the plan, but ‘bathrooms’ were likely to be outside the house and the double garage the house itself...They saw advantages in living in informal ‘sub-standard’ and illegal housing rather than going into debt and paying out large amounts of money in mortgages or rents. While some could afford to if they chose, others simply did not have the means. Such a collision in values was less obvious in Auckland, where most participants seemed more aligned with the mainstream, although lacking the means to have their own ‘real house’.

PROS, CONS AND PATHWAYS OUT?
Here there is a collision between a rhetoric of the ideal of home ownership for all and the reality of a lack of affordable housing. This can be framed in terms of Merton’s theory of anomic deviance and types of adaptation (Merton, 1957, 1996), with home ownership viewed as a universally imposed ‘societal goal for success’, while the means to achieving it are restricted. Aaron highlights the dissonance between mainstream values (universally imposed goals for monetary success, including home ownership) and the impossibility of achieving it.

Property investment in this country is lunatic; we’re really plugging this investment thing – how to do up your property and sell it for $250,000 more. We’re not thinking about housing people...Even working people seriously do not believe they are going to own their own home.

(Aaron)

In a society where mortgages and borrowed money are a way of life for those who can afford them and the way into ‘desirable’ housing, those who are not prepared to take out a mortgage – or even spend money on rent – do not conform; they are ‘deviant’. Those who do not work towards the goal of monetary success can also be seen as ‘deviant’.

Just under half the Coromandel participants and most of those in Auckland were on benefits. This meant they had regular contact with WINZ. Several were also dealing with HNZC, trying to find a pathway out of informal housing. They spoke of feeling disrespected and dismissed by front-line staff. Tarata related a situation where, in trying to ‘get ahead’ and provide a house for herself and her daughter, she was stood down for a benefit for using holiday pay from a job to pay off timber, and then slipping further into debt and dependence.

What really got to me was I was trying to get ahead, to build me and my daughter a house so I didn’t have to live in a caravan that has four seasons coming through it and it didn’t matter to them. It didn’t matter to them. I said ‘but I have put all my holiday pay down on my timber so I can build me and my daughter a house’ and the lady just said to me, ‘well, that’s the last thing you should have done with your money’. It’s not important, is what she said to me. And I couldn’t get through to her that it is important. Couldn’t they see that I was trying to do something to better myself? But no, it didn’t matter. And what really pissed me off is that they didn’t give a shit about it.

(Tarata)

There are feelings of being totally misunderstood, totally disregarded. 99 Similarly Donna spoke of being made to feel she’d ‘done something wrong’, when trying to apply for an HNZC house in Auckland.

99 Auckland City Mission community social work team leader, Richard Larkin, talked of advocating on behalf of clients with government agencies so they could get the benefits they were entitled to: “Sometimes I feel our main job is acting as an interpreter so that both sides understand each other” (Larkin, 2006, personal communication).
I'm supposed to be applying for a Housing Corp house but all the questions they ask makes you feel you’ve done something wrong...I mean how hard is it to go in and say ‘I need a house, look I’m in this situation’...

(Donna)

It took Donna, living in the garage of the HNZC house of her partner’s mother, several visits to both WINZ and HNZC before she understood all the paperwork requirements to apply for her own HNZC house – each time having to take her two toddlers by bus to their separate offices. And then she still found herself in a Catch 22 situation.

[Sean’s mother] received a letter saying the house was overcrowded and me and the kids had to move out. They know that we’re living in the garage. I phoned back to HNZC and she said we had to be out by the sixteenth, which is today. I said we had nowhere to go. She said to come down and all she could do was put me on the waiting list. But yesterday when I went down she said I couldn’t apply because I’m living here with [Sean’s mother]...

(Donna)

Such bureaucratic nightmares are very stressful for people who are already in very stressful situations.

Concluding comments

Participants’ perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of their informal housing situations examined in this chapter reveal that the actual structure of a house is only one among many considerations in terms of desirability, which include the general context of place, family and other connections (Saville-Smith, 2004), and degree of feelings of self-efficacy (Haarhoff, 1984). They also underline the fact that the perceptions of many participants diverged widely from mainstream perceptions about what constitutes adequate living conditions, examined in Chapter Four, Media Discourses. The mainstream definition of housing is a narrow one: housing equals house or apartment. And yet when one considers the core purpose of a house as providing shelter and a place to eat and sleep (as opposed to sleeping rough), one can also see participants as being ‘housed’, as most in this study saw themselves. Kearns (2004) has highlighted the ‘paradox’ of people being ‘at home without a home’. Similarly, participants living in vans, buses, tents, caravans and garages can be seen as ‘housed’ without a house – and many of them ‘at home’.

Participants were aware of judgements about their informal housing and the ‘us’ and ‘them’ processes of exclusion. As a counter to this, amongst Coromandel participants, a reversal of the ‘us-included/them-excluded’ dichotomy occurred: those excluded from the mainstream (‘them’) stressed the advantages of their values and, identifying with others in

PROS, CONS AND PATHWAYS OUT?

182
similar circumstances, became the ‘us’ (in turn ‘excluding’ the mainstream). Narratives revealed a wide range of other coping mechanisms employed, including minimisation and humour.

There were significant Coromandel-Auckland differences between the participants, with the former more likely to come up with their own housing solutions, whereas Auckland participants tended to look to government agencies for solutions. This can be seen as indicative of a higher degree of self-efficacy and higher levels of social cohesion (Spoonley et al., 2005) amongst Coromandel participants, as well as perhaps reflecting a reality of a low density rural environment being more conducive to informal or non-standard DIY housing than an intensive city environment. Participants’ narratives show Coromandel participants were also more likely to accentuate the positive aspects of their housing and Auckland participants the negative, with the former taking on ‘positive’ and the latter ‘negative’ self-identities (Elliott, 2005), shaped by both their social worlds and their own experiences and interpretations.

Coromandel participants greater satisfaction with their current circumstances meant they were perhaps less motivated to find pathways out of their informal housing than Auckland participants. (Certainly the follow-up interviews carried out with participants six to twelve months after the initial interviews to see if their living situations had changed showed that while almost all Coromandel participants were in the same informal housing situations, most Auckland participants had moved into more mainstream housing.)

Kearn’s (1994) observations that housing conditions which may be distressing for some people (especially where they perceived a lack of control over their circumstances) may not be for others because they develop successful coping strategies, has implications for the health and wellbeing of participants living in informal housing; so do their own perceptions of health and wellbeing. An exploration of concepts of health and wellbeing, and the many meanings of both expressed in participants’ narratives, follows in Chapter Eleven, Sense of Health and Wellbeing.
CHAPTER ELEVEN

SENSE OF HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Introduction

Public-health researchers need to be cautious about applying standard measures of health. People from a variety of perspectives may assess health in different ways. (Dew & Carroll, 2007:128)

Just as sense of home and place varies considerably (DeMiglio & Williams, 2008), so too does sense of health and wellbeing. Health, and what it means to be healthy, has been variously defined over the centuries. From beliefs in divine intervention (still dominant in many parts of the world) and debates about miasmas and the need to balance the humours of the body, the germ theory of disease has come to dominate in the West over the past hundred years (Davis & Dew, 1999). With the dominance of the bio-medical model, sickness is no longer seen as “something that happens to whole human beings but something that happens to their parts” (White, 1999:36), with a focus on disease and pathogens, mortality and morbidity statistics. But health is still about whole human beings, about individual perception and meaning, as well as statistical norms. Two people with the same ‘disease’ can have very different ‘illness’ experiences in spite of identical bio-medical labelling (Danz, Rose, Walter, & Klapp, 2001). It can thus be argued, as Blaxter (2004) does, that subjective definitions of health are the most meaningful.

The origin of the word ‘health’ is related to the word ‘whole’ (Concise Oxford Dictionary, 2002). The Old English greeting, hal, the High German hell, and the Greek hugeia and euexia, all connect health to fullness and the good life, with the question in Hebrew, ma shalomcha, how are you? literally asking if one is ‘whole’ (Mordacci & Sobel, 1998). The
Māori hauora, which translates as both health and the spirit of life, also makes this connection between health and wholeness.\textsuperscript{100}

While there are ‘a variety of perspectives’ on what it means to be ‘healthy’, there is little public debate over the meaning of ‘health’, with a default definition of ‘absence of disease’ dominating health service provision and funding. Exploring what participants meant by ‘health’ is necessary in order to represent their experiences of health and wellbeing. It is also important to consider various perspectives in terms of providing alternatives which may better meet the needs of different individuals and groups.

This chapter looks at conceptualisations of health and the many meanings of health and wellbeing which emerged from participants’ narratives. The roles of home and place in participants’ experiences of health and wellbeing are also explored. Collisions with mainstream beliefs potentially challenge some public health concepts, and extend the notion of public health to include the environment – both in terms of the environment as healing, and healing the environment.

Conceptualisations of health and wellbeing

‘Health’ is a construct difficult to define. Downie and Macnaughton (1998) suggest this is because health is in some sense ‘transparent’, lacking a clear identity of its own, and usually only apparent in its absence. It is also because ‘health’ is about individual perception and meaning (Blaxter, 2004; Danz et al., 2001).

Probably the most frequently quoted definition is the 1946 World Health Organisation (WHO) definition of health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (World Health Organization, 1946). This broadens out the dominant default definition of ‘health as the absence of disease and infirmity’ and equates health with a sense of wellbeing (DeMiglio & Williams, 2008) but there remains an inference that people who are experiencing less than complete physical, mental and social wellbeing are unhealthy. However, in a study of 4000 patients with different chronic diseases, Danz and colleagues (2001) found that many nevertheless felt ‘healthy’. Faull and Kalliath (2001), working with people with disabilities, also question current definitions of health which exclude those who have permanent physical, cognitive or social impairment. Does this mean, they ask, that people with disabilities or chronic

\textsuperscript{100} So did Hippocrates, writing in 400BC. The father of modern medicine saw health holistically as a balance between humours (biological), personality and the environment(Grbich, 1999).
conditions can never be healthy? "Or does it indicate that our perception and definition of health does not reflect the essence of health?" (Faull & Kalliath, 2001:43).

A revised WHO definition of health as: “...a condition or quality of the human organism which expresses adequate functioning under given genetic and environmental conditions” was arrived at in 1957 (cited in Grbich, 1999:7). While this acknowledges the impact on health of genetic inheritance and different environmental conditions, health is still seen as a ‘state’ to be aspired to, or attained. But as Mordacci and Sobel (1998) write, health is more an interactive process than some absolute you either have in its entirety, or not at all. The 1986 WHO Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion moved towards ‘health as process’ with its definition of health as something “created and lived by people in settings of their everyday life; where they learn, work, play and love” (World Health Organization, 1986). Here health is seen as a way of interacting with the world; something experienced, a part of the ‘lifeworld’ an individual creates. The British National Health Service’s definition of health as “being confident and positive and able to cope with the ups and downs of life” (cited in Stewart-Brown, 1998), similarly portrays health as a ‘process’ rather than ‘state’. In both definitions there is tacit acceptance of the interconnectedness of the individual with the world around them, with health (or ill-health) experienced as part of this.

For Māori, interconnectedness is implicit in the concept of hauora – health, or spirit of life. Durie has described the four cornerstones of Māori health as te taha wairua (spiritual aspect), te taha hinengaro (mental aspect), te taha tinana (physical aspect), and te taha whanau (family and community). The importance of tribal land (mana whenua) to Māori health and wellbeing is also acknowledged (Durie, 1994). Māori traditionally do not see themselves as separate from the land: whenua is both land and placenta, a source of nourishment and connection. Some Pākehā, too, express a strong sense of ‘oneness’, a ‘spiritual’ connection with the land.

Wakefield and McMullan (2005:3) suggest the interpretation of places people live in is primary for wellbeing and may help explain “the complex ways material and social conditions interact to produce health inequality.” As well as a setting for daily life, the physical environment may be connected with a sense of identity and security. It can also be perceived as ‘healthy’ or ‘unhealthy’. There is a perception “that urban areas are relatively unhealthy and rural areas relatively healthy” (Gesler, 1992:737). North American narratives of people ‘escaping modernity’ with second homes in rural settings extol the virtues of finding refuge in nature and the health-enhancing effects of living a simpler life immersed in the rhythms of nature.
nature (Williams & Van Patten, 2006). The importance for health and wellbeing of ‘therapeutic landscapes’ – places which are seen to be healing – is discussed by Kearns and Gesler (1998b).

Research shows contact with nature is good for health, “at least for some people in some circumstances” (Frumkin, 2003:1452). Frumkin (2003) cites studies showing speedier recovery amongst post-operative patients, fewer sick calls for prisoners, better pain control, lower blood pressure and anxiety levels, and improved attention amongst ADD children, all through contact with nature. Nature is seen as ‘restorative’, providing an appropriate setting for reflection and for recovery from the stresses of everyday urban life, with natural settings giving “a sense of order and relatedness at both perceptual and conceptual levels...encompassing both the imagined as well as the perceived scene” (Milligan et al., 2004:1785). Milligan and colleagues (2004) suggest that both mental engagement, through sensory experience and sense of place, and direct engagement with nature, are health enhancing. Thus beauty and tranquillity combine with cognitions and feelings of connection to produce a sense of wellbeing.

‘Sense of health’ is broadly captured in the concept of ‘wellbeing’, encompassing the physical, mental, social and environmental elements which together constitute ‘health’ (as opposed to disease and illness), and provides “…a way of thinking that takes on board the dynamic quality of these experiences” (Anderson, 1999:58). As defined in the Introduction, wellbeing can be seen to include mental, social and environmental/spiritual elements of health, allowing “resilience of self when life events challenge the existence of self” (Faull, 2002:9). Sense of wellbeing is also about a perception of ‘self as well’ and relates to how people interpret their circumstances (Airey, 2003:130), including their physical environment.

**Participants’ perceptions of health and wellbeing**

As researchers such as Danz and colleagues (2001) and Faull and Kalliath (2001) have found, many participants considered themselves healthy even when coping with health problems. Kingi, for instance, declared himself “pretty healthy, above normal...I’ve got no health problems”, in spite of numbness in his hands and arms. Mona considered herself healthy, even though her leg had been “permanently buggered” since she had broken it two years...
previously and her back hurt. Nick differentiated between particular ‘health problems’ and being healthy.

I’m finding coming up fifty there’s little things happening, deterioration of the body, and old injuries are starting to catch up with me… but from a health perspective I’m very healthy.

(Nick)

However other participants spoke of chronic conditions affecting their health and wellbeing. For Dan it was cancer:

Healthwise and workwise, everything snowballs from there…

(Dan)

For Alison it was the consequences of rheumatic fever she had contracted ten years earlier which compromised her health and wellbeing:

Before I got rheumatic fever I would have put myself into the really healthy category. But not now.

(Alison)

Dave spoke of problems with diabetes and depression. Because his diabetes had been “playing up” he had not slept well and was low on energy, he said. He defined health as:

A state of physical and mental wellbeing. It’s a balancing act. You’ve got your highs and lows.

(Dave)

Like respondents in the 1984-85 National Health Survey of England, Scotland and Wales (Blaxter, 2004), participants tended to define health in terms of absence of disease, having ‘reserves’ of health (a strong constitution), and ‘wellbeing’ (expressed in terms of psychosocial wellbeing, healthy lifestyle, physical fitness, energy and vitality, and social relationships).

Health as ‘not sick’

Several participants defined health as ‘not sick’. Anaru said he was ‘fine’ because there was nothing ‘wrong’ with him’; and Tarata considered herself healthy because she “never ever had health problems” and almost never went to the doctor. Other participants, including Mona and Anaru, also spoke of being healthy because they hardly ever went to the doctor.

I don’t think I’ve ever been to a quack down here, except for my kids…

(Mona)
Healthy is when you don’t go to the doctor more than once a year. You go to the doctor and they tell you all these things wrong with you, and then you get sick.

(Anaru)

Here there appears to be an intimation that the best way to stay healthy is to not think about your health, and to avoid going to the doctor.

Most participants, however, like the respondents in the British survey (Blaxter, 2004), were most likely to describe their health holistically in terms of general wellbeing. As Nick said:

Well, there’s physical health which is, you know, not being ill. But a lot more is to do with mental health and how you perceive yourself and your environment. That’s a huge part of the holistic aspect of health.

(Nick)

Health as ‘reserves’

Some participants expressed the idea of reserves of health, of resilience. Nick spoke in terms of a ‘robust constitution’ which meant he was hardly ever sick.

Well my health is good, I’ve always been a healthy person. I’m just one of those people that’s got a very robust constitution, so I’ve never had any illness children usually get. My father’s a bit that way. He’s built like a rock and I’ve probably inherited a bit of that and so my health is good.

(Nick)

These reserves could be built on by ‘toughening up’. Karen talked of “a physically demanding lifestyle” being “good for your health”; Jean and Pete of “fresh air” and “bare feet” toughening you up; and Terry of getting used to the cold being good for your health:

Because you do live outside quite a lot you get acclimatised to the weather...like I notice that I can handle more cold than a lot of other people now, whereas usually I couldn’t because I don’t have meat on my bones to keep me warm...I think it’s better for your health to live like that because you’re not in a hot environment then going outside into the cold environment. That can’t be very good for you.

(Terry)

Tarata talked of the damp conditions of her caravan not affecting her health because the body learned to cope.

I think if you live like that for long enough your body gets used to it and I think that’s why we never got sick because we got used to it.

(Tarata)

Many Coromandel participants contrasted their ‘healthy’ outdoor life, which promoted good health, with the less healthy ‘soft’ life of the city.
I think that people have to harden up. They’re too soft. They get mollycoddled and they get sick.

(Pete)

Health as fit and happy

Some participants defined health in terms of physical fitness, or energy. Dave spoke of having “a lot of energy” when you are healthy; Julie, of physical health meaning she could “go for a run or a swim” with ease and without pain. For Neil, ‘healthy’ meant his body was “working reasonably well”; it meant “being able to walk, not having muscle discomfort, not being kept up at night by pain, or a sore neck; being able to go through a range of movements.” Here there is a crossover into ‘health as function’ – being able to do physically what you want in your life, without being impeded by your body. Terry extended this to include the idea of happiness:

A healthy person is someone who can do things for themselves and is happy with what they are doing.

(Terry)

Downie and Macnaughton (1998) see ‘positive health’ as impossible to distinguish from other states like fitness, vigour or happiness, and many participants either included some sense of being content, not stressed and happy, in their explanation of health. Rona, when asked how her health was, responded, “good, I’m content and happier. I don’t have to worry about anything”. For Alison, too, happiness was part of health: “If you’re going to be healthy you’ve got to be happy as well”. Conversely, John did not feel healthy because he was ‘not right in his feelings’: his physical body felt okay, but he was ‘sad’.

Health linked to nature

Coromandel participants, both Māori and Pākehā, expressed a deep sense of belonging to the land, which many also saw as ‘healing’.

I love it. This peace, this land, there’s something here that’s healing…

(Julie)

I don’t know what it is, but this place, I’ve always felt good.

(Mona)

Terry talked about healing properties specific to her land. She liked it when others came and benefited “from the healing of the land”:

Some land you walk on to and you feel peaceful; other land you walk on you feel tormented – maybe there was a war. I don’t know what happened here – perhaps it’s always been a healing area.
She also spoke of gaining ‘spiritual nourishment’ and wellbeing from the peace and beauty of the land.

For my wellbeing I need to be on the land sitting here like we are now, listening to the birds, listening to the creek...listening to the running water, knowing it is clean running water, tasting it. Watching nature, you know. If you really want to you can sit and watch and a ponga frond will unfurl. That has to be spiritually nourishing.

Most Coromandel participants spoke of the positive impact of the physical environment on their health and wellbeing. Julie noted how “physical surroundings really affect health” and how well she was in her bus in the bush:

I am well because I am mentally well; I am peaceful – I live in utter peace and with beauty.

She had lived in many places, said Julie, and when she reflected on where she had been happy, it was always in the country. Several other Coromandel participants distinguished between the city and the country in terms of health. Fred talked of life outdoors in the country being “a healthier life than in the town”; and Pete and Jean of being healthier because “we’ve lived just about all our lives with bare feet, in contact with the earth and all that sort of stuff”. For Arama and Val too, the country was healthier, though people had to let go of city “stress” and “hurry” to benefit.

You see a lot of townies that do come down to a place like this and they, well, they’re living in the country now, but they’ve still got that city attitude.

Many Coromandel participants talked of health benefits from engaging with the environment. Karen spoke of her “physically demanding lifestyle” being good for her health and Terry, coping with hepatitis C, talked of how she would “probably go down really fast” if she moved from her bus in the bush into a flat or house in town.

I’m not going to [go down] here, because I’m too busy living, and I’m really enjoying living it, you know.

Some Coromandel participants who spoke strongly about the healing potential of the environment also appeared concerned to ‘heal’ the environment.

It’s a piece of land you want to take care of, nurture – get it back to what it once was...Really we just want the bush to grow, so we help it along where we can.

SENSE OF HEALTH AND WELLBEING
Terry and other members of the community she lived with had strict rules around conservation and protection of their land, including not using pesticides or insecticides, controlling invasive plants, and a native tree planting programme to help natural regeneration. Bathing in the stream, or using soap or shampoo anywhere near it, were forbidden, both because the community drank water from the stream, and to protect the resident wildlife.

There’s lots of creatures live in it. There’s lots of fish and eels and the little koura\textsuperscript{102} and snails.

(Terry)

Here the concept of health is extended to include the environment. There is a recognition of the interdependence of humans and their environment, of the importance of a healthy environment for human health; but also the idea that human health and wellbeing should not necessarily take precedence over the health of other species. Others attracted to the ‘therapeutic landscape’ of the Coromandel who established communities on the Peninsula have been similarly concerned with ‘healing’ the environment (King, 1990; Sargisson, 1990).

Auckland participants made few explicit references to engagement with nature or the land, although part of the reason Daryl gave for living in his van was to save money to buy some land up north.

I definitely have dreams of buying a bit of land up in Whangarei and building a house with trees around it and raising my family there. That is a definite dream.

(Daryl)

Two other participants, Aaron and Rona, spoke of their love of gardens. During his years sleeping rough, Aaron had often slept in gardens, because they felt ‘safe’: “I like gardens,” he said. Rona spoke of her enjoyment of the gardens she had developed and grew vegetables in around her HNZC house.

When I moved here, there was only an apple tree and a pear tree and that was it, and a little bit of garden at the corner. They’d sliced all the banana palms off, the whole ground was bare, there was nothing…

(Rona)

Housing and health – Coromandel

Several participants spoke of the beauty of their surroundings outweighing the disadvantages of primitive housing conditions.

\textsuperscript{102} Freshwater crayfish
I'm prepared to put up with a little bit of damp in the winter because, come summer, it's beautiful, you have the shade of the bush and the beautiful sunsets, absolutely glorious sunsets.

(Nick)

Four participants however felt their informal housing impacted negatively on their health, notwithstanding the beauty of the outdoor environment. For two, the problem was lack of space. Mere, living with her partner and three children in a garage-studio, said the “stress levels had gone up” because it was such a confined space. Mikaere, living in a caravan and small lean-to with his thirteen-year-old son and coping with mental illness, spoke of needing more room so his son could have his own space.

I get haunted as it is... listening to him, well he actually haunts me worse than the voices... Yeah, loud music haunts me as well, and he has it up really loud.

(Mikaere)

Two other participants put feelings of depression down to their informal living situations. Wiki spoke of it all being “too hard”, and Tarata, after eight years living in a caravan with her daughter, deciding to move to a flat in town because it was “bringing her down”.

I was depressed, crying all the time. I’d had enough. I’d had enough of my sink running into a bucket and um I had to empty my bucket, I had to go outside to get water, just stuff like that. Yeah, I was sick of the cold in the winter, four seasons coming through the caravan.

(Tarata)

Tarata noticed a big change in her twelve-year-old daughter after the shift into her flat in town. “She’s just a different person living in town,” she said. “She was never very smiley and all that [before].” Her daughter, when asked how the change was for her, said being in the flat was much “funner”.

Because almost none of the Coromandel participants moved out of their informal housing into mainstream housing during the period surveyed, or had just moved (apart from Tarata) before the first interview, participants’ narratives contained few perceptions of health benefits associated with improved housing. However Ross, who was temporarily house-sitting in town with his partner and two children when interviewed, compared the “far colder and damper... five bedroomed house, despite the big fire and the gas heater and an electric heater or two” with his “cosy house-truck”.

I think that a small cosy mobile home works a lot better health-wise than a large, badly ventilated house in terms of health... it’s colder here. And older houses like this, there’s a lot of heat loss. You light the fire in the house-truck, and you have to open a window pretty soon afterwards.

(Ross)
Housing and health – Auckland

The majority of Auckland participants, like Coromandel participants, did not feel their informal housing situations adversely affected their health. Those who did, identified problems of cold and damp, safety issues and stress. Rona talked of the effects of years of stress moving around with her children, before getting a HNZC house:

I found out my kids’ self confidence and their way of coping was going down...We didn’t seem to have any purpose in life. I think at that time I was so low, very low. Amazingly enough, when we got this house, all of that seemed to disappear...we just seemed to close that door.

(Rona)

Alison spoke of the damp and cold of the unlined suburban garage she rented affecting her children’s health. Both children suffered from asthma and on occasions had been hospitalized.

It’s freezing, and really damp. You walk out of here and there’s fog coming out of your mouth. It’s not insulated. And because I’ve got my ten-year-old coming out of her room into the freezing kitchen, she is constantly getting the flu.

(Alison)

Donna, also living in a suburban garage, talked of ‘stressing a lot’. Her children’s safety was a major issue for her.

