RESIDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON LIVING IN INNER CITY MEDIUM DENSITY HOUSING

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INTRODUCTION

With a degree of boosterist exuberance, a recent piece in the *Newcastle Herald* argues that the inner city of Newcastle is in transition. At the centre of this transition are residents:

> Newcastle has become hip. No one is exactly sure when, or even how it happened, but somewhere after the closure of BHP the city has lived up to what has become a much-used phrase - it has moved from steel city to style city. … Much of the change has taken place around the foreshore, where the Honeysuckle urban renewal project has Novocastrians and visitors working, living and playing … The latest figures on Honeysuckle are astounding: … more than 5000 jobs created, some 2500 people working in the area and 1920 residents calling it home. (Watson 23rd June 2011)

This change in the residential make-up of the inner city in recent years has led another *Herald* commentator to name the presence of a 'new high-rise society' (Thompson 29th May 2010), made up of an apparently distinct grouping of residents associated with the city's growing stock of medium density housing. Such residents are commonly constructed as being drawn to the cosmopolitan array of services and facilities available in inner city environments and are frequently presented in the form of individual and household archetypes, like 'empty nesters' and 'young professionals'. Cultivating an inner city where people can 'work, live and play' is a key element of Newcastle's ongoing development imperatives, and its inner city residents are a central part of that development.

Stories of property-led urban development and gentrification, like that of Newcastle, appear to be widespread in Australian cities. The role of residents in populating growing numbers of medium and high density housing stock in inner cities is, then, central to processes of contemporary urban change and requires close scrutiny. Indeed, many researchers are unpacking this, perhaps most notably in relation to planning and governance of the 'compact city' (Bunker et al 2002; Burton 2000; Buxton & Tieman 2004; Randolph 2006; Searle 2003). But, there has been little research on the experiences and perspectives of residents living in these newer examples of medium density housing. The lack of detailed empirical research into such residents' perspectives runs the risk of over-simplifying the way residents live in medium density residential environments. For Newcastle, its nascent 'new high-rise society' could become an ever-more meaningless term for residents of denser housing forms. This paper joins recent research into the lived experience of newer medium and high density housing (see Easthope & Judd 2010; Oakley & Johnson 2011) by reporting on what residents themselves claimed to be important to their residential experience.

Empirically, the paper examines inner city medium density housing residents' perspectives of living in their dwelling and/or building. It uses a case study of seven recently constructed, relatively expensive medium density housing developments within the inner city area of Newcastle NSW. The paper engages the concept of 'home' in the human geography literature and applies that concept to medium density housing as a site of homemaking practice. After outlining the case study and data collection methods, this argument is developed by detailing two key themes arising from the responses of residents regarding living in medium density, namely: maintenance and personalisation; and neighbouring. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of the findings and the role for further research on resident experience.

AT HOME IN MEDIUM DENSITY HOUSING?

The concept of 'home' means many things to many people. In a review of the literature, Mallet (2004: 63) explains the elusiveness of the concept:

> house or dwelling accommodates home but home is not necessarily confined to this place. The boundaries of home seemingly extend beyond its walls to the neighbo[u]rhood, even the suburb, town or city. Home is place but it is also a space inhabited by family, people, things and belongings – a familiar, if not comfortable space where particular activities and relationships are lived. In my account home is a virtual place, a repository for memories of the lived spaces.

From the work of Mallet and others we can accept that 'home' can be conceived as denoting interactions of geographical markers (such as places/spaces) with systems of meaning (such as attachment/belief/practice), that together produce sites of emotional, cultural and social significance (see Blunt & Dowling 2006; Dowling & Mee 2007).

In a sense, this paper engages the concept of 'home' in its most conventional guise: the dwelling as home. Popular and academic accounts frequently emphasise the strong connections between 'house' and 'home'; the former being the physical structure, and the latter an amalgam of the physical structure imbued with individual/collective meaning and significance (Dowling & Mee 2007; Mallet 2004). Researchers have examined the way houses are understood and made into homes (home-making) by examining the bonds between people and their housing, and relating that to the experiences of different household types, housing forms, and household practices (for an introduction see Blunt & Dowling 2006; Dowling & Mee 2007). Most importantly for this paper, past research places critical importance on *home-making practices* to the achievement of a home. Home-making practices can include, but are not limited to, everyday activities and routines, material cultures, and social relations (Blunt & Varley 2004; Gram-Hanssen & Bech-Danielsen 2004). Rather than a universal, linear path towards a sense of being-at-home, home-making practices are enacted with varying degrees of success by residents. Home is not, therefore, a predetermined reality, and for some, a feeling of being-at-home is an aspiration (Blunt & Dowling 2006).

