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Dwelling in discordant spaces: Material and emotional geographies of parenting in apartments

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Dwelling in discordant spaces:
Material and emotional geographies of parenting in apartments

Sophie-May Kerr

This thesis is presented as part of the requirement for the conferral of the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

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School of Geography and Sustainable Communities

Supervisors:
Associate Professor Natascha Klocker
Professor Chris Gibson

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Certification

I, Sophie-May Kerr, declare that this thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the conferral of the degree Doctor of Philosophy, from the University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Sophie-May Kerr

13ᵗʰ August 2020

Abstract

In recent decades, many cities in the industrialised west have witnessed unprecedented residential densification. The scale and pace of development is largely driven by population growth and speculative real-estate investment, enabled by strategies of urban consolidation, and manifest materially within planner's visions for future cities shaped by notions of order and control, standardisation and homogeneity. What remains opaque is the lived experience of diversity within this seemingly more ordered, consolidating landscape. To what extent are apartments produced to accommodate diverse needs and evolving senses of home and belonging? This thesis seeks to answer this question through examination of Australian parents' experiences raising children in apartments.

Despite being framed as the domain of singles, childless couples and empty nesters, increasing numbers of families with children are living in apartments. This presents a pronounced departure from hegemonic discourses that position a detached house as the ideal home for families with children, especially in the Australian context. When such families live in apartments, they are at risk of being seen as out-of-place, their needs poorly accommodated. Urban researchers have begun to document the challenges families with children face in higher-density residential settings, but as yet, researchers have seldom explored the material negotiations and emotional work of parenting and making home in apartments. With planning agendas prioritising the expansion of higher-density living within a narrow format of apartment buildings, our cities are being reshaped in ways that may fail to support a diversity of needs across the life-course.

This thesis responds by examining the everyday experiences of parents living with children in apartments in Sydney, Australia's most populous city. Qualitative methods and feminist and cultural geographic insights on housing and home foreground narratives that reveal connections between material, cultural and emotional dimensions of apartment life. Positioned as a contribution to the interdisciplinary field of housing studies, I bring together urban planning discourses and cultural norms (as they affect apartment design, materials and regulations), with the lived and embodied experiences of families who dwell in this setting. A mixed-method approach incorporating interviews, floor plan sketches and home tours, allowed insight into eighteen families' everyday practices and emotions, the materiality of their dwellings and accompanying interactions. Spending up to four and a half hours with families over repeat

visits provided in-depth understanding of homemaking processes. From this empirical base, I adopt a narrative format throughout the thesis to privilege the voices of parents and support readers' insight into the complexity, emotion and depth of their accounts.

Conceptual influences from literature on material and emotional geographies, together with the study participants' accounts, reveal that apartments, as currently encountered and experienced, are discordant spaces that fail to match needs and function poorly, requiring ongoing work. Homes in apartments are continually made and unmade via distinctive spatialities and temporalities. While parents associate apartment living with locational and lifestyle affordances, their sense of home is frequently undermined by designs that fail to respond to daily needs and by persistent questioning of their parenting and housing choices. Feelings of guilt, shame, stress and frustration multiply, as families attempt to juggle everyday life in settings ill-suited materially and culturally. Points of tension include cultural norms expressed in wider familial and social circles; managing children's sounds in close proximity to neighbours; and juggling the needs and possessions of children and adults within the spatial constraints of (poorly-designed) apartments. Parents attempt to order and control stuff, space, noise and everyday practices, to dwell with reduced stress, but also to appease neighbours while conforming with notions of 'good parenting'. At the same time, they confront longstanding cultural norms that are reproduced by planners and apartment developers enacting standardised visions of order and purity. This thesis discusses parents' travails, as well as their spatial, temporal and material coping strategies for making everyday life work within or around existing infrastructures and norms. In so doing, it also adds to a bourgeoning literature exploring how higher-density spaces are experienced, embodied and inhabited in multiple ways.

Building on my methodological commitment to foreground parents' apartment dwelling narratives, this thesis also reflects on my experiences of publishing interim results in the midst of the research process, and the significant and unforeseen volume of media attention, debate and dialogue that ensued. Circulating the results of this study into public debate during the research process created opportunities for cross-disciplinary exchanges, for shifting narratives and for collecting new and unexpected forms of data. I conclude by emphasising the importance of housing research attuned to the emotional terrain of home, alongside the prompt circulation of research findings into public debate and planning decisions – especially in the context of rapidly consolidating cities. As cities are being actively reshaped, timeliness

is key to capturing meaningful insights, as are iterative dialogues not just between researchers and policy-makers but also between research participants and practitioner audiences. On this basis, I champion a mode of engaged qualitative housing research that repositions city dwellers as vernacular experts, and advocate for city design, governance and imaginaries that are inclusive of diversity and informed by the *lived* material and emotional complexities of residents' everyday urban lives.

Acknowledgments

'All places in Australia, whether urban or otherwise, are Indigenous places' (Porter 2018:239). This research was conducted on the unceded land of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation in Sydney and the land of the Dharawal, Yuin and Wodi Wodi people in the Illawarra. I would like to acknowledge and pay respect to their Elders past, present and emerging for they hold the knowledge, traditions, hopes and relationship with the land which is passed on to younger generations.

I would like to sincerely thank the participants involved in this research for letting me into their lives and homes. Without their generosity in sharing experiences and feelings, this thesis would not have been possible. I hope I have done justice to their stories and hope that in sharing them more widely we see positive shifts towards higher-density spaces becoming more inclusive in design and cultural acceptance of families.

It has been an immense privilege to work alongside and learn from my supervisors, Natascha Klocker and Chris Gibson. I thank them for their generosity and guidance throughout the entirety of this journey. From Natascha, my primary supervisor for honours and now my PhD, I have learnt a great deal from her attention to detail, thoughtful feedback and skillful writing. I am thankful for her always making herself available to support my research journey with attentiveness and care. She not only helped inspire this research project by sharing her own experiences with me, but also sparked passion in me as an undergraduate student to share stories that matter and advocate for social and political change through my work. I thank Chris, for his wise analogies, endless backing and infectious enthusiasm for all things geography. I thank him for all his advice, for encouraging me to embrace the 'mess' and for assistance navigating the world of media engagement.

Thank you to my fellow postgrads and the academic and professional staff in the School of Geography and Sustainable Communities and Australian Centre for Culture, Environment, Society and Space. The collegiality and care within this school makes it a very special place to work. In particular I am thankful for the support and friendship of Charlie Gillon, Susie Clement, Ellen van Holstein, Carrie Wilkinson, Lance Barrie, Rebecca Campbell, Ananth Gopal, Alex Tindale, Freya Croft, Inka Santala, Makrita Solitei, Craig Lyons, Chantel Carr,

Declaration and Statements of Authorship

The following publications, completed during my candidature, are included in part in this thesis. Both publications were based on research carried out by Sophie-May Kerr and were co-authored with supervisors, Associate Professor Natascha Klocker and Professor Chris Gibson.

Kerr, S.M., Gibson, C. and Klocker, N., 2018. Parenting and neighbouring in the consolidating city: The emotional geographies of sound in apartments. *Emotion, Space and Society*, *26*, pp.1-8.

Kerr, S.M., Klocker, N. and Gibson, C., 2020. From backyards to balconies: cultural norms and parents' experiences of home in higher-density housing. *Housing Studies*, doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2019.1709625 pp.1-23.

Kerr was the lead author, primarily responsible for the research design and solely responsible for data collection, analysis and interpretation. Kerr wrote the first draft of each manuscript and was responsible for responding to the editorial suggestions of Klocker and Gibson and anonymous reviewers. Klocker and Gibson critically reviewed multiple drafts before submission and assisted with the development of argument and structure.

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Chapter 1
Introduction

If we are to "live well" in the city, it should, first and foremost, address the needs of future generations… this starts with focusing on those areas where families – the new generations – are likely to be raised… we must not forget that without parents, children and the neighbourhoods that sustain them, it would be impossible to imagine how we, as a society, could "live well" or even survive as a species… living well should not be about where one *should* live but about how one *wants* to live and for whom (Kotkin 2016:5, original emphasis).

1.1 Discordance in the consolidating city

In March 2016, a Sydney mother took to social media after receiving a letter threatening her with a $550 fine for her toddler breaching strata scheme by-laws pertaining to noise. The letter came from her apartment building strata company, whose role in the Australian context is to manage multi-unit properties comprised of privately-owned dwellings and shared common spaces. The letter read: 'it has been brought to our attention that excessive noise, in the form of your child shouting and screaming, is emanating from your apartment… please refrain from allowing your child to create excessive noise immediately and into the future' (Chung 2016:online). The story was picked up by several TV and radio programs, and print media outlets. The mother lived in a two-bedroom apartment with her son and husband and was pregnant with their second child. She expressed feeling discriminated against and was anxious about what would happen as their family grew.

This case prompted discussion – amongst viewers, readers and listeners – around the growing number of families living in apartments and the tensions associated with their presence (in part, due to poorly designed buildings with inadequate soundproofing). Many people wrote or called in to describe similar neighbourly tensions resulting from the everyday sounds of children. Some renters even shared stories of being evicted due to their children. The case generated mixed opinions. Some people sided with the mother while others took the opportunity to vilify families with children and complain about noise pollution. At the more compassionate end of the spectrum, people defended this family, stating that apartment dwellers need to be more understanding because they have chosen to live in close proximity to others. Others argued that children and their sounds do not belong in apartments, and suggested that families with children

should live outside the city, presumably in detached housing where this 'type' of household might 'fit in'. Two years later, the stories uncovered and shared through the research I share in this thesis, prompted an amplification of this national conversation.

Alongside many major cities around the world, Sydney is fast transforming from a low-density, suburban landscape into a 'vertical city' (Graham and Hewitt 2013 and Harris 2015)[1]. Rapid densification of major Australian cities is driven by population growth and real estate investment (Beer et al. 2007; Dufty-Jones and Rogers 2015). While Australian suburbs are still characterised by detached housing (Dowling 2008), 2015 marked the first year in which apartment construction surpassed the construction of new detached dwellings (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2018). The shift towards more people dwelling in smaller, shared spaces requires distinctly different material and emotional negotiations. In this time of transition towards a denser urban paradigm, this thesis explores the lived experiences, practices and emotions of a particular set of apartment residents: families with children. The family that was on the receiving end of the abovementioned letter was one of more than 90,000 Sydney families with children who lived in apartments in 2016 (ABS 2016a). By documenting the complex everyday lives of 18 such families, this thesis highlights tensions between cultural norms and shifting urban landscapes. It raises questions around the appropriateness of compact city policies, the suitability and durability of the kinds of homogenous, ordered built environments that result from densification, and their capacity to accommodate a diversity of inhabitants and uses of space.