‘S’ can go out that door whenever he pleases and I mean it’s not fenced off and he can just take off...and he’s not very stable going downhill. He tends to get a bit of a run on and ends up face first on the concrete. So that worries me and everything else worries me, like not having our own house and not being able to get one anytime soon. All that sort of stuff.

(Donna)

Safety was also an issue for some of those who had spent time sleeping rough. Although Dan was ‘a big guy’ he said he had often felt unsafe.

There are thugs and criminals and stand-over artists that think there is mana attached to what they are doing, and sometimes those tempers reach critical mass.

(Dan)

Paddy, while he said he had always felt safe, thought his lungs had been adversely affected by pollution. However, he appeared unconcerned.

I was sleeping in bus stops all those years, stuffing those fumes in. I must have been stuffing those fumes in for a few years, you know...but ah, well, who cares?

(Paddy)
Aaron was unable to get treatment for his depression when he was sleeping rough, because he needed a residential address to get psychological help from the Auckland Hospital Board (AHB):

I couldn’t get psychological help from the AHB unless I was living somewhere and had a doctor declare I was sick and receiving treatment. For the Hospital Board you have to be living somewhere – for quite logical reasons that therapy is not going to be much use without a more holistic approach.

(Aaron)

While Aaron did not feel that his move from informal housing into mainstream housing (an HNZC unit) had greatly improved his health, other Auckland participants did – especially those with children.

Susan, moving from a rented caravan into a HNZC house with her three children, spoke of how it was less stressful being in a house.

It’s good having a house of my own, having privacy. With the caravans everyone was always watching and talking about things behind our back. We’ve got our own toilet and shower – we don’t have to share. I feel more at home, more relaxed and the kids are happy. The kids have got somewhere to play. In the caravan there wasn’t anywhere for them to play. Here they can go outside and play and run around and I know that they are safe.

(Susan)

Rona spoke of how before getting her NZHC house she had worried because her children were not thriving; now they were:

Now, they’re so happy in it and so content. We have been here for a year and everything has sort of turned around. And nobody else lives here, just myself and my family.

(Rona)

It was “a healthy home,” she said: “the kids are not sick.”

‘Place’ and health

Contrasting views surfaced over the role housing and the environment played in health. The above participants all identified specific ways in which they felt their living situations adversely affected their health; others, conversely, attributed their good health at least in part to ‘therapeutic environment’ affects. But in both instances the characteristics of ‘place’ were seen to have direct or indirect effects on health and wellbeing. As Karen said,

I think people’s environment is incredibly important for their sense of wellbeing. And your house is in your immediate environment, so I think it’s really important.
One Coromandel key informant spoke of the ‘dire accommodation’ some elderly people were living in – and their remoteness – being detrimental to their health. While in some ways, she said, their isolated informal living situations kept them independent and away from the health services, when it “went wrong” for them “it went badly wrong”: their conditions like heart disease and diabetes needed regular management and “it isn’t that easy to get to them”. She questioned the long-term viability of their informal accommodation for many on the Peninsula:

We all know, there’s a lot of people living around this Peninsula in caravans and sub-standard housing. I mean you only have to look down the village here and see what’s living under canvas, so it’s there. I mean the guys who are living under canvas are fifty – what are they going to be like in ten years time?

Julie, sixty-six and living alone in a bus in the bush, was aware of the risks associated with living in isolated informal housing and said she was prepared to take them; she just had to work on keeping fit, she said.

The risk I take is that I could have an accident and may not be found. But that to me is worth it, for my peace of mind, my love of here.

另一个观点表示，除了基本的需要，住房与福祉无关。我认为大多数人的幸福感是他们无论在他们的物理环境、实际住房。这些人虽然快乐和快乐快乐；而且有很多人在巨大的舒适的房子里，没有一个拥有幸福感的理由。

According to this view, improving housing would make little difference to sense of wellbeing because people ‘wouldn’t be comfortable for other reasons’: Said Ross: “I think there’s a lot bigger picture than whether someone is living in a proper house as opposed to a temporary house.”

Many Coromandel participants viewed the city as an unhealthy place to live. Stress caused by lack of affordable housing, high expenses and the faster pace of life, the more materialistic values of the city and being away from natural surroundings were all cited as reasons for this. They also saw city people as less healthy because they were too soft from indoor living, had city ‘attitudes’ and got sick all the time – in contrast to themselves who lived in a healthier, more relaxed environment, without the stress of expensive overheads.
Auckland participants, however, did not consider their city environment unhealthy in itself; the major factors they saw affecting their health were the stresses caused by inadequate and unaffordable housing, and accumulated debt.

Cultural collisions

Major differences between professional and lay definitions of health are highlighted by some participants’ narratives, both in terms of what health is, and what is good for health. While professionals tend to operate within the bio-medical model, many participants, particularly on the Coromandel, had a holistic view of health which emphasised the importance of their wider living environment for health and wellbeing. Part of this could be explained by the fact that more than half of the Coromandel sample were Māori, and reflected, to a greater or lesser extent, the holism of ‘the Māori health perspective’.

There are conflicting representations of nature as benevolent and nature as hazardous. From a public health perspective, being closer to a natural state may serve to increase the risk of infections (Dew & Carroll, 2007); but from the perspectives of many participants, living in close contact with nature was health-promoting.

The importance of their relationship with the land for many Pākehā and Māori – including its perceived importance for health and wellbeing – resulted in different priorities and living situations, which did not fit mainstream concepts of health and housing, particularly on the Coromandel. This brought cultural collisions, both conceptual and actual. As Tiles (1993) notes, health is primarily identified with normality, and failure to conform is seen as grounds for intervention. The implications of this are discussed in Chapter Eleven, Health, Home and Compliance.

Concluding comments

Participants in this study often defined health in broad terms, equating health with a sense of psychosocial wellbeing. This parallels the findings of international surveys on lay concepts of health which highlight differences between the bio-medical focus of health professionals and lay understandings of ‘health as wellbeing’ (Blaxter, 2004). Many participants, especially on the Coromandel, also stressed the importance of the land and environment for health. Some (particularly Māori) also saw themselves as both belonging to and coming from the land.
There is a long tradition of nature as healing (Keams & Gesler, 1998b, above) with research showing health benefits from contact with nature (Frumkin, 2003, above). The concept of ‘therapeutic landscape’ was clearly articulated by several Coromandel participants, and extended by some from the idea of the environment as healing, to include healing the environment. Like Williams and Van Patten’s (2006) respondents who extolled the virtues of living a simpler life immersed in the rhythms of nature (see above), Coromandel participants also stressed the health benefits of living simply in close contact with nature.

Strong connections with the land were expressed in terms of both ‘reflection’ and ‘engagement’ (Milligan et al., 2004, above), with participants portraying health benefits from both the beauty and peace of their surroundings, and through their physical experiences interacting with the land.

This interpretation of their environment as ‘therapeutic’ could help account for Coromandel participants’ general sense of good health, despite difficult material living conditions. For instance few thought their health was negatively affected by their living situations – even though these might be considered ‘unhealthy’ in public health terms. They saw the inconveniences of lack of facilities outweighed by the advantages of their environment, a more relaxed lifestyle and freedom from the stresses many associated with mainstream housing and life in the city.

There is a strong Auckland-Coromandel difference evident here. Auckland participants tended not to make the same direct connections between health and place. While Alison attributed health issues directly to her inadequate informal housing, there were generally fewer references in their narratives to their health being impacted (positively or negatively) by either their informal housing or their wider environment. Rather, Auckland participants saw the stress caused by lack of money and insecure tenure as the main environmental inputs in terms of health.

As with participants’ narratives on home and place, some inconsistencies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b) emerged in participants’ narratives. For instance, several participants who described themselves as healthy went on to talk about health problems – and then said they really had “no health problems”. Possible explanations for such inconsistencies (over and above Denzin and Lincoln’s (2000b) observation that people tend to be inconsistent when recounting their perceptions), include the difficulties of defining what health is (Downie & Macnaughton, 1998) and the fact that for some, specific health problems did not detract from their perceptions of themselves as ‘healthy’.
This chapter has looked at differing concepts of health and how, although the bio-medical model dominates in the West, it is only one of several competing models. It has examined how participants made sense of health within the context of the broader environment, and their perceptions of their living situations as either 'healthy' or 'unhealthy'. Despite a lack of basic facilities, most participants did not feel their health was adversely affected by their informal housing; on the contrary, Coromandel participants in particular made a virtue of tough conditions, portraying them as health promoting, and themselves as generally healthy.

The following chapter, *Measuring Health*, looks at participant health in terms of their responses to two self-report health surveys.
CHAPTER TWELVE

‘MEASURING’ HEALTH

Introduction

Despite the perceived importance of health, health status has remained difficult to define.

(Kaplan, 2001:6581)

It is now widely accepted that health has many dimensions; that it is broadly about quality of life, as well as morbidity and mortality. Methods of assessment of health-related quality of life represent at least two different conceptual traditions – psychometric and decision theory (cost effectiveness analysis) approaches (Kaplan, 2001). Two self report surveys in the tradition of psychometric health status measurement – the SF-36 and the GHQ-12 – have been used in this study, along with the in-depth interviews, to access ‘public’ and ‘private’ accounts (Blaxter, 2004) of participant health and wellbeing. Self-report surveys are a means of measuring population health, important in predicting both health care needs and in evaluating the effects of interventions aimed at improving health (Hemingway, Nicholson, & Stafford, 1997).

This chapter reports on the survey results which both confirm and extend the qualitative findings about health and wellbeing which emerged from participants’ narratives in the previous chapter. They form part of the ‘crystallization’ described by Richardson as a way of ensuring rigour in qualitative research (Richardson, 2000). The relevance of the SF-36 as a general measure of population health in Aotearoa/New Zealand is also discussed.

The SF-36 attempts to provide separate measures for several different dimensions of health-as-quality-of-life. Perhaps the most commonly used health outcome measure (Kaplan, 2001), it has been evaluated in large population studies, and its reliability and validity have
been well documented in many countries, including New Zealand (Brazier, Harper, & Jones, 1992; Bullinger, 1995; Hemingway et al., 1997; Jenkinson, Wright, & Coulter, 1993; Kaplan, 2001; Li, Wang, & Shen, 2003; Scott, Tobias, & Sarfati, 1999; Stansfeld, Roberts, & Foot, 1997; Sullivan, Karlsson, & Ware, 1995; Taft, Karlsson, & Sullivan, 2001) — although Scott and colleagues (2000) have questioned the internal consistency, reliability and construct validity of its two dimensional mental and physical health components among some Māori and Pacific respondents. The SF-36 includes eight health concepts: Physical Functioning (PF), Role Physical (RP), Bodily Pain (BP), General Health Perceptions (GH), Vitality (VT), Social Functioning (SF), Role Emotional (RE) and Mental Health (MH) (Ware, Kosinski, & Dewey, 2000). However, in Māori and Pacific health models, physical and mental components are not generally seen as independently functioning, and survey responses from older Māori and Pacific peoples have borne this out (Scott et al., 2000).

The GHQ-12 has been used internationally to measure housing stress (Thomas, Evans, Huxley, Gately, & Rogers, 2005). In Aotearoa/New Zealand it has been administered as a quick measure of the mental health status of patients visiting their general practitioners (GPs) (MaGPlE Research Group, 2001, 2003, 2004), and by Kearns and colleagues (1991) as a measure of the mental health status of a sample of inadequately housed people in Auckland and Christchurch. Twelve questions focus on feelings (such as distress, happiness, self-worth, self-efficacy) and mental functioning (such as concentration or ability to make decisions). They have been designed to uncover potentially undiagnosed mental health problems. The GHQ-12 was used with study participants to further access their perceptions of their mental and emotional wellbeing.

The SF-36 was used as part of the 1996/97 New Zealand health survey, a cross-sectional, nationally representative sample of 7,862 people fifteen years and over. How does the health of participants in this study living in informal housing ‘measure up’ against the normed New Zealand population?

Method

The SF-36 and GHQ-12 were administered with all except eight of the participants at the time of the initial interviews, and with three of these subsequently. The surveys were not administered with the five remaining participants for a variety of reasons, including their reluctance and lack of time.
Both the SF-36 and GHQ12 can be either self-administered, or administered by an interviewer. To deal with any comprehension difficulties and time constraints, and to ensure surveys were completed, in this study the surveys were verbally administered, with participant responses noted down by myself. Occasionally a clarification was given. Thus there was a high completion rate, with only three questions unanswered in the SF-36 and all answered in the GHQ-12.

A complication was caused by the accidental use of two versions of the SF-36 – the intended Australia/New Zealand Standard SF-36 and an earlier version. Twenty-two participants completed the Australia/New Zealand version (19 of the Coromandel participants and three Auckland participants), while 12 completed the other version (10 of the Auckland participants and two Coromandel participants). Three of the eight health concept areas – General Health, Physical Functioning and Social Functioning – were unaffected; but although the questions were the same in the concept areas of Role Physical, Bodily Pain, General Vitality, Role Emotional and Mental Health, the number of response options differed. This use of two different versions necessitated some scaling adjustments in these areas during analysis (see Appendix C for details). Higher scores indicate better health.

The twelve questions of the GHQ-12 each gave four options for answers – “more than usual”, “same as usual”, “less than usual” and “much less than usual”, with scoring of either 0 or 1 for individual questions. This bimodal method of scoring gives a possible range of 0-12, with higher scores indicating higher levels of mental health distress (Goldberg & Williams, 1988). A score of 5+ in the Aotearoa/New Zealand MaGPle Study (MaGPle Research Group, 2001, 2003, 2004) was seen as evidencing reasonably significant distress, and flagging potential psychological problems.

An alternative to the above ‘GHQ’ bimodal method of scoring is the multiple-response ‘Likert scale’, with a possible range from 0-36 (Goldberg & Williams, 1988). Again, higher scores indicate higher levels of mental distress. As this was the scale used by Kearns and colleagues (1991), participant GHQ-12 responses were also translated into Likert scores so that comparisons could be made with their sample of 213 inadequately housed participants in Aotearoa/New Zealand.
Results

The table below sets out results of the SF-36 and includes national norms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>New Zealand mean (%)</th>
<th>Coromandel n=21: mean (%)</th>
<th>Auckland n=13: mean(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical Function</td>
<td>86.0</td>
<td>87.6</td>
<td>91.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Physical 1*</td>
<td>80.7</td>
<td>69.0</td>
<td>59.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Physical 2*</td>
<td>80.7</td>
<td>69.0</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bodily Pain</td>
<td>77.9</td>
<td>79.6</td>
<td>62.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Health</td>
<td>73.8</td>
<td>78.1</td>
<td>68.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitality</td>
<td>65.6</td>
<td>68.0</td>
<td>46.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Function</td>
<td>86.6</td>
<td>83.9</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Emotional 1*</td>
<td>85.0</td>
<td>84.1</td>
<td>69.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Emotional 2*</td>
<td>85.0</td>
<td>84.1</td>
<td>76.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health</td>
<td>78.0</td>
<td>79.6</td>
<td>63.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Alternate scaling options shown where option scores varied (see Appendix C)

Results of the SF-36 (Table 12.1, above) show the Coromandel sample was similar to national means, with no statistically significant differences. Higher scores suggest higher levels of functioning and lower scores, less. Means for Physical Functioning, Vitality, Mental Health, Bodily Pain and General Health were all slightly higher, with Role Physical somewhat lower, and minor differences in Role Emotional and Social Functioning. The Auckland sample differed more from the national average, with lower averages in all fields except for Physical Functioning. Again, however, the differences were generally not statistically significant. Because the scores were not normally distributed and the sample size was small the results should be interpreted with caution. There was wide variation in individual scores, with many people scoring 100 percent on some scales. Even with a larger, statistically representative sample, it would be hard to generalise, as such wide within-group variation makes it difficult to ascertain a relevant group mean.

Table 12.2 below sets out results of the GHQ-12. It shows considerable differences in mental wellbeing between the Coromandel and Auckland samples. The mean for Coromandel participants was 1.3, and for Auckland participants 3.2. While only two of the twenty-one Coromandel participants surveyed scored 5+ (putting them into a potentially psychologically distressed category), five of the thirteen Auckland participants scored 5+.
When the GHQ-12 responses were re-calculated using the ‘Likert’ scale (0-36 rather than 0-12), Coromandel scores ranged from 3-28, with a mean of 8.6. Auckland scores ranged from 1-25, with a mean of 10.9. Both means are considerably lower than the mean of 14.9 (with scores ranging from 2-36) for those inadequately housed surveyed by Keams and colleagues (1991:376). This indicates better mental and emotional wellbeing amongst those living in informal accommodation surveyed in this study, with a greater sense of wellbeing amongst Coromandel participants than Auckland participants.

While participants in both the present study and the study by Keams and colleagues (1991) were ‘inadequately housed’, those in the latter were all selected from HNZC waiting lists, thus indicating not only inadequate housing, but also dissatisfaction with their current situation and a desire to move. This was not so for many of the participants in the present study, particularly on the Coromandel, who also stressed the advantages of their living situations and their positive choices to live where they were (see Chapter Seven, *Pathways Into Informal Housing*). The difference in GHQ-12 scores between participants in the two studies lends weight to the proposition that feelings of self-efficacy and satisfaction are mediating factors in the poor housing-poor health correlation. While Keams and colleagues did not directly address this proposition, they noted that “the dwelling condition and the experience of being inadequately housed may not in itself be the key predictor of human health and well-being” (Kearns et al., 1991:377).

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**Table 12.2 GHQ-12 scores for the Coromandel and Auckland samples**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range of scores</th>
<th>Coromandel sample (n=21)</th>
<th>Auckland sample (n=13)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>11</td>
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</table>
Discussion

In terms of the SF-36 survey results, while sample sizes may have been too small to be statistically meaningful, the results confirmed the health status of those surveyed living in informal housing both on the Coromandel and in Auckland did not deviate widely from Aotearoa/New Zealand norms. The slightly higher Physical Function scores of both samples can perhaps be explained by the active outdoor lifestyles reported by many participants. The slightly lower scores of Auckland participants across all fields except Physical Function could in part be explained by the stressful inadequate housing situations several of them found themselves in, and over which they perceived they had little control. Kearns and colleagues found housing difficulty “is significantly related to perceived health and mental distress” (Kearns et al., 1991:377). This could in part also explain the higher levels of psychological distress in the Auckland sample shown in the GHQ-12 results. While Coromandel participants (whose scores on both the SF-36 and GHQ-12 indicated better mental and physical health) generally expressed satisfaction with their living situations in the qualitative interviews, or saw them as an interim measure on the way to building their own home, many of those in Auckland expressed dissatisfaction, and saw themselves as lacking other options. Thus the survey results support the qualitative results from the in-depth interviews presented in the previous chapter, Sense of Health and Wellbeing.

There was an excellent completion rate with only three questions in the SF-36 (and one from the GHQ-12) unanswered. This is considerably higher than a usual completion rate (Scott et al., 2000; Scott et al., 1999) and can be attributed to the oral administration of the surveys, which meant any participant queries about questions could be clarified. Scott and colleagues (2000; 1999) have assessed possible cross-cultural shortcomings of the SF-36 on the basis of the analysis of missing data due to differing cultural understandings. Here, because the surveys were orally administered, differential understandings could be addressed. One Pacific participant, for instance, did not want to answer Q11b – *I'm as healthy as anybody I know...* because “I don’t want to compare myself to others”. And questions about his physical health drew responses about his emotional state: “Once you have problems, nothing is going to be full of life” (9a); “I’m living with sadness now” (4d); “Once you’re feeling sad, that affects your health” (11a). These responses appear to corroborate Scott and colleagues’ (2000) findings about cultural differences in terms of understanding and understanding.

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103 While oral administration could be seen to have compromised the reliability of the results because clarification responses were not standardised (but rather given to ‘fit’ the respondent), the questionnaires were administered for indicative rather than definitive findings.
responding to a dichotomised view of health; that in Pacific health models, physical and mental components are not generally seen as separate.

Verbal responses from participants to some of the SF-36 questions also suggest that they are not necessarily relevant for a ‘healthy’ general population. Questions relating to basic physical abilities such as bathing and dressing oneself (3j), carrying groceries (3e), walking up one flight of stairs (3c) or 100 yards (3i) for example, appeared irrelevant to most participants. Some questions may also elicit age-specific rather than health-specific answers. For example three Coromandel participants in their late fifties (and all in very good health) questioned the intention behind Q11c, *I expect my health to get worse*. Of course their health would get worse, they said, as they got older...it was fact of life. Perhaps it is, as Scott and colleagues (2000) note, that while generic health-related quality of life measures may have great value in terms of monitoring population health inequalities and developing appropriate health policies, it is not possible for a survey, “regardless of how carefully it has been translated, to reflect anything other than the normative constructs of the society or culture within which it was created” (Scott et al., 2000:1662); and one could perhaps add, nor can it take into account different values and perceptions based on age and life stage.

Concluding comments

This chapter has outlined results of the SF-36 and GHQ-12 surveys completed by participants and considered some implications of the findings. The surveys complement reports of participant health status presented in the previous chapter, *Sense of Health and Wellbeing*, which emerged from participants’ narratives. In spite of shortcomings, the survey results extend the understanding of participants’ health gained from the qualitative interviews. Administered orally at the end of the interview process, the SF-36 on occasion elicited specific health information which, on completion of the survey, led to further discussion about a participant’s health. For instance, when asked about their health in the course of the interview, a participant might have reported that their health was really good, that they had no health problems; yet they may then have rated themselves in Q7 in the SF-36 as coping with ‘moderate’ bodily pain – and then, after the survey was completed, gone on to talk about specific health issues. The GHQ-12 questions in some instances also opened participants up

‘Measuring’ health

207
to talk about their emotional wellbeing. Different methods make lifeworlds visible in different ways.

While it may be, as Denzin and Lincoln (2000b) state, that in neither surveys nor interviews are people likely to be consistent in their reporting of actions or intentions, the survey results have helped build up this montage of 'realities' of informal housing and health. The process continues with the following chapter, *Housing, Health and Compliance*, which looks at competing knowledges and cultural collisions which emerged from participants' narratives.

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104 For three participants (one in Auckland and two on the Coromandel) some GHQ-12 questions caused discomfort. For Rangi, (diagnosed with bi-polar disorder), being able to talk about how he was feeling seemed helpful. However for Dan, answering the questions caused him to feel down about his circumstances. Another participant, Fred, became distressed with the question “do you feel you are playing a worthwhile part in things?” All three participants were dealt with sensitively and I ensured they were okay before leaving.
CHAPTER THIRTEEN

HEALTH, HOME AND COMPLIANCE

Introduction

Attempts to improve the health of populations raises the issue of how individual freedoms can be balanced against state power.

(Dew & Kirkman, 2002:207)

The goal of mainstream public health is risk reduction – to ensure people are protected from injury or invasion from a variety of potential hazards – along with population-wide decreases in morbidity and mortality (Davis & Dew, 1999). Since the mid-nineteenth century adequate housing, clean water and sewage disposal, seen as inextricably linked to public health, have been regulated to avert health risks. A major focus of both the 1900 Public Health Act (a response to fears of bubonic plague) and the 1920 Public Health Act (a response to the high number of deaths in the 1918 influenza epidemic) was the provision of sanitary conditions (Dew & Kirkman, 2002). These remain a focus of current public health legislation.

Protection from germs and environmental hazards is enshrined in health and safety legislation, with territorial local authorities (TLAs) and district health boards (DHBs) responsible for ensuring compliance. Dwellings, for instance, must have a potable water supply and adequate sanitation facilities, meet fire and safety standards to protect against injury and death, and must not be damp (Building Act 2004). Health Protection Officers attached to DHBs and Environmental Health Officers in TLAs fill a similar role to the health or sanitary inspectors of the Health Department in earlier days. Much of their work continues to focus on regulatory enforcement (Webber, 2004:6).

From a mainstream public health perspective, people living in informal housing such as caravans, shacks, garages and buses, using long-drops for toilets and lacking electricity,
reticulated water and sewage, increase both their own health risks and potentially those of the wider population; so too do those who have made make-shift shelters in carparks, gardens, or a band-stand. The informal ‘housing’ of most participants failed to comply with public health norms. Six participants on the Coromandel and three in Auckland spoke of conflict with TLAs or HNZC staff for breaching regulations. Others faced the threat of action against them because their living situations contravened regulations.

While lack of money was always cited as a barrier to compliance, some participants, particularly on the Coromandel, also felt the standards set were unnecessary for health, and that their own arrangements were perfectly adequate. The financial stresses of paying rent for a flat or a house, or trying to find and finance the $100,000-plus needed for a new, code-complying dwelling, were also seen as ‘unhealthy’ and to be avoided. In some instances on the Coromandel, participants felt their housing and health solutions were ‘better’ and voiced strong environmental perspectives and alternative public health rationales. Sargisson’s summary of the views of people living in informal housing in alternative communities on the Peninsula sums up the view of many Coromandel participants in particular:

We have the right to live within our means and not to be forced to go into debt and mortgage ourselves for the rest of our lives. We can build low cost homes, using available materials according to our needs and can house ourselves in a safe, dry and creative way.

(Sargisson, 1990:18)

This chapter looks at implications of informal housing choices in terms of public health perspectives and issues of regulatory compliance, particularly on the Coromandel, where more participants were living in long-term informal housing. The conflict between ‘individual freedoms’ versus ‘state power’ is examined within the context of different health perspectives, along with different concepts of risk (Douglas, 1992). Collisions between alternative ‘knowledges’ and public health rationales on the one hand, and mainstream public health perspectives on the other, is also explored.
Complexities of compliance

Public health is clearly not simply a matter of applying knowledge in a neutral way in order to enhance the health of people. Public health knowledge is produced within a particular social, political and cultural setting.