This paper is explicitly concerned with the physical-material form of the medium density dwelling as a site of home-making. It contributes to a tradition that Jacobs & Smith (2008) recognise as the 'materialisation of home', which they argue needs to problematise analyses of housing and home as separable fields of inquiry. In the context of medium density dwellings, it is precisely this materiality – the internal and external physical arrangement of dwellings/buildings – that mediates and is shaped by residents' attachments, values and meaning, and that this paper argues is important to the way residents practice and attempt to be-at-home.

Before introducing the case study, it is useful to highlight recurring understandings within the Australian context about the relationships between ideas of 'home' and particular forms of housing that position the findings of this paper. In terms of housing form, medium density housing has operated, and continues to operate in the context of normative values that position detached housing as the ideal housing form (see Davison 1997, Lewis 1999). Costello (2005) points out that this may be related to the historically poor quality of medium density housing and its association with social disadvantage. More recently, the normative values privileging detached housing have been consistently challenged and disrupted through a renegotiation of the acceptability and adequacy (and often necessity) of medium density housing (Dowling & Mee 2007). With an increased presence in Australia's residential mix, medium density dwellings appear to be gaining legitimacy as acceptable 'homes'. Indeed, recent research has shown that many Australians feel 'at home' and make homes in medium density dwellings (McNamara & Connell 2007; Mee 2007). Commenting on the ideas underpinning the Australian home since Federation, Timms' (2008: 233) concurs, stating: 'although the suburban dream is still alive and well, it is no longer the only permissible dream'.

But, how much is known about the types of homes occupied and made by medium density housing residents? In the case of private, new-build inner city medium density housing, the answer is quite little. There is little empirical research on the material and social home-making practices that enable the achievement of home (exceptions being Easthope & Judd 2010; Oakley & Johnson 2011), despite the prominence of new-build medium density housing within popular and policy discourse. Reversion to caricature is tempting in this context, and Fincher & Gooder (2007) and Costello's (2005) work alludes to the common portrayal of inner city apartment residents as affluent and conspicuous consumers, seeking out the cosmopolitan offerings of the inner city. It is important, though, to move beyond simplified understandings that can overlook the varied values, motivations and habits of these residents. Within this context, this paper will examine home-making practices and the perspectives of medium density housing residents in inner city Newcastle NSW.

METHOD: CASE STUDY & DATA COLLECTION

This paper focuses on the inner urban area of the regional city of Newcastle NSW, located approximately 150kms north of Sydney. The study area incorporated the CBD and harbour areas of inner Newcastle, including the suburbs of Newcastle, Newcastle East, Cooks Hill, Newcastle West, Wickham and Maryville (see Figure 1).

A visual audit was conducted in the inner Newcastle area, confirming the location of newer medium density housing stock. Such housing generally conformed to either low-rise residential complexes (groupings of semi-detached/terrace style dwellings) (see Figure 2) or multi-storey apartment buildings (see Figure 3).

After the ages of potential buildings/complexes (hereafter 'study sites') were verified against Newcastle City Council Development Application records, seven study sites were included in the research. The ages of the study sites were verified for applicability within the category of 'newly built medium density housing', as opposed to the large stock of older medium density housing that is also a feature of inner Newcastle's gentrification (see Rofe 2000). All seven study sites had been occupied for less than 10 years, with many less than five years. Incomplete Council records prevented the verification of exact occupation dates.

Figure 1: Map of Case Study Area with Study Site Locations

Figures 2 & 3: Low-rise Residential Complex (Left) & Multi-storey Apartment Building (Right)

Primary data comprised the results of a resident questionnaire and follow-up in-depth interviews. The questionnaire was voluntary and anonymous, containing a mixture of quantitative and qualitative data. The questionnaire was distributed to 504 mail boxes, encompassing all households within the seven study sites. Approximately half were delivered to low-rise residential dwellings and half to apartment dwellings. In total, 73 questionnaires were returned, yielding a response rate of 14.5%. Follow-up semi-structured interviews were completed with 17 questionnaire participants. Interviews were used to investigate the underlying meanings and causes that informed residents' attitudes and behaviour (Cloke et al 2004), enabling a more detailed understanding of the processes of homemaking (Bradshaw & Stratford 2005; Hoggart et al 2002).