Around the world, increasing numbers of families reside in higher-density environments. This trend has been attributed to new spatial manifestations of global real estate capital investment (such as urban renewal schemes focused on high-rise residential apartments); social changes (e.g. more women in the paid workforce), and the lifestyles enabled by higher-density living due to the proximity of amenities (Karsten 2007; Karsten 2015a; Brydon 2014; Rogers 2016). Such trends are evident in the Australian context. Although low-income families with children have long occupied apartments (see Randolph 2006), middle- and upper-income families are a newly emerging group of apartment residents in the Australian context (McCrindle 2017). For many developers, families with children were not the expected demographic for this growing

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[1] In this thesis, 'Sydney' refers to the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Greater Sydney, Greater Capital City Statistical Area.

apartment market (Fincher 2004). Yet, whether by preference, convenience or constraint, the number of families living with children in apartments in Australia has more than doubled over the past decade (SGS Economics and Planning 2017). In Sydney, the city where the present study took place, families with children under the age of 15 comprised 25 per cent of the apartment population in 2016 (ABS 2016a).

Although apartments have proliferated across Australian cities (and other cities globally), consolidation plans have arguably neglected families' changing relationships with urban space, producing 'child-blind' higher-density housing strategies (Randolph 2006). As evidenced in this thesis, lack of recognition for families and their changing needs across the life-course materialises in apartment design and governance, and in cultural norms, which together position families as out-of-place in higher-density settings. Exigencies of real estate markets in combination with cultural norms give rise to problematic urban forms that linger in the landscape and are inhabited long after their initial development. As shown in the later empirical sections of this thesis (Chapters 5-8), this generates ongoing tensions and increases the emotional burden for families who, despite dominant expectations, find themselves inhabiting apartments.

Rigid apartment designs conforming with narrow formats of apartment development are inherited from modernist planner and developer visions built around notions of order, control, homogeneity, as well as lingering cultural norms about 'who is suited to live where' (Sennett 1970:80). In architectural modernism, which developed from the early decades of the twentieth century, form followed function, resulting in a shift away from adornment and diversity towards standardisation, mass construction, minimalism and repetition of a 'clean lines aesthetic'. Around the same time, modernism infused the increasingly codified profession of planning: exemplified in Le Corbusier's skyscraper visions for Paris (Harvey 1989). As urban scholars have long observed, top-down planning visions overlook the complexity and diversity of cities and their inhabitants (Jacobs 1961; Sennett 1970; Jacobs 2006; Fincher and Iveson 2008; Kotkin 2016; Lauster 2016). Attempts to plan cities along predetermined lines leave scant space for 'the unintended, for the contradictory, for the unknown' (Sennett 1970:84) – for the messiness that is everyday life. In contrast to modernist and capitalist principles of profit and purity, the idealised city was for Jane Jacobs (1961) one that attracted and retained families, embraced diversity and was dense but human-scaled. While an advocate for human-scaled density, Jacobs was a vocal critic of large-scale urban renewal and Le Corbusier's 'vertical

city' (Jacobs 1961:21). She cautioned planners that when densities get too high, they repress, rather than stimulate diversity:

> At some point to accommodate so many dwellings on the land, standardisation of the buildings must be set in. This is fatal because great diversity in age and types of buildings has a direct, explicit connection with diversity of population, diversity of enterprises and diversity of scenes… there must be leeway for variety among buildings. All those variations that are of less than maximum efficiency get crowded out. Maximum efficiency, or anything approaching it, means standardisation (Jacobs 1961:212-13).

Thus, it can be argued that cities catering to profit maximisation through mass-produced apartments built for singles, couples and investors, directly threaten inclusivity and liveability. They risk being sterile and out of touch with the desires of diverse inhabitants; built around the needs of childless households rather than the 'idiosyncratic, diverse… democratic form that Jacobs celebrated' (Kotkin 2016:41). While apartments are not necessarily intrinsically discordant spaces – by which I mean spaces that lack harmony and that conflict with everyday domestic practices – this thesis argues that they become so when inhabited by families with children whose needs have been overlooked in planning and design.

Any shift towards a more inclusive urban form requires planners to learn from 'success and failure in real life' (Jacobs 1961:6). Understanding the 'varied politics and practices of apartment living' is essential for revealing how the housing system impacts upon people's daily lives and for determining how urban spaces could be rendered more liveable for a diverse population (Easthope 2019:2; McKee et al. 2019). Harris (2015:610) accordingly called for further empirical, ethnographic work in order to understand the variety of urban experiences, arguing:

> Meanings of vertical buildings and structures need to be understood as generated and negotiated as much through the ideas, imaginations and memories of their users, dwellers and observers as their original designers.

This thesis provides insight into how families with children use their apartments, what is important to them, the challenges they face and the strategies they have for managing everyday life in smaller, shared spaces. In so doing, the research explores how parenting practices and emotions are shaped (and often constrained) by apartment materiality alongside discourses that

position families as out-of-place in higher-density dwellings. By paying attention to the everyday lived realities of families in apartments and revealing the fissures between idealised designs and families' domestic practices, the dysfunction of Sydney's current housing system is laid bare. Shedding light on families' experiences and struggles provides an opportunity to move beyond dominant narratives of city life, to recognise families as legitimate apartment dwellers whose needs must be accommodated.

1.2 Research context

Building materiality, governance and cultural norms are all central to parents' experiences of raising children in apartments. While housing and family issues are intimately connected, meanings and 'norms around housing and family life in one place… differ from norms in another' (Mulder and Lauster 2010:437). To that end, the following two sections situate this study within the spatial and cultural context of Sydney, Australia – where visions of a 'proper' family home traditionally centre upon ownership of a detached dwelling[2]. I am cognisant of diverse family configurations, and that these need not necessarily involve children (see Churchill 2018). Nonetheless, in this thesis I sometimes use the word families as a shorthand for the specific type of family that is the focus of the study: families with children. In what follows below, I first provide an overview of changes to Sydney's urban morphology, highlighting key planning assumptions and population pressures driving the urban consolidation agenda. Second, I draw on literature exploring dominant narratives relating to children in apartments, revealing how in Australia, families have been excluded from discourses surrounding higher-density housing. These broader trends in housing form and cultural norms set the scene for the importance of this study. While these sections are separated here, it is important to note that housing form, governance and cultural housing norms overlap and influence one another (this is reflected in Chapters 5-8).

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[2] I acknowledge that in many other places, it has long been common for children to live in apartments (for example, Singapore, Hong Kong, Paris and Moscow), and that there is a risk that the present analysis reinforces a western, Anglo-centric perspective on urban transitions and cultural norms. Nevertheless, I contend that the case examined here is relevant beyond the Australian context, especially to other rapidly densifying western cities where similarly suburban cultural norms have dominated (including cities in the USA, Canada and New Zealand), and in non-western contexts where predominantly single-storey homes (including in informal settlements) are rapidly making way for high-rise structures – as in much of Latin America (see Harris 2015).

1.2.1 Shifting urban landscapes: from backyards to balconies

Unlike some cities in Europe, North America and Asia, Australia has not had a longstanding tradition of higher-density living (Randolph 2006). The built environment of Australian cities has historically been characterised by low-density suburban environments. In 2016, the long standing 'suburban ideal' (Davison 1994) still dominated the housing landscape, with 73 per cent of Australia's dwellings being detached houses (ABS 2016b). In Sydney, this figure was 57 per cent, while apartments accounted for 28 per cent of the city's dwelling stock[3] (ABS 2016c). The dominance of detached dwellings is the result of successive paradigms of urban planning: the early Twentieth Century 'garden suburb' movement (imported from the UK) based on the ideal of detached houses with yards, in self-contained communities surrounded by a range of facilities and parklands; a post-World War II suburban 'quarter acre' ideal based on housing the working-class in affordable 'fibro' homes on large blocks in greenfield estates (Greig 1995; Vanni Accarigi and Crosby 2019); and more recently, large, expansive houses on smaller blocks (pejoratively referred to as McMansions) that are valued for their internal open space, light and flow (Gleeson 2006; Dowling and Power 2012). While these paradigms are distinctive in important ways, they have all involved a detached house standing in its own garden. This remains the dominant, aspirational form of housing for many Australians (Kellett 2011).

Detached homes are valued for their expansive space – which allows family members to achieve both independence from one another and togetherness – and also for their status and respectability (Dowling and Power 2012). Yet owning a detached house with a backyard is becoming increasingly unrealistic in Sydney, as planning policies prioritising vertical growth and speculative real estate investment put upwards pressure on house prices and detached houses in particular[4] (Sisson et al. 2019). The recent shift towards higher-density housing in Sydney (and indeed other Australian cities), runs counter to this history of low-density growth. At the time of the 2016 census, the number of occupied apartments in Australia had increased by 78 per cent over 25 years (ABS 2016d). While apartments have increased in number across Australia, nearly half (47 per cent) of all occupied apartments in 2016 were in New South Wales (NSW) (ABS 2016d). Sydney (the capital of NSW) has seen the largest growth and

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[3] The remaining dwellings were semi-detached, row or terrace houses or townhouses (14 per cent) and other dwellings (1 per cent) (ABS 2016c).
[4] In March 2020 the median price of a detached house in Sydney was AUD1.1 million (Domain 2020a).

hosts 87 per cent of all apartments in the state. It is estimated that by 2031, up to 45 per cent of Sydney's housing stock will be higher-density (Randolph 2006). Randolph has described the shift in policy towards higher-density housing in Australian cities as a 'revolution' to Australia's housing market (2006:473). In the following sections I detail the features that make apartment living distinct from detached housing, outline apartment demographics and highlight the key factors driving the growth of Australian apartment developments.

i)   Apartments as a distinctive housing form

Apartments differ from detached houses in important ways, and a shift towards higher-density housing brings with it unique politics and practices (Easthope 2019). The average Australian apartment is half the size of an average detached house (Johnson 2015). Apartments typically have fewer bedrooms, which in many cases would be considered unconducive to the needs of families with children. The 2016 Census revealed that the majority of apartments in Australia (60 per cent) had two bedrooms, with 24 per cent having only one bedroom. This contrasts with separate houses where 51 per cent had three bedrooms and 38 per cent had four bedrooms (ABS 2016e). In 2016, the majority of apartments were in complexes with four or more storeys (38 per cent), 35 per cent were in one or two storey developments and 27 per cent were in three storey developments (ABS 2016e).

Regardless of the size of individual apartments and the complexes they are situated within, residents live in closer proximity to their neighbours, are likely to have more neighbours and share at least some built features and facilities (Easthope and Judd 2010; Power 2015; Easthope 2019). The individual apartments within a complex are adjoined and therefore interdependent, resulting in reduced autonomy over what structural changes individual owners can make (Easthope 2019). In addition, the shift towards apartment-dwelling requires Australians to adjust to new modes of governance. In NSW, a legislative framework known as strata title exists in developments where there are both individual 'lots' (i.e. individually owned apartments) and communally owned property (i.e. gardens, lifts, shared stairwells and hallways) (Altmann 2015). Strata legislation is designed to help manage the diverse range of stakeholders involved in each development (Easthope and Randolph 2009) and it requires property owners to work together to manage the building and maintain upkeep (Easthope 2019). Each strata scheme is regulated by its own by-laws – a set of rules that owners, tenants and guests must follow. Model by-laws exist to assist schemes in managing their apartment complexes, however, schemes are not required to adopt any specific by-laws, and rather it is

up to each owners corporation[5] to decide which laws will apply to the scheme. As indicated in the opening story to this thesis, adoption and enforcement of certain by-laws can result in tensions between individual rights and a sense of shared responsibility, and gives neighbours the scope (and power) to enforce particular codes of behaviour upon one another (McGuirk and Dowling 2011). This raises challenges when diverse residents have different homemaking ideals.

ii)   *Apartment demographics*

The 2016 Census of Population and Housing revealed that 10 per cent of Australia's population now lives in apartments (ABS 2016d). Demographic analysis shows that, at a national level, 66 per cent of apartment residents were born outside of Australia (ABS 2016d). With a disproportionate number of migrants living in apartments, scholars have called for further research into the 'challenges and opportunities associated with culturally diverse high-density residential environments' (Liu et al. 2017:407), drawing attention to the importance of understanding how diverse residents can successfully share urban space.