(Dew & Kirkman, 2002:215)

In Aotearoa/New Zealand, as elsewhere, the state is seen as having "a legitimate policy role in addressing the externalities of housing” because housing is a “major determinant of health” (Bierre et al., 2007:43). Certainly the public health focus on improved sanitation and housing, which continued at an accelerated rate after World War II, had a positive effect on health, with a decrease in the incidence of infectious diseases and an increase in life expectancy (King, 1981).105

Pre-World War II legislation included the Health Act (1920), the Housing Survey Act (1935) and the Native Housing Act (1935). The Manual of Instructions for Conducting Housing Surveys (Housing Survey Act,1935) stated dwellings were to be “sound, clean and in a good state of repair”, that there should be a “sink, bath and water closet”, and “adequate provision for heating and cooking” (Isaac & Olssen, 2000:114). Many houses surveyed at the time lacked these basic facilities.106 Māori housing and sanitation were particularly dire. A 1940 report estimated 36 percent of Māori “lived in houses unfit by minimum Pākehā standards...[and] that only half had safe water supplies” (King, 1981). While the intention of the above Acts was to improve housing through compliance with minimum standards, Bierre and colleagues (2007) note the difficulties of enforcing the regulations because of a lack of alternative accommodation. They also note a “hands-off” policy taken towards substandard Māori housing; given a lack of resources to ensure adequate housing, “a house not fully meeting housing by-laws” was considered “better than none at all”, although the government stopped short of officially endorsing such a stance (Bierre et al., 2007:55). In many instances a ‘hands-off’ policy is still in force. However some housing which lacked basic facilities was demolished in the 1950s (Sinclair, 2008), including the previously mentioned Māori housing along Auckland’s Tamaki Drive (Chapter Four, Media Discourses).

Lack of resources, dwellings that do not meet regulatory standards and ambivalence over enforcement remain issues today. Current legislation concerned with regulating housing in

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105 Belich (2001) suggests that increased Maori cash incomes also played a major role in Maori health improvements.
106 14.7 percent of middle class and 19.5 percent of working class houses had no bath, and 4.7 percent and 5.47 percent respectively no water closet (Isaac & Olssen, 2000:118).
order to reduce health risks includes the Housing Improvement Regulations, 1947, the Health Act, 1956, the Residential Tenancies Act, 1986 and the Building Act, 2004. Key informant interviews with three council officers from Thames-Coromandel District Council (TCDC) imply similar ‘hands off’ policies in terms of enforcement for the same reasons given sixty years earlier. Information from an Auckland City Council key informant would suggest that compliance is more strictly enforced in the city. However, councils appear to turn a blind eye to the several thousand people anecdotally living in informal housing across the Auckland conurbation.

Responses around enforcement on the Peninsula from TCDC staff included: “We’ve got enough problems without going out to look for them”; a reluctance to take on Māori transgressors who “think that the law doesn’t apply to them”; an acknowledgement that the cost of building consents was high and beyond the financial resources of many; an awareness that enforcement in the face of lack of money for alternative accommodation or to carry out required upgrading “could create unnecessary hardship”; and that “forcing people from their dwellings because they are illegal and deemed inadequate does not necessarily contribute towards improved living conditions for those who are forced out”. These responses are similar to those recorded in a 2005 government report on local authority difficulties with enforcement. The report highlighted: “constrained resources, lack of alternatives for housing occupants and the complexity of many housing quality issues” as reasons for non-enforcement (Bierre et al., 2007:59).

Morality and ‘risk’

Issues of compliance and housing provision carry moral overtones. Isaac and Olssen (2000) note nineteenth century fears that sub-standard housing threatened ‘godly’ home life, and Bierre and colleagues (2007:54) highlight 1930’s attitudes linking housing standards to morality:

Just as some deserved better housing through their character, reputation or ability to keep a clean house, others were portrayed as undeserving because of their apparent choice to lower their housing standards.

From a mainstream perspective those currently in informal housing can be seen to have similarly chosen ‘to lower their standards’.

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107 See Bierre et al. (2007) for a full discussion of these regulations and bodies responsible for enforcement, and institutional continuities around lack of resourcing and attitudes to enforcement.

Petersen and Lupton (1996) suggest public health in general can be viewed in terms of an all-pervasive ‘new morality’ which leaves few areas of personal or social life untouched. Health and safety regulations cover homes and work places, public buildings and infrastructure, modes of transport and public spaces, the clothes we wear and the food we eat, and public health messages exhort us to desist from ‘unhealthy behaviours’ (see Chapter Four, Media Discourses). Life is viewed as ‘risky’ and health as ‘precarious’; it is our moral duty to protect ourselves (Davis & Dew, 1999), with Public health seen as fulfilling the role of the ‘moral regulatory institution’ to try and make sure that we do (Dew, 2007). An underlying assumption is that illness results from “a failure to regulate oneself” (King & Watson, 2001:409). Health professionals thus disseminate ‘knowledge’ so that individuals can ‘regulate’ their behaviour and take the necessary precautions in every sphere of daily life to ensure they remain healthy.

Douglas (1992) suggests there is a tendency to view as risky anything which transgresses societal norms, with a focus on risk seen as a way of enforcing conformity to these norms. Those who defy risk warnings and institutions are ‘blamed’ for their transgressions. Douglas also notes risk research shows ‘the public’ “does not see risk in the same way as the experts” (Douglas, 1992:11). Such differences in perception about what is risky emerged in the narratives of Coromandel participants in particular. For instance, while many lacked facilities which from a public health perspective may be considered necessary, they felt they were not a risk and had what they needed in their living situations to be healthy.

As both Douglas (1992) and Dew and Kirkman (2002) note, knowledge about healthy behaviour and ‘risk prevention’ is not value free – it is ‘produced within a particular social, political and cultural setting’ and changes over time. Ineichen (1993) too suggests some of the things currently considered necessary for health (and a lack of them thus ‘risky’), may be in part culturally determined.

Some needs – fresh water and sanitation – are universal...problems of damp housing...the danger of fires or the threat of infestation also need improving... [other] areas concern more subjective needs, such as adequate space and warmth....[and] appropriate standards may in part be culturally determined.

(Ineichen, 1993:89)

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109 See Dew (2007) for a discussion of the dual ‘moral’ roles that Public Health can be seen to play in society, both in terms of regulation of the individual and of other competing institutions.
Thus there are competing ‘knowledges’. These include the traditional Māori model of health dividing people, places and events into tapu or noa (Dew & Carroll, 2007; Durie, 1998) and other diverse ‘knowledges’ reflected in participants’ narratives. Ineichen (1993) also notes how perceived need grows with affluence.

Increasing minimum standards to produce better quality dwellings, intended to safeguard health, may in fact pose unintended health risks, suggest Hammitt and colleagues (1999). For instance, increased compliance costs increase the cost of housing and this can produce an ‘income effect’, drawing household income away from other health-protecting expenditure. It can also produce a ‘stock effect’, with people trapped in older, less healthy homes (or perhaps informal accommodation) and/or putting off needed renovations because they cannot meet increased code-related costs (Hammitt et al., 1999). While participants’ narratives showed they avoided both potential ‘income’ or ‘stock’ effects by avoiding compliance altogether, it could be argued that some may have considered obtaining building consents if the costs of compliance, in terms of minimum standards and fees, had not been so high.

Competing health perspectives

For public health researchers, an awareness of alternative public health perspectives may lead to a reconsideration of universal measures to overcome identified health problems.

(Dew & Carroll, 2007:128)

Health professionals decide who and what is healthy, and this ‘knowledge’ feeds into regulations to protect the public’s health. There is a tendency towards ‘absolutism’ (Dew, 2007), even though there are competing health perspectives based on different epistemological and ontological premises and proscribed and prescribed truths have changed over time.

Challenges to “orthodox public-health positions” can come from a variety of different views about health. Five distinct health ‘positions’ which may be useful in understanding diverse and conflicting responses to public health issues – the ‘utilitarian’, the ‘risk-averse’,

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10 Durie’s (1999) Maori health promotion model Te Pae Mahutonga (the Southern Cross constellation) likens the six stars to six guiding elements: Nga Manukura (leadership), Mana Whakahaere (autonomy), Mauriora (access to Maori world), Toi Ora (healthy lifestyles), Waiora (environmental protection) and Te Oranga (participation in society).

11 Durie has challenged Maori Health Protection Officers to consider what place Maori concepts like tapu and noa have in their work (Webber, 2004:42)

12 Saville-Smith (2007, personal communication) has also noted such effects on low income households as a result of high compliance costs.

The ‘utilitarian’ can be seen to underlie the ‘orthodox’ public health position, concerned with risk minimisation, decreased morbidity and increased longevity. From a population health perspective this means accepting that occasionally some individuals may suffer for the greater good; but overall, health benefits will outweigh suffering. Fluoridated and treated water supplies fit with a utilitarian health perspective because they are seen to reduce the risk of disease and improve dental health. These public health measures were rejected by several Coromandel participants who went to considerable lengths to ensure a clean, pure (but untreated) water supply.

The ‘risk averse’ perspective is similarly concerned with decreasing morbidity and increasing longevity, though the focus is on avoiding individual risk and suffering, rather than overall population health gains. Public health messages taken on board about exercise, healthy eating, and regular medical check-ups are examples of a ‘risk averse’ perspective. Several participants defined health in terms of living a healthy lifestyle and Roha, for instance, spoke of the need to get healthy lifestyle messages across to children to ensure their good health.

In contrast to the ‘utilitarian’ and ‘risk averse’, the ‘realistic hedonist’ perspective is less concerned with longevity and the avoidance of risk and disease than with living life to the full and experiencing the world. The emphasis is on quality of life (personally defined), not quantity. This perspective accepts suffering as part of human existence. Most Coromandel participants had realistic hedonist rather than utilitarian or risk averse perspectives, living in ways which from either a utilitarian or risk averse perspective might not be seen as health-promoting. They lacked what many consider ‘basic’ facilities, yet most portrayed themselves as content. As Val, who had spent thirteen years in a car case house with a dirt floor before upgrading to a home cobbled together from two second-hand garages said: “I’m not into anything flash – so long as it’s cosy and comfy, that’s all I need.”

The ‘purist’, unlike the realistic hedonist, is also concerned with averting risk, decreasing morbidity and increasing longevity, but based on notions of what is wholesome and pure, avoiding ‘contaminants’ and concerned with not weakening the natural immune system.

113 A controversial book on Maori health rejecting public health messages about avoiding fatty foods and not smoking, with talk of ‘public health Nazis’ (Caccioppoli & Cullen, 2005) can be seen as coming from a ‘realistic hedonist’ perspective.
Though generally participants did not have a purist perspective, Terry, living with Hepatitis C, was particularly concerned with the effects of certain foods and pollutants on her health. This ‘purist’ perspective can sometimes extend into a ‘holistic’ perspective, broadening out to incorporate the surrounding environment.

From a ‘holistic’ perspective, human health (individual and population) is seen to be inseparable from the health of the environment. The goal is a healthy environment, both to ensure human health and as an end in itself. Conservation and protection of the environment are perceived as central. Several Coromandel participants talked of working in with the natural environment to protect and enhance it.

We don’t put any chemicals on the land...we don’t use insecticides or pesticides or anything like that. Really we just want the bush to grow, so we help it along…

(Terry)

A strong environmental awareness was coupled with a rejection of ‘mainstream’ materialist values, which were identified as leading to a plundering of natural resources and widespread pollution. The emphasis was on conservation, regeneration, and using as few resources as possible. Living on the land, and from the land and sea (in terms of growing food, fishing, hunting and collecting shellfish) and caring for the land, were seen as health promoting. Māori in particular, as tangata whenua, articulated a sense of oneness with the land of their ancestors. As the Māori Women’s Housing Research Project Report notes, “The land expresses Māori wellbeing by a partnership with Papatuanuku” (Maori Women’s Housing Research Project (N.Z.), 1991:15). Walker writes of Papatuanuku as “a living thing: it is not separate from the individual and the individual is not separate from the collective” (Walker, 2004:215). The traditional Māori system of rahui, of tapu and noa which previously helped to ensure the health of people and land (see Durie, 1998; Metge, 1995) has been overtaken by mainstream models of conservation and public health promotion and protection. Webber (2004) suggests the use of tools like rahui for instance, could be more effective than closing contaminated seafood gathering sites with government signs.

The competing health perspectives outlined above are not the only possible health perspectives; nor are they either immutable or mutually exclusive. But the utilitarian perspective (which underlies public health) in particular can be seen as likely to clash with realistic hedonist, purist and holistic perspectives. While many Auckland participants and a few Coromandel participants inclined towards utilitarian and risk averse perspectives, most Coromandel participants appeared to have more ‘realistic hedonist’ and ‘holistic’
perspectives, with a strong focus on enjoying life and an emphasis on their interconnectedness with the natural environment. Thus rather than seeing their informal housing situations without basic utilities as health-compromising, most Coromandel participants emphasised the health benefits of their living situations while at the same time making a virtue out of ‘making do’. They were less inclined towards orthodox public health goals of lessening risks, increasing longevity and decreasing morbidity, and almost all also saw little need, or point, in obtaining consents for their dwellings. “It costs too much” and “I don’t think all the regulations are necessary in the country for people to live healthily”, were common reactions.

The holistic Māori health perspective in particular provides some major challenges for mainstream Public Health (policy, practice and research) as the mechanisms of causation are seen to be far more wide-ranging than an orthodox bio-medical view of causation, and there remain elements of a different epistemology. Anaru talked of the mauri (life-force) within all things and differences between types of ‘knowledge’.

Everything’s got mauri, inanimate and animate. This piece of wood has got mauri, where it came from, how it was created. And we’ve been getting flak ‘Oh what’s this mauri you fellows carry on about?’ So what it basically is, is spiritual DNA. (Anaru)

He differentiated between explicit and implicit, or ‘tacit’, knowledge, and the acknowledged value of the latter:

Mine is the iwi way of doing things, not your scientific [way]... There’s tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge, and explicit knowledge is something you know because you’ve been taught it; tacit knowledge is something you’ve known, but you don’t know how you got it. Māori have a lot of tacit knowledge. Unfortunately a lot of these scientists have to have it scientifically proved. (Anaru)

Other participants’ perspectives also posed potential difficulties for public health and compliance – in the same way that health and housing regulations posed difficulties for many participants. As Tiles notes, health is primarily identified with normality and “failure to conform to the norm” is grounds for intervening (Tiles, 1993:737). Informal housing, quite obviously, does not ‘conform to the norm’. But does this mean the housing situations of participants posed risks (Douglas, 1992) for public health?

Public Health risks?

From a mainstream public health perspective there are personal and public health risks, direct and indirect, associated with informal housing. These include risks of infection and disease.
from what are perceived as inadequate and unsafe water and sewage systems and non-
complying, uninsulated dwellings, and increased risks of fire. The use of candles, for
instance, has been implicated in fatal house fires in Northland and other rural areas
(Duncanson et al., 2000). Many Coromandel participants used candles, kerosene, bottled gas
and fires for lighting, heating and cooking. A Coromandel key informant spoke of the risks
associated with using bottled gas in a variety of informal housing situations on the Peninsula.
They were “a disaster waiting to happen,” she said.

We had a guy in Manaia living in a caravan and he blew himself up. And he’s not the
first one like that. There’s a guy at Kennedy Bay in a caravan who blew himself up
with his gas bottle. The problem is they keep them inside caravans instead of outside
and they’re not the sort of people to get their gas bottles certified. It’s a real safety
issue.

(Coromandel key informant)

Coromandel participants spoke of being aware of the dangers of fire and taking precautions to
make sure candles were safely used around children, for instance.

When we first started using candles the kids used to like playing with [them]…
because it was something a bit different, you know…It was a bit scary at first, [but] it
doesn’t bother me now – all the kids are really good with candles. They don’t play
with them. They’ve lost the fascination of them now.

(Marama)

Mona, aware of the dangers, nevertheless preferred them to kerosene.

The kids could flick it [the candle] over and there goes my buildings. But I won’t use
kerosene – that’s just as bad. I don’t like the fumes, I don’t think it’s very healthy for
the kids.

(Mona)

Julie too rejected kerosene in favour of candles to light her bus, because she considered the
kerosene ‘tilly’ lamp more dangerous.

The cost of complying sewerage systems in rural areas, particularly in coastal
environments, can be prohibitive. One key informant estimated a minimum cost of $15,000-
$20,000, putting them out of the financial reach of most participants (who also did not
consider them necessary). Two Coromandel participants used small portable toilets, Mona
emptying hers in the town facility for portable toilets and Rangi digging the contents of his
into his garden. But most had some form of ‘long-drop’ toilet. While long-drops are ‘illegal’,
participants considered them safe and healthy in a rural setting as long as they were well
maintained and dug well away from streams or the sea. A good long-drop lasted several years, and then you just dug another hole.

The guys come in and dig it with the drill. It goes pretty deep. It lasts between three and five years... I wouldn’t mind a septic tank though, so I didn’t have to go outside in the rain to use the long-drop. Other than that it doesn’t worry us.

(Val)

These participants were aware such alternative sewage arrangements would not work in an urban environment.

I guess you have to have regulations when it’s a built up area. A little section wouldn’t be big enough for all the shit-holes you’d have to dig – especially for a family.

(Terry)

Anaru, who himself used a long-drop, was well aware of environmental risks they could pose.

I just hope that we as a people use our clues and work out our sewerage responsibilities, because that is a responsibility... I use a long drop. They’re supposed to be one of the most efficient [toilets] out because it doesn’t go far into the soil before it decomposes, but we’ve got to get into the composting toilets, because in time long-drops – you can imagine a lot of people around here are pretty close to the water [and] it will start affecting it...

(Anaru)

While most participants were careful of waste discharge, a few were not. In one situation outdoor showering/washing facilities were right beside a stream; in another waste water from a kitchen sink went directly into an estuary. However, other participants went to elaborate lengths to ensure the safe disposal of waste water and construct environmentally ‘safe’ toilets.

Similarly, the three Auckland participants who were living in vans and those ‘sleeping rough’ were more (or less) careful about washing and toilet facilities and waste. They spoke of using a range of public facilities in parks, swimming pools, the casino and Auckland University, as well as a ‘pee bucket’ or ‘ingenuity when caught short’.

May used a ‘pee bucket’ in her van.

I much prefer a little pee bucket to a portaloo. When I bought the van it come with one of these little portaloo things which, okay, you can maybe have more comfort sitting on one of these, but it takes up such a lot of space. I just rinse out my bucket and it is absolutely fine. There is always somewhere where there is a loo.

(May)

A TCDC key informant said if an Environmental Protection Officer saw a long-drop on a property the owners would be asked to replace it, especially in a built-up area: “But what we don’t know can’t hurt us, especially way up in the backblocks.”
For [urination] you just open the door. It becomes the norm. I grew up on a dairy farm. You want to go to the toilet, you open the door.

(Neil)

Neil was aware that this approach was ‘not sustainable’ on a wider scale.

Dave found keeping clean and hygiene a real problem.

I can go a couple of days without a shower but more than that and I become unpleasant to myself.

(Dave)

While the narratives of most Auckland participants showed an awareness and acceptance of mainstream public health norms (even if their current situations precluded compliance), some Coromandel participants appeared to espouse alternative ‘public health’ strategies, with a strong emphasis on the ‘health’ of the environment.

Alternative ‘Public Health’

Tom, concerned about proximity to the sea, had fought with the council to install a compost toilet instead of a septic tank.

The council insisted I put a septic system in and I refused. I said ‘I’m not doing that because we’re too close to the sea’. It’s a shallow harbour, and ultimately that’s where it’s going to end up, and I’d rather deal with it in some other way. Finally the guy from the council came out and consented to having it [the compost toilet], so it’s legal. That’s many years ago. It’s legal now and they’re more common.

(Tom)

Other Coromandel participants also questioned the use of septic tanks. Environmental concerns about pollution, the amount of water used – and opinions that the decomposed waste was better recycled as compost – were voiced. While some participants continued to use or dig new long-drops because that is what they were used to (many had grown up with them) and they were an inexpensive option, other participants had come up with options they considered more environmentally sound. For instance for Terry and Julie toilets were shallow pits in the ground covered by a board, with strict rules about use.

You just lift a board up and squat over that and try not to pee in it because that stops the breakdown of it (you pee somewhere else, preferably up around the citrus), and just put a handful of sawdust over the top. Don’t use much toilet paper either and that breaks down really nicely and after you’ve left that pit for about a year you can dig it out again and use it around the fruit trees – it’s broken down into a really nice, friable soil, it’s great...We should all be putting it back on the land.

(Terry)
As with sewage, so with grey water disposal. While in a few instances (as above) grey water was being discharged into, or close to, a stream or estuary, other participants were very conscious of environmental issues.

We’ve got a bush bath, but we don’t use soap in it or shampoo or anything like that because when you let the plug out it goes straight to the stream.

(Terry)

Several participants recycled grey water into gardens, stressing the need to conserve water resources.

You learn to conserve water, big time...I make sure I buy soap which is bio-degradable – well they keep saying it is – and the washing water, that goes on the garden.

(Anaru)

Arama and Val filtered their grey water through oyster shell before using it on the garden.

It filters though oyster shells, they’re the best thing to filter anything through. It goes into a drum and then down through the oyster shell. A lot of people don’t realise that the oyster shells are the best filtering things out...in Japan they use it for all their waterways and it filters all the garbage and all that stuff out.

(Arama)

Reticulated and treated water supplies have historically been an important public health initiative. But most Coromandel participants preferred their own ‘natural’ stream/spring/rain-water sources and saw ‘natural’ as better. Several complained about the taste of town supply water. Aware of potential health hazards such as giardia associated with drinking water straight from creeks, some participants boiled drinking water.

We use water from the creek for drinking. We have to boil it. I got giardia from drinking some water [at a house up the road] out of a hose. That’s why I’m really fussy with my drinking water now.

(Wiki)

Others were satisfied their water source was pure. Julie, who collected her water from an adjacent stream, had a complex system of buckets to avoid any contamination.

These two are shower buckets, then two more buckets for hand-washing – one for soaping and one for rinsing – and that blue one there is spare. These ideas are my own, all this bucketry business. There are two more buckets inside for cooking and drinking. No hands go in to them.

(Julie)

The above scenarios can be viewed as examples of participants adopting alternative public health strategies rather than following proscribed health and safety norms. The preference for spring, stream or rain water rather than treated town supply water was almost universal
amongst Coromandel participants. Public health measures such as fluoridated and chlorinated water supplies, reticulated sewage systems and septic tanks were rejected, although many participants acknowledged that such measures would be necessary in an urban environment because of population density. For them in their rural settings, these were viewed variously as unnecessary, wasteful of resources, expensive and polluting. This brought participants into conflict with mainstream public health regulations and institutions.

**Cultural collisions**

There is an inherent collision between Public Health, concerned with minimizing perceived morbidity and mortality risks at a population level, and the health needs and desires of specific individuals, particularly in a climate of scarce public resources. There is also an underlying conflict (which affects resource allocation) between the extent to which health is seen as governed by lifestyle choice and the extent to which underlying socioeconomic factors are seen as determinants of health status. In addition, there are collisions between competing ‘knowledges’ as to what is ‘good’ and what is ‘bad’.

To some extent this entire chapter, with its focus on ‘difference’, is about ‘cultural collisions’ – the way different health perspectives, and the specific beliefs and behaviours of participants, collided with mainstream health perspectives and institutional regulations.

A clash between the utilitarian and risk-averse perspectives of the mainstream bio-medical and public health approach (reflected in regulations and public health education and promotion), and the more realistic hedonism/holistic perspectives of many Coromandel participants, appears inevitable. Almost none lived in dwellings which would be considered health-enhancing from public health utilitarian or risk-averse perspectives. Yet most Coromandel participants perceived their living situations as healthy and reported themselves and their children to be in good health. They accepted the trade-off of ‘primitive’ living conditions to be able to live in a ‘therapeutic’ rural environment. They considered these less stressful and more spiritually enriching and healing than living in a mainstream house in the suburbs.

From an institutional perspective informal dwellings on the Coromandel posed risks of injury associated with living in dwellings considered structurally unsound and risks of fire from the use of gas bottles and candles; there were personal and environmental health hazards from untreated water, alternative toilet facilities and grey water discharge: there were also
indirect health risks from living in uninsulated dwellings. However, from the participants’ perspectives, their dwellings were structurally sound; they were aware of the fire risks associated with using candles and emphasised the need for care; they preferred their ‘natural’ water sources; and septic tanks were generally rejected in favour of composting toilets and well sited and well maintained long-drops. These were seen as more ecologically sound – and affordable.

Building materials was another area of collision on the Coromandel. The Building Act (1991 and 2004) lays down strict regulations about materials and modes of construction. Few second-hand materials, for instance, are permitted for use in the construction of new dwellings: framing timber needs to have been chemically treated to an approved standard and certain exterior cladding must have a fifty year durability (Thames-Coromandel District Council, 2005, personal communication). These regulations were viewed by participants as unnecessary, putting houses beyond the reach of many and wasteful in a world of scarce resources. Recycled car cases, sheets of old iron, second-hand cladding, windows and doors and second-hand garages had been recycled into dwellings. Use of such materials might not comply with building regulations, but was seen as environmentally sound, as well as making dwellings affordable. Permits were considered unnecessary.

Just to build a house, to put a house up on your own land, they want two grand from you. So where’s a low-income family going to get two grand from? And that’s just for the Council to say yes, you can build on your land. This is why people give up and come to a standstill. This is why we live in caravans and stuff.