The findings of this paper provide a predominantly qualitative account of a particular group of residents – participating residents in inner Newcastle. With this in mind, the results are coloured by a range of features of this group. Comparing participants to the profile of their suburbs, they exhibited higher proportions of couple-centred households, mid-to-late age groups, higher income households, owner occupants, and had higher proportions of females. Due to the focus on resident-identified issues, the results do not generally differentiate residents' experiences on the basis of demographic features (i.e. gender, age, ethnicity) unless they have been identified by residents themselves. The implications of the participants will be discussed in the conclusion.

RESULTS: RESIDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON LIVING IN MEDIUM DENSITY

To provide some initial context to the findings it is important to acknowledge that residents reported high levels of satisfaction with their living arrangements. In total, 76% stated that they would not prefer to live in another type of dwelling, and no responses indicated that they would rather live in another location under their current circumstances. When asked to rate their satisfaction on a range of different aspects of their dwelling (i.e. build quality, space, privacy), over 85% of questionnaire respondents were either 'very satisfied' or 'fairly satisfied' on all counts, with the exception of 'own ability to make noise' (75%) and 'external noise' (63%). When asked 'do you feel that where you live is your home?' 82% indicated in the affirmative. Given this generally positive overall experience, it is worth pursuing what it was that residents derived high levels of satisfaction from and what helped them achieve a sense of being 'at home', and alternatively, for the 18% who did not consider where they lived as 'home', why this was the case. To begin to address these questions the following section is structured around two topics that correspond to recurring themes identified by residents: first, maintenance and personalisation; and second, neighbouring.

Maintenance and Personalisation

The problem of excess maintenance in previous dwellings and lower levels of maintenance in current dwellings were both prominent factors in the responses of residents, identified by 26% and 58% of questionnaire participants respectively. Reduced maintenance to the exterior and garden areas was most commonly mentioned. Although, some were motivated by the prospect of less interior maintenance, such as vacuuming, that would be experienced through a reduction in dwelling size. Of particular interest was the split between those who sought less maintenance for *lifestyle* related reasons and those who sought it due to self-identified *necessity*.

The most pronounced group cited less maintenance as something that would enhance their lifestyle, echoing findings in the literature on master-planned residential estates that identifies connections between lifestyle factors and residential choice (Dowling et al 2010). These residents' saw reduced maintenance as allowing time for other, more pleasurable, things:

> "We now have plenty of free time, no lawns to mow"

> "We enjoy unit living – no lawns or gardens to maintain"

Contrasting this were residents who sought a dwelling that required less maintenance because of the practicalities or necessities of their lives. Some desired a reduction in maintenance due to their lack of physical ability:

> "I was getting on in years, I'm 65 now turning 66 and that was probably six or seven years ago and I could see I wouldn't want to be there [in a detached house] when I was 65 or 66 with a yard"

some for work related reasons:

> "If I'm going to go away for a couple of weeks I need … something that I could literally walk into and walk out of - vacuum and that sort of stuff - no maintenance issues"

and those whose maintenance costs were becoming excessive and who sought a newer, smaller and therefore less costly dwelling to maintain:

> "Less time maintaining larger house built in 1960s. Inner city residence built less than five years ago did not need renovation"

In addition to maintenance, personalisation was a key feature of residents' accounts. As Dowling (2008: 540) states: "homemaking practices involve relations with and negotiations around objects", and for many residents arranging objects was the first step in materially creating a home. Many residents spoke of how when moving in, it was the arrangement of their dwelling that was the simplest way of creating a space that they felt comfortable and 'at home' in. As the following quote expresses:

> "I just think the minute you start moving your things in and start rearranging it, you come home and you feel comfortable there. When I would move home I reckon it would only take

me a couple of weeks to make it my home and I feel like it's home. I've never moved into a place that wasn't my home when I've got it arranged how I want it."

The arrangement of the dwelling emphasises how material possessions create a sense of familiarity for the household, incorporating the familiar materiality of residents' objects with unfamiliar surrounds. For residents of medium density housing, the act of moving house can involve downsizing the household's possessions, thereby reducing the amount one can fit into the dwelling so that only the most treasured or practical objects can be taken. The following quote shows both the importance of material objects to the household and how a 'compromise' was averted in moving to a large apartment:

"We had a little bit of a sale and gave away a lot of stuff, dispersed a bit around the family. A lot of people have to downsize to very small apartments…We didn't have to compromise and lose various special treasures or major pieces of furniture because we'd already downsized to a townhouse from another house. I don't feel we've had to compromise in making it a home."