Alongside many overseas born residents, apartments are characterised by a significant rental profile. In 2016, renters were the most dominant tenure type living in apartments (59 per cent). By comparison, just 21 per cent of detached houses in Australia are rented (ABS 2016d). The high portion of rented apartments correlates with high rates of investment in this housing form. As Easthope and Randolph (2009) have shown, this can lead to conflict between owner-occupiers and investor-owners in the same apartment block, and between residents of different tenure statuses (owners and renters) (see also Baker 2013). Despite the dominance of renters in apartments, they have very little influence over the governance of their dwellings – for instance, only owners have a vote on strata committees. Apartment renters are also often inhibited from making changes to their dwellings to make them better suit to their needs or more homely (Baker 2013; see also section 2.2.1 of this thesis).

While families with children were previously underrepresented in Australia's higher-density dwellings, analysis of household composition in apartments in 2016 indicates a demographic shift has occurred in recent years (as discussed in section 1.1). Australia-wide, lone person

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[5] The owners corporation is comprised of all owners of the lots in strata schemes. Owners corporations are responsible for maintenance, repair and overall management of the common property.

households accounted for 38 per cent of apartment dwellers in 2016, followed by couples with no children (23 per cent), families with children (19 per cent) and group households (9 per cent). Focusing on Sydney, lone person households remained the most common household composition in apartments (31 per cent), closely followed by families with children (25 per cent), couples with no children (24 per cent) and finally group households (8 per cent) (ABS 2016d). While apartments have been cast as spaces for childless households (Fincher 2004), the reality is that, in Sydney, families with children now constitute a comparable proportion of apartment-dwellers to couples with no children and lone person households. Marketing of apartments to singles and childless couples, and accompanying discourses of who 'belongs' in apartment buildings, are yet to catch up to these changing demographics.

iii)   Factors driving the growth in apartment developments

The scale and pace of densification in Australian cities has been driven by a number of factors including population growth, real estate investment and environmental concerns (Beer et al. 2007; Dufty-Jones and Rogers 2015). The empirical setting for this project is Greater Sydney (Greater Capital City Statistical Area) Australia, which had an estimated resident population of 4.8 million people in 2016 (ABS 2016c). The Sydney Housing Supply Forecast projects Sydney's population will grow by an extra 2.4 million people between 2016 and 2041, resulting in the need for 1.03 million additional homes over the same period (NSW Government 2020). Urban consolidation agendas have been presented in a series of new strategic plans 'each anticipating more growth than the last' (Troy et al. 2020:5). The majority of this residential growth has thus far occurred through higher-density urban renewal and infill development in urban centres and transit corridors (Troy et al. 2020). Transit oriented growth areas are strongly linked to the 'Metropolis of Three Cities' 30-minute city principle[6], which Sydney metropolitan planning hinges upon (Hasham 2014; Greater Sydney Commission 2018). While density has historically been conflated with centrality (McFarlane 2016), altered planning approval processes and rezoning (driven by population pressures and market-determined factors) have resulted in more of Sydney's high-density development being constructed in and amongst older low-density housing. This development is occurring city wide, challenging the simplistic model of inner-city, high-density development, surrounded by low-density suburban sprawl (Gibson and Brennan-Horley 2006). The increase in density in Sydney's middle-and outer-ring suburbs,

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[6] In response to the growing population, the Metropolis of Three Cities plan, envisions Sydney being divided into three key cities – the Western Parkland City, the Central River City and Eastern Harbour City – where most residents live within 30 minutes of their jobs, education and core services (Greater Sydney Commission 2018).

where apartments have not traditionally been part of the city fabric, has led to tension and community and council opposition in instances where this form of housing is deemed incongruous to its location (Searle and Filion 2011; Cook et al. 2013; Hasham 2014).

Changes in urban morphology are largely shaped by policies that draw on aggregate statistics to justify the efficiency and rationality of increasing housing supply through the development of apartments (Baxter 2017). In Sydney (alongside other Australian cities, as well as cities in North America and parts of Western Europe), low-density sprawling suburbs have been associated with poor sustainability outcomes due to high infrastructure and consumption costs, inefficient use of land, high dependence on private cars, and large environmental footprints (Wulff et al. 2004; Gleeson 2008). The compact city has been positioned as a 'solution' to affordability problems and the environmental challenges associated with low-density sprawl (Gleeson 2008; McFarlane 2016). Yet there is some ambivalence over the environmental implications of urban consolidation. Critical scholars have suggested that assumptions over-emphasise the environmental significance of urban form, failing to account for 'deeper socio-cultural forces' that drive overconsumption and carbon dependency (Gleeson 2008:2654). The social dimensions of apartments have also been scrutinised. Despite their acclaimed benefits, densification policies have been critiqued for lacking human-scale, with 'their topological experiences usually falling short of their topographical promises' (McFarlane 2016:637 – see also Jacobs 1961; Kotkin 2016). Such critics argue that density is not simply a linear or numerical problem that can be fixed without considering multiple relations and spatialities. Density is differently experienced, perceived, negotiated, contested and *felt* (Rose et al. 2010; Harris 2015:609; McFarlane 2016); it 'may perform well in one place… [and] poor[ly] in another' (Jacobs 1961:209; see also Jacobs 2006).

In addition to environmental imperatives, planners have argued that 'family housing' is already oversupplied in Australia, suggesting that the growing apartment stock is needed to cater for an increase in smaller, ageing households (Batten 1999; Sherry and Easthope 2016). While this rationale assumes a more efficient housing allocation, research has demonstrated that smaller households do not necessarily want to live in smaller dwellings (Yates 2001; Wulff et al. 2004). Ageing households in Australia have not universally downsized to apartments to make their detached houses available for families with young children, resulting in limited supply of detached housing and increased prices (Sherry and Easthope 2016). As planners continue to prioritise growth in the form of higher-density housing, these simplistic assumptions (that

apartments will house small households) are likely to become problematic as an increasing portion of the population opts for – or is constrained to – living in apartments that do not necessarily suit their needs (Bunker et al. 2005; Randolph 2006).

While strategic planning frameworks (such as the *Metropolitan Plan for Sydney 2036* (2010), *A Plan for Growing Sydney* (2014) and *Greater Sydney Region Plan* (2018)) are seemingly driven by the above imperatives, research shows that speculative market-led dynamics also play a key role in driving apartment development (Troy et al. 2020). Housing is increasingly viewed as a commodity and a financial asset (Blandy et al. 2006; Smith 2008). The distinctive phase of apartment growth in cities such as Sydney and Melbourne (and also Singapore, Hong Kong, London, Toronto and Vancouver) is heavily influenced by increasing investment in real estate – from both foreign and domestic sources (see Rosen and Walks 2013; Rowley et al. 2014; Edwards 2016; Ley 2017; Sisson et al. 2019; Troy et al. 2020). While the aforementioned planning agendas indicated that the development of the 'missing middle' (i.e. medium-density housing) would inform part of Sydney's required housing stock growth, research suggests that delays in filling this gap may be growing because medium-density housing yields less profit for developers (Troy et al. 2020). Investment seeking maximum returns finds its material form in high-rise apartments – primarily of one to two bedrooms – built in the most profitable locations to maximise land value uplift (Murphy 2019). This phase of development has significant ramifications for building quality and design. Indeed, emerging research has shown that many new multi-owned properties are 'plagued with defects' (Johnston and Reid 2019:6 – see also Shergold and Weir 2018). Standardised, mass-produced apartments built for an investor market (with the assumption they will be rented for short periods of time) are a very different product to those designed as long-term homes for a diversity of owner-occupiers (Randolph 2006). While recent densification strategies have produced high numbers of new dwellings in Sydney (with continued higher-density development forecast (Greater Sydney Region Plan 2018)), it is imperative to question both the quality of these buildings and the extent to which they are adaptable and flexible to the needs of a diverse apartment population, including families with children.

1.2.2 Who belongs in the compact city? Representations of apartments as spaces for the childless

The focus of this thesis is on the experiences of families with children who, whether by preference, convenience or constraint, are increasingly living in Sydney's apartments. As I will outline below, the decision to raise children in apartments challenges Australia's traditional housing norms. Documenting the experiences of residents at the forefront of this change is imperative. An emerging body of research has begun to explore the experiences of families in apartments, which will be reviewed in detail in Chapter 2. In this section, I draw on one strand of this literature which focuses on media, developer and planner narratives relating to families in apartments. I do so because this literature provides important context for the cultural prejudice against families in apartments that is foundational to the experiences outlined in the remainder of this thesis.

Australian cities have traditionally been predominantly low-density, characterised by detached homes, backyards, and cultural norms of home ownership (Johnson 1994; 2006). Australian suburbs have been cast as a sprawling space of heteronormative values associated with nuclear families and domesticity, as opposed to the exciting, productive and cosmopolitan inner-city (Powell 1993; Dowling and Mee 2000). Such discourses have persisted for generations, and powerfully frame notions of home even in an era of intensified urban consolidation. Although apartments have proliferated across Australian cities, cultural norms have not kept pace with either the changing urban morphology or shifting apartment demographics. In the Australian context, notions of home remain synonymous with ownership of detached housing (Blunt and Dowling 2006). Social expectations to live in a detached house are particularly prevalent for families with children (Fincher 2004; Wulff et al. 2004; Costello 2005; Fincher and Gooder 2007; Carroll et al. 2011; Lauster 2016; Raynor et al. 2017). Owning a free-standing house is framed as the 'proper', socially-appropriate aspiration when starting a family (Blunt and Dowling 2006; Dowling 2008; Raynor 2018). Large detached houses are seen to support middle-class familial values and accommodate family ideals and identities associated with motherhood and homemaking (Dowling 2008; Dowling and Power 2012). Other types of tenure (including renting both publicly and privately) and other forms of housing (namely, apartment dwellings) have been viewed as temporary phases, 'stepping stones' towards the eventual purchase of a detached house (Fincher 2004; Wulff et al. 2004; Easthope 2014). In contrast to the positioning of detached houses as family spaces, apartment developments have

typically been viewed as the domain of singles, couples, empty nesters and consumer citizens – marketed as spaces for luxury lifestyles, excitement and consumption – unsuitable for families (Costello 2005; Raynor 2018).