(Tarata)

Such clashes in perspectives led to several collisions between Coromandel participants and the authorities. For instance, Arama and Val, and Marama recounted visits from a building inspector during construction of their dwellings – and being told they would have to stop work. They didn’t, and had not heard anything further, they said. In both cases the inspector was told the structures they were building were a vast improvement on their current living situations (Arama and Val had been living with their children in a car case house and Marama with her children in caravans) and all that they could afford. Arama spoke about the many dwellings on the Coromandel built without consents:

It’s the same as the whole Peninsula if you look at it really, the whole Peninsula where you see baches, most of them are not consented or permitted or anything like that. So really, if they had to clamp down on that particular thing, there’d be hardly any bloody people on the Peninsula...

115 These are well documented, with the Housing Insulation and Health Study showing health benefits from warmer, drier houses (Howden-Chapman et al., 2005).
Tarata was facing a conflict with Environment Waikato. She spoke of a long drawn-out correspondence over a leaking septic tank. She was aware of the need to have it fixed, she said, but did not have the money to do so.

Environment Waikato comes in and tells us to fix it or they’re going to fine us. For one, we haven’t got the money to fix it and the people that fix them won’t give us an account, the local plumbing people...It’s like they’re just piling shit on top of shit to keep you down there. It’s like, give us some time to get the money together instead of laying fines on us, you know. What makes you think we can pay your fines when we can’t even pay to get our septic tank fixed?

Two further Coromandel participants, Kingi and Mona, spoke of visits from Environmental Protection Officers following complaints made about their lack of basic utilities. Mona said she had been told she had three months to get her buildings off the land she was renting, and this warning was followed up six months later with a letter.

Now they’ve sent me an official letter, saying if I don’t get an engineer builder in here to sort it out and give me a certificate or whatever, and it’s going to cost me $300 just to get him up here, [and] he’s going to say no because I haven’t got the plumbing, I haven’t got a proper flush toilet...I can’t afford that...It made me feel really stink...Can they kick people out of their own homes and throw them out on the road? Can they actually do that?...I don’t think it’s humane at all.

Mona wanted to stay where she was, and said she was thinking of selling the two small sheds and the shipping container which made up her home and getting a caravan instead because that would not require a permit.

See council wants, no matter how you look at it, they want you to spend fifty thousand bucks on something to live in it...I thought what I was doing was a good thing. I feel good about it. People might look at this lot and think it’s a hard life, but I don’t feel it, it’s not hard at all. It’s a lot easier with no complications and no bills to pay.

Here there is a collision both with ideas about what is adequate housing and with regulatory authorities.116

Some Auckland participants had also clashed with authorities. Dave had to move from the band rotunda in Cornwall Park where he had set up “a cocoon shelter” after “a visitation by security” at six am one morning.

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116 While few people appear to be evicted a family living in a motor-home on land they owned near Rotorua were given two weeks to “move out or face jail” in July 2008 (The New Zealand Herald. July 28, 2008:A4)
He told me I could get arrested for trespass. The irony is other mornings the security people came through and unlocked the toilets only seventy-five metres away, and didn’t really notice anything. This was a Sunday morning; maybe there was a change in security guards over the weekend.

(Dave)

He had managed to keep a ‘low profile’ for three weeks, said Dave, and had only been “hassled” by a groundsman (who had reminded him of the formal park policy against erecting structures), once previously. After the ‘visitation’, Dave moved to the grandstand at the Auckland Domain, where he said he was assured by ‘Vinnie’, who had been there for several months, that the only problem was if it started to rain he’d have to go up to the band rotunda:

He’d had a couple of visitations from the cops, but basically they left him alone.

(Dave)

Auckland participants Donna and Sean faced eviction from the HNZC garage they were living in with their two children. The house was tenanted by Sean’s mother who had received a letter from her HNZC support worker telling her they had to leave, said Donna. When Donna contacted HNZC she was told to “come down and all she could do was put me on the waiting list”:

When it comes to someone with two children with nowhere to go, basically they don’t care. It really upsets me; it upsets me a lot. I find most of the time with HNZ if you’re an island person you get a house just like that, but when it comes to us white people, if you’ve got white skin, you’re stuffed. Basically they don’t care.

(Donna)

Another area of major collision which surfaced in the narratives of Coromandel participants concerned the payment of rates, both in terms of some participants feeling they got nothing for them, and some Māori participants feeling that they should not have to pay rates anyway.

We were never meant to pay permits or rates. That was part of the agreement between the British and Māori.

(Arani)

From a regulatory perspective, an enforcement officer complained of “Māori thinking there is one law for them and one for everyone else” (Thames-Coromandel District Council, 2003, personal communication), highlighting cultural collisions around compliance issues as well as rates payments.

117 Several participants expressed views around migrants and refugees receiving preferential treatment.
Concluding comments

This chapter has examined implications of informal housing choices, particularly on the Coromandel, in terms of public health perspectives and issues of regulatory compliance. Building on participant narratives presented in Chapter Eleven, Sense of Health and Wellbeing and incorporating findings from TLA key informant narratives, it has looked at how participants' housing situations and varying health perspectives have brought them into collision with institutional public health. In exploring some of the complexities of compliance, the presence of different perceptions of risk have been highlighted (Douglas, 1992). As Douglas notes, the 'experts' and the public have very different perceptions of risk and this has shown in the differing 'risk' narratives of TLA key informants (representing the 'experts') and Coromandel study participants (the public). Participants' narratives have also shown there are different knowledges at play (Dew, 2007), which can be viewed in terms of an 'alternative public health'.

While many of the 'cultural collisions' over what constitutes risk and compliance requirements remain in the realm of discourse, six Coromandel and three Auckland participant narratives provide examples of these collisions becoming concrete and conflicts with TLAs and other institutions eventuating. It is clear that while Acts may lay out health and safety regulations in black and white, when it comes to enforcement there are many grey areas, and problems with disentangling what have somewhat euphemistically been called 'the complexity of many housing quality issues' (Bierre et al., 2007).

A major goal of Public Health is the reduction of risk, as defined by the state. From a mainstream public health perspective participants increased the health risks to themselves and their children by living in informal housing, a view concurred with by several Auckland participants (and all of those with children). However, from the perspective of Coromandel participants, they were risking neither their own health, nor the health of their children; on the contrary, they emphasised the therapeutic benefits of their lifestyles, such as sense of belonging, being close to nature, and lack of financial stress, and most inconveniences associated with their living situations were largely discounted (exceptions are discussed in Chapter Ten, Pros, Cons and Pathways Out). Living in the country was seen as healthier than living in town.

From a public health perspective, being closer to a natural state may increase the risk of infections and/or provide insufficient amounts of some important health elements such as...
good access to health care (Dew & Carroll, 2007). But from the perspective of the participants, living in close contact with nature increased health reserves because they ‘toughened up’ and this was beneficial for both mental and physical health. Here there are conflicting representations of nature as potentially ‘dangerous’ on the one hand, and ‘benign’ on the other – and conflicting representations of the city as on the one hand providing access to ‘health enhancing’ amenities and on the other being a source of stress. Some of those who had rejected mainstream public health practices had developed their own environmental health guidelines, or an ‘alternative public health’.

Viewing ‘collisions’ in perceptions and practices through the lenses of the different underlying health ‘positions’ outlined above – utilitarian, risk-averse, realistic hedonism, purist and holistic – makes obvious the potential cultural collisions between holistic ‘alternative’ models of health (Māori and Pākehā), and the utilitarian and risk averse current bio-medical public health model. Most Coromandel participants had made a positive choice to live on the land. Rejecting the comforts of urban life, they lived in accommodation considered sub-standard from a mainstream public health perspective. Many promoted a rhetoric of hardiness: city living was seen to make people soft; in contrast, living on the land made people more resilient and enhanced their experience of life. Taking a realistic hedonist or holistic perspective, these participants reframed what others might consider ‘health risks’ as ‘health-promoting’.

Acknowledging different health perspectives raises questions about whether we need to broaden our views about what is health promoting and what increases health risks – whether we need to re-examine the current ‘one size fits all’ approach to public health and regulation. Is there a case for relaxing some regulations and/or a difference in urban-rural building and health requirements? Do increasingly high minimum acceptable building standards, intended to be health promoting, instead, as Hammit and colleagues (1999, above) suggest, run the risk of being health damaging, through ‘income effect’ and ‘stock effect’? As Davis and Dew suggest (1999), perhaps we need to look at ways in which society affects health status and consider how we can make this impact a positive rather than a detrimental one.

The following chapter, *Demographics in Poetry*, returns to participants’ housing stories and ‘narrative identities’ through the presentation of a series of thirty-four poems.
CHAPTER FOURTEEN

DEMOGRAPHICS IN POETRY

Introduction

There is a need for more ‘windows’ into the experiences of householders whose views are otherwise obscured by survey-based research designs.

(Kearns, 2004:163)

Kearns writes of new ‘expansive’ qualitative approaches signaling fresh housing and health research directions (Kearns, 2004). The following thirty-four poems, written from interview transcripts and observations from field notes, can be seen as one such ‘expansive’ new approach – and one allowing more ‘windows’ into the lifeworlds of those in informal housing.

Drawing on the Greek roots of the word ‘demographic’—demos, the people, and graphien, to write (Chambers Dictionary, 1993) – the poems, which combine the words of participants with descriptions of their living situations, represent participant demographics in the broadest sense. They uncover their lived housing experiences, and illustrate the wide range of people, housing histories and dwelling types which make up the phenomenon of informal housing.

Re-engaging with participants’ narratives to create these poems has been part of the phenomenological approach of this thesis; an attempt ‘to walk in the footsteps’ of participants; to further ‘interpret the meaning of their lived experiences’ (Hein & Austin, 2001); and to more fully represent the participants and their living situations.

While Schwalbe (1995:393) has argued that poetry cannot fulfil the responsibility of social scientists to “creat[e]...access to social worlds by exposing and analyzing the frameworks of meaning that uphold those worlds” (in part because meanings in poetry tend to be implicit rather than explicit), a number of sociologists, anthropologists and public health researchers have effectively used poetic representation as a method of ethnographic enquiry and representation (Denzin, 1997). Some have used it as the sole means of presenting research.
findings (Furman, 2006; Furman, Lietz, & Langer, 2006; Glesne, 1997; Ohlen, 2003; Richardson, 1997); for others poetry has been part of a wider ethnographic enquiry (Clarke et al., 2005). As with Clarke and colleagues (2005) the following thirty-four poems complement the thematic analysis.

The use of poetry in ethnography has been described as 'evocative representation’, “a striking way of seeing through and beyond social scientific naturalisms” (Richardson, 2000:931). Poetry can “yield accurate and detailed information on being and doing and can therefore supplement...conventional research methods and knowledge products”; and it can “move us to draw comparisons from our own immersions in life in relation to those of others...[separated] by the cultural differences of age, gender, generation, personal characteristics...” (Brady, 2005:1003).

However, poetry can also be difficult to interpret. It is usually more cryptic than prose and often has hidden meanings. ‘Experimental forms’ of writing do not necessarily lead to greater insights (Ezzy, 2002). With this in mind, these poems have been written to be accessible and explicit, speaking clearly to the minds and hearts of readers. As Brady (2005:1017) notes, “poetry loses...if it does not conform at some level to the experience of its audience”. The following thirty-four poems tell participants’ stories, evoking images and emotional responses, to add texture and colour to this evolving montage of informal housing.

The thematic analyses presented in preceding chapters have ‘deconstructed’ participants’ narratives, teasing out perceptions of home and health, examining the factors which led participants into informal accommodation (and kept them there) and looking at issues around health and compliance. The intention in this chapter is to recreate a sense of context and wholeness with a return to participants’ narratives, to presentations of their ‘residential histories, present experiences and future aspirations’ (Winstanley et al., 2002). As Winstanley and colleagues (2002) and Bruner (2003) have observed, it is through stories that we make sense of the world and those in it. Thus it is through engaging with participants’ stories that we come to understand more fully the complexities of the phenomenon of informal housing.

The tension in ethnographic inquiry between a ‘deconstructionist’ framework which decontextualises the human subject, and a ‘humanistic’ framework which acknowledges ‘the integrity of the subject’ (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008), has already been noted. Working the

\[118\] Note the inclusion in *Journal of Public Health and Epidemiology* of poems on environmental health.
edges of this tension, ‘deconstructing’ participants’ lifeworlds while at the same time according centrality to their personal stories, allows for a broader understanding of the phenomenon. Poetic engagement with participants’ narratives is the pathway I have chosen to return to ‘the integrity of the subject’.

Writing and recording the poems has in itself been a method of enquiry, helping tease out themes, ambiguities and cultural collisions. As Richardson (2000:931) says, using an evocative form like poetry, one relates differently to the data: “We find ourselves attending to feelings, ambiguities, temporal sequences, blurred experiences...” The poems have been written to try and more fully present/represent the participants and their ‘lifeworlds’– to ‘give them a voice’ and thus to add the perceptions of some of those living on the margins to dominant discourses around housing and health.

I cannot claim to represent the participants absolutely through these poems; they are, in effect another layer of construction and another layer of interpretation. But I have attempted to do so as faithfully as possible. While I have chosen which words from the interview transcripts and which images from field notes to use in creating the poems, I have attempted to be as true ‘to the integrity of the subject’ as possible, using participants’ own words where feasible. Where possible, the poems were returned to participants for their comments. Their responses to these representations of their lifeworlds were overwhelmingly positive and confirmed that from their perspectives, the poems did represent them faithfully. For instance Dan’s response on reading *None of Us are so Important* was ‘yup, that’s me...yup...that’s me”; Arama’s was, “You got it to a T, you got it to a T!”, as he read the poem, *So Long as its Comfy*; and for Aaron, *The Man who Slept in Gardens*, ‘captured my situation’. Wiki, four years on and no longer in the same dire informal housing situation, cried as she remembered the events from *Keep Smiling All Day Mum*: “That’s what it was like,” she said.

The poems, telling the stories of the participants, can also be seen in terms of a “deliberate attempt(s) to reposition the author and the reader” (Ezzy, 2002:151), to awaken the emotions and imagination; to touch the reader as I myself have been touched during the course of this research. Letting the voices of the participants come through the poems has been a way to bring psychological and emotional unity to this montage of informal housing.

The accompanying CD of the recorded poems provides another form of engagement with participant experiences, values and perceptions. A small introduction before each poem on the CD provides a context for the poems (presented overleaf) in both their spoken and written form.
The poems in their written form occur in the same order as they are on the CD. Those representing Coromandel participants are presented first, followed by the poems representing Auckland participants. Discussion of some of the narrative identities which surfaced through the poems, and the possible relevance of these in terms of participants' perceptions of their informal housing, conclude the chapter.
DEMOGRAPHICS IN POETRY – COROMANDEL

Family matters – Marama
What’s important in life – Terry
Catching the tide – Anaru
So long as it’s comfy – Arama and Val
Never that lonely – Fred
Mod cons – Karen and Ross
It doesn’t sit quite right with us – Arani
It’s never been easy – Mere
I guess this is what they call living in poverty – Tom
Living the cliché – Hemi and Roha
All in the same waka – Kere and Tane
The tattooed lady – Julie
Happy as pigs in shit – Jean and Pete
Haunted – Mikaere
It comes down to personal values – Nick
Fare Tahiti – Rangi
This place welcomes me with open arms – Mona
Before the korero the kai – Kingi
Safe as houses – Wiki
Money makes the world go round – Tarata

p.234 (track 2)
p.236 (track 3)
p.237 (track 4)
p.239 (track 5)
p.241 (track 6)
p.243 (track 7)
p.244 (track 8)
p.246 (track 9)
p.248 (track 10)
p.249 (track 11)
p.250 (track 12)
p.251 (track 13)
p.253 (track 14)
p.255 (rack 15)
p.256 (track 16)
p.257 (track 17)
p.259 (track 18)
p.261 (track 19)
p.263 (track 20)
p.265 (track 21)
Marama

In her thirties and Māori, Marama lived in her half-built house on family land. She and her partner slept in an old caravan while her three children and a niece slept in bunks curtained off from the kitchen space in the house.

Family matters

“I’ve been here most of my life.
Born in the house down there,
grew up in the blue house over on the hill.
All this around here is family things.

Went to Whitianga for a while
for a change of scenery,
worked in Auckland
for Namu Plastics
until it went redundant,
then I came home.

I had two girls and two boys
but one died.
He’s buried up there on the hill.
We were living in caravans then,
rented from a guy in Thames.
Holes in the gas hoses,
and the doors and windows not water-tight,
but they were all we could get.

Oh, I could’ve stayed with my parents –
spent a year in their shed
when I first got back.
But just too many of us,
too crowded, too cold.

Now I’ve had my own place built,
or half of it,
up on the hill.
I’ll finish the rest
when I’ve got the money.
No electricity or running water.
Gotta get water tanks in
but gotta get our door fixed first,
‘cos a drunk fella
went straight through the glass.
Haven’t had the money to fix it.

I like it here,
just don’t like the mess.
My mum’s pigs have decided to root up the ground
and my brother and thems got new puppies
that drag everything around.

We built up here on the hill for the view
‘cos from here I can see everything.
I can see where my son’s buried,
see all the beach and that,
what’s going on.
I can see all my family.”
Terry

In her fifties and Pākehā, Terry had lived for thirteen years in her old bus on a large tract of land in the Coromandel ranges she had bought to establish a cooperative community, dedicated to sustainable living and healing.

What’s important in life

Sea, sky,
sunsets and moonsets.
That’s what’s important in life.

Sees them all from the bus
She’s lived in for thirteen years.

“It’s a good space,
easy to warm up,
though nowhere to spread out.
And I can only pace
up and down this aisle so many times –
just once in a while I’d like to goound and round a room.”

“Want to build
a little cabin one day
with a bit more space for myself
and having the grandchildren to stay.

“Got the piles,
already paid for, and the cement.
Now I’ll book up the bearers
and pay them off.
It’s going to be slow,
but I figure I’ll do it
by the time I’m sixty.

“I only need a small cabin.
I can probably knock up
something basic
for ten grand, yeah...

“It isn’t easy,
living with Hep C.
But better a bus in the bush
than a house or flat in town.

“I’d probably go down
really fast in town,
but not here –
I’m too busy living.”

Sea, sky,
sunsets and moonsets...
Anaru

It was a million dollar view from the tent Anaru (in his fifties and Māori) had lived in for five years on family land across the estuary. The only access was by boat.

Catching the Tide

Ten in the morning,
a clear autumn day.
A good time
to catch the tide.

Three tinnies *
on the muddy river bank,
the blue-green
flash
of a kingfisher
in the mangroves.

We sink in soft sludge,
dragging his battered boat
to the water.
A still morning.
Only the puttering outboard
and one jumping fish
break the silence,
putting a heron
and two shags
to flight.

Nose into the rocks,
duck under the pohutukawa,
scramble up the bank
and we’re at Anaru’s place
at the Point.

An old square tent
for sleeping,
water off the roof
for drinking,
recycled car side mirror
for shaving,
and a million dollar view.

Half a black plastic mussel buoy
makes a bath
and another half
a comfortable top
for the long-drop.
We sit in the sun
and he talks
of fishing and gardening,
of whenua and mauri
(spiritual DNA, he calls it);
of whanau, and iwi
and how Māori today
have gone soft
and would be lost
without the biggest iwi of them all –
Ngati Warehouse and Ngati Pak’nSave.

He talks
of the changing tides
of his own life:
of childhood on the family farm and
hydro construction sites;
of marriage, children,
and twenty years on the move
with New Zealand Post
before the nine years in Surfers,
driving a taxi
and dreaming of home.

He’s been back six years now,
living in the tent
at the Point.
The tent’s okay, he says,
but he plans to build
his own place one day –
“a ’gottage,‘
like they advertise on tv”.

Time to go.
The shell bank in the estuary
is starting to show.
Just enough time to drop me off,
and catch the tide
back home.

*Aluminium dinghies
Arama and Val

Arama, Māori, and Val, Pacific (both in their forties) had lived with their two children in a car case house with a dirt floor for thirteen years before cobbling two second-hand prefabricated garages together to make a house.

So long as it's comfy

One big room
partitioned into four,
wooden pallets, newspapers
and three layers of carpet
over the dirt floor.
Old windows and doors
free, from mates,
second-hand iron on the roof
and buckets to catch the leaks
when it rained.

The whole lot built
from mahogany car cases
inside and out.
“Only five dollars a sheet
from the Toyota plant in Thames.
Under a thousand dollars
to put it together.”

Decided to upgrade
after thirteen years.
“We weren’t in a hurry,
we were comfy.
If you’re in a hurry
you should shift to the city”...

Bought two second-hand garages
for three thousand dollars
and turned them into
a house
with help from
the local community
and mates from down the line
who turned up with building gear.
Gave them a good feed of seafood
and took them fishing
in exchange.

A building inspector
told them they
would have to stop work
because
they didn’t have
a permit.
He was told
they’d been living
with their children
in a car case
with a dirt floor
for thirteen years
and this was a
vast improvement
and all they could afford.
They haven’t heard
a word
since.

“They say ‘you can’t live in garages’
and shit like that,
yet we’ve seen on TV
people go and spend
two or three hundred thousand dollars
on those big flash pads
and they’re just rotting away.*
Can’t see the point of
spending money like that.
We’re not into anything flash —
so long as it’s comfy,
that’s all we need.”

* Arama is here referring to ‘leaky building syndrome’
Fred
In his sixties and Pākehā, Fred lived alone for thirty years in a bush shanty before moving into a rest-home following an accident while limbing a tree. The matron spoke of the many older single men living lonely, solitary lives in informal accommodation.

Never that Lonely

“I was never that lonely,” he said settling back well fed into the old armchair by his rest-home bed.

Between breakfast and lunch in the lounge he’d read the paper, won at Housie, and retold his tall wartime story—the one about the German torpedoes, the sunken ship, and the three bars of gold bullion he’d plucked from the ocean floor.

“It’s warm in here,” he said. “Good to have a few comforts at my age, people to talk to, a nice place to sleep.”

Slept warm in his bush shanty close to the fire for thirty years. “Nine by thirteen”, it was, and he split the wood himself. Dirt floor, blanket for the door and an old window with three panes did the trick.

Had a radio and a pup for company, and now and again would wander down to talk to the neighbours.

“No, I wasn’t really lonely,” he said.

A weekly walk for groceries, sugar sack on his back. Down the ridge follow the fence line then along the main road.
to the store.
Took his time,
know what he wanted.

Cooked his tucker on the fire,
took water from the stream
(a clear running stream).
"I like life in the open-air," he said;
"It's a healthier life than inside...
but never mind, you take what you get."

A bit out of the way,
his shanty,
off the beaten track.
But he'd do it again, he said;
liked it like that.

"I wasn't that lonely...
no it wasn't really a lonely life at all."
Karen and Ross

Karen and Ross, both Pākehā and in their thirties, lived with their two young children in a house-truck and caravan five kilometres up a dirt track on 200 hectares of regenerating scrubland, with the goal of living a sustainable rural lifestyle.

Mod Cons

You lived in
a three bedroomed house
with all the mod cons
out in the suburbs.

Swapped it for
a house-truck and caravan
five kilometres up a dirt track
in the back of beyond.

What do you miss most
about leaving the city? a friend asked,
and you couldn’t think of anything —
not a single thing.
Arani

Arani, in her forties and Māori, lived with her partner and other whanau in a collection of informal dwellings on family land. Arani was deeply involved in the fight for recognition of tribal titles guaranteed in 1935 with the Declaration of Independence of the United Tribes of New Zealand – He Whakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tiereni.

‘It doesn’t sit quite right with us’

Protest banners at the gate,
the flag of Independence
of the United Tribes
flying from the roof,
the big red cross
signifying
royal protection
for all Māori.

They’re a Māori Incorporation
living in
caravans and baches
on a fifty-four hectare block,
autonomous
from the government,
exercising rights
guaranteed by the Queen.

No building permits
and don’t pay rates
because they consider
the government
and all its laws
illegal –
“Just a New South Wales settlers’ parliament,
residing in Wellington.”

Jailed for occupying
wahi tapu
DoC had made a scenic reserve.
“It’s our ancestors they’re walking all over.”

Refused conciliatory offers
of partnership,
because they already have
a partnership,
with the Queen.

Spreading the word that
all land titles
are null and void;
that the Queen
remains trustee of all land.
and that Māori
are reclaiming
tribal titles and sovereignty.

"It doesn't sit quite right with us
that when we walk on land
that's rightfully ours
by unextinguished native title
we can get done for trespass.

“Our children
and our children’s children
should have the right
to walk the land,
to live where they want.

“That will be the legacy
I leave,
when I go.”
Mere

Mere, in her thirties and Māori, was living with her partner and three children in a garage. Saving for a house of her own, she had lived in informal housing for eleven years. Mere knew she could have a 'proper' house in the city, but like many participants, wanted to live where she had grown up, close to family.

‘It’s never been easy’

Lived in a cowshed
with her three children
before this Skyline garage
originally intended
as an art studio,
beside her mother’s house.

Wants a proper place
for her “three gorgeous daughters”,
with a bit of space,
a bit of privacy.

“It’s all getting
just a little bit
too much,” she says.
“Life would be
so much easier
with our own toilet,
our own shower,
especially in the winter.

“Kids get sick
when you cart them in
and out
of the cold.”

Her big canvasses of
bush and birds
hang in
the local gallery
and on the walls
of houses
round the world.

No time for painting
these days though –
except for the houses
she paints,
inside and out
to earn the money
to build her own.
It’s never been easy, she says, and she’s gotten used to it. “But yeah, now it’s definitely time...”
Tom

Tom, fifties and Pākehā, had lived in his old bus near the estuary for eleven years. He earned what money he needed doing casual building work, choosing to work less in order to have more time.

‘I guess this is what they call living in poverty’

The old bus slowly rusts its life blood into the soil.
Its travelling days are over
but it’s good for a few years yet.

Recently it’s acquired a new roof—
a bright blue Warehouse tarp
stretched taut
to cover the leaking, peeling green.