As Dowling (2008) notes, objects with a long history are important in making home. One resident spoke of how his dwelling was made home by certain pieces of furniture that have been with the household over an extended period of time and when arranged create an instant sense of comfort:

"We've had some key pieces of furniture that's travelled all over the place with us, over the last probably seven or eight years we've moved probably six or seven times and a couple of the key pieces of furniture go with us, and as soon as we put them in, my wife says that as soon as they're in she feels like it's home, you know ... so it doesn't take long, she sorts that out and it makes me feel at home as well. "

For many, the arrangement of material objects created an almost immediate connection to their dwelling; effectively linking the new surrounds to the familiar meanings and memories that were connected to their possessions. Many framed this in terms of enabling 'comfort' and feeling 'comfortable' when their dwelling was arranged (see also Fenster 2005).

The appeal of a dwelling that was 'ready made' was another important factor. Residents commented that the relative newness of their dwelling meant that they did not need to renovate or alter the dwelling, or that because of this only a minimal amount of work was needed in order to feel comfortable or 'at home'. This was often positioned in opposition to detached housing that was thought to require more work to achieve similar quality standards.

However, alterations still played an important role for residents. The following resident explains the extensive changes she made to her dwelling:

"This was carpet and I had it tiled, I had the lighting changed, I changed the section of the entry, it had shelves and looked like a linen press to me, I made it look a bit more interesting. Then I made a themed courtyard, my courtyard is different from everyone else. I've just changed it. It's now subtle Moroccan, prior to that it had a Balinese theme. I like the fact that I have my own ideas about the garden, even my front garden is a bit different from everyone else. … I've painted some feature walls…I made my first bedroom into an office."

In contrast though, residents frequently identified limitations to their ability to personalise their surrounds. This was particularly acute for private renting households. Those who privately rented generally felt inhibited by not being able to make changes to their dwelling (eg. hanging pictures, installing furnishings/fittings). Renters also dominated the 18% of residents who reported that they did not feel at 'home' where they lived, with many explaining that the inability to personalise their residence perpetuated this feeling. Other research has similarly noted links between the ability to put a personal stamp on one's dwelling and a feeling of being 'at home' (Dowling 2008, Gorman-Murray 2007). Strata title conditions also posed limitations that were frequently acknowledged by both owner occupiers and renters. Some were angered by them, but many saw them as a fact of life that came with living in medium density:

"strata title (rightfully so) requires consistency in external appearance of all connected townhouses. But it is still a restriction compared to my previous house."

Residents' responses supported the claims made elsewhere, that the home is an important site for self expression and a tangible canvas in which residents reinforce and experiment with their identities (Gorman-Murray 2008). By *arranging* and *changing* the dwelling space residents created a representation of

themselves and/or their household. The arrangement of material objects and making changes to suit the tastes and needs of the household, in other words, allowed residents to render their values and beliefs into the fabric of the dwelling, acting as a material record of their identity, as the following quotes highlight:

> "when I walk in the front door, I feel a sense of security and comfort that I am home because of the 'feel' of the place. Everything I have in my home I own and it is an expression of who I am."

> "I believe in making my environment warm and inviting by having several paintings on the walls, lots of pot plants inside and out, cushions, etc …This house has become a home because it has a lot of my personality through it."

Taken together, personalisation and maintenance are not of themselves specific to home-making in medium density housing. For instance, the literature on 'home' points to practices of identity formation, like the practices of personalisation detailed above, to be quite a common precondition of a person's ability to feel at home (see for example Gorman-Murray 2008). The residents of medium density housing discussed here, therefore, have much in common with other inner city residents, such as students (McNamara & Connell 2007) and public housing tenants (Mee 2007). However, the interaction of the specific social features of residents (i.e. affluent, high proportions of owner occupiers) and the materiality of medium density housing (i.e. generally reduced private space, strata restrictions, interaction of private/communal/public spaces) works to condition the way residents attempt to make their homes. In other words, the social and the material coalesce through the medium density dwelling/building to produce specific ways of being-at-home.

Neighbouring

While interactions between residents and their dwelling environments were important aspects of home-making practice, medium density housing also raises issues about the quality and quantity of interactions with other residents. To try to understand how this was experienced, this subsection examines resident interactions through the lens of 'neighbouring'.