The idea that apartments are inappropriate for families with children dates at least to the early 1920s, where 'published opinion was virtually unanimous that apartments encouraged childlessness, delinquency, immorality and itinerancy… reinforcing the common belief that the only Australian home to aspire to was a house and garden' (Butler-Bowdon 2009:152). Inner-city high-rise apartments were built as part of 'slum' clearance programs that sought to redevelop working class housing surrounding industrial zones that were generally poor quality and associated with ill health. While this phase of development – aiming to purify the inner-city and remove disorder from the urban landscape – was initially seen as a 'saving grace' for inner-city areas, these high-rise apartments quickly became contested and seen as ghettos (Costello 2005:53). By the time high-rise public housing was introduced in Australian cities in the 1970s, apartment blocks were stigmatised and continued to be cast as negatively impacting the lives of children and families (Costello 2005). High-rise housing has changed considerably since the 1970s – in some instances becoming a symbol of modern living, no longer associated with low-income. Yet, the high-rise market continues to be associated with childlessness. The expectation that children do not belong in apartments is evident in media discourses (Raynor 2018) and within planner and developer narratives (Fincher 2004). Marketing and advertising of apartments as sites of luxury, excitement and elite consumption excludes families as potential residents (Johnson 1997; Costello 2005; Fullagar et al. 2013). Socially-constructed ideas about the life-course shape developers' ideas about who should be housed where in the city, and in what dwellings. Research documenting developers' narratives about the construction of high-rise residences found those within the housing development industry consider high-rise residences as 'appropriate only for people without families' (Fincher 2004:325).

The disparity between planning assumptions and the actual apartment population is problematic (Easthope and Tice 2011). Fincher (2004) argued that narrow assumptions about who lives in apartments have resulted in limited facilities for children within high-rise residences. More recently, analysis of newspaper articles and interviews with residents and built-form professionals demonstrated that despite growing acceptance of wealthy families occupying luxury apartments, the broader narrative that children belong in detached, suburban

housing remains pervasive (Raynor 2018). Such ideas about housing and neighbourhood have tangible implications. They give rise to an urban form that excludes the needs of families, reflected in decisions regarding the number of bedrooms, layout of living spaces and the design of common areas.

Raynor's (2018) research in Brisbane, Australia, revealed that high-density living is not only framed as inappropriate for families with children, it is also considered dangerous or deviant. Emblematic of this was the September 2018 headline of a front-page article in The Sydney Morning Herald (one of the largest national newspapers in Australia), in which my research was cited: 'Kids at risk in high-rise lifestyles' (Gladstone 2018). Some years earlier, prominent Australian entrepreneur and media figure, Dick Smith, suggested that the quality of life of Australian children is in jeopardy, referring to children who grow up in apartments as 'battery kids' – as opposed to 'free-range kids' who grow up in detached houses with backyards (Smith 2010). Such discourses, which intimate that parents are risking their children's wellbeing if they live in apartments, further entrench outer-versus-inner-city binaries (Gibson and Brennan-Horley 2006), and distinctions between family-friendly detached houses and childfree apartments (Raynor 2018).

After publishing an online article in The Conversation[7] based on my research findings on the sound-related tensions families face in apartments (Kerr 2018 – and the focus of Chapter 7 in this thesis), the comments section attracted 114 posts[8]. Many of these perpetuated ideas of apartments as unsuitable for children. Commenters responding to The Conversation article referred to apartments as 'slums', 'prison cells', 'shoeboxes' and 'stress-inducing hell-holes' that are 'eminently not suitable for families'. Comments directed judgement at parents who are raising children in apartments – going so far as to suggest that if you cannot afford a 'proper' home (i.e. detached house) then you should not have children. One response stated:

> I couldn't think of anything worse than living that closely to anyone who had mini-ferals screaming and running amok. I'd much rather work my ass off and have my home with land all around it and space between me and the neighbouring homes. To be honest, if I couldn't afford a proper home I wouldn't have children. You risk your kids

[7] The Conversation is an independent source of online news and views, sourced from the academic and research community and delivered direct to the public. The Conversation is free to read and free to share or republish under creative commons.
[8] This figure includes comments on the original article and comments captured from The Conversation's Facebook page when the article was posted there.

befriending other kids of lower socio-economic backgrounds who could send them off the rails despite all your good teachings. It is no life for them to be raised in high rise cement jungles, they need access to their own little gardens to learn about nature, insects, growing produce, playing and expanding their imagination, and getting fresh air. I loved all those things about where I grew up and think it would be depressing to have been made to grow up in a flat. Nature is so important for a healthy mind.

Another person suggested:

This is why I sold my apartment and bought a house. In Europe and Asia people don't have a choice, but in Australia we do, and units have only ever been for (a) the poor (b) investors (c) or a young person's first entry into the market. By the time you are ready for children you should own your own house. If you can't afford a house, then you can't afford children.

Such attitudes are illustrative of the entrenched cultural norms documented above. Australian families are expected to raise their children in detached houses – and raising a family in an apartment is seen as anathema to the Australian way of life (Stevenson et al. 1967; Raynor 2018). These discourses are problematic. Despite families with children not being the expected demographic for higher-density housing forms, a sizeable number of such families now *do* live in apartments, by choice or for affordability reasons, and their numbers are increasing rapidly. Housing is often built through expectations about the 'types' of people who will live in different dwellings, based on taken-for-granted views of the relationship between certain life stages and certain housing forms (Fincher 2007; Klocker and Gibson 2013). The visions of apartment life portrayed in advertising materials, developer and planner narratives and media content are influential. They legitimise certain behaviours and exclude others (Karsten 2009), influence the way housing is imagined and built (Fincher 2004) and play an important role in shaping housing choices and perceptions of who is seen to belong in certain forms of housing, or not (Gillon and Gibbs 2018). They also have wider implications for family-friendly infrastructure and service provision such as schools and childcare (Sherry and Easthope 2016) and play spaces (Krysiak 2018). As I will show in this thesis, such discourses affect apartment design and governance, parenting practices and emotions and families' sense of belonging. Further evidence of such cultural norms, alongside the study participants' awareness and internalisation of dominant narratives about the 'right' place to raise children, are discussed in detail in Chapter 8. While concentrated in Chapter 8, these social pressures are also referred to

throughout the other empirical chapters (in particular Chapters 5, 6, 7), as discourses, practices, emotions and materials intersect in parents' everyday apartment lives.

1.3 Aim, research questions and contributions

The overarching aim of this thesis is to examine the lived experiences, practices and emotions of families with children living in apartments. This study of 18 families with children living in apartments in Sydney, Australia, sheds light on the ways in which built forms interact with cultural norms to shape how apartment spaces are understood and inhabited. As a growing demographic living in apartments, a focus on parents raising children in higher-density housing demonstrates what happens when families' everyday lives intersect with a discordant urban landscape built around rigid notions of order, control, standardisation and homogeneity, fueled by planning ideologies and developers and investors seeking maximum profit.

To provide insight into the lived and contested experiences, practices and emotions of families living with children in apartments, this thesis asks six questions:

1. What is prompting families with children to live in apartments?
2. How are parenting practices and emotions shaped by higher-density living arrangements?
3. How does the materiality of apartment buildings intersect with everyday family life?
4. How do cultural housing norms shape families' sense of home and belonging in apartments?
5. What strategies do families with children have for making home and managing everyday life in apartments?
6. How might apartments be better designed, managed and governed to meet the needs of families with children, as a longer-term (rather than transitional) living arrangement?

Drawing on feminist and cultural geographic insights to explore connections between the material, cultural and emotional dimensions of apartment life, this thesis contributes to a growing body of literature seeking to understand the 'inhabited landscapes of vertical urbanism' (Harris 2015:609). The focus on families with children offers new insights into the ways in which parents negotiate the process of homemaking in vertical landscapes. The specific practices and emotional geographies of parenting that unfurl in the consolidating city, are understood as spatially constituted (shaped by the material properties of apartment buildings

and design of surrounding landscapes) and relational (impacted by wider cultural housing norms and processes). Importantly, the rich narratives shared by the parents involved in this study reveal that while families have strategies for making everyday life work in apartments these are wearying. Homemaking in apartments generates emotional labour and ongoing tensions for families dwelling within spaces that were never intended for them. Broader cultural and material improvements are needed to support families in this setting over the longer-term. By shedding light on these issues and advancing knowledge of how apartments are experienced, negotiated and contested, this thesis makes an academic contribution to literature on the emotional and material geographies of home in higher-density dwellings.

Additionally, my commitment to share families' experiences and to advocate for change outside of the academic sphere resulted in an unanticipated volume of media coverage on this topic. My research sparked public discussion and news stories were shared widely, receiving hundreds of comments on social media platforms. This thesis documents my experiences of navigating this intense level of interest. I reveal how the chance to be part of a national conversation, as it emerged, created new opportunities for shifting public narratives, engaging in cross-disciplinary conversations and for collecting unanticipated new forms of data. I reflect on the role of researchers and our contributions to policy and decision-making in an age of social media. Ironically, while discourses of smart cities, big data and urban consolidation increasingly govern city reshaping, there is arguably an information vacuum around the very people who are affected by shifts in planning and city governance, and their tangible, everyday experiences of resultant material-cultural landscapes. At a practical level, then, this thesis raises questions and offers suggestions for key stakeholders who design, influence and provide housing. Planners, developers, architects, strata managers and governments can learn from the experiences, motivations, challenges and desires of families who are living in this setting to ensure they are creating and governing housing in a way that responds to the needs of a diverse population, not just investors and childless households. The project captures the value of foregrounding empirical narratives in the public debate, to facilitate such stakeholder learning as cities rapidly consolidate.

1.4 Thesis outline

This thesis is comprised of nine chapters including this introduction. Chapters 1, 2 and 3 situate this study contextually, conceptually and methodologically, providing the necessary background for interpreting the empirical chapters. The subsequent five chapters (4, 5, 6, 7 and 8) are driven by participants' narratives. These empirical chapters highlight the complexity of families' housing decisions and shed light on the ways in which families experience tensions relating to space and material possessions, sound and cultural norms while living in apartments. They also reveal the strategies families implement to make everyday life work within spatial and cultural constraints. A final concluding chapter draws these themes into discussion, returning to the research questions and highlighting the key contributions of this research project.

Structured in two parts, Chapter 2 begins by drawing together insights from cultural and feminist research on housing and home. It reviews housing literature focusing on house design and experiences and meanings of home. This strand of literature casts light on the material and emotional elements of home that inform everyday life. By conceptualising home as a constant process that is made and unmade through everyday practices, I acknowledge the multiple temporalities that shape interactions between residents and their homes. So too, I set a framework for exploring the work that goes into maintaining a sense of home and belonging in apartments. In the second section of Chapter 2, I outline existing research exploring homemaking in higher-density housing and review the nascent literature on families in apartments. This section highlights key gaps in knowledge relating to parenting emotions and materials as enabling or constraining of parenting practices. By examining the emotional and material travails accompanying parenting and homemaking in higher-density environments, this thesis contributes to this body of work.