Inside, a bed propped up
to catch the morning sun,
a shower, a stove, a table,
a collection of comfortable couches.

Outside, clumps of flax and lavender,
the weedy remains of a vegetable garden,
a doorless dunny on the hill,
a broken windmill.

Running hot water,
12-volt power for music and light,
fish, rabbit and goat for a feed—
not much need for money.

“I guess this is what they call living in poverty,” he says,
“but it doesn’t feel like that to me. Keeping it simple is good for my mental health.

“The only thing that doesn’t work is when my boys come home with city friends. It’s too primitive for them. And when they ask where the toilet is and I tell them to piss in the long grass...”
Hemi and Roha

Hemi and Roha (both in their thirties and Māori) were living with four children (two boys of their own and two nieces) in a garage and lean-to while waiting for their own house to be built. Roha was pregnant with their third child. For them garage living was a temporary measure; for others, it was long term.

Living the Cliche

“Life’s really good,
in our Skyline garage...
what a cliché!”

“It’s not
a career housing move,
but we fit right in.

“We’re really
part of the whanau, now,
in our Skyline garage.”
Kere and Tane

_Tane, in his thirties and Kere, in her twenties (both Māori) left an isolated bach in the bush for a bus on her family land while awaiting the arrival of their baby. Like many couples they would have preferred a house of their own, but had no money._

_All in the same waka*

It’s a long walk to
the bach in the bush,
built on his family land
from timber
bought with
a payout on
electricity shares.

Too long,
after the last storm
wiped out the bulldozed track,
and with the baby coming.

You’ve shifted closer to town,
into an old bus
on her family land.

The bus is only temporary –
three years at the most, you say;
much less
if you win Lotto.

Need a hundred grand
to build a decent house,
a home a couple
could look forward
to having a family in, you say.

“A hundred grand would be well-spent
on a family home,
but even twenty grand would do.”
(Not that you’ve got even one between you.)

It doesn’t matter
which whanau
you belong to, you say,
everyone’s in
the same waka…

*boat/canoe
Julie

Julie, in her sixties and Pākehā, was a recovering alcoholic dealing with depression. She paid $40 a week rent for her bus in the bush.

The tattooed lady

The tattooed lady, you call it,
your dark green bus
with black tar down the seams
to keep the water out.

Kitchen at one end
with green and white gingham curtains
and pot plants at the window.
A pile of patchwork quilts
on the big bed at the other.
In between,
shelves, table,
an armchair,
and pot belly for warmth.

Your toilet’s
a hole in the ground,
the open-air bathroom
a series of plastic buckets:
two for showering,
two more for hand-washing
(one for soaping, one for rinsing),
a bucket for peeing in the night
and another one spare.
“My life is full of buckets,” you say.

Inside are more.
Buckets for drinking and cooking,
another for dish washing.
You’ve never been happier, you say:
“At last I’m at peace.”

A year and a half ago you were going
to take your own life.
You’d drunk every night for thirty-two years
and “everything came to a crunch.”

Spent time in a psychiatric hospital
in Hamilton
then came to Coromandel
to rehabilitate.

You’d married into the army,
lived everywhere, you say.
“We moved,
and moved
and moved.
I never had a choice.
Not then, or later,
because I lived
with a very violent man.”
The army breeds them, you say –
although there are exceptions.

Now you live alone
in your bus in the bush
with your cat,
your books,
and the radio
for company.

You live in utter peace
and beauty, you say,
in the tattooed lady.

“I can’t improve on a bus…”
Jean and Pete

Jean (Māori/Pākehā), and Pete (Pākehā), both in their fifties, were renting an old sheep-shed after living communally for eighteen years. They’d swapped city life for a rural ‘commune’ in the seventies, when about a dozen were established on the Coromandel Peninsula.

Happy as Pigs in Shit

Part of a travelling road show, 
you moved around with a band. 
Did the festivals, 
took a rock opera on tour, 
then together bought a piece of land.

Cut kanuka for houses 
clad with car case ply. 
Planted gardens, 
established orchards, 
caught fish, 
collected seaweed, 
grew tobacco 
or dope 
if you wanted 
to smoke.

Everyone 
worked together 
and ate together, 
until the dole came in. 
Then they 
had money 
to go to the shop 
and buy food. 
It changed everything, you say.

You stayed on for a while, 
then moved into your house-truck 
somewhere else, 
before settling into 
the sheep-shed.

“It’s a headache to find money 
every month for 
power or phone, 
or rent or rates – 
so much easier to be without. 
I think we’re peasants by choice,” you say.

“We’re happy in the sheep-shed – 
“happy as pigs in shit.”
But you've kept the house-truck.
Like the fact
you can go
anywhere you want
and take your house with you.
Mikaere

In his forties and Māori, Mikaere lived in a caravan and lean-to with his teenage son on family land with other whanau. Mikaere was dealing with schizophrenia

Haunted

Lives in a caravan
and lean-to
with his thirteen-year-old son.

“He’s trouble,
a lot of trouble.
We fight over everything
all the time.

“I get haunted as it is.
Listening to him,
well he actually haunts me
worse than the voices do.

“His music haunts me too
He’s into heavy metal,
has it up really loud.

“I’d like a bigger space
so I can get out of his face
and he can get out of mine.”
Nick

Nick, in his forties and Pākehā, lived in his bus at a beach-side camp ground a few minutes by car from his workplace. Camping grounds in both city and rural areas provide affordable informal accommodation for many.

**It comes down to personal values**

It comes down to personal values, you say;
what you aspire to,
what sort of living spaces
you feel comfortable in.

“Life circumstances change.
When I was married
and had three children
we did the good life.
We had the big old villa
in the country,
sheep, pigs, goats, chooks
and all that carry on.

“Now I live in a bus
thirty feet long,
with all the creature comforts.
Double bed down one end,
a couple of bunks for spare accommodation,
a little bathroom and shower,
kitchen, lounge, dining area...
a nice little self contained space.

“No room for stuff you don’t need,
the umpteen paintings around the walls,
the Dutch dresser,
the great big lounge suite.

“I’m happy with what I have –
it works well.
And I can travel around,
take it anywhere.

“Home to me is my bus.
I go through the door,
I feel comfortable.
It’s home.”
**Rangi**

Rangi, in his fifties, and identifying simply as a 'New Zealander', was forced to leave his house and studio with its beautiful Coromandel views when he became ill with depression. He was living in a garage 'studio', without basic utilities.

**Fare Tahiti**

Fare Tahiti you call it,  
this old garage sitting on piles  
with firewood stacked underneath  
to fuel the black pot belly  
and heat the yellow enamel coffee-pot  
sitting squat on the side.

No fridge, no stove, no running water.  
Instead a chilly bin,  
an electric fry-pan,  
and bottles of San Pelegrino mineral water.

Books on art –  
Gaugin, Lautrec, Matisse;  
and a collection of classical CDs –  
Verdi, Mozart, Handel.  
An old tea trolley holds your art supplies:  
pens, pencils, brushes, tubes of paint.

A profusion of colour inside –  
orange and pink leis,  
gold and green silk scarves.  
Paintings, posters, postcards, and photos  
pinned to walls of sunburst hues  
and cool sea shades  

Fish everywhere,  
on shelves,  
swimming along the bright orange cloth  
wrapped round the green plastic chair,  
and hanging from the chandelier.

A profusion of colour outside too –  
sunflowers,  
sweetcorn  
and zinnias.  
(It was kikuyu, gorse and blackberry  
when you arrived.)

At one end of the courtyard  
inlaid with pottery shards and shells  
is your outdoor shower  
(strictly summer only)  
and wash basin.
The porta-potty is out of sight
behind the garden shed.

Your last home featured
in *House and Garden* magazine.
It was a work of art –
beautiful, you say,
with wonderful views.
But the rent doubled,
you got into debt
and had to leave.
"I’m very sad I lost it," you say.

Now you’ve created Fare Tahiti.
No mod cons
or any sort of view,
but very little rent to pay
and a place to paint and garden.

It’s another work of art,
inside and out.
Mona

In her forties and Māori, Mona and her son had graduated from a bus to living in a shipping container attached to a small shed on rented farmland.

This place welcomes me with open arms

She lives in a shipping container
attached to a small shed
surrounded by mud
mucked up
by cattle pug.

Her car has died,
stuck in the mud.

“This place welcomes me with open arms!” she says.

Rented houses for five years
until deciding
she didn’t want to pay
somebody else’s mortgage
forever and a day.

“I’d pay out $8000 a year in rent
and I’d walk away
with nothing
but bills
on top of bills.

“I wasn’t getting nowhere,” she says

Bought a bus
and moved around,
then decided to settle down.

Shifted a shed
and shipping container
into a paddock
with a view of Castle Rock.

“It’s illegal,”
said the man from the Council,
who came
to investigate
a complaint.

Her son, aged eight, replied:
‘Scuse me, Mr Council Man,
but I have something to say:
our container is warmer
than the house we lived in –
and we had to pay
a 150 bucks a week
for that!

"That kid really blew me away, ay," she says.

"If I’d decided to go this way
when I was younger
I’d probably own
my own house by now."

What say, I ask, someone said:
‘here’s fifty thousand dollars
for a deposit on a house’
What would she like
and where would she like it?

“This is where I like and here is what I like!” she says

She’d spend the fifty grand
on a brand spanking new 4WD;
one that never broke down,
and never got stuck
in the mud...
Kingi

Kingi, fifties and Māori, had returned to family land and set up an encampment which he shared with others from time to time. Council staff were investigating a complaint.

Before the korero the kai

Dusk settles,
soft rain.
I walk through lush grass
dodging cowpats.

Past disinterested cow,
scattered vans and cars,
pause by an untended fire
flanked by old sofas.

They come to greet me,
Kingi and whanau.
Handshakes and hongi all round,
sit me down.

Yellow tarp walls,
rusting roof,
no doors.
Faces flicker in candlelight.

Before the korero, the kai.
Fish and mussels
from Tikapa*,
chicken and chips
from town.

Then it’s stories and laughter
washed down with wine.

They talk of
whakapapa,
social justice,
and the bullshit you have to go through.

“We’re not going to let anyone fucking shift us!” says Ngawha

The rain stops,
a ruru calls.
A full moon
shimmers
on the estuary.

“Come and look at this…”

*Hauraki Gulf

DEMOGRAPHICS IN POETRY 261
Ngawha takes my hand
and leads me
past the fire
to better see the view.

“What more could you possibly want?” she asks.
Wiki

Wiki, in her thirties and Māori, ended up living with her daughter in an old bach without utilities after her uninsured house was badly damaged in a flood.

Safe as Houses... on her thirty-first birthday

Carefully tended pot-plants on the rotting wooden deck, orange pumpkins and purple kumara dry in the sun while a tiny pinkdoll drowns in the birdbath.

Grass grows up around her old green car that wouldn’t, couldn’t get a warrant – the car that floated away the night of the flood.

Now the stream runs shallow between grassy banks, pretty as a picture. That night it was a raging torrent, surging through her home.

Changing her life forever.

Terrified, she clutched her children and struggled for the safety of her car, only to see it swirl away in ever-rising floodwaters.

Nothing has been the same since.

Further down the coast a woman died. Another, washed out to sea, barely survived.

These stories made the news; sent glad shivers down the spines of those safe as houses.

But what of Wiki, stunned and shocked, home left knee-deep in mud, then deemed unfit to live in?

And no, no insurance, because there never was a permit...

Stayed in a caravan for a while. Lost her young son to his father – because she’d nowhere fit to live, he said.
Now she’s in this bach
across the stream
from the home she loved.

Lost her hopes and dreams.

‘It’s too hard,’” she says,
and cries.
Cries for her lost son
and lost home.

Painted pillow slips
with his and her names
hang beside her bed.
On hers a yellow butterfly,
on his a deep blue heart.

No power,
no water,
no phone
in this home.

But sunflowers
in the long-drop,
geraniums
in the living room,
and a posy
on the lace-topped table,
beside the birthday card from her daughter
that says,

‘Keep smiling all day Mum’
Tarata

*Māori, lived in a caravan with her young daughter for eight years to save money to build her own place on family land.*

Money makes the world go round

“Money’s not everything.
but it helps, it helps.
The world will not go round,
love will not get any better,
without money.

“Without money
you’re down, you’re down.
Try to get ahead,
you’re pushed back down,
without money.”

She lived in a caravan
for eight years.
Stinking hot in summer,
cold and damp in winter.
Saving money to build a place
of her own one day.

“People said
‘you don’t know how lucky you are
with no rent to pay’.
Let them try it, I say
we’ll see how lucky they think they are.

“Not many would call it
a decent life.
You get used to it,
learn to cope,
but we shouldn’t have to, ay…

“They say you can
shift into town,
get a job,
rent a house.
That’s how they got us
off our land in the first place.

“Why should I pay rent
for the rest of my life?
Why shouldn’t I
have a place of my own?
It wouldn’t be like this
if we still had our land.
“Money’s not everything. 
but it helps, it helps. 
The world will not go round, 
love will not get any better, 
without money...”
DEMOGRAPHICS IN POETRY – AUCKLAND

It’s a hard life on the street — *Paddy*  p.268 (track 22)
Living in a shed really sucks — *Donna and Sean*  p.270 (track 23)
Daddy’s coming home — *Chrissy*  p.272 (track 24)
Passport to freedom — *May*  p.274 (track 25)
The urban backwoodsman — *Fred*  p.275 (track 26)
None of us are so important — *Dan*  p.277 (track 27)
Fallen Angel — *Lisa*  p.279 (track 28)
Safe in the church carpark — *John*  p.281 (track 29)
Happiness in a Housing Corp house — *Rona*  p.283 (track 30)
Escaping expectations — *Neil*  p.284 (track 31)
A nice home and a decent man — *Susan*  p.286 (track 32)
Circumstantial really — *Daryl*  p.289 (track 33)
Life in a suburban Skyline garage — *Alison*  p.290 (track 34)
The man who slept in gardens — *Aaron*  p.291 (track 35)
Paddy

In his fifties and Māori, Paddy swapped life in the suburbs, always broke, to living on the streets for six years, before becoming an unofficial night watchman and sleeping on site in an inner city commercial building. His gambling addiction kept him broke.

It’s a hard life on the street

“It’s a hard life,
it’s a hard life
on the street,
oh crikeys yeah.
You’ve got to look out for number one.

But it’s a good life,
it’s a good life in the city, ay.
Plenty of money to be had,
things to do, places to go.
Just don’t trust anyone.

Places to sleep too:
shipping containers in Parnell
(warm you know, the way containers are);
wagons on railroad sidings
(take plenty of newspapers);
the toilets at Sky City casino
(not bad those loos, the place is clean);
old buildings,
band-stands,
bus shelters where there’s plenty of light
(it’s safer in the light.)

Can get cold in the wind, though.
Maybe better to find a car,
drive somewhere quiet
and sleep in the back
where it’s warm.

Wouldn’t mind a place of my own
now I’m older.
But nothing expensive, ay.
That’s why I went
on the street –
by the time I paid the rent
I had nothing to spend.

What’s the use of living,
when you’ve nothing to spend?

And only a place
handy to the city.
Not out West, and
definitely not Otara*:
It’s not civilised in Otara —
like you can’t get
food parcels out there.

Feel sorry for the newcomers,
the out-of-towners,
by crickeys yeah:
I hope they get on well
with the city.

It’s a hard life,
it’s a hard life
on the street,
oh crikeys yeah.
You’ve got to look out for number one.”

*Low income suburb with a lot of social housing south of Auckland City in Manukau.
Donna and Sean

Donna and Sean (both in their twenties and Pākehā) and their two toddlers had had to move out of the house they were renting. With no money for a bond and unpaid debts, they could not find accommodation – apart from the garage of Sean’s mother’s Housing Corp house.

Living in a Shed Really Sucks
(Family life in a Housing Corp garage...)

Cramped, stifling hot, airless.
No opening windows,
only one door.
The fug of cigarette smoke chokes.

Double bed,
single bed,
and cot made from two chairs
pushed end on end,
all crammed side-by-side.

Beds rumpled,
heaped with clothes.
Table and chairs, three couches,
drawers, dressers, boxes,
in one precarious pile.

All their worldly goods and possessions.

She leans back on the bed,
smoking.
He hunches, head down,
can of beer in one hand,
roll-your-own in the other.

“Living in a shed really sucks,” he says.

A narrow pathway
between cardboard cartons
is cluttered with toys.

Danny, not yet two,
blond curls,
bright eyes,
snotty nose,
totters around
clutching his yellow plastic truck.

Sam, three, plays with the door.
Open, slam
open, slam
open slam.
“Stop!
You’ll jam your brother’s fingers, man!”

Screams, shouts,
rough words,
tears, soothing.

“It isn’t easy,
four of us stuffed in a garage,
but you’ve got to do
your best,” she says,
“and for the sake of the kids
stay as calm as you can.”

Living in a shed really sucks…
Chrissy

Christy, in her twenties and Māori, was just settling into a Housing New Zealand Corporation unit with her baby daughter after years of 'sofa surfing' and living in a variety of informal situations.

Daddy’s coming home

"Daddy’s in jail,
but should be out
for your first birthday.
He’s in for burglary –
serves him right I say,
though I miss him.

Goes up for parole next month.
He’ll get it,
’cos he’s been a good boy.
I shouldn’t say boy –
he’s thirty-one.
Hope being inside has made him grow up.

He’s pretty good, but
when he starts drinking
that’s the end of it.
I had it rough.
He was violent,
very violent
when I was pregnant with you.
I was surprised you survived.

Got into trouble myself
as a teenager.
Liked to party,
moved around.
Ended up in the cells in Central,
drink driving, no licence.
But they said I was a good driver.

When I was carrying you
I knew it was time
to grow up.
I had to put you first.

Daddy’s coming home,
but it will be my rules
or there’s the door,
my way,
or the highway.
If he doesn’t like it he can go back inside.
You’ll probably think he’s not your dad,  
because he left  
when you were  
two  
months  
old.

Daddy’s coming home,  
he should be here  
for your first birthday."
May

May, in her sixties and Pākehā, was one of thousands of older people belonging to the New Zealand Motor Caravan Association and travelling Aotearoa/New Zealand with the distinctive wings insignia on her van. May owned her own home, but had decided to take to the road.

Passport to freedom

“It’s a simple little Nissan van, 1989.
Belonged to someone
who loved it like a baby.
A cocoon, a home on wheels,
it’s got everything I need.

It’s my passport to freedom.

There’s comradeship
in the community
of fellow travellers –
more than in suburban homes,
waiting for children to visit.

You chum up with a few,
go off for a day or two.
Or visit family or friends,
share a meal,
a cup of tea.

Never need to feel
that you impose
because you come with
your own separate space.

There’s freedom, too
from financial pressure.
From the stress of bills
too big to pay
for rent or rates,
power, water
and phone.

It’s just a simple little Nissan van, 1989,
but it’s my passport to freedom…”

DEMOGRAPHICS IN POETRY
Dave

Dave, in his forties and Pākehā, was unable to clear credit card debt on his sickness benefit. He reframed his boarding house/rough sleeping/informal housing life, seeing himself as an urban backwoodsman, a modern-day knight, a 'Real Kiwi'.

The urban backwoodsman ("The Real Kiwi")

"What you’re looking at," he says, "is a real Kiwi –
trader, facilitator, researcher,
part quartermaster, part scrounger.
I’m an urban backwoodsman,
using camp craft skills
and the number eight wire philosophy."

Slept in the band rotunda
for three weeks
when he found himself
between boarding houses.

Swapped the rotunda
for the Domain Grandstand
after a park attendant
told him
he could be arrested
for trespass.

Met Vinnie,
who slept under a park bench
and reassured him
he’d had a couple of visitations
from the cops
but basically they left you alone.

Sees himself as a modern-day knight
living by an old school code of chivalry.
"You take what you need
and nothing more;
if you have too much,
you share;
and you reap what you sow.
In my case I’ve reaped a lot of goodwill

I’m living off the land,
but I’m not bleeding it."

Rides his bike like a trusty steed,
his gear in a backpack,
and two pannier bags.
He’s learnt to be resourceful:
three dollar bags of fruit and veg
from the local greengrocer
by ‘special arrangement’,
mark-downs in the discount bin at Foodtown,
banquet-style breakfasts
and all day smorgasbords
at free promotional seminars at plush hotels.

Sometimes there’s a free
sports bag,
memory stick,
camera.
Free health checks too:
gets his diabetes and
blood pressure tested
at trade fairs...

“If you’re clever you can live
very, very, well,” he says.

Need to be clever, when the only thing
you really own
is the contract
on a three cubic metre lockup
and a $5000 credit card debt.

Need to be clever
when you’re dealing with
the ups
and downs
of depression
and the downs
get harder
to bounce back from.

Need to be clever
when you haven’t got money,
says the urban backwoodsman.
Dan

In his forties and Pākehā, Dan was transitioning into a hostel after some months living on the streets—a common transition in the city for single men who have been sleeping rough or in inadequate informal ‘housing’. Dan was dealing with cancer.

None of Us Are So Important

“None of us are so important
bad stuff
can’t happen
to us,”
he said.

It happened
to him,
bad stuff.
Real bad stuff.
Thought it was
the world’s vendetta
against him.

Got into fights,
willful destruction,
aggravated robbery.
Jailed for eighteen months.

Came out
clear and sober,
moving forwards,
until a drunk driver killed his love
three days
before the wedding.

Six months screaming at the moon,
going crazy
till the cops came and took him away.

Then it was cancer,
job lost (last on first off),
no money for rent.
On the street with
one hundred and fourteen dollars
and thirty-five cents.

“You can’t do squat in this town
with no address
and no phone,”
he said.

Slept in doorways,
an elevated ledge,
a park bench.

Now he has an address,
a phone,
a place to call his own
(A place to hang his hat, he said: “the old songs are always the best.”)

Once again he’s
moving
forwards…

“None of us are so unimportant
good stuff
can’t happen
to us as well,”
said the man who lived on the streets.
Lisa

Lisa, just fourteen and Pākehā, had given up on home and school and was living informally in the inner city.

Fallen Angel

‘Fallen Angel’
are the words on your slightly grubby t-shirt.
“I hate being dirty,” you say.

Downtown at one am,
sitting silently crying beside the old busker,
what do you want?

A bed,
a roof over your head,
somewhere to call your own.

“I’d like to know
I have a place
to go,
instead of
walking around
all night
trying
to find somewhere
to sleep.”

You’ve made some good friends,
met some bad people on the street.
But you’re safe, you say,
your street brothers look after you because you’re the youngest.

“My mum says they’re just scum,
they only want you for one reason,
but she doesn’t know.”

Left home over fights with your mum,
ran away from everything.

“Last year my bestest friend in the whole world shot himself.
I don't know why.

Another was killed in a crash, and a few months ago
two of your street brothers
hit a tree
(chased by the cops, it was in the news.)
One died,
the other broke his neck.

"It seems
everyone's dying," you say.
You sometimes feel
you just
want
to
crawl
into a little ball
and
never
wake
up.

Think of killing yourself, but what would that do?
Don't want
to hurt others
like they hurt you.

"I have this fantasy," you say,
"that I will fly to Australia
and my father will be waiting
for me.

"He will be so happy to see me
that he will be crying,
and I will tell him
that I love him."
John

John, in his thirties and Pacific, had walked away from his family, home, and his job because of “bad feelings” and “shame” over gambling and debts. He was sleeping under the stairs in an inner city carpark.

Safe in the Church Carpark

“I should have killed myself a long time ago,” he says.

Lonely and hopeless, life ripped apart by betting on horses and losing, he sleeps in an inner city carpark under a stairway.

“I want to make myself uncomfortable now so that I have a hope of moving away, he says.

Behind with the rent, in debt, walked away from his job, his two young sons and his missus. Worried he might do ‘something bad’.

“A lot of bad things happen,” he says, “and it’s sad. Men killing their families as a way out of the shame, but it’s not.”

Doesn’t want his children to know, or imagine him where he is now. “I’m in the wrong situation,” he says.

Shifted from Myers Park to a doorway with people passing and talking and things getting pinched when you sleep.

“A lot of kids, they think this life is the way to freedom, but it’s the way
to hell," he says.

Ninety-three dollars
paying off debts leaves
fifty-seven dollars
for everything else.

Feels safe in the carpark.
Never mind the lights
and noise of the cars,
It’s peaceful, he says.

"The carpark belongs
to the church.
It feels like coming home."

DEMOGRAPHICS IN POETRY
Rona

Rona, in her thirties and Pacific, finally got a Housing Corp house after years of stress and insecurity, constantly on the move with her three children because she couldn't keep up with the rent.

Happiness in a Housing New Zealand Corporation House

“This is my home,” she says.
“I call it my castle.
I’m happy here
and so are my kids.
This is the home I want to grow old in.”

No more moving twice a year,
always behind with the rent,
ever out of debt
and having to lie
to keep a roof over her head.
(The lying was the worst part, she says.)

No more buckets in every room
of the last dank flat
and, when she complained of the leaks
the landlord buying
three bowls from Mitre 10
for her son to put in the roof.

No more sharing a house
with her sister and six kids,
and having to ask
for every bit of food and
permission to do the washing.

No more mattresses on the floor
of a friend’s place
and always on her toes
trying to please,
because this was not her house.

No more months ‘in the pits’,
walking every day to the
Housing Corp office,
desperate for somewhere to live,
a home of her own.

“There is nothing like a home,” she says.
“This house likes us
and we like it.
I love my home.”
Neil

Neil, in his thirties and Pākehā, had been living in his van for the previous year and a half. While Neil had various housing options, others live in vehicles around the city out of necessity because they cannot afford to pay rent.