Above all else, the key difference in residents' responses about neighbouring concerned the separation between tenures; between 'owners' and 'renters'. One resident summarised the relationship as:

> "In apartment living there is almost an 'us and them' dynamic between renters versus owner occupiers"

The division between owners and renters was most often framed in terms of 'care'. Renters were perceived by owner-occupiers as taking less care with both common property (including lifts, foyers, pools, gymnasiums and gardens) and private property. One resident commented on the damage to common property that can be caused when people move in and out of his building:

> "It's probably the renters who tend to damage things. The number of removals in and out who damage things. Every time you look down there, there is a removal truck. Someone's moving in, someone's moving out and there's always damage done. They knock the walls and do things to the carpet."

Renters were also described by owner occupiers as taking less care with private property, as the following resident explains:

> "The owners you can always tell, [they] will have done something nice to the front entry of the property, their gardens that are exposed always look much nicer. Those that are renters you'll tend to see dead plants and weeds because not too many tenants care what the garden looks like and you'll see their front entry, there'll never be anything there except lots of shoes."

Comments about a lack of care by renters were often linked to a perceived lack of pride. Owners were cast as being 'house proud' residents, who took an interest in their surrounds and in maintaining their dwelling, where renters were believed to have weaker bonds to their housing and, therefore, less pride.

Complicating the owner/renter dynamic is the fact that many renters were perceived to be young in the eyes of presumably older owner-occupiers. The following resident highlights the issues of age at play that impact on interactions between renters and owners:

"So if they're loud and swearing, young people may occasionally be renting there, and they'll come home late on a Saturday night and the boyfriend and girlfriend will be having a fight. I've actually got up one night and gone out the front and said 'do you mind, people live here and we're trying to sleep' and they ran away really quickly. They were in their twenties. I reflected back on my twenties and we never thought about how much noise we were making either. Unless someone tells you, you seem not to think about it."

Younger and older residents are involved in claims over the boundaries of acceptable behaviour that exist in each building/estate. This was most noticeable in relation to issues of appropriate noise levels, where the 'excessive noise' of younger renters meant they were frequently seen as a disruptive and unwanted feature of the owners' residential experience. Due to the relative lack of renters in the resident sample, the perspective of the renting population can generally only be speculated, though the renters that did participate referred to the perceived sense of authority and entitlement that owners exerted and the feeling that renters were seen as less legitimate residents.

Apart from tensions around tenure, most residents felt that their neighbourly relations allowed them to feel respected and that the neighbourly environment was quite harmonious. Residents repeatedly explained, though, that their positive neighbourly experience was dependent on 'striking a balance' between privacy and contact; a balance that is not the same for each resident. While 94% of residents thought that their level of neighbourly contact was desirable, there was an almost equal split between residents who classed themselves as having 'minimal-to-no contact' with neighbours and those who classed themselves as having 'more than minimal' contact.

For the residents who stated that minimal-to-no contact characterised their neighbourly situation (53%), the reasons for such levels of contact were varied. Some residents worked irregular hours, while some worked business hours but were still on a different schedule, it would seem, to other residents:

"Most times I leave before most people are up, and get back when most people are already back and doing their own thing. I just do what I do and if you pass them you say 'hi'. …I think they tend to keep inside their houses, they probably do a lot of stuff during the day that we would do of a weekend and, because we're at work all week, you just don't see them."

This quote highlights the different ways people use their time and that these uses sometimes do not enable high levels of contact between neighbours (see Laurier et al 2002). In this case, it is not so much a conscious avoidance of neighbourly contact, rather, a reality of different lifestyles and daily schedules. For some other residents a perceived high rate of tenant turnover created a disincentive to establish links with neighbours, which saw many owner occupiers limiting their contact only to other owner occupiers. Some also commented that the physical design of the building/estate made neighbourly contact difficult:

"to be quite honest I see less of people and neighbours in an apartment building than I did living in a [suburban] neighbourhood. I live in what I call a vertical neighbourhood these days and I suppose if you were to put fifty homesteads side by side or across the road it would cover a fairly big block or suburb. But you see when you are coming home in a normal suburb you see people over the fence or across the road, whereas [here] you virtually don't see anybody."

The relatively low levels of neighbourly contact described above can be contrasted against the residents who believed that they had more than just minimal contact (47%). This group often cited the 'social environment' created by neighbours:

"We have regular gardening groups, which is another way of meeting other residents. Having the open spaces we often have outdoor gatherings of a social nature."