The methods employed throughout this study are discussed in Chapter 3. It begins by discussing how a qualitative mixed-method approach (incorporating two semi-structured interviews, floorplan sketches, home tours and photographs) enabled me to document families' everyday experiences. I then turn to my own positionality within the project and discuss key ethical considerations. Chapter 3 additionally outlines the recruitment strategies and participant selection criteria adopted in this project and provides detail on participant attributes and apartment characteristics. This is followed by a discussion of how the qualitative data were

analysed. The chapter concludes with a reflection on media engagement as a part of my method, and considers its impacts on the project and public debate. I include a short discussion of existing public geographies literature in this section, positioning this project as a case study that attests to the importance of researcher engagement beyond the academy.

Chapter 4 allows me to introduce the families who were part of this study by providing insight into the motivations and constraints which led them to live in apartments. It highlights the common factors mentioned by study participants including affordability, location and proximity. The chapter also scratches beneath the surface, demonstrating how housing choices are complex and multifaceted, intimately connected to other aspects of participants' lives, relationships and aspirations.

Chapter 5 considers how social practices and familial relations are bound up in uses and experiences of space both within individual apartments and on common property. By paying attention to material features (such as apartment size and layout) and apartment governance, this chapter sheds light on the ways in which the design and management of spaces can either support or hinder practices of homemaking and perceived good parenting. A focus on familial rhythms and routines demonstrates how spaces are made multifunctional. Evidence of complex negotiations across the day and throughout the life-course demonstrate that the dwelling is never static. In this chapter, I discuss the strategies parents have for sharing space and negotiating daily life within the limitations imposed by the physical space of their apartments and the social space defined by dominant ideals of home and family (Munro and Madigan 1999). Some of their strategies go against traditional norms (e.g. giving children the largest bedroom) and require ongoing emotional labour as parents face judgement and question their own choices.

Chapter 6 focuses on how families accumulate, store, share, borrow, organise and rid material objects within the spatial constraints of their apartments. Housing units are more than just physical space; rather, they can be seen as spaces of consumption and everyday material cultural practices. By exploring parents' domestic materialities and practices, Chapter 6 demonstrates the complex ways apartment-dwelling families engage with material possessions in their everyday lives. The parents in this study devised intricate strategies for storing their material possessions, and for ensuring their children would not need to go without items they considered essential for a 'good' childhood. This demonstrates a strong commitment to make

their homes work for them, despite challenges. While such families have strategies for overcoming the structural constraints of apartment life, the work of storing stuff is ongoing and tiring.

Chapter 7 explores the emotional and material geographies of sound in apartments, shedding light on parents' struggles with the expectation that children (and their sounds) do not belong. Parents' experiences of apartment living reveal how the materiality of sound and built form interact with cultural norms and apartment regulations to shape how higher-density spaces are understood and inhabited. So too, how the emotions of everyday life co-construct apartment spaces and social relations (both within families and between neighbours). The empirical material presented in this chapter demonstrates that physical proximity leads to tensions around acoustics and privacy, while apartment materiality creates an emotional dilemma between being a good parent and a good neighbour. Sound frequently leads to feelings of guilt, shame, and stress. In Chapter 7, I discuss these travails, as well as families' spatial, temporal and material coping strategies. The findings demonstrate that both cultural and technical norms must shift to support families with children in the consolidating vertical city.

Chapter 8 builds upon the literature presented in this introductory chapter pertaining to media, planner and developer narratives of who belongs in apartments. The empirical material shows that parents feel the weight of these cultural expectations and assumptions when raising their children in apartments. Descriptions of apartments as 'temporary', 'less than' and 'inappropriate' for families with children are commonly expressed when apartment-dwelling parents interact with family, friends and neighbours. Chapter 8 draws together literature on the emotional geographies of home, alongside parents' narratives to demonstrate how dominant apartment discourses impact on families living in apartments. This chapter demonstrates that parents often experience a contested sense of home and belonging in this setting – highlighting the importance of a cultural shift which sees the discourses that surround apartment living become more inclusive for a diverse population.

Chapter 9 draws together key points for discussion raised in the empirical chapters and returns to the research questions outlined in the introduction. I discuss the key contributions this thesis makes to the housing studies literature and, more specifically, to understandings of home in higher-density settings. In consolidating the empirical findings, this chapter demonstrates that families' contested sense of home is co-produced by cultural norms, apartment materiality and

parenting emotions. Drawing on the vernacular expertise of the parents involved in this study, I suggest a series of recommendations that would enable apartments to better meet the needs of families with children, as a longer-term (rather than transitional) living arrangement.

Chapter 2
Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This thesis seeks to contribute to the interdisciplinary field of housing studies by generating feminist and cultural geographic insights on the emotional and material dimensions of apartment life. It explores how apartment dwellings, family life and meanings of home are co-produced and understands the making (and unmaking) of home in apartments as an ongoing process. This chapter situates the thesis in broader research literatures. It is structured in two parts. First, I provide an overview of literature on feminist and cultural geographies of home. I focus on the interplay between the emotional and material elements of home and draw together perspectives on housing, homemaking and belonging. This theoretical grounding sets the framework for this thesis to deliver insights on how families with children come to feel 'at home' (or not) in higher-density dwellings. The second part of this chapter discusses existing studies in a bourgeoning literature on lived experiences of higher-density accommodation. I highlight what is currently known about residents' experiences of living in apartments, situating the thesis within this emergent discussion. This thesis extends the nascent literature on families' experiences of apartment life by foregrounding parenting emotions and practices, and their intersections with apartment materiality, governance structures, planning agendas and cultural norms.

2.2 Housing studies, and feminist and cultural geographies of home

Blunt and Dowling (2006) identified four main strands of research within the discipline of housing studies: housing policy, the economics of housing provision, house design and the experience and meaning of home. This project is primarily concerned with intersections between the latter two bodies of work – examining families' experiences of home when living in apartments that were not necessarily designed with their needs in mind. To understand families' experiences and everyday parenting practices, I draw on the work of feminist and cultural geographers who attend to connections between the emotional and material dimensions of home (Blunt 2005). By questioning the inclusiveness of current apartment design and governance, the findings of this thesis also link directly to the housing policy strand of housing studies.

Home is a complex and multi-layered geographical concept which has received significant attention from housing scholars (for reviews see Mallett 2004; Blunt and Dowling 2006; Dowling and Mee 2007). While there are multiple definitions of home, commonly home is understood as 'a place/site, a set of feelings/cultural meanings, and the relations between the two' (Blunt and Dowling 2006:2). Although house and home are often conflated (Mallett 2004), 'home encapsulates so much more than housing… to talk only of housing is insufficient to understand the complexity of what home is, both emotionally and materially' (Jacobs and Smith 2008:518). Recognising this complexity, Jacobs and Smith (2008:518) argued that instead of focusing attention on the home/housing binary, housing scholars should attend instead to an 'assemblage of dwelling'. Paying attention to the material features of dwellings and the social lives that inhabit them, this approach embraces the 'meaning, experience and practice that is called 'home' but also the house [dwelling] that is the locus of its performance' (Jacobs and Smith 2008:518). Informed by these insights, this thesis works across conceptualisations of housing and home, focusing on the co-constitutive relationship between dwelling design and governance and experiences and meanings of home.

Such co-constitutive relationships are inherently dynamic. As Carr et al. (2018:258) have shown, 'multiple, overlapping temporalities configure relationships between materials and bodies in the home', shaping everyday practices and domestic care work (Power and Mee 2020). A 'home does not simply exist, but is made' and shaped into something inhabitable through ongoing routinised activities, that seek to control and order space (Blunt and Dowling 2006:23; Lauster and Zhao 2017). Being 'at home' – or making a home – is an ongoing process that requires significant emotional and physical energy (Dowling and Mee 2007; Mee 2007). Its counterpart, home *un*making occurs when elements of the home, both material and/or emotional are destroyed or disrupted (Baxter and Brickell 2014; Cheshire et al. 2019). The making (or unmaking) of home is contingent on everyday practices, ideas, lived experiences, social relations, material objects, memories and emotions (Blunt 2005). The process of homemaking involves interactions with building materials and objects within the home (Blunt 2005; Gregson 2007; Miller 2008; Cox 2016a). This requires spatial and behavioural adjustments and negotiations as occupants work with or around existing infrastructures (Carr et al. 2018). Such adjustments and negotiations are influenced by the physical space available, dominant ideals of family and home (Munro and Madigan 1999:109), residents' tenure status (Easthope 2004), financial and social constraints (Carr et al. 2018), and housing form (Easthope 2019). Homemaking and unmaking are also influenced by social relations (between household

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members, neighbours and housing systems) and by conceptions of 'the proper home', 'good parenting' and 'good homemaking' (Dowling 2008).

Recognising home as a process implores that meanings and experiences of home are never stable. People may experience home in contradictory ways, which shift through 'relations with others, and their own changing position in society' (Mee 2007:212). While 'belonging is solidified through embodied feelings of the 'right fit' between self and place' (including in the home), emotional sensations are mutable (Gorman-Murray 2011:213). So too, identities performed at home are neither singular nor stable (Johnston and Valentine 1995). Recognising that people have multiple experiences of home is important in discordant settings, such as explored in this thesis, where a sense of home is yearned and struggled for, often present, yet always contested.

Broader socio-political relations have an important bearing on processes of homemaking and unmaking (Cheshire et al. 2019:5). Feminist scholars have critiqued the public/private divide, recognising that meanings of home and homemaking are influenced by a multitude of factors across diverse scales both within and beyond the domestic interior (Baxter and Brickell 2004; Blunt and Dowling 2006; Cook et al. 2016). Home is constituted through public and political worlds (Blunt and Dowling 2006). Residents are seen to 'engage in processes of negotiation with other members of their household, with their neighbours and other people in their neighbourhoods, and with other institutions, such as businesses and governments' (Mee 2007:212). This process is complex, ongoing and shaped by power inequalities (Massey 1991). Power and Mee's (2020) articulation of housing as an infrastructure of care provides a useful framework for thinking through the impossibility of separating experiences of home from the broader political context. Drawing feminist care ethics together with the infrastructural turn, Power and Mee (2020) argued that intersections between materiality, housing markets and governance, enable or constrain possibilities of care at a household and social scale. The different opportunities for care afforded by different forms of tenure are a good example of this (Power and Bergan 2019; Power and Gillon 2019). The cultural value and political promotion of home ownership in Australia, has resulted in a range of policies that favour owners and investors over renters (Power and Mee 2020). This body of work has direct applicability for the present study. Indeed, caring constraints are front-of-mind for parents with children living in apartments who, as shown in Chapters 5-8, are regularly required to compromise on their own (and societal) parenting ideals based on the material and cultural context within which

they reside. In the Australian context, apartment developments' materialities and market dynamics have produced a discordant built form. Apartments are often built in locations where the land value uplift is greatest, rather than locations of best fit or amenity. Apartment location and design often reflect speculative investment strategies rather than the extant material needs of the population for long-term homes. On top of this, strata legislation governing how spaces can and cannot be used restrict children's use of communal property and give neighbours the means to enforce particular codes of behaviour upon one another in ways that impinge upon everyday family life.