Escaping expectations

Your Toyota HiAce van (long wheelbase and high top) comes with a bed that folds up for your surfboard or mountain bike to sit on and a little garden of succulents.


Went to the South Island to reinvent yourself and escape from those expectations of the eldest very intelligent son, who’s not realising his potential.

Work in your uncle’s factory ten hours a day for fifteen dollars an hour and park your van at the foot of Mt Wellington because it is only five minutes from there to work.

Drive to the top of the mountain every weekday morning for breakfast and t’ai chi, looking out to Rangitoto or Coromandel, depending on which way the wind is blowing.

People are friendly, you say, and nobody bothers you. “It’s just a van parked on the other side of the road to ninety-five percent of people.”
Weekends you leave the city.  
Having your home with you  
all the time  
makes it really handy.

Used to think  
you needed  
a home and career to be secure.  
But you’ve found  
an inner resourcefulness you say,  
– a different kind of security.
Susan

Susan, twenties, Pākehā and pregnant, was living in a city caravan park with her two children and her sister. By the time I spoke to Susan her baby had been born and she had just moved into an HNZC house.

A nice home and a decent man

“My mother couldn’t look after us by the time the fifth one came along, and my father, well, he was alcoholic.

Went to a Christian family when I was five. Looked after us five along with their five. They were real religious, real strict. Weren’t allowed to cut our hair, pierce our ears, wear long pants. Used the kettle cord on us.

Sent to another family when I was twelve, then another and another. So angry my mother gave me up, though I’ve forgiven her now. Think maybe she just couldn’t cope at the time.

Met the father of my first two kids at eighteen. He was real violent, not a nice guy though I was with him, on and off, for seven years. The kids were taken by CYFS*, live up North with their father’s family.

* Child Youth and Family Services

DEMOGRAPHICS IN POETRY
Then there was K’s dad.  
We got married,  
but it didn’t last.  
Then J’s dad,  
but that didn’t last either.  
It was alright at first  
but he was jealous,  
started pushing me around.

Keep picking  
vioent men,  
I’m going to start a course  
called  
‘breaking the cycle’…

Came to Auckland  
for a few days  
and got stranded.  
Ended up  
in a caravan.

People in the park  
were nice  
but the caravan wasn’t.  
It leaked  
and had fleas.

Got evicted  
for not paying the rent.  
Found another caravan  
in another park  
through a friend.  
That was good,  
but really too small  
for us all.

It’s good having  
a house of our own,  
our own toilet,  
our own shower.  
Not having to share.  
And the kids  
having somewhere to play.

What do I want  
in my life?  
No more children,  
that’s for sure;  
too easy to make  
and too hard to look after.
I want my children

to be happy

and safe

and to have

a good education.

Oh, and I'd like

a nice home,

and to meet

a decent man."
Daryl

*In his twenties and Pākehā, Daryl is living in a van while saving money to buy land and build a house. At night he parks at a beach, beside a park, or in the driveway of a friend’s house.*

**Circumstantial Really…**

You bought the van
for a summer holiday
and went on living in it.
“Circumstantial, really,” you say.
“Saves money.”

You’re glad of the experience.
Blew your ideas
about necessities
and having to live
in a house.

You jump in your van
after work,
head for the beach,
a park,
go rock climbing.
Read a book,
write, visit friends.

“When you don’t have
a house to go to
it makes you do the things
you actually want to do,” you say.

But it’s only temporary.
Don’t want to live in your van
for more than this year,
if that.

You’d like to have
a desk to write at,
a couch,
clothes that aren’t
always damp –
and dinner parties.
Alison, in her twenties and Pākehā/Māori, paid $200 a week to live with her two children in a suburban backyard garage. Many people are living illegally in Auckland backyard garages in an attempt to make ends meet.

**Life in a Suburban Skyline Garage**

You live in a double garage with children aged ten and two. Concrete floors, unlined ceiling and walls. And twenty-three trips to Starship Hospital with asthma since they were born.

In summer it’s an oven, in winter a freezer. Rain so loud on the tin roof it scares the children. And your ten-year-old begs you please to say ‘going home’, not ‘back to the garage’, in front of her friends.

You meant to stay six months, but the months have stretched into years. Would move if you weren’t up to your neck in debt, you say. You’ve done budget after budget, but just can’t manage it.

You dream of a three-bedroomed house with en suite, manicured lawns and a double garage. A proper garage – just to park your car in.
Undiagnosed depression saw Aaron, in his forties and Pākehā, lose first his flat and then his job. After two extended periods sleeping rough – mostly in gardens – he moved into an inner city HNZC flat.

The Man Who Slept in Gardens

The man who did not like to impose, and never presumed, had a penchant for parks and gardens.

“You’re safe when nobody knows where you are,” he said.

But walking in Myers Park one night ten young thugs smashed his teeth in. (A week later one of them murdered a man.)

“What can’t be cured must be endured,” he said.

Albert Park was peaceful, nobody bothered him there. So was the little garden off Aotea Square.

“The gardener soaked me one morning, apologised; I said ‘Don’t apologise – it’s your garden.’”

Best of all was the secret garden round the corner from the chess club where he was a member.

Out of sight, and protected from wind and rain he slept totally warm, totally dry.

“I could slip under the bushes and nobody knew I was there,” he said.

Twenty-three deaths in fifteen years is a lot to deal with. He couldn’t, didn’t.

Gave up on everything after a car crash killed his lover.
A year and a half
spent wandering the streets,
sleeping in gardens.

"I like gardens," he said.

Now he lives,
properly housed
in an inner city,
ground floor,
Housing New Zealand flat.

A sense of security
and less vulnerability
– at least in theory.

But he no longer sleeps well at night.
People peer in from the street,
eavesdrop at the window,
drop syringes in his doorway.

The noise from above crashes in,
and the din from outside –
fights, cars and passersby.

"I got more sleep living on the street," he said.

One day he’d like
a house of his own.
It’s pie in the sky,
but he’d feel more secure.

“And it would be nice to have a garden,” said the man
who did not like to impose
and never presumed.
Participant (and researcher) perceptions

The thirty-four poems above provide ‘windows’ into the diversity of informal housing situations and participants’ perceptions explored in this study. Themes of inadequate income, debt, physical and mental illness emerged, along with themes of self-reliance and resourcefulness; and value systems which accentuated family and/or environmental and/or spiritual values over material security. So too did concepts of home and place, of health and wellbeing, and issues around compliance.

Narrative ‘identities’, the stories or discourses participants constructed about themselves and their lifewords, became clearer through the process of writing the poems. These identities, as noted in the previous chapter, ranged from ‘victim’ through to ‘hero’ and ‘visionary’, and many in between. They including hard-done-by ‘battler’, easy-going ‘hippy’, ‘activist’, street-wise ‘hero’, ‘travelling [wo]man’, ‘man alone’, contented ‘backwoodsman/woman’ and environmental ‘warrior’, amongst others.

Participants fell along a continuum between feeling strongly empowered (because they felt they were freely choosing their informal housing situations) and disempowered (because they felt they had few choices). Participants at the more ‘empowered’ end of the continuum tended to accentuate the positive aspects of their situation, disregard conventions and see adversity as a challenge; while those towards the ‘disempowered’ end were more likely to accentuate the negative aspects and be crushed by their circumstances.

Table 14.1 (below) shows some of the common participant attitudes/responses emerging through narrative identities represented in the poems. Auckland participants were more likely to fall towards the more disempowered end of the continuum and Coromandel participants towards the more empowered end.
Table 14.1: Empowered – Disempowered Continuum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Empowered</th>
<th>Disempowered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disregard of conventions</td>
<td>Conventional expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Bugger it’</td>
<td>Victim/helplessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number eight wire</td>
<td>Noose around neck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social connectedness/pride</td>
<td>Social exclusion/shame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rising to challenges</td>
<td>Hard done by/resentment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of belonging</td>
<td>Little sense of belonging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Shit happens’ – accentuate positive</td>
<td>‘Shit happens – accentuate negative’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling good in your skin</td>
<td>Hanging on by the skin of your teeth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>Fragility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is constructive to consider participants’ narrative identities in terms of Merton’s modes of adaptation (Merton, 1957; 1996). As previously noted, Merton suggests these typify responses where there are universally imposed societal goals for success but restricted means to achieve them. He outlines the five ‘types’ as: the conformist (accepts the goal of success and monetary reward and means to work towards it); the innovator (accepts the goal of success and monetary reward but lacks the means); the ritualist (accepts the means but rejects the goal of success and monetary reward); the retreatist (rejects both and withdraws); and the rebel (rejects both and substitutes alternative goals and means). As with all typologies, categories are not mutually exclusive, and may also be context-specific. It is important to also note that the various identities which individuals construct and maintain impact on the social fabric. There is a danger, notes Elliott (2005:131) “that people are merely seen as making decisions and acting in a pre-defined and structurally determined field of social relations rather than as contributing to both the maintenance and metamorphosis of the culture in which they live”.

Merton’s typology of adaptation can be viewed as a set of over-arching generic ‘narrative identities’ into which participants’ individual narrative identities (such as ‘pioneer’, ‘victim’, ‘battler’, ‘activist’, ‘backwoodsman/woman, etc.) can be placed. These five generic ‘types’ – conformist, innovator, ritualist, retreatist or rebel – can in turn be seen as representing different patterns of culture, the “regularities transcending individual variations” (Macdonald, 1999:113), and proffering an explanation for the ‘cultural collisions’ which are evident in many of the poems and have been discussed in preceding chapters. The ‘types’ can also be viewed as a set of ‘cultural’ responses to underlying structural social, economic and political inequalities, which largely determine individual SEP and chances of ‘success’ in achieving
mainstream goals of success and monetary reward. In the context of present-day Aotearoa/New Zealand this includes owning your own home.

Merton notes that in society generally even those without easy access to either the goal or means of success remain conformists. While more than half of the Auckland participants (nine out of fifteen) appeared to fit into the conformist category (including Dan, *None of Us are so Important*; Rona, *Happiness in a Housing New Zealand Corporation House*; Alison, *Life in a Suburban Garage*; Daryl, *Circumstantial Really*; and Donna and Sean, *Living in a shed really sucks*...), this was so for only six of the twenty-five Coromandel participants, including Wiki, *Keep Smiling All Day Mum*; Nick, *It Comes Down to Personal Values*; and Hemi and Roha, *Living the Cliché*. Coromandel participants were more likely (thirteen out of the twenty-five) to fit into the rebel category (compared with three out of the fifteen Auckland participants). Of the remaining participants, five Coromandel and two Auckland participants could be viewed as retreatist, with one innovator from amongst both the Coromandel and Auckland participants. (None of the participants appeared to fit the ‘ritualist’ category, where, in spite of no expectation of success, nevertheless the ritualist goes through the motions of working hard.)

The relatively high number of conformists amongst Auckland participants (with little possibility of conforming because of lack of resources) fits with the finding that Auckland participants were more likely to feel disempowered by their informal housing situations than Coromandel participants. (Coromandel conformists were more likely to have the possibility of ‘conforming’ because of access to family land, which Auckland conformists lacked.) Conversely, the relatively high number of rebels (who had redefined both their goals and their means) and retreatists (who had opted out) amongst Coromandel participants compared with Auckland participants, is in keeping with the finding that Coromandel participants were likely to feel empowered rather than disempowered, because they were not futilely striving for some unattainable goal of ‘success’. The high number of Coromandel participants in the rebel category could also explain some of the ‘cultural collisions’ with authorities over compliance issues which were examined in *Chapter Thirteen, Health, Home and Compliance*.

**Concluding comments**

This chapter has presented participants’ informal housing histories, living circumstances and narrative identities in the form of a series of poems. The poems show the diverse range of informal housing situations and of those living in them; their experiences and perceptions;
their values, hopes and dreams. Many are stories of hardship, and some are stories of despair, with poverty and debt consistent (though not universal) themes; but so are resilience and determination. All of these are factors in this montage of informal housing.

Writing the poems has been part of the phenomenological approach of the thesis, an approach concerned ‘to make more understandable the worlds of experience’ (Denzin & Lincoln 2000b). Hein and Austin (2001) have defined such an approach as a ‘science of consciousness’; the study of phenomena from the point of view of the people experiencing them, with ‘clear descriptions’ which reveal both ‘the structure and meaning of phenomena as they are experienced’. The poems, which combine words participants used to describe their lifeworlds and field notes, are thus a phenomenological research response – an attempt to ‘walk in participants’ footsteps’; an ‘intentional act of attachment to the world’ (van Manen, 1990).

The inclusion of poetry in this thesis re-emphasises both the socially constructed nature of reality and the subjective ‘constructed’ nature of any data analysis, as well as acknowledging “the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b:8). Thus the poems can also be seen in terms of my personal response to the research process and to participants’ stories.

The poems allow the voices of the participants to come through. In Bruner’s (2003) words they ‘let many stories bloom’, potentially broadening existing discourses around housing and health. They challenge the ‘tyranny of the single story’, showing the diversity of participants and their living situations; they enhance basic demographic details presented in Chapter Six, Participant Demographics, and provide a human context for the themes which have been explored in the preceding chapters.

The use of Merton’s ‘typology of adaptation’ to examine narrative identities expressed through the poems underlines a central tenet of this thesis: that underlying structural inequalities – historical and present-day – play a large part in the prevalence of informal housing.

The Discussion which follows completes this montage of informal housing in Aotearoa/New Zealand.
CHAPTER FIFTEEN

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The aim of this thesis has been to ‘capture realities’ of informal housing in Aotearoa/New Zealand from the perspectives of those living in it and to explore implications for their health and wellbeing. The intention is to extend housing and health discourses, which currently largely exclude the ‘realities’ of those living on the margins; for as Bryson (1992) notes, how we talk about issues is fundamental to social policy outcomes.

Previous chapters have provided a contextual background; reviewed the relevant literature; outlined the theoretical paradigms which inform this study; discussed the themes which emerged from participants’ narratives; and presented the voices of participants in the thematic chapters and the series of thirty-four poems. Cultural collisions between participants and the ‘mainstream’, and Auckland-Coromandel differences, have been highlighted throughout the thesis. In this concluding chapter, key findings in relation to the research question are summarised and considered in the light of previous literature; strengths and limitations of the research methodology are examined; and implications for policy are discussed.

One cannot move from findings to implications without a consideration of values. As Dickey (2000) notes, even the most sophisticated studies cannot establish the morally “right” way to spend public money. Social justice, as noted in the Introduction, is a core value which has guided this exploration of informal housing, along with respect for the perspectives of the participants. Similarly, considerations of social justice and respect for participants’ perspectives underpin this Discussion – together with academic values of comprehensiveness, consistency and rigour.
Summary of research findings

It is clear that the relationship between housing and health is complex. Dunn and colleagues (2004) note that housing is a ‘crucial nexus’ for a wide range of factors shaping everyday life. Although much research into links between housing and health focuses on structural aspects of housing, the findings from this thesis, supported by other relevant research, indicate these cannot be separated out from individual psychosocial contexts (including protective individual and community factors which may modify experiences of stress and perceptions of home and place) in any meaningful way. The present study confirms Shaw’s (2004) view that housing is best seen as a ‘catch-all’ term, with strong ‘physical, proximate, emotional and social’ aspects which in combination impact on health and wellbeing.

In their ethnographic study of forty rural ‘homeless’ participants in the UK, Cloke and Milbourne (2006) note findings reflect “a complexity which can render generalisation problematic”. Similarly, the findings from this investigation of the experiences and perceptions of forty participants living in informal housing highlight the complexity of informal housing in Aotearoa/New Zealand and the heterogeneity of the participants’ circumstances. In summary, participants were demographically diverse; although lack of financial resources was a common theme and a key pathway into informal housing, nonetheless, home ownership remained an important end goal for many; home did not necessarily equate with house, what was considered ‘adequate’ housing by participants varied (both amongst participants and often with mainstream perceptions); different perceptions of risk in terms of health and wellbeing also appeared to be at play; most participants did not feel their health and wellbeing was compromised by their informal housing, with choice and sense of belonging at the individual level and social cohesion at the community level appearing to be mediating factors in the housing-health relationship, along with a wide range of coping strategies employed by participants; and there were significant differences in the perceptions and experiences of the Auckland and Coromandel samples. Each of these findings is examined in turn below.
Informally housed participants were demographically diverse

Study participants came from a wide range of family situations, educational backgrounds (from no educational qualifications to tertiary degrees and diplomas) and ages (from fourteen to seventy-four). While they shared the characteristic of living in informal rather than mainstream housing, there were as many intra-group differences as there were inter-group differences.

Comparisons cannot be drawn between this sample and others living in informal housing situations because of a gap in the research literature. Surveys of absolute homelessness in Aotearoa/New Zealand show those sleeping rough are disproportionately male and Māori (Auckland Rough Sleepers Initiative, 2004, 2005, 2007), and research into substandard rural housing highlights Māori deprivation. Māori were disproportionately represented in this study also, with fifteen of the forty participants identifying as Māori and three as Māori/Pākehā. However only half of the study participants were male, and more than a third of the households contained children. Somewhat unexpectedly, only a third of Coromandel participants (excluding the two superannuitants) were receiving a social benefit. In Auckland the figure was higher – eleven of the fifteen participants were on a social benefit, with one superannuitant.

Participants’ dwellings were also diverse, ranging from encampments and purpose-built structures to buses, vans, garages and sheds originally intended for other purposes and converted into dwellings. While homelessness is generally characterised by mobility (Breakey, 1997; Milbourne & Cloke, 2006), many participants, particularly on the Coromandel, had lived in their informal housing for a number of years. This was not, by and large, the case in Auckland.

Lack of financial resources was a key pathway in

Lack of financial resources was a key pathway into informal housing for most participants (although not all: three owned houses elsewhere that they chose not to live in). Some saw it as a way to save money to build a house; for yet others it was the only accommodation they could afford. While the latter were ‘backed into a corner’, the former could be viewed as ‘taking a breather’ in a corner.

Affordability has been identified as the primary determinant of housing choice (Ancell & Thompson-Fawcett, 2008; Carroll et al., 2008b; Murray, 1997), with factors of location and family connections also important (Carroll et al., 2008b; Clark & Onaka, 1985; Saville-Smith, 1985).
Considerations of location and family connections were paramount for most Coromandel participants, who knew that choosing to live on the Peninsula would probably mean living in informal housing, at least for some time, because of the lack of available, affordable mainstream housing. For some, the drivers were family and family land; for others, environmental values of living a sustainable lifestyle and taking care of the land. Location and family connections were also factors for some Auckland participants, but affordability was more likely to be the primary driver of informal housing ‘choice’.

**Home ownership remained an important end goal for many**

Owning their own homes was an important goal for many participants, particularly on the Coromandel. Some had already built, or were building, their own informal homes; others were planning to. Many had rights to family land, or individual title, which all except one Auckland participant lacked. Perkins and Thoms (1999), Benton and colleagues (Benton et al., 2002a) and others note home ownership is ‘a central objective’ for most New Zealanders, with Dupuis and Thoms (1998) identifying both financial and ontological security as important drivers of home ownership. Most participants spoke of the security home ownership would give them.

However, there were major differences between mainstream home ownership, and home ownership for most participants on the Coromandel. Firstly, while almost all home owners in Aotearoa/New Zealand obtain their home by raising a mortgage, most participants were not prepared to. Owning or buying a home can represent ‘a huge psychosocial burden of debt’ (Shaw, 2004) which Coromandel participants were not willing to incur. Secondly, Coromandel participants were not concerned about building a house which complied with building and resource consent regulations (again seen as representing unaffordable and stressful financial costs). And thirdly, while a dominant mainstream housing discourse is home-as-realisable-asset (*Chapter Five, Media Discourses*), none of the Coromandel participants appeared to view home ownership in terms of a ‘realisable asset’.

Davey and Kearns (1994) and Saville-Smith (2004) contrast mainstream Pākehā concepts of land and home as ‘commodity’ with more holistic Māori concepts of home. On the Coromandel, Pākehā participants were just as likely as Māori participants to view home and land holistically; to speak in terms of ‘guardianship’ of the land rather than rising property values; and to see building a house on their land as something for their children’s future, rather than part of their ‘financial portfolio’. This represents a significant departure from the mainstream, where property is a major part of the individual economy (both in terms of
investment and on-going expenses), the building industry is a key part of the national economy, and the borrowing and lending of money for mortgages is central to the banking system. While wanting the security of home ownership, Coromandel participants can be viewed in some sense as opting out of the market economy. In contrast, those Auckland participants who spoke of one day wanting to own their own home had expectations more in line with those of mainstream Aotearoa/New Zealand. They saw the home-ownership process as one of saving up for a deposit, raising a mortgage to buy a ‘proper’ house and then slowly paying it off over their lifetime. Those who were on social benefits doubted they would ever be in a position to either save a deposit, or keep up on-going mortgage payments. (An exception was Rona, who hoped to buy her HNZC state house.)

**Home did not necessarily equate with house**

There were also major differences between mainstream, everyday definitions of home-house, and participants’ everyday concepts of home. From a mainstream perspective, ‘home’ equates with house or apartment, but for Coromandel participants their informal dwellings were equally ‘home’. ‘Home’ was often also more connected to ties to land and family than to their actual dwellings, as noted in previous research on Māori perceptions of home in rural areas (Maori Women’s Housing Research Project (N.Z.), 1991; Saville-Smith, 2004; Te Ropu Whariki, 2006). This study shows that several Pākehā participants on the Coromandel had similar understandings. It was their sense of connection to the land, even though it was not ancestral land, which was paramount; the dwelling was secondary. Thus, whether or not many participants were satisfied with their housing could have more to do with ‘place’ and connections than the attributes of their dwellings. The seeming paradox of Māori feeling at home when, from a mainstream perspective they are homeless because they are houseless, has been noted by Kearns (2006).

While study findings point to a broad definition of ‘home’ on the Coromandel, this was less the case in Auckland. For Auckland participants, home was more likely to be equated with the structure they were living in – or to a ‘proper house’ rather than their current informal accommodation.

**What is ‘adequate’ housing appears to be relative**

Informal housing is an integral part of our past, Māori and Pākehā (Belich, 2001; King, 2003), and remains part of our present housing mix. So does overcrowded housing. Both can be seen in terms of a response to the supply of affordable housing not keeping pace with natural
increase and migration (both internal and external) leading people to house themselves in a wide range of informal dwellings in both urban and rural areas, or to ‘double up’ with others.

Most participants’ informal housing, particularly on the Coromandel, contravened provisions of the Housing Improvement Regulations (1947), the Health Act (1956), and/or the Building Act (2004). Thus, while from a mainstream and regulatory perspective it was anything but adequate, most Coromandel participants considered their housing adequate – and not just as a strictly temporary measure. As Ineichen (1993) and Keams (1994) note, there are inherent difficulties in establishing ‘absolute definitions’ of what is and what is not adequate housing, because this varies depending on individuals and circumstances. Perceptions of adequacy are context and time specific, and include, for instance, the amount of space a family may need for health and wellbeing. It has been argued that people who are healthy, function well together as a family, and have outside opportunities, can be fine with “a lot in a small house” – but not families who “are stressed on a number of levels, with insufficient income and a lack of external connections meaning everybody is at home all day” (Sneddon, 2009, personal communication). My own childhood housing experiences, recounted in the Prologue, support this.

It is paradoxical that informal housing is valorised in one context and seen as a transgression in another. Low impact camping and baching are an idealised part of mainstream Kiwi culture, which King (1993) and others posit as a reflection of the pioneering spirit. The virtues of life in a tent, a caravan or a basic bach, making do in ‘primitive conditions’ without basic utilities, are extolled; living close to nature is seen as renewal for the spirit – so long as at the end of the holidays people return to their everyday lives and houses.

**Different perceptions of risk seem to be at play**

Thus ‘informal housing’ and making do in primitive conditions on a strictly temporary basis is considered good for health and wellbeing; but if lived in indefinitely, such living situations are seen as putting inhabitants at risk. The informal housing of participants collided with mainstream perceptions of what constitutes adequate housing, and government health and safety regulations.

It is clear that some situations such as unsafe water supplies and sewage disposal, adversely affect health; and as Michael Lennon, the ex-CEO of HNZC strongly argues, in a twenty-first century OECD country there should be enforceable minimum health and safety
standards (Lennon, 2004). However, what should these minimum standards be? Opinions on what is and is not risky differ. As Douglas (1992:11) notes, research on risk shows ‘the public’ “does not see risk in the same way as the experts”. Certainly most of the participants in this study did not. From a public health perspective Coromandel participants were at risk from such factors as un-monitored water supplies, polluted streams and cold, damp dwellings (Webber, 2004). Yet many participants tended not to perceive their lack of basic utilities as a health risk, either for themselves or for others, and saw no reason why they should conform to the norm. Those on the Coromandel argued that regulations which may be necessary for health and safety in an urban area may not be so in a rural setting. In fact some espoused an ‘alternative public health’ (Dew & Carroll, 2007) with different perspectives both on what constitutes health risks and ways of dealing with those risks.

Douglas (1992) suggests there is a tendency to view as risky anything which transgresses societal norms – with a concomitant blaming of the transgressors who defy the risk warnings and the institutions. She posits this focus on risk as a way of enforcing conformity to societal norms. Thus those living in informal housing, in their transgression of societal norms about ‘proper’ housing, are seen to be personally at risk and posing a risk to others.

The health and wellbeing of most participants did not appear to be compromised by their informal housing

Most of the study participants in both Auckland and on the Coromandel reported themselves to be in good health in the interviews and on the SF-36 and GHQ-12 self-report health measures. This is at variance with a population health pattern of poorer health outcomes for those with lower SEP, including ‘poor’ housing (Dunn, 2000, 2002; Howden-Chapman, 2004). There are several possible explanations for this.