"it's really easy to walk fifty metres or twenty metres and the neighbours all know each other. A good example, in summer time I've got a friend who lives two blocks down and they were waiting for me to turn up for drinks one night and it took me about three quarters of an hour because I was talking to people on the way down and they were offering me drinks and saying 'I haven't seen you in ages, have a wine', and talking to people who were out on their balconies. … So it's just nice and social, you don't have to be that social, but if you want it [you can]"

Irrespective of residents' levels of neighbourly contact, residents expressed the need for 'balance', amounting to the mutual fulfilment of privacy and social contact. The following residents explain this balance:

> "I believe it is essential to make every effort to be on good terms with your neighbours. There is a difference between [a] house and neighbours and a unit and neighbours. One must adjust to the latter and try to strike a balance between friendship and a certain respect for privacy."

> "need to cultivate a friendly, open manner with neighbours, but at the same time a certain distance which does not invite over-familiarity."

Balance was often thought to involve some compromise in the behaviour of residents. Many residents mentioned being a 'considerate' neighbour was very important. Negotiation of noise was a frequently cited aspect of being a considerate neighbour, which involved moderating noise levels as to not invade other residents' privacy, or as in the case of the following quote, giving prior warning to residents that your household will being making more noise than usual:

> "my son was having his eighteenth there and we just warned some of the neighbours that there was going to be a party going on. … When somebody has a party once or twice a year, you aren't going to get upset about it. So far I have found people pretty considerate and the only people that do cause any disruption are not the people that live there."

Again, when residents' experiences and perspectives are looked at closely, on one level, neighbouring in medium density broadly reflects neighbouring in other housing forms. For example, recent research on master-planned residential estates points to tensions around balancing contact and privacy, as well as neighbouring practices relating to the use and management of communal facilities (Dowling et al 2010). In theory, conflict between 'owners' and 'renters' is not specific to medium density either. Though, as suggested elsewhere (see Crow et al 2002), higher density housing forms have the potential to bring these elements into closer conversation than they perhaps are in lower-density residential environments. In addition, the presence of communal and public property, and the 'private' conceptions of home that were often invoked by residents, when combined in proximal configurations made for a qualitatively altered type of home-making, that meant the achievement of home was negotiated through close interaction of public and private spaces and identities.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

This paper has aimed to explore how residents experience living in relatively new medium density housing in an inner city location. By drawing on the concepts of 'home' and 'home-making practices', the paper foregrounds the connections between residents and their dwelling environments that amount to a 'materialisation of home' (Jacobs & Smith 2008) in and through medium density housing. By focusing, in qualitative detail, on the themes of maintenance, personalisation and neighbouring it is argued that residents are more than 'housing consumers' – they have a stake in their housing that exceeds questions of finance, to include emotional, material and social connections to their dwellings and buildings/estates that seem to resonate powerfully in the responses of residents. The conceptual frame of 'home' and 'home-making' has affirmed findings elsewhere, that many residents do feel 'at home' in non-detached housing (see McNamara & Connell 2007; Mee 2007), while also fleshing out an understanding of residents of newer medium density housing as more than affluent, child-less, consumer archetypes.

The main aim of this paper has been to explore the role of medium density housing – its physical-material form – as an element of residents' experiences and home-making. Indeed, residents themselves thought that it made a difference that they were living in medium density housing as opposed to detached housing. The connections between medium density materiality and home-making came together in site-specific configurations, some of which are arguably more likely in medium density housing contexts, despite not being exclusive to medium density housing forms.

A persistent feature of the findings that warrants further mention is the role of tenure, or more precisely the division between owner-occupiers and private renters. More than any other factor tenure seemed to divide residents. While underrepresented in the sample, renters were less likely to feel 'at home' in their dwelling and were more inhibited in personalising their dwelling. The neighbourly interactions between owners and renters also pointed to the sometimes antagonistic dynamic between different groups of residents. While research on social mix and tenure mix is quite developed in terms of public and private tenure mix (see Arthurson 2004; Ruming et al 2004), it is apparent that tenure mix *within* the private tenure grouping is an important, but understudied area of inquiry.

Finally, the paper was shaped by the specific features of the resident sample used in this research. Being relatively old, affluent, owner-occupiers compared to the profile of the surrounding suburbs suggests that participating residents had an enhanced capacity to make the types of homes they wanted. They represent a somewhat privileged segment of medium density housing residents, both in general terms and even in terms of the residents within the study sites used for this research. In order to extend the findings of this paper to medium density housing residents at large, more investigation is required. Though, from the initial account presented in this paper it appears that, in order to get beyond simplified understandings like Newcastle's 'new high-rise society', life in medium density housing continues to need close attention. Making home in medium density may prove to be less 'new' and more familiar than one might have thought.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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