In order to provide an intimate and rich account of how families with children experience homemaking and unmaking in higher-density settings, this study focused on the interplay between the material, cultural and emotional elements of home – teasing out the complexities and contradictions of these processes. Literature relating to the cultural norms associated with familial homes was outlined in Chapter 1. The following sections review literatures on the emotional and material dimensions of home separately, for the purpose of drawing out key themes in each. These are, however, interrelated and in section 2.3.2 I explain how these literatures are brought together in this thesis. These connections are also evident throughout the empirical chapters which are fundamentally focused on how material, cultural and emotional aspects of apartment life are intertwined.

2.2.1 Emotional geographies of home

Just two decades ago, emotions were neglected in geographical research. In their influential editorial in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, Anderson and Smith (2001) raised concerns around the silencing of emotion in both social research and public life. Davidson et al.'s (2005:1) book *Emotional Geographies* similarly declared the discipline of geography as an 'emotionally barren terrain'. The neglect of emotions in geography was attributed to a longstanding masculinised value placed on detachment, objectivity and rationality (Anderson and Smith 2001). In recognising emotions as highly political and gendered, Anderson and Smith (2001) contended that engagement, passion, desire and subjectivity had been sidelined, devalued and feminised. No longer can this be said to be unilaterally so. Ground-breaking work by feminist geographers (see Widdowfield 2000; Anderson and Smith 2001; Bondi 2005; Davidson et al. 2005; Sharp 2009) has highlighted how human geographies are constructed and lived through emotion. Emotional relations,

feelings and sensibilities are so central to the human experience that they cannot be ignored. Over the intervening years, attempts to understand emotion and the ways in which emotions are situated within and co-constitutive of everyday lives have proliferated (Davidson et al. 2005). The practical and conceptual relevance of emotions to the discipline of human geography is now widely-recognised across diverse themes from the spatial dimensions of emotions (Bosco 2007), to corporeality and the politics of emotion (Ahmed 2014; Clement 2018), emotional dimensions of disaster preparedness and recovery (Eriksen 2019), tourism mobilities and volunteering (Frazer and Waitt 2016), sustainability leadership (Duffy et al. 2019) and gendered spaces of paid work (McDowell et al. 2005; Warren 2016). Emotional responses to every day encounters are viewed not as singular, psychological states, rather as interconnected (Sharp 2009) and spatially, temporally and socially located (MacKian 2004; Ahmed 2014; Warren 2016).

The home has become a key focal point for emotional geographies. An important strand of literature (emerging especially within cultural geography) focuses on the lived experiences, social relations and emotional significance of domestic life (Blunt 2005). Recognising home as a social process, this work explores how homes are made and remade through homemaking practices that have emotional, cultural and social significance (Blunt 2005; Dowling and Mee 2007). A key theme explores connections between home and identity formation, whereby home can invoke feelings that are intimately tied to one's sense of self and sense of belonging (Blunt 2003; Easthope 2004; Blunt and Dowling 2006; Gorman-Murray 2006; Mee 2009). Neither home nor identity are seen as fixed, rather they are mutually co-constituted through the ongoing process of homemaking (Gorman-Murray 2008).

Such research has shown that home is often imagined as a place that provides safety, security, privacy and comfort (Dowling and Mee 2007; Dowling and Power 2012). These idealised, static notions of home position it as a 'haven from the public world, a space of familial intimacy and a site of domestic comfort' (Blunt and Dowling 2006:119). Feminist and cultural geographers have played a crucial role in critiquing this singular view. While home is romanticised as a place of refuge and belonging, homes are also complex and contested and can instead invoke alienation, fear, marginalisation and exclusion (Blunt and Dowling 2006; Gorman-Murray 2008; Wilkinson 2014). For all those that are welcome and belong (whether in a particular home, or in the broader framing of home), others are considered out of place – judged on the basis of what sorts of people or activities are appropriate (see Mee 2009 for an

overview of belonging and care in public housing). Recognising that experiences of home (and accompanying emotions) are not uniform across society, existing research has sought to shed light on homemaking experiences across various axes of identity: gender, age, race, class, disability, and sexuality (see for instance Gorman-Murray 2006; Clapham 2011; Wilkinson 2014). So too across diverse forms of tenure and housing precarity (Mee 2009; Bate 2018; Gillon and Gibson 2018; Harris et al. 2018; Nasreen and Ruming 2020) and different housing forms (Dowling and Power 2012; Baker 2013). Collectively this work has documented the diversity of homemaking experiences, meanings and emotions, revealing home as a contested and complex process. A few key strands of this body of work are particularly informative for this thesis. As I will outline in section 2.3, housing form has an important bearing on how dwellings are experienced by residents, resulting in distinct differences between the homemaking practices and emotions of apartment residents and those living in detached dwellings. In addition, gender and tenure have a strong influence on the homemaking experiences uncovered in this research.

Core to understanding diverse and multiple experiences of home, is the fact that the home remains a gendered space with women positioned as being responsible for both the domestic sphere and care for children (Blunt and Dowling 2006; Dowling 2008; Luzia 2010). In this light, home is a key site in the oppression of women (Blunt and Dowling 2006). Household labour and child rearing have been normalised as the care work of women (Kellerman and Katz 1978; McDowell 1999; Reid et al. 2017). This care work entails diverse feelings and emotions (Strazdins and Broom 2004; Power and Mee 2020). It also cannot be separated from wider networks of consumption and capitalist relations (Cox 2013). Conceptualising the home as a site of social reproduction, feminist scholarship has challenged the dualism between home and work to argue home is an important site of work for women; few activities at home can be separated from the work that goes on there (Cox 2013; Luxton 2015). As Blunt and Dowling (2006:16) contend, 'the notion of home as haven, as a sanctuary from society into which one retreats, may describe the lives of men for whom home is a refuge from work, but it certainly doesn't describe the lives of women for whom home is a workplace'. While feminist scholarship has played an important part in documenting women's experiences in the home, the struggle continues and neoliberal social policies have further increased the domestic care work managed by women (Luxton 2015; Reid et al. 2017). This work is, in some respects, heightened in the context of apartment living. As Reid et al. (2017) have documented, managing the use of space and risk to children within apartments requires emotional work – a

burden that falls unequally on women. While women bear the brunt of inadequate apartment designs that render domestic labour and childcare more difficult, their lived experiences are rarely accounted for in the design process (Power and Mee 2020). As I will detail in section 2.2.2 and throughout the empirical chapters, women are required to re-work normative housing infrastructures, and to push against entrenched cultural norms, in an attempt to make their families' everyday lives manageable in apartments. These are wearying tasks.

As noted above, homemaking experiences and emotions are also influenced by tenure (Power and Gillon 2019). Section 1.2 explained that, alongside detached dwellings, Australian visions of a 'proper' family home centre upon ownership. Such narrow understandings of home are problematic, given the significant number of households who rent publically or privately (Bate 2017). Research focusing on experiences of home and belonging among public housing tenants (Mee 2007; 2009) and private renters (Easthope 2014; Bate 2018; Hulse et al. 2019), demonstrate that property rights and tenancy legislation contribute to the way residents understand, experience and make home – and the emotions that attend these processes. Focusing specifically on the private housing market, prevailing cultural norms position renting as 'an inferior, and inherently transitionary, form of occupancy' (Hulse et al. 2011:25). These binaries come to the fore in apartments, where owners and renters frequently live closely alongside one another. One study documenting differences in homemaking values between neighbours in higher-density settings found that owners perceived renters as 'less legitimate residents' leading to tensions over the use of communal space and facilities (Baker 2013:275). The framing of rental housing as 'inferior' to ownership is underscored by a housing system that favours owners and landlords and disadvantages private renters (for example, through first home-owner subsidies, tax breaks, a residential tenancy act that allows no grounds termination at the end of a fixed-term tenancy and strata by-laws that prevent renters from having input in decisions affecting their apartment block). Negative stigma associated with tenure status can have a significant impact on residents' emotional wellbeing and identity (Easthope 2014). As with any social group, the homemaking experiences of renters are diverse and differ depending on individual choices and constraints. While the majority of tenants are financially constrained to this form of tenure, others explicitly prioritise living in desired locations over ownership (Hulse et al. 2019). In Australia, private renters' ability to feel at home in their dwellings is influenced by financial security, choices about mobility and stability (Bate 2018). As will become evident below, the ability to feel at home is also influenced by residents' autonomy to make material changes to their dwellings (Easthope 2014). For families living with children in

apartments (and renters in particular) this is a point of contention, with residents constrained to make changes to their dwellings. This shapes parenting emotions and everyday material homemaking practices in important ways.

As shown throughout this section, numerous geographers have demonstrated that emotional labour – the *work* of coming to grips with unfolding relations and circumstances – is central to homemaking experiences. As with other aspects of homemaking, this emotional labour often remains invisible (Lauster and Zhao 2017). Moreover, certain spaces 'require heightened emotional performance' or emotional management (Hochschild 1983; Warren 2016:40; Head and Harada 2017). In this thesis I argue that for families with children, discordant spaces such as ill-suited apartments in previously low-rise suburbs, provide an example of a space where emotional work is heightened. Dwelling in spaces that are too small and inflexible in design, lack storage and adequate soundproofing and that are perceived as culturally inappropriate for families, generates work and emotional tensions for parents (especially mothers) who struggle to manage, order and control everyday life in this setting. The emotional geographies literature discussed above sheds light on the ways in which emotions are situated within and co-constitutive of domestic life. The empirical chapters of this thesis draw on this foundational scholarship to demonstrate how parents' efforts to create and maintain a feeling of home and belonging while raising children in apartments is an ongoing, contested and often wearying process.