It could be that the equivalent of a ‘healthy worker’ (Choi, 1992) or ‘healthy migrant’ (Fennelly, 2005) effect is at play – that to cope with living in informal housing situations participants had to have a reasonable level of physical health to begin with. Participants’ mean scores on the SF-36 were slightly higher than the national average for Physical Functioning.

Perceptions of the Coromandel as a ‘therapeutic environment’, coupled with the sense of belonging many participants felt because of family and/or past associations, could also in part explain why Coromandel participants expressed a greater sense of health and wellbeing than Auckland participants. Here there could be a ‘therapeutic environment’ effect at play (Frumkin, 2003; Kearns & Gesler, 1998a; Milligan et al., 2004). The fact that many on the
Coromandel also owned their dwellings and/or land could also have conferred the health benefits of ontological security and having a sense of control (Dupuis & Thorns, 1998), while avoiding the stresses of trying to finance mortgages or rents associated with mainstream housing.

Several participants had ended up in informal housing because of mental or physical health difficulties. Research into homelessness has highlighted a two way process of poor housing affecting health, and health status affecting the likelihood of being poorly housed (Keams & Smith, 1994). Paradoxically though, two participants on the Coromandel with health problems considered living in buses in the bush as better for their health than mainstream housing would be. Many participants on the Coromandel saw their housing situations as helping to build resilience and keep them healthy.

As Keams and colleagues (1991:377) note, the condition of a dwelling “may not in itself be the key predictor of human health and well-being”. Whether or not someone is satisfied or dissatisfied with their housing may be a more reliable predictor. Most Coromandel participants expressed satisfaction with their informal dwellings – and their GHQ-12 scores indicated they had better mental and emotional health than either Auckland participants, who tended to express less satisfaction with their informal dwelling situations, or respondents in the survey of those inadequately housed carried out by Keams and colleagues (1991). The latter were all on HNZC waiting lists, indicating dissatisfaction with their current housing situations. The lower GHQ-12 scores of Coromandel participants lend weight to the proposition that feelings of satisfaction may be a strong mediating factor in the poor housing-poor health correlation.

Research highlights the likelihood of poorer health outcomes in adult life for those exposed to housing deprivation in childhood (Thomson et al., 2001). While findings suggest present adult health and wellbeing was not unduly affected by participants’ informal housing situations, questions could be raised about the long term health of their children. Some parents’ narratives highlighted concerns, linking, for instance, recurring asthma attacks with cold and damp, and identifying socialisation and stigmatisation issues. However, cold and damp are also features of much mainstream housing in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Howden Chapman et al., 2008) and most participants did not feel their children’s health was compromised by their living situations; on the contrary, many on the Coromandel felt their children benefited and became more resourceful growing up close to nature.

119 Indicating better mental health and wellbeing.

DISCUSSION 304
Mediating factors in the housing-health relationship include individual factors such as choice and sense of belonging, and community factors such as social cohesion.

Numerous studies show a strong interaction between material and psychosocial factors. Feeling that they were making a choice to live where and how they did, and knowing they had other housing options such as renting a house or flat in the city, gave Coromandel participants a sense of control over aspects of their environment which appeared to be lacking for many Auckland participants. Research shows that a sense of limited personal control reinforces feelings of helplessness and alienation, and dependency on external agencies (Feldman & Steptoe, 2004). Many Auckland participants openly talked of their expectations that external agencies should solve their housing problems. Conversely, even those Coromandel participants who were dependent on external agencies still stressed their independence, and the need to find their own housing solutions. While Feldman and Steptoe (2004) also found feelings of limited personal control were more prevalent in the city than in rural areas, whether the above finding is the result of the characteristics of this particular sample, or an indication of urban-rural differences, is unclear.

Social cohesion has been identified as a strong mediating factor between structural determinants of health and wellbeing and health and wellbeing outcomes (Kawachi & Kennedy, 1997; Wilkinson, 1997a, 1997b). As Gendall and colleagues (1999:89) note,

the relationships we have with our families, friends and acquaintances...not only provide support in times of need but also help to create the fabric of society in which we live.

Tepania-Palmer (2007) cites the negative impact on Māori wellness of urbanisation, tearing apart as it did the social fabric of Māori society. However, the narratives of Māori participants on the Coromandel showed connections to family, land and marae remained strong. Pākehā narratives on the Coromandel also showed connections with the wider community, an involvement in the ‘fabric’ of society. This could in part explain the general greater sense of wellbeing expressed by Coromandel participants, Māori and Pākehā. Amongst Auckland participants there was less sense of belonging, less evidence of social cohesion.

Participants employed a range of coping strategies

It could be that participants’ health and wellbeing was also better than expected, not only because of ‘healthy worker’ and ‘therapeutic environment’ effects, the mediating influences
of a sense of self efficacy and social cohesion, but also because participants had learnt effective coping strategies through experiences of living in adverse conditions.

One common coping mechanism was to see one’s own situation as ‘lucky’ compared with that of many others. Several participants made reference to people who were far worse off than themselves. They also distanced themselves from others in similar situations who were seen as ‘deviant’ from a mainstream perspective (Elliott, 2005). Stressing the advantages of their situations, downplaying the disadvantages, and the use of humour, were other strategies employed.

Kearns (1994) notes that coping strategies in response to stressful situations can produce positive outcomes. These coping strategies, allowing participants to feel ‘okay’ about their informal living situations, can also be seen in part to militate against a move into more mainstream housing – along with other factors already considered, such as not wanting to go into debt.

**There were significant differences between the Auckland and Coromandel samples**

This study has highlighted significant differences between the Auckland and Coromandel samples. It is difficult to know how much these might be a reflection of urban-rural differences in wellbeing (Feldman & Steptoe, 2004) and how much a reflection of these particular participants in these particular geographical locations. One area where there appears to be clearly an urban-rural difference relates to the use of buses versus vans as dwellings. Five Coromandel participants lived in large buses but none lived in a van, whereas three Auckland participants lived in vans and none lived in a bus. A likely explanation is that vans are less conspicuous and take up less space than buses, making them more suitable for urban informal dwelling, whereas space is less of an issue in rural areas.

While many participants on the Coromandel and in Auckland were perhaps equally disadvantaged in term of SEP, the former evinced a greater sense of wellbeing, as already noted. Factors suggested above as likely to have contributed to this include Coromandel participants’ sense of making a choice to live where they did and having a stronger sense of belonging and of social cohesion, along with perceptions of the Coromandel as a ‘therapeutic landscape’. Many Coromandel participants spoke of connections to family and land, and emphasised the beauty and healing qualities of their environments. In contrast, Auckland participants were generally less satisfied with their informal housing situations, and felt they had little choice. They tended towards the more disempowered end of an empowered-
disempowered continuum, while Coromandel participants tended towards the empowered end (Chapter Fourteen) and had found or built their own accommodation. Haarhoff (1984), writing in a South African context, suggests providing one’s own housing, however basic, gives a sense of control which stimulates both individual and social wellbeing, and this appeared to be the case amongst Coromandel participants.

Just as in wealthier countries a higher income level and more commodities are required to achieve the same social functioning as in a poorer country (Sen, 1999) the same comparison could generally be made between Auckland and the Coromandel. In Auckland, the lack of a commodity (in this case a house or flat) was likely to exclude participants from mainstream social functioning; but this appeared less the case on the Coromandel, where participants were in the same boat/waka as many of those around them. There was less conspicuous consumption; less a sense of ‘us’ and ‘them’ amongst Coromandel participants; less sense of being marginalised because of their informal housing. For instance while living in a garage in Auckland might (and did) cause feelings of shame, living in a garage on the Coromandel meant, as Rona said, that ‘you fit right in’.

Thus, feeling a greater sense of self-efficacy and choice, more social cohesion, the effects of living in a ‘therapeutic environment’ and a normalisation of informal housing on the Coromandel, are all possible explanations for the lower levels of dissatisfaction with their informal housing and greater sense of wellbeing expressed by Coromandel participants.

Tensions, collisions and paradoxes

Capturing ‘realities’ of informal housing has involved giving a ‘voice’ to people living on the margins in informal housing; attempting to understand their experiences and perceptions; and presenting these within the context of mainstream discourses of housing and health. There are tensions between the perceptions of participants in this study and the perceptions of mainstream ‘outsiders’ over the adequacy and acceptability of their informal housing – and in some instances, whether or not it constituted ‘housing’. These tensions, evident in media representations, in key informant narratives, and in collisions with current building, health and safety regulations, play out within the context of an over-arching tension/collision between the stated aim of successive governments of decent housing for all New Zealanders, and the lack of political will/resources to ensure this. Housing is just one of the many calls on public money, and policies and outcomes have fallen far short of achieving stated aims.
Regulations have also fallen far short of ensuring minimum standards laid down in legislation are met. Regulations are often not enforced. There are tensions between minimum standards of compliance, and the financial inability and/or unwillingness of so many people to meet them – including the participants in this study. This has set up collisions between participants and others in similar situations, and mainstream institutions.

There are tensions between the findings of good health and wellbeing amongst participants in this study and population-based research suggesting that participants’ ‘poor housing’ should have been associated with poorer health and less sense of wellbeing. Most participants considered themselves to have good health and wellbeing, despite their objectively ‘poor’ housing – and in some instances on the Coromandel, because of it. There are also tensions between people’s right to choose how they live and their right to participate in society.

Many participants who were objectively ‘poorly’ housed did not consider themselves to be so. They can be seen to have positioned themselves positively in relation to the counterfactual of objectively ‘poor’ housing conditions through the adoption of narrative identities, shaped by their social world and the available ‘cultural repertoire of stories’, and their own experiences and interpretations (Elliott, 2005) which fitted their perceptions. Cultural collisions inevitably arose between these and mainstream narratives and narrative identities coming out of different ‘social worlds’ and ‘cultural repertoires’, experiences and interpretations.

The Greenacres Caravan Park debacle (Chapter Four, Media Discourses) exemplifies key cultural collisions between informal housing and mainstream discourses, the unacceptability of the informal structures within the park being contrasted with ‘decent’ surrounding suburban houses. This contrast was coupled with the perceived undesirability of the occupants compared with ‘decent’ residents, causing Greenacres to be labelled by police ‘the boil on the backside of the South Auckland police’ (Herald reports and TV 3 60 Minutes documentary, Greenacres, March 2005).

While there are undoubted safety issues, and genuine concerns for the wellbeing of children living in some informal housing situations, underlying moral judgements which equate a ‘decent house’ with ‘decent’ family life, play a part in such collisions. So too do concerns that informal housing lowers the tone of an area, thus affecting property values. There are similar concerns voiced over the siting of social housing – including the current (2009) Prime Minister John Key’s statement that building state houses adjacent to up-market
housing in a planned mixed development in west Auckland would be ‘economic vandalism’ (Rudman, 2008).

Greenacres Caravan Park was closed down, and residents forced to leave. While some study participants faced various compliance issues, their particular informal housing situations tended, unlike Greenacres, to be relatively inconspicuous. As one TCDCI key informant said, “We’ve got enough problems without going out to look for them”. Council staff were also aware that by enforcing compliance they could make life more difficult for people who lacked financial resources to comply, and/or had no alternate housing options. Thus there is a tension between legislation requiring compliance, and the everyday reality of many peoples’ lives which makes compliance problematic.

Collisions over what is ‘adequate’ reflect differences in perceptions and values. While buses, caravans, vans and garages are not legally considered adequate permanent dwellings, many participants considered them so. Similarly, many Coromandel participants living on their own land and/or planning to build, questioned the need for septic tanks, reticulated and treated water supplies or mains electricity; these might be necessary in urban areas, because a lack of them potentially put people at risk, but not in rural areas, they argued. Building specifications, including a ban on the use of second-hand timber for houses, which put houses which complied outside the financial reach of several participants who wanted to build their own, were also questioned.

Cultural collisions over concepts of land reflected differences in perceptions and values between the mainstream and many study participants. These included differences between ideas of land as a commodity to buy and sell versus something held in trust; and land to develop economically versus guardianship and conservation.

The above collisions between mainstream views of housing and land and those expressed by many participants on the Coromandel and a handful in Auckland can also be viewed in terms of an overarching collision between mainstream consumer/materialist values versus values of low-cost living and self-sufficiency. These were expressed by Māori and Pākehā alike. However a collision over requirements to pay rates on land related only to Māori participants – and then only to the few who felt there was no legal reason why they should pay rates. These participants felt they were guaranteed title to the land through the British Crown, not the government of Aotearoa/New Zealand, which was described as ‘a New South Wales settlers’ parliament, residing in Wellington’ (‘It doesn’t sit quite right with us’, Chapter Fourteen).

DISCUSSION
Several paradoxical situations also surfaced in this study. Different perceptions of 'home', for instance, led to the same seeming paradox identified by Keams (2006) amongst rural Māori of participants who, while not having a home in terms of the everyday definition of a house or flat, nevertheless felt very much 'at home'. Differences in perception of what constitutes adequate housing and concepts of health led to another paradox – of 'poor housing' being seen by several participants as 'good' for health, as noted above. And different perceptions of what constitutes 'independence' produced a seeming paradox of participants dependent on the State in terms of receiving a social benefit still stressing their independence.

Reflecting on the methodology

[There is] a long humanist tradition...of attempting to understand the meaning of behaviour and experiences from the perspectives of the individuals involved.

(Elliott, 2005:124)

The aim of this study has been to present an overview of the phenomenon of informal housing, exploring a wide range of living situations in terms of material conditions, the people who lived in them and their perceptions and experiences. It has been 'an exploration, elaboration and systematization' (Banister et al., 1994), using an applied ethnographic framework underpinned by broad phenomenological and hermeneutic approaches. While the urban and rural samples have captured a diversity of both structures and 'householders', this does not presume to be a complete overview. The use of in-depth qualitative methods, rather than a large scale quantitative survey, precluded identifying the size of the 'problem' or all the possible permutations of informal housing. I am aware of the many informal housing structures, the people living in informal situations, and the many perceptions and experiences I have not 'captured'.

I am also aware of the propensity of thematic analysis to look for similarities in situations. In so doing so, I have not meant to collapse intra-group differences, although inevitably this has happened. Categorising participants is part of the process of making meaning from the data; however, it is important to keep in mind that all the individuals do not share all of the characteristics assumed by a categorisation, and nor are categories mutually exclusive. Over-generalisation and over simplification are acknowledged methodological difficulties (Ezzy, 2002).
The phenomenological and hermeneutic underpinnings of this applied ethnography have meant an acceptance of participants’ narratives as a reflection of their experiences and perceptions, including definitions of their housing. This has created tensions between the ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ status of participants’ housing, between participant and mainstream perceptions and definitions. Most of the participants in this study did not view themselves as homeless, for instance, even though by many definitions they might be considered so, because they did not live in a house or flat with secure tenure (and some in Auckland had only rudimentary shelter). Nor did many consider their housing ‘temporary’, which is why this term was rejected as a definition of participants’ housing early in the study, and the term ‘informal’ (Haarhoff, 1984) substituted. Participants accepted the use of the term ‘informal’ to categorise their housing. While many participants interviewed in the UK for an ethnographic study into rural ‘homelessness’ (Cloke & Milbourne, 2006) likewise did not consider themselves homeless, they were categorised as such by the researchers – and deemed to be ‘wrong’ and hindering efforts to help the homeless by downplaying the size of the problem. The same criticism could be levelled at this study: that by not categorising those in informal housing as ‘homeless’ as others in Aotearoa/New Zealand have (Chan, 2005; Roberts, 2004, personal communication), the study minimises the problem of the lack of availability of sufficient adequate housing, because while ‘homeless’ clearly identifies a housing lack, ‘informal’ is merely a neutral description and does not.

With the reliance on one in-depth and one follow-up interview with each participant for data collection I am aware participants’ narratives were produced at just one (or two) moment(s) in time, in one particular setting to one particular person – myself, a Pākehā settler researcher (Jones & Jenkins, 2008). Narratives and narrative identities are not immutable (Elliott, 2005). They are context and time sensitive. Can we know, for instance, how satisfied or dissatisfied participants really were with their caravans, their sheds, their buses and vans; how many would have talked about preferring a ‘proper’ house if interviewed at another time in another situation? A well-designed questionnaire calculated to establish consistency may have provided a better indication of this than open-ended interviews; but such an approach would also have precluded the richness of data which the interviews have provided.

In retrospect I would have included a photo-voice component, with participants photographing their own informal housing situations, but I was unaware of photo-voice as a methodology at the beginning of this study in 2002. I took snap-shots of some of the participants’ informal housing as part of the ethnographic record; but having participants
photograph their own ‘lifeworlds’ would have allowed access to different perspectives, less shaped by the researcher and potentially attending to more mundane matters that do not emerge in an interview situation (Radley & Taylor, 2003). This may also have provided more possibilities for teasing out satisfactions and dissatisfactions than were afforded by the interviews alone.

Fine and colleagues (2000) discuss the difficulties inherent in trying to portray ‘the other’. I have attempted to walk alongside participants (van Manen, 1990), rather than ‘other’ them. However, I have remained an outsider. This outsider status, while on the one hand potentially hindering my ability to present participants’ narratives from their standpoint, has on the other been useful in making me more aware of ‘contested meanings’ and ‘cultural collisions’ (Chambers, 2000:858; Fadiman, 1997). The applied ethnographic approach of this thesis has focused on uncovering contested meanings and cultural collisions with existing mainstream discourses, providing both a broader understanding of the phenomenon of informal housing and uncovering alternative housing and health discourses. This is important in terms of effective housing policy, for as Benton and colleagues (2002b, Vol.1:3) argue, “those who make and implement policy...need to see the world through a variety of angles and through more than one lens.” Highlighting cultural collisions points a tentative way forward.

Like Fine and colleagues (2000) I agree that participants and their observations “deserve to be placed within historical and social contexts”, and hence the contextualising Background, Literature Review and Media Discourses chapters. These bring to light tensions between the different discourses/narratives of informal housing presented by many participants and re-presented by myself, and the role of underlying structural determinants. Placing participants’ narratives within historical and present day socio-economic contexts has allowed an understanding of the role these play in informal housing while at the same time acknowledging the narratives of participants not just as the “result of pre-existing social facts”, but also “as a resource for social expression” (Johnstone, 1997:316).

A potential pitfall of the ethnographic approach adopted is a tendency to be drawn to ‘the good story’, the eccentric and the quotable quote, at the expense of the more representative mundane, because the former are more interesting – and because an interesting ‘story’ is more likely to catch the attention of those with the power to effect change. Again like Fine and colleagues (2000:118), I have had to take care not to construct a narrative “spiked only with the hot spots”. I was particularly mindful of this when going through the transcripts to create the poems; and I am aware that those which are the most memorable, the most touching, are
those that are indeed ‘spiked with hot spots’. However, the writing of the poems has been another attempt to “respect the integrity of the informants’ consciousness and narratives” (Fine et al., 2000:120), as well as, to use Denzin and Lincoln’s (2000a)words, make ‘more understandable their worlds of experience’.

I am aware that this thesis is not just about participants’ narratives; that the analysis of these, the presentation of background information, themes and poems – the whole meaning-making process which has built up this montage – is in itself a narrative. As Elliott (2005:13) says,

\[\ldots \text{researchers make selections, have opinions about what is significant and what is trivial, decide what to include and what to exclude, determine the boundaries, or beginnings and endings of their accounts.}\]

Transcribing and coding an interview conducted with myself by a colleague alongside the participants’ interviews allowed for reflection of both the interviewing and analysing processes (Bolam et al., 2003); allowed me to be aware of similarities and differences between my own housing and health narratives and participants’ narratives, and to be mindful of the possible influences of my own perceptions of housing and health during the writing process. Cross-checking coded transcripts and emerging themes with my academic supervisors provided opportunities to further reflect on, and ground interpretations in the data. However, just as the presentation and meaning of participants’ narratives depends on ‘the social context in which they are produced’, so too does the meaning of this thesis/narrative. The ‘social context’ in this instance includes a combination of my own ‘lifeworld’ (contained within the wider socioeconomic context); values of social justice and integrity; and academic requirements and practices, including standards of academic rigour (see Chapter Five, Methodology).\textsuperscript{120}

How well have I fulfilled van Manen’s (1990) requirements of the hermeneutic research process? A ‘phenomenon which seriously interests me’ – informal housing – has been thoroughly explored, and ‘lived rather than conceptualised experience’ investigated through the in-depth interviews; ‘essential themes’ have been reflected upon and ‘described’ – with ‘a scholarly relationship’ maintained, along with a ‘balance between a consideration of the parts and the whole’ during the process. This has produced an account which, while not definitive and generalisable to all of those living in informal housing, nevertheless has a ‘sensibleness’

\textsuperscript{120} Given the applied ethnographic focus of this thesis, accessibility, and dissemination of research findings are also important considerations (Chambers, 2000). Efforts already made to raise issues which have emerged from participants’ narratives and to ‘give them a voice’ are outlined in Appendix E. More conference presentations, academic articles and poetry presentations will follow.
(Packer, 1985) about it; an account which has significant implications for both further research and for policy.

**Ethical considerations and dilemmas**

Ethical issues often arise as part of the research process, unanticipated during planning.

(Rice & Ezzy, 1999:40)

A major ethical question I have as I reflect on the research process concerns the Māori participants in this study. This thesis topic was not about investigating Māori housing, values or processes, and I agree with Tolich (2002) that leaving Māori out of an investigation into informal housing because the researcher happened to be Pākehā would not have been fulfilling commitments under the Treaty of Waitangi. I consulted with kaumatua before embarking on my interviews; I did not ask specific Māori-Pākehā’ cultural questions; I was not exploring Māori/Pākehā (or Pacific) difference: rather this thesis has been about establishing an overview of an area where there was none. But there are deeper levels of meaning, including specific cultural meanings for the many Māori in informal housing yet to be uncovered and outside the scope of this thesis. Collaboration with a Māori researcher would have made it possible to explore some of these (Jones & Jenkins, 2008).

How much or how little to become involved in the lives of participants was another ethical issue. On occasions there was an impetus to ‘help’, coupled with a concern that this might jeopardise my ‘researcher’ role, as well as set up on-going expectations which I could not meet. I was very aware of how much materially better off I was than most of the participants, and of how much in need some participants were. Generally caution and time constraints precluded more than the odd friendly gesture (some Leggo of my now-grown sons for the young son of one participant; a follow-up visit with supplies to another struggling with young children who had little support; information about extra entitlements and educational opportunities passed on to others), over and above the two research interviews.

However I did intervene, after discussion with my primary supervisor, in the case of a young couple with two pre-school children, because of concerns for the children’s wellbeing. With the couple’s permission the transcript of our interviews and other details were forwarded to HNZC head office in Wellington. The response of HNZC was that there were many families in the same plight; that having been brought to their attention they would follow the case up, but there was a long waiting list and they were reluctant to encourage ‘queue-jumping’. Eight months later the couple were settled in an HNZC house, although I suspect
this had nothing to do with my interventions – except perhaps that ongoing contact with the
couple may have motivated them in their own dealings with HNZC. The efficacy of
intervention in the case of a just-fourteen-year-old girl living on the streets was also
questionable. I offered her a place to stay temporarily and put her in touch with her mother,
but this did not ‘rescue’ her from the street – although it may have helped to keep her safe, at
least for some time.

This research has not been participatory action research, with the primary goal of
empowering participants and transforming lives (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988); but I have
attempted, in the participatory action research tradition, to be “humanistic, holistic, and
relevant to the lives of human beings” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b:376). When it seemed
harmful not to intervene, I intervened and do not think that these ‘humanistic’ interventions
have jeopardised in any way the integrity of the research findings.

Strengths and limitations of the study

This study of forty participants, providing an overview of informal housing and showing the
diversity of both participants and their living situations, has been conducted with
methodological, interpretative and ethical rigour. Transcripts have been carefully transcribed
and cross-checked with participants; systematic coding has been cross-checked with my
academic supervisors. The interpretative analyses are linked to concrete statements from the
data.

The range of theoretical approaches, information sources, research methods and modes
of interpretation employed have provided ‘crystalization’ (Richardson, 2000). The health
survey results, for instance, confirm interview findings in terms of participants’ perceptions of
their health and wellbeing. This has further ensured academic rigour, and thus the
dependability of the findings.

The maximum variation sampling (Rice & Ezzy, 1999) means one can have some
confidence that both the diverse range of those living in informal accommodation and a wide
variety of their experiences and perceptions were captured. Similarly, while the findings
primarily relate to the two groups of participants interviewed, one can have some confidence
that perceptions and experiences which emerged in participants’ narratives are transferable to
others in informal housing situations. However, there are a number of limitations which must
be considered.
The comparatively smaller number of Auckland participants, while capturing the diversity of informal housing in the city, has not allowed urban-rural distinctiveness to be as fully explored as it could have been. The imbalance in sample size may also have led to greater emphasis on the experiences of Coromandel participants (two fifths of the study sample) and their more positive perceptions of informal housing. Including another ten Auckland participants in informal housing to even up the numbers may well have captured a greater proportion of narratives stressing the disadvantages of informal housing and brought a greater focus on issues of poverty and debt, and specific issues faced by families with young children living in informal housing. Such findings could then possibly have provided enough material to apply lenses such as dependence or debt to the data, as a counter-balance to the pioneering lens of *Echoes of a Pioneering Past* Chapter Eight. As it is, these factors are merely named and commented upon. Similarly, there has been little examination of gender differences, or the specific issues faced by families with children living in informal housing, including issues of safety. This should be a focus of future research on informal housing, along with an exploration of the experiences and perceptions of the children.