2.2.2 Material geographies of dwelling

Alongside the emotional aspects of dwelling, the built fabric of dwellings co-constitutes experiences of home. Connections between the physical dwelling, material objects and residents' everyday lives have been widely discussed across geography and related disciplines (Dowling 2008; Jacobs and Smith 2008; Nansen et al. 2011; Dowling and Power 2012; Jacobs and Gabriel 2013; Cox 2016a; Cox 2016b; Carr et al. 2018). This reflects the ascendance of non-representational, more-than-human and relational ontologies in the discipline more broadly. Foregrounding socio-material interactions, this body of work recognises that while material spaces within the home and the things within them can be structured by human activity, as 'vibrant matter', they also have agency in their own right and can either facilitate or constrain domestic interactions (Blunt 2005; Dowling 2008; Bennett 2010; Nansen et al. 2011; Stevenson and Prout 2013; Ghosh 2014; Gillon and Gibbs 2019). As Nansen et al. (2011)

and Power (2015) have shown, buildings are more than a neutral backdrop or stage for the performance of residents' daily lives; rather, they actively shape practices of dwelling and family life. In her earlier work, Power (2009) provided an example of this, revealing that residential construction styles structure belonging by generating feelings of homeliness and unhomeliness (see also Cox 2016a). Likewise, scholars have explored the ability of buildings to generate emotional disorientations (Jacobs 2006), feelings of fear (Lees and Baxter 2011) and welcome (Kraft and Adey 2008) through their particular material design. Key strands of research within material-cultural geographies of home that are relevant to the current project focus on the relationships between domestic architecture, design and everyday experience, and the material cultures of objects and their use.

i) Domestic architecture, design and everyday homemaking

Feelings of being at home are evoked when building materials, and the interior design, furnishings and layout produce a sense of comfort and familiarity. If this sense of belonging is absent due to inappropriateness of the material setting, a sense of unhomeliness or discordance can arise (Cox 2016a). Power inequalities are central to such experiences. Within the home, 'domestic architecture and design are inscribed with meanings, values and beliefs' that both reflect and reproduce particular inclusions and exclusions (Blunt 2005:507). This becomes particularly unjust when such exclusions are built into the urban landscape on a mass scale, as is often the case with modernist planning agendas possessed by the desire for purification, homogeneity (Sennett 1970; Jacobs 2006; Lauster 2016) and profit (Troy et al. 2020). Discordance emerges when idealised designs (based on the visions of planners, developers and architects) do not align with residents' everyday domestic practices, desires and realities (Kotkin 2016). An example of this can be found in the experiences of people with a disability, living in dwellings that do not take their access and ease of movement requirements into account (Imrie 2004). Imrie's work on disability highlights how builders, designers and regulators' lack of 'understanding of the implications of building design in relation to impairment' can result in material dwellings that are oppressive to residents with a disability (2004:686). Similar oppressive processes can be found in the housing experiences of Indigenous Australians. Research into Indigenous understandings and meanings of home has revealed that housing systems shaped by Western/European notions of home (as in Australia), produce housing that is culturally inappropriate – inhibiting the caring practices of older Indigenous people for themselves, kin and country (Penfold 2017; Power and Mee 2020).

Asymmetries between housing design and residents' everyday needs are also evident in the experiences of families with children living in apartments (Fincher 2004). As noted in Chapter 1, apartment design is shaped by the assumption that apartments will be occupied by residents who are not in the child-rearing stage of the life-course (Fincher 2004). As a result, 'facilities for children and for pursuits other than consumption of the individual 'lifestyle'' are rarely considered in the dwelling design (Fincher 2004:325). Residential design and form influence occupants' senses of belonging and shape caring possibilities and constraints long after they have been designed and built (Power and Mee 2020). Social and cultural meanings reproduced in the physical dwelling can impact the functional use of buildings for certain individuals and can also impact the identity of individuals by reinforcing 'disadvantage, stigma and feelings of inadequacy or abnormality' (Clapham 2011:371). Families with children who challenge social expectations by making their homes in apartments, find themselves dwelling in discordant spaces – that are intolerant of diversity.

In examining the relationship between embodied individuals and the homes they inhabit, there are three interrelated moments in the life of a building (Clapham 2011). First, the design of buildings is shaped by the intentions, biases and meanings of the designers (locking inclusions and exclusions into the built form). During the second stage, agency shifts and the building itself structures the human relationships of its users. Householders rework domestic care practices to accommodate infrastructural constraints (Power and Mee 2020). The third moment involves reconfiguration of the material dwelling form by users – for instance, residents who 'come to know the built fabric of their home' over time (Carr et al. 2018) and then adapt the building physically (Cox 2016a), or 'through their behaviour alter the meaning of the building by using it for a purpose not foreseen or sanctioned by the designers' (Clapham 2011:364). Miller (2002) has referred to this two-way process as 'accommodation' – the physical home is appropriated by its inhabitants and residents also make changes to their practices in order to suit the physical home.

Ongoing interactions between residents and buildings reveal the temporal and embodied dimensions of home. Far from being static, dwellings are continually re-adjusted through daily domestic practices that enable them to operate effectively (Dowling 2008; Strebel 2011; Carr et al. 2018). As Nasreen and Ruming (2020:np) summarised:

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> Home is a place of material breakdown and repairs, break-ups and patch-ups of social relations, and day-to-day disruptions and regulations in multisensory experiences; hence, it is subject to an ongoing process of making and unmaking.

A strand of research examining relationships between bodies, materials and inhabitation has advocated for conceptualising buildings as 'living' and 'performative' (Lees 2001; Strebel 2011). The emphasis in such work is that a building is not a stable object or container, rather the layout, materials and overall form have agency that can impact upon processes of making and unmaking home (Strebel 2011; Carr et al. 2018; Nasreen and Ruming 2020). In this view, 'a building is always being 'made' or 'unmade', always doing the work of holding together or pulling apart' (Jacobs 2006:11). Focusing on this ongoing lively relationship between residents and their buildings, research has explored 'eventful' building disruptions (e.g. renovation, retrofit and demolition) (see for example Maller et al. 2012; Wiesel et al. 2013 and Vannini and Taggart 2014) as well as more incremental microscale adjustments to materials and practices (e.g. maintenance and repair and spatial and behavioural modifications in the home) (Strebel 2011; Cox 2016a; Cox 2016b; Carr et al. 2018).

Understanding domestic maintenance practices 'unveils both the agency of materials, and the continued revision of our relationship with home and its components' (Gillon and Gibbs 2019:109). Housing is understood as 'a site of ongoing and active building work' (Jacobs and Cairns 2012:83). Cox (2016b) has shown that working on homes through practices of DIY (Do-It-Yourself) maintenance and improvement can be formative of homemaking and gendered identities. Focusing on the invisible maintenance work carried out through block checks[9] in high-rise housing estates in Glasgow, Strebel (2011) argued that this ongoing problem-solving and maintenance sustains the building. Similar work conducted with Singaporean high-rise estates, reflects maintenance practices as socio-technical events that hold housing systems in place (Jacobs and Cairns 2012). In addition to closer examination of cyclical building maintenance practices, scholars have also explored how residents engage in iterative practices of making and unmaking housing assemblages. Processes of mundane microscale accommodation are 'continually implicated in the ebb and flow of occupants' lives' (Carr et al. 2018:274). Adjustments to practices, interactions and materials take place across multiple

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[9] Strebel (2011:243) defines a block check as 'a repetitive and routine tour that concierges carry out on the buildings in their care… during block checks, concierges control doors, patrol landings and stairs, close windows left open, check rubbish chutes, remove rubbish, carry out smaller cleaning tasks and sometimes get rid of objects that are obstructing passages'.

temporalities such as day and night (Gallan and Gibson 2011), season to season (de Vet 2014) and across the life-course as householders' needs change (Carr et al. 2018). Alongside maintenance and repair, residents also undertake spatial and behavioural adjustments as they come to know the built fabric of their homes. In Carr et al.'s (2018) longitudinal research with environmentally engaged households, participants added shading devices to windows, inserted windows to admit more light, or changed the use or location of certain rooms to accommodate privacy and shifting space and amenity needs. Similarly, Munro and Madigan (1999) examined how families negotiate their relationships and everyday lives within the limitations imposed by the physical space of the home and also the social space defined by dominant ideas of family and home. They highlighted the ways in which 'time zoning' and 'space zoning' were used by householders to manage and resolve conflicts over shared space, allowing the same physical space to be used by different family members for different purposes and at different times. Additional strategies included furnishing children's rooms as multifunctional spaces, including beds, play areas, toy storage, desks and technology (e.g. sound systems or televisions) (Munro and Madigan 1999 – see also Dowling and Power 2012). As shown in each of these examples, the materiality of the home plays a crucial role in facilitating (or constraining) multitasking and allowing families to juggle responsibilities and meet changing needs within the household.

Such strategies and adjustments are especially relevant to the current exploration of families' experiences of space in apartment buildings. While the building fabric continues to be constituted long after construction is complete (Carr et al. 2018), this becomes particularly challenging in apartments, as renovation or remodelling of a single apartment can impact other parts of the building (Easthope 2019). Beyond material constraints, strata rules and regulations pertaining to building modifications and the ability to make changes, restrict residents' autonomy to make both larger structural changes and minor modifications. With material modifications constrained for apartment residents, inhabitants are required to organise their everyday lives in such a way that is accommodated by the existing material dwelling. The challenge of adapting an apartment to make everyday home life more functional is even more difficult for renters and lower-income households who have less choice and control over their living arrangements (Easthope 2004). The inability to make physical changes to dwellings impacts on residents' ability to feel at home (Easthope 2004). And so, dwellings' material design and agency in shaping everyday practices cannot be separated from homemaking emotions. This framing opens up possibilities for exploring the role of materials in facilitating different 'emotional attachments and experiences of inhabitation', animating architecture in an

ongoing process of holding together or not holding together long after construction is complete (Jacobs and Merriman 2011:213; see also Jacobs 2006). While apartment structure and governance are often rigid and deterministic, everyday family life is messy and unpredictable. As was discussed in Section 2.2.1, dwelling in discordant spaces alongside proximate others requires significant emotional work by parents – a point that is taken up again in Chapters 5-8.

ii)   The material cultures of objects and their use

The examples presented in the previous section invite further conceptual and empirical analysis of material and behavioural strategies for negotiating the entanglement of spaces, objects and subjects (humans and non-humans) in domestic space (Blunt 2005; Nansen et al. 2011; Carr et al. 2018). Over the past two decades, interest has grown in how the material cultures of objects are embedded within meanings and experiences of home (Pink 2004; Blunt 2005). Housing units are more than just physical space, rather, they are sites of consumption and everyday material cultural practices. Yet householders do not simply appropriate and consume goods (Money 2007). Processes of ownership and relations with possessions are constitutive of a sense of belonging, place and homeliness (Nansen et al. 2011). Domestic objects are also linked to gendered identities and sensory experiences within the home, with sensory and material domains co-constituting each other and providing insight into gendered performances of resistance or conformity (Pink 2004). Tracing material objects and their use in the home, research has revealed that through processes of acquiring, displaying, storing and ridding in the domestic sphere, individuals become producers of meaning (Gregson 2007; Money 2007). Arrangement of objects and furniture within the home is a way of personalising the dwelling and creating a sense of comfort and familiarity (Baker 2013). As Ruonavaara (2012:186) stated: 'residents actively make dwellings homes by redesigning, decorating, and changing them according to their values and wishes'. Gregson (2007) has argued that getting rid of things, sorting, holding and keeping them, are equally important to achieving the state of being at home. These ongoing processes are seen as fundamental to 'making accommodations accommodating' (Gregson 2007:24). Being at home, then, is realised through 'living with things' (Gregson 2007:1; Nansen et al. 2011).

Residents' relationships with things, and their ability to store, organise and style their homes to suit their preferences and needs are shaped by the dwelling's layout, size and storage capacities (Miller 2002; Dowling 2008; Baker 2013). They are also impacted by middle-class conceptions of 'the proper home', 'good parenting' and 'good homemaking' (Dowling 2008).

Although such notions are fraught and contested, they continue to shape domestic interiors, homemaking practices and parenting emotions in important ways (Blunt and Dowling 2006; Blunt and Dowling 2012). For instance, Cwerner and Metcalfe (2003:233) argued that while it does not reflect the reality of everyday life, 'a properly conceived home' is one that is free of clutter. For families with children, such ideals can be especially difficult to achieve. As Luzia (2010) has argued, a home space transforms into a different environment alongside parenthood. The addition of a child requires new practices of homemaking and new forms of care work.