Time constraints and ethical considerations meant the perceptions and experiences of children in informal housing were not part of this study. Further research into informal housing should include interviews with children to give a fuller picture of the phenomenon, and address issues specifically pertaining to children’s developmental needs (Grotberg, 1995; Morrow, 2003; Spencer & Woolley, 2000). Gleeson and Sipe (2006) note research shows children have very different perspectives on home and place and wellbeing from adults. The general absence of the perspectives of children was highlighted during two interview situations where the children present became engaged in the interview process and made comments.

Interviewing people in government provider organisations such as WINZ and HNZC would make cultural collisions between the lifeworlds of those in informal housing and those in authority dealing with them clearer; and the generation of “productive exchanges at the border of competing or clashing ‘situations’” (Gergen & Gergen, 2000:1032) could potentially lead to more effective housing policy, with improved housing for those on the margins. There is often a degree of disconnection between the purposes of policy and delivery and implementation. Thus in-depth interviews with frontline staff which explored their perspectives and experiences would be useful and a fruitful avenue for further research.
Other areas of suggested research which would increase understanding of the phenomenon of informal housing and provide evidence for policies aimed at improving housing for those on the margins include: establishing a more accurate measure of the number of people in informal housing; further research into general perceptions of what constitutes ‘adequate’ housing in Aotearoa/New Zealand and the experiences of different population groups in a variety of housing situations to explore commonalities with this study; projections of general housing need and type; and investigating different and complementary roles that government, the private sector and the community sector could play to ensure the provision of affordable housing for all.

Policy implications

When decisions are taken that something must be done about a problem, the nature of the proposed action will depend on prevailing notions of what is causing the problem. (Whitehead, 2007:473)

So what are the policy implications of the findings of this study? The findings show considerable differences between the Auckland and Coromandel samples; many participants feeling the advantages of their informal housing situations outweigh the disadvantages; a diversity of meanings of taken-for-granted concepts of home and health which challenge current narrow societal definitions; and alternative perceptions which confront norms of ‘adequate housing’ and what constitutes health risk. As such norms underpin legal standards and regulations, the findings also challenge the ‘one-size fits all’ nature of current standards and regulations. The findings show lack of financial resources and affordable housing were key pathways into informal housing, and that psychosocial factors such as having a sense of choice, a sense of belonging and being satisfied with one’s living situation (or not) appeared to mediate the ‘poor housing/poor health’ relationship. They appear to suggest that some people are fine living in informal housing, while others are not.

By expanding mainstream housing and health discourses and highlighting ‘cultural collisions’, the findings point a tentative way forward: building on the resilience and resourcefulness of those who want to remain in their informal housing, and providing alternatives for those who do not. However, as Whitehead (2007) notes above, any policy decisions will ‘depend on prevailing notions of what is causing the problem’. Thus policy options likely to be considered will depend on whether people in informal housing are viewed as the problem; whether existing standards and regulations are seen as the difficulty; or whether underlying structural determinants are seen as the root cause of informal housing.
Policy options will also depend on prevailing values. While social justice and reducing inequalities are a focus of this study, they are not necessarily a primary goal of governments, or their constituents. In a democratic society, political realities dictate that policies must be in line with constituent opinion, at least to some extent. Results from the 2005 New Zealand Values Survey (Carroll et al., 2008a) show less than half of those surveyed were in favour of increased taxes for subsidised mortgages or government-owned houses for those in housing need. Any policies requiring funding also depend on the resources available. Between eighty and ninety percent of government spending is already firmly committed. Thus even with a firm commitment to improving housing outcomes through increasing the supply of social housing, measures to ensure affordable housing for all and grants/loans made available to upgrade existing dwellings, there are many other calls on the remaining discretionary funding.

As stated in the Introduction, this study is indicative rather than definitive. In terms of specific policy recommendations, more research is required to determine both the size of the ‘problem’ and how representative the findings of this study are. The findings point towards a need to address problems caused by a one-size-fits-all approach to regulation and setting building and compliance standards so high many cannot meet them. However, there is a need for caution. For instance, while the gap between the ‘ideal’ standard on which regulations are based and the ‘reality’ of informal housing (and much existing mainstream housing stock) means thousands of people are currently living in ‘illegal’ dwellings, the present ‘grey area’ in terms of compliance also means most are not hassled over their non-compliance. Council officials are aware many lack alternative appropriate housing options. They do not want to enforce regulations which could result in people forced from their homes and left in worse situations.

Relaxing standards to bring the ‘ideal’ more in line with the ‘reality’ and setting differential standards acknowledging differences in situations (for example urban-rural differences, access to communal facilities) and differences in perception of what constitutes adequate housing, would still pose problems of deciding what standards needed to be met in which situations, for health and safety. Such a move could also be seen as perpetuating the existence of unhealthy and sub-standard housing (Lennon, 2004) and people in rental situations in particular could be placed at increased risk. It could also lead to a more ‘black-and-white’ approach to enforcement, potentially making life even more difficult for those in informal housing.
Relaxing present standards could also run the risk of institutionalising a two-tiered system of first and second class housing; of legitimising glaring housing inequalities. Such an approach was considered in terms of Māori housing in the 1950s as a way of dealing with substandard housing, and discarded, for the same reasons (Bierre et al., 2007). However, the reality is that thousands of people are living in informal housing in Aotearoa/New Zealand and are likely to be doing so for some considerable time. An explicit rather than tacit acknowledgement of their situations could potentially pave the way for grants/low interest loans to be made available, particularly in rural areas like the Coromandel where mainstream housing options are lacking, so that householders could improve their housing situations. The Housing New Zealand Rural Housing Programme is already in place in some rural areas to improve substandard housing. This could be extended so that those in informal housing who want to provide themselves with basic utilities, ensure a potable water supply and safe sanitation, could do so. Small loans could also be made available to the participants and others like them who were building simple, low-cost ‘homes’, but lacked the money to complete them. They neither required nor wanted a large mortgage.

The study findings, in also highlighting issues around the general lack of adequate affordable housing, potentially have wide-ranging implications for social policy. An evaluation of OECD countries shows universal programmes encompassing all citizens appear to be more efficient at reducing poverty and tackling social inequalities than a minimal safety net and/or targeted programmes focussing exclusively on those at the bottom of the social scale (Whitehead, 2007). Thus strategic investment in improving living conditions via more equitable distribution of public and private resources (Lynch & Kaplan, 2000) would benefit those who have ended up in informal housing at least in part because of a lack of financial resources. Similarly, a much needed increase in the overall supply of adequate, affordable housing would also benefit those in informal housing.

How could this be achieved? Housing affordability is a complex challenge, requiring a real commitment to the provision of housing for all and ingenuity in housing policies to solve. Over the decades successive governments in Aotearoa/New Zealand have had the goal of decent housing for every citizen, but failed to achieve this goal. Participants’ narratives, key informant interviews, housing research and media reports all indicate a continuing shortfall in affordable housing. This is a societal, not just an individual problem, leading, along with homelessness, informal housing and overcrowding, to macro-economic instability. A market failure to provide sufficient houses of the right type in the right places, coupled with speculation fuelled by easy access to loans and tax breaks for those investing in rental
accommodation saw house prices double in many parts of Auckland and on the Coromandel between 2000 and 2008. The impacts of the current recession and accompanying drop in house prices, has yet to be seen. House prices remain over-inflated (May 2009). Apart from putting home ownership beyond the reach of those on average incomes, this has also meant rent increases and burgeoning accommodation supplement payouts as those on low incomes struggle to cope, deflecting resources which might potentially be available for increasing state housing stock. Speculation has also meant decreased security of tenure for renters, with many owners waiting for just ‘the right time’ to sell off their investment properties. Security of tenure for renters is a major issue which needs to be addressed.

There would appear to be no ‘silver bullet’, no single solution to the housing affordability problem. To pursue security of occupation rather than one form of occupation – freehold title to a house with a mortgage – and guarantees of secure tenure for those in rental properties would seem fruitful policy directions. Pumping money in to encourage home ownership without also increasing supply, for instance, has merely served to push up house prices and exacerbate affordability issues. A combination of increased provision of state housing, third sector partnerships, planning instruments to encourage/ensure the building of affordable housing in the private market, and innovative approaches to making rental accommodation both accessible and affordable would seem to be required. However, there is minimal expansion in the number of state houses planned in the short term, with an emphasis on upgrading existing houses rather than building new ones. Similarly, while third sector partnerships have a role to play in the provision of affordable housing, their performance to date (less than a quarter of one percent of housing being built) and difficulties raising capital would suggest they are likely to remain only a niche player in the supply of affordable housing. Pensioner flats in Coromandel town and housing for Māori at Kennedy Bay/Heretaunga are examples of third sector partnerships on the Coromandel, while Habitat for Humanity’s thirty-two houses in South Auckland’s Clendon housing development and the planned Mission in the City development in Auckland’s CBD (see www.missioninthecity.org.nz) are Auckland examples.

Clearly neither state housing nor third sector initiatives are going to be able to make up the current affordable housing shortfall – let alone keep pace with future demand. The 20,000 additional state houses estimated to be required over the next decade to accommodate families in acute need (merely to keep pace with population increase and maintain the status quo), at $350,000 per house would represent a cost to the taxpayer of $7 billion – and does not include the cost of subsidising rents (Sneddon, 2009, personal communication). Such provision is
unlikely to happen, especially in the current economic circumstances (a world-wide recession) and political climate (the National Government more committed to personal than collective responsibility). Even less likely is a government commitment to tackle the estimated current shortfall of some 100,000 homes (at a cost of $35 billion).

Apart from its role as the provider of ‘housing of last resort’ and as a partner in third sector housing ventures, government also has a broader role in providing access to affordable housing. This was recognised with the passing of the Housing Affordability Act (2008)\textsuperscript{121} which enables local territorial authorities to make it more attractive for private developers to provide more low-cost accommodation, but stops short of requiring them to do so. Requirements that a certain percentage of all housing developments be ‘affordable’, land lease proposals, encouraging shared equity schemes and facilitating cohousing ventures\textsuperscript{122} (such as Earthsong Eco Neighbourhood in West Auckland), all have a role in increasing access to appropriate, affordable housing.

In terms of access to appropriate, affordable rental accommodation, an accommodation supplement subsidises those on low incomes in private rental accommodation to ensure they have access to housing; but considerable barriers remain for some. It has been suggested that the Government could act as guarantor for those unable to secure private rental accommodation (Sneddon, 2009, personal communication).

The policies to improve housing outlined above are only one part of the mix of policies required to reduce inequalities in health and wellbeing, for housing is but one of the many socioeconomic determinants of health and wellbeing, as discussed in the Literature Review. But it is a fundamental one. Whitehead (2007), in looking at ways of improving health and wellbeing outcomes, suggests a typology for action which includes strengthening individuals and communities, improving living conditions and advocating for healthy macro-politics. To be effective in reducing inequalities and improving health outcomes, housing policies too need to address issues at the individual and community level, to improve living conditions and advocate for economic and social policies that support improved housing outcomes for those living in informal housing.

\textsuperscript{121} Due to be revised by the present (2009) National Government.
\textsuperscript{122} Cohousing ventures are composed of private homes supplemented by extensive common facilities, with home owners joint shareholders in the land.
Concluding comments

Housing issues need to be given real prominence in planning and resource allocation decisions at both the national and local level, if policy initiatives based on research are to bring much-needed improvements in the health of vulnerable populations. (Bierre et al., 2007:60)

The aim of this thesis has been to ‘capture realities’ of people living in informal housing, thereby expanding and providing a counterpoint to dominant housing and health discourses by adding voices from the margins, and in so doing, play a role in shaping values (Nutley et al., 2007) and the way housing issues are conceptualised. To provide definitive instrumental evidence for specific policy changes has been beyond the scope of this thesis. However, participants’ narratives both highlight inequalities in access to good housing, and provide indicative evidence for possible ways forward to lessen the effects of these disparities on those living in informal housing. In terms of providing evidence for policy change, this investigation is just a beginning which, not surprisingly, raises as many questions as it provides answers (Weiss, 1987). Further qualitative and quantitative research is needed to more fully understand the complexities and the extent of the phenomenon.

However, the study fills a gap in the housing research literature, providing an overview of informal housing in Aotearoa/New Zealand and furthering understanding of the complexities of housing ‘choice’. It presents perceptions and experiences of the forty study participants within the overall context of housing in Aotearoa/New Zealand, past and present. Along with the findings from key informant interviews, this has allowed for a consideration of both specific issues of non-compliance and broader issues of housing affordability and accessibility, health and wellbeing.

The contextual material presented in the Prologue, Background, and Media Discourses chapters, the thematic analyses, poetry and photographs, together with the Discussion complete this ‘montage’ of informal housing. It reveals the ‘lifeworlds’ of participants, reflects on housing as a ‘catch-all’ term (Shaw, 2004) and nexus of everyday life (Dunn et al., 2004), and on home as a ‘metaphor for humanness’ (Bachelard, 1994). It shows the complexity of the relationships between housing, health and wellbeing. Participants’ voices coming through in the thematic analyses and the poetry challenge the ‘tyranny of the single story’ (Bruner, 2003) and highlight issues ‘worthy’ of policy consideration (Bryson, 1992). The ‘superimposed images’ have built on one another not only to create an overview of informal housing and its complexities, but also to bring ‘psychological and emotional unity’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a) to this montage.
Figure 15.1 (below) extends Figure 1.1 in the Introduction. It illustrates the interconnectedness of the thematic findings chapters, nested within the research methodologies adopted and the particular characteristics and living situations of the study participants - Methodology and Demographics. The Pathways In chapter describes the various triggers which led participants into informal housing, while Sense of Home, Sense of Health and Pioneering Echoes capture differing perceptions of home, place and health, and associations of these with different informal housing choices and levels of satisfaction/dissatisfaction - Pros and Cons - and thus motivation to find Pathways Out (or not). The findings chapters are in turn encompassed within the broad social, political and economic contexts of Aotearoa/New Zealand - Background and Media Discourses - which constrained individual choice and reinforced existing inequalities, as explored in the Literature Review. Figure 15.1 further illustrates how study findings can broaden housing and health discourses, feed into public debate and the policy sector, generate further research questions and influence policy and practice.

Figure 15.1: Framework for the montage of informal housing and dissemination of findings

DISCUSSION

323
Making research findings accessible to those with the power to bring about change and presenting possibilities for moving forwards are part of the ‘criteria for utility’ for an applied ethnographic study such as this (Chambers, 2000). Thus there is a commitment to disseminate research findings so that participants’ perceptions can in fact feed into dominant discourses and the policy sector (Appendix E).

As Bierre and colleagues (2007) note above, housing issues must be given ‘real prominence in planning and resource allocation’ to ensure better housing, an increase in the supply of affordable housing and improved access. However, it seems that there is neither agreement that structural, rather than individual, deficits are the root cause of housing problems, nor a strong enough commitment – which would require the ‘haves’ to relinquish some of their privileged position to ensure better housing for the ‘have nots’ (see cartoon, Appendix D) – to effectively tackle housing issues.

Perhaps we need to consider whether we are attempting to live beyond our means in terms of housing standards, just as we have been with unsustainable levels of household and national debt. Our perceptions of what is an adequate family home (fuelled by media images, the consumer society and middle-class North American standards) have changed, with greatly increased expectations of space and amenities. House sizes, (and numbers of bathrooms) have gone up as household sizes have come down. Perhaps there is not enough money in the public coffers to finance sufficient social housing, to repair and up-grade existing aging stock and to make land and money available for shared equity schemes; and not enough money in the private purse for ‘ordinary people’ to realise the New Zealand dream of owning their own home. Perhaps we need to accept that informal housing will remain part of our housing mix indefinitely.

Maybe, while doing everything possible to increase the supply of affordable housing, to ensure more equality of access to decent housing and to upgrade existing substandard housing (including 900,000 mainstream houses which do not meet current insulation standards), we also need to assist those in informal housing – and to accept that, for some, informal housing is a choice based on different values and different priorities, and is not necessarily injurious to health and wellbeing. Haarhoff (1984) has suggested informal housing could be viewed as part of the solution to shortages of affordable housing, and has the benefit of allowing people to produce housing for themselves which they can afford. Many Coromandel participants, for instance, did not see the need for a standard house with ‘mod cons’. This appeared to be a
function of environmental values, family and place being more important than ‘space’, as well as options limited by lack of financial resources.

The focus in this study on participants’ perceptions and experiences rather than structural determinants has been to assure the ‘integrity of the human subject’ (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). This is not to deny the effects of socioeconomic inequalities on health and wellbeing, but rather to assert that, notwithstanding structural determinants, people also make their own history, determine what is best for their own health and wellbeing. Similarly, acknowledging the resourcefulness of many participants in providing their own housing is not to deny the need, both in terms of social justice and societal self interest, to tackle underlying inequalities. As Tarata, living with her daughter for eight years in an old caravan, said: “You get used to it, learn to cope – but we shouldn’t have to, ay…”
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Appendix A

INFORMATION SHEET

Capturing Realities of Temporary Housing in New Zealand

Researcher Penelope Carroll

Thank you for agreeing to consider taking part in the temporary housing study. We would like to invite you to discuss your housing, your health, your general sense of well-being.

About the study: The Department of Statistics gathers information on people’s housing and their health. Now I want to hear more from your point of view. I am asking a small number of people to talk about the things which are important to them about their housing and health. I would like to talk to you at a time and place that suits you. The interviews will take between 1-2 hours and I would like to record the interviews.

The interviews will then be typed up and only the researcher will read them. There will be no information that will allow you to be identified by anyone else. Once they have been typed up, the tapes will be wiped.

Benefits and risks of participation: By helping us with this study you will help us understand how to make housing and access to health care and other services better in New Zealand.

If you decide to take part in the study and later change your mind, you can withdraw.

Confidentiality: All information will be treated in the strictest confidence and will not be passed on to anyone else. No material identifying you will be used in any reports on this study. All information collected will be stored safely and securely.

This study has received ethical approval from the Waikato and Auckland Ethics Committees.

General: If you have any queries or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study you may wish to contact a Health and Disability Services Consumer Advocate, ph (09) 373 1060.

You can contact the researcher at any stage of the research and following the completion of the interviews by calling (07) 866 8971 or (09) 376 7036

(The information sheet was distributed on University of Otago, Wellington, letterhead paper.)
Appendix B

Participant Consent Form

Study Title: Capturing Realities of Temporary Housing in New Zealand

I have read and understand the information sheet for people taking part in the research project about temporary housing in New Zealand. I have had the opportunity to discuss this study. I am satisfied with the answers I have been given.

I understand that my participation in this study is confidential and that no material that could identify me will be used in any reports in this study.

I have had time to consider whether to take part and I know who to contact if I have any questions about the study.

I understand all information will be totally confidential

I consent to an interview being audio-taped

I…………………………………………………………hereby consent to take part in this study.

If you have any concerns about the study, you may contact:
The Waikato Ethics Committee, Hamilton, ph (07) 8587021; or the Auckland Ethics Committee, ph (09) 580 9000.

Signature: Date:

Researcher and interviewer: Penelope Carroll, (07) 866 8971 or (09) 3767 036

(The consent form was distributed on University of Otago, Wellington, letterhead paper.)
Appendix C

Scaling options for the two SF-36 versions

With Role Physical and Role Emotional fields, instead of the either/or “Yes”/”No” option of the Australia/New Zealand (standard) version, respondents had a five-point scale (“all of the time”, “most of the time”, “some of the time” “a little of the time” and “none of the time”) to choose from.

For the purpose of analysis, two different ways were chosen to deal with this (see table 10.1 below): the first equated ‘none’ with ‘no’ and all the other options with ‘yes’; the second collapsed ‘a little of the time’ and ‘none’ into ‘no’, while the other three options remained ‘yes’.

Table 10.1 Coding schemes used for both versions for Role Physical and Role Emotional

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intended version</th>
<th>coding</th>
<th>Other version</th>
<th>Option one</th>
<th>Option two</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>All of the time</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Most of the time</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Some of the time</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A little of the time</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>None of the time</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the Bodily Pain scale (see Table 10.2 below), one of the two questions offered a five-point response scale while there were six response options to the questions in the Australia/New Zealand version.

Table 10.2 Coding scheme for Bodily Pain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intended version</th>
<th>coding</th>
<th>Other version</th>
<th>Option one</th>
<th>Option two</th>
<th>Option three</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very mild</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>Very mild</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mild</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Severe</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very severe</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>Very severe</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The six point scale of the intended version gave a maximum of 1.2 points between the options. Leaving the scores the same, and just removing the ‘mild’ option, meant a gap of 2.3 points out of a possible total of 5 points (option one), a large gap numerically between very mild and moderate. Another option considered (option two) was to rescale, spreading the numerical options out. However this would have meant large differences at the mild end of the scale compared with the standard version. It was decided to use a hybrid (option three) which kept scoring values closer to the standard version for both the high and the low end of the scale (see table 10.2 above).

Similarly in the General Vitality and Mental Health fields, while the intended New Zealand/Australian version offered six possible responses, there were only five options in the other version (see table 10.3 below).

Table 10.3 Vitality and Mental Health coding schemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intended version</th>
<th>coding</th>
<th>Other version</th>
<th>Option one</th>
<th>Option two</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All of the time</td>
<td>1 (6)</td>
<td>All of the time</td>
<td>1 (5)</td>
<td>1 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of the time</td>
<td>2 (5)</td>
<td>Most of the time</td>
<td>2 (4)</td>
<td>2 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A good bit of the time</td>
<td>3 (4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some of the time</td>
<td>4 (3)</td>
<td>Some of the time</td>
<td>3 (3)</td>
<td>4 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little of the time</td>
<td>5 (2)</td>
<td>A little of the time</td>
<td>4 (2)</td>
<td>5 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the time</td>
<td>6 (1)</td>
<td>None of the time</td>
<td>5 (1)</td>
<td>6 (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This scale fell in a more natural division of options and so it was decided to simply leave the numerical scale as it was for the Vitality and Mental Health fields in the other version.

Scores were calculated on each scale by adding the codes for individual questions together. These were

APPENDIX C 353
converted to a 0-100 value by subtracting the minimum possible total score, dividing the result by the possible range of scores and multiplying by 100. The averaged participant scores were then compared to the New Zealand norms (Scott et al., 1999) with T-tests used to test for statistically significant differences.

The table below sets out results of the SF-36 showing both versions and different scaling options. It is not possible to determine an effect size due to the use of the different versions because of the low number of respondents involved – only two for ‘other’ in Coromandel; and three for ‘intended’ in Auckland.

Table 10.4 SF-36 New Zealand norms with comparisons of averaged Coromandel and Auckland participant results (both versions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>National average</th>
<th>Coromandel</th>
<th>Coro</th>
<th>Coro</th>
<th>Auckland</th>
<th>Auck</th>
<th>Auck</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Intended (n=19)</td>
<td>Other (n=2)</td>
<td>Overall average</td>
<td>Intended (n=3)</td>
<td>Other (n=10)</td>
<td>Overall Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PF</td>
<td>86.0</td>
<td>88.9</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>87.6</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>92.5</td>
<td>91.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP1</td>
<td>80.7</td>
<td>69.7</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>69.0</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>59.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP2</td>
<td>80.7</td>
<td>69.7</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>69.0</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BP1</td>
<td>77.9</td>
<td>77.5</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>79.6</td>
<td>57.7</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>62.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BP2</td>
<td>77.9</td>
<td>77.5</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>79.6</td>
<td>57.7</td>
<td>63.5</td>
<td>62.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BP3</td>
<td>77.9</td>
<td>77.9</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>79.6</td>
<td>57.7</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>62.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GH</td>
<td>73.8</td>
<td>79.7</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>78.1</td>
<td>64.7</td>
<td>69.6</td>
<td>68.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VT1</td>
<td>65.6</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td>56.3</td>
<td>68.0</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>46.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VT2</td>
<td>65.6</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>68.1</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>46.0</td>
<td>47.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SF</td>
<td>86.6</td>
<td>84.9</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>83.9</td>
<td>79.2</td>
<td>73.8</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RE1</td>
<td>85.0</td>
<td>82.5</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>84.1</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>73.3</td>
<td>69.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RE2</td>
<td>85.0</td>
<td>82.5</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>84.1</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>76.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MH1</td>
<td>78.0</td>
<td>78.7</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>79.6</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td>64.5</td>
<td>63.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MH2</td>
<td>78.0</td>
<td>78.7</td>
<td>88.0</td>
<td>79.6</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td>66.4</td>
<td>65.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The tables were compiled in conjunction with biostatistician/data manager Helen Viggers (Department of Public Health, University of Otago, Wellington).
WHAT WE NEED TO DECIDE IS HOW THE BIRDS CAN BE MORE IN CONTROL OF THEIR OWN ENVIRONMENT!
Appendix E

Dissemination of thesis findings (May 2009)

Preliminary research findings fed into redefining 2006 Census dwelling categories, the HNZC submission process for *Building the Future: Towards a New Zealand Housing Strategy* discussion document (Housing New Zealand Corporation, 2005), and into workshops to review the Building Act 2004, and Aotearoa/New Zealand Building Codes.

Conference presentations include:

2007: Public Health Association Conference: *The Widening Gap: Perceptions of Inequalities and Implications for Public Health*; and *Giving a Voice to Those on the Margins: exploring the realities of housing inequalities*

2006: Public Health Association Conference: *Towards a sustainable public health – exploring aspects of wellbeing/wairuatanga*

2004: Public Health Association Conference: *DIY housing and DIY health*; Primary Care Conference Research Forum: *No fixed abode: how do those in temporary accommodation access health care?*

2003: SAANZ Conference: *Capturing realities of temporary housing: how temporary is temporary?*

2002: SAANZ Conference: *Dominant media discourses in housing*


Poems from the thesis have been presented at various venues, including the Wellington School of Medicine, Public Health Association conferences and some public poetry readings. The photograph below is from a poetry reading in Thames (Coromandel) in April 2009.