Research focusing on the material cultures of everyday family life reveal that the containment of children's toys and mess, complicates domestic aesthetic ideals (Dowling 2008; Stevenson and Prout 2013). Exploring parents' relationships with material possessions in the context of open-plan detached housing, Dowling (2008) has shown how children's activities and belongings disrupt cleanliness and spaciousness, requiring material and emotional management, primarily by mothers. Families in Dowling's (2008) study had furnishing and behavioural strategies to contain children and their mess to certain parts of the house (e.g. play rooms, informal living areas) in order to keep the formal living room tidy and presentable – thus reducing anxiety related to clutter and maintaining performances of 'good homemaking'. Similar themes have been explored by Stevenson and Prout (2013) in relation to new build properties in Scotland. In their research, the lack of storage space and inflexibility of internal layouts created challenges for the management of objects by families with young children. In an effort to manage stuff within the home, parents repurposed study rooms and dining rooms into play rooms. When toys did enter the living room, furniture was used to create the appearance that they were not there and that it was an adult space (Stevenson and Prout 2013). Other strategies used for reclaiming space in the home included periodic clean outs and storing and tidying practices.

Geographic forms and housing design influence 'what is bought, what is produced at home and what the work of home-based consumption is' (Cox 2013:823). While expansive detached houses encourage greater levels of consumption, higher-density living creates different consumption patterns and different types of consumption-related work (Cox 2013). Due to reduced storage capacities, the management of material objects is central to accounts of apartment living (Nethercote and Horne 2016). Families rely on clever accumulation and storage strategies in order to manage everyday family life within the spatial constraints of apartments (Nethercote and Horne 2016). While such strategies are successful for some

families, others are inundated by material possessions, further restricting their use of space. As Chapter 6 will show, the complications that arise when living with things in poorly designed apartments, have material and emotional implications for parents who find themselves grappling with disorder amidst an ill-designed built form and middle-class homemaking expectations.

2.3 Apartments as homes

Much of the research outlined in the previous part of this chapter has focused on material and emotional geographies of home in detached dwellings. As Fincher and Gooder (2007:166) have noted, other forms of housing are 'not much dwelt on, in the literature, when 'home' and its meaning are discussed'. In particular verticality and home have seldom been brought into dialogue.

Recognising the need for housing research to better account for multiple experiences of home (Dowling and Mee 2007; Mee 2009), this thesis contributes to a growing body of work exploring how residents feel 'at home' in higher-density dwellings. Among the research contributing to this emerging field are studies of the meaning of home and homemaking in apartments in the UK (Baxter 2017; Scanlon et al. 2018), Canada (Ghosh 2014) and Australia (Baker 2013; Mee 2007; Power 2015). This body of work has shown that, among diverse apartment residents (e.g. recent immigrants, pet owners, owner-occupiers and both private and public housing tenants), feelings of home are co-constructed by materials, practices, regulations and social relations that are unique to vertical living. A sense of home, in apartments, can be hindered or complicated by particular limitations imposed by strata regulations, living within close proximity to neighbours, reduced privacy through the sharing of sound and space, restricted space and security of the dwelling (Mee 2007; Baker 2013; Power 2015). Tensions arising from these limitations are heightened in settings where apartments are poorly designed, or designed for only certain types of inhabitants. For instance, Baxter (2017) explored how vertical dwelling practices in a modernist high-rise public housing estate in London were intertwined with competing meanings of home. For residents, certain features – such as the view, 'sense of being in your own world' and interactions with neighbours in walkways – enhanced a sense of homeliness and were associated with positive emotional attachment. By contrast, anti-social behaviour and crime (in stairwells, lifts and walkways) and stigmatisation of the estate in the media hindered residents' experiences of

home. In the Australian context, Mee (2007) explored experiences of home among public housing tenants. Her study focused on residents living in medium-density housing in inner-city Newcastle and their experiences of privacy and ontological security in this setting. Mee (2007) contended that residents living in apartments face more challenges maintaining their privacy than in other types of dwellings. Living in close proximity led residents to feel watched by their neighbours and highly alert to noise related tensions (see also Kerr et al. 2018; Chapter 7). Noise related-tensions were also evident in Power's (2015) research which explored practices of homemaking, pet keeping and neighbouring in apartments. She argued that the materiality and spatiality of apartment buildings plays a key role in the production of noise through the containment of sounds, transformation of sounds into noise and co-production of noise (Power 2015). While nuisance noise made by pets was portrayed by Power's (2015) study participants as a product of inconsiderate neighbouring, in higher-density dwellings the design and quality of the building is often to blame. Additionally, the consequences of noise related tensions in apartment complexes may fall unevenly depending on tenure status. Baker (2013) found that renters were considered less legitimate occupants and disputes over appropriate noise levels highlighted differences in homemaking values between residents.

While strata and tenant regulations are highly restrictive, apartment residents often find ways of overcoming rules to make home. Examining the experiences of Bangladeshi migrants living in high-rise rental buildings in Toronto, Ghosh (2014) explored how vertical residential structures affect the life worlds of residents. Residents transform high-rise buildings through their daily routines in order to create sites of meaning. While the high-rise apartments in question were seen as constraining and strictly-regulated, residents in Ghosh's (2014) study actively transformed the high-rises into sacred, economic and social spaces. Corridors were used as play areas, entire apartments were rented communally and transformed into mosques, and residents ran a number of informal businesses from within their building. While such practices enabled residents to make high-rise feel like home, tensions nevertheless surfaced relating to perceived differences between Bangladeshi residents and other ethnic groups resident within the complex. The quality of the building, lack of security and exploitation and discrimination resulting due to unequal power relations between owners and governing bodies and the occupants were also key sources of tension (Ghosh 2014). Such work highlights the interconnected nature of everyday homemaking practices and wider housing systems and social processes.

The current thesis contributes to the above discussions of home in higher-density housing, though a focus on the nuanced lived experiences, practices and emotions of a particular set of apartment residents: families with children. In particular, it speaks to Harris' (2015) call for greater understanding of 'ordinary vertical urbanisms', by paying attention to how everyday verticality is experienced, embodied, inhabited and struggled over in multiple ways. The following section discusses extant research on families with children in apartments, and makes a case that greater attention needs to be afforded to the emotional dimensions of their lives.

2.3.1 Families in apartments: towards research on lived experiences

As outlined in Chapter 1, certain living arrangements and housing forms have become normalised and associated with different stages of the life-course. Research into the positioning of families within urban consolidation debates (i.e. Fincher 2004; Costello 2005; Fincher and Gooder 2007 and Raynor 2018) provides important insights as to how media, developer, planner, architect and marketing narratives play into dominant discourses that frame families as out of place in apartments. While these scholars have begun to provide important evidence of such norms, the majority of the data they have collected does not include the voices of residents living in apartments. Understanding high-rise spaces from the perspective of residents themselves is necessary to unpack how apartment living – and related discourses – are experienced. This is pressing given the scale and pace of urban consolidation occurring in Sydney, including in previously low-density suburbs. This is an extraordinary process with long lasting effects that has proceeded with little critical commentary and self-reflection. When residents' perspectives are foregrounded, the impacts of child-blind urban consolidation on parents' everyday experiences, emotions and meanings of home in apartments are revealed. The practices of families with children living in vertical dwellings, however, have not yet received sufficient empirical and policy attention (Gleeson and Sipe 2006; Easthope and Tice 2011; Karsten 2015a).

This thesis accordingly documents experiences of families dwelling and struggling for home in rapidly densifying contexts. Research into families' experiences of apartment living has discussed apartment desirability and families' motivations for living in apartments (Easthope et al. 2009; Carroll et al. 2011; Karsten 2015b), women's perspectives on liveability in vertical communities (Reid et al. 2017), neighbourhoods surrounding high-density housing (Whitzman and Mizrachi 2012; Andrews and Warner 2019), children's access to play in high-rise

communities (Agha et al. 2019; Krysiak 2018), parents' social connectedness within apartments (Reid et al. 2017; Warner and Andrews 2019), implications of apartment living for children's health (Heenan 2017; Andrews et al. 2018), and the material geographies of high-rise family living (Nethercote and Horne 2016; Reid et al. 2017). Research exploring the motivations and constraints leading families to live in apartments reveals families' decisions to live in apartments are multi-faceted, with affordability and location both important considerations. Exploring the desirability of apartments among predominantly lower-income families within children in Sydney, Easthope et al. (2009) found that 45 per cent of households would prefer to be living in a house – suggesting there are a considerable number of families constrained to apartment living. However, 39 per cent of the households in that study preferred apartment living, highlighting that some participants pro-actively chose this form of housing and valued it. Location played a key role in decision making: Easthope et al. (2009) found that although some households would prefer a different dwelling type, remaining in their preferred location was more important – even if they could only afford an apartment there.

Research focusing on the experiences of middle-income families living in apartments has revealed a similar story (Carroll et al. 2011; Brydon 2014; Karsten 2015a and b; Nethercote and Horne 2016; Andrews et al. 2018; Kerr et al. 2020). Examining the experiences of middle-class families in Hong Kong, Karsten (2015) reported that they had strong time-spatial motivations for apartment living and valued living within close proximity to work, school, transport and grandparents who could assist with childcare. In addition to relative affordability and locational attributes, the literature reveals a range of other benefits for families who live in apartments including access to a wide range of amenities and services, reduced commuting time and reduced reliance on cars, a sense of safety, security and community and less maintenance (Brydon 2014; Carroll et al. 2011). The benefits cited by families in such studies complicate the perception that apartments are undesirable and unsuitable to this demographic group. Understanding the preferences of families who live in apartments (amidst expectations that families belong in detached housing) shows that both the dwelling itself and the surrounding location are important factors shaping residential preferences (see Chapter 4).

While more families are living in apartments, for a range of reasons, their perspectives and needs continue to be 'ostracised from the planning and development sectors, despite them being consumers of the residential spaces created' (Reid et al. 2017:16). Existing research focusing on families' everyday lives in apartments provides evidence of the material and social

challenges parents and children continue to face as a result of speculative real estate developments geared toward profit maximisation. The experiences of children living in apartments differ spatially, dependent on a number of factors including household income, design of buildings and tenure (see for instance Appold and Yuen 2007; Whitzman and Mizrachi 2012). Early Australian research on apartment dwelling families focused primarily on lower-income households, who were constrained to apartment living (Randolph, 2006; Easthope and Tice 2011). Children in this context were likely to have moved in the recent past, have a parent or guardian that was born overseas, live in smaller sized accommodation and be situated in rental accommodation (Randolph 2006). Key characteristics of the apartments occupied by lower-income households were argued to disadvantage their children, for instance limited outdoor space to play, poor maintenance and security of communal areas and restrictions on games and playing.

The generalisability of the above findings has been questioned due to their focus on a distinctive, lower socio-economic status cohort (see Nethercote and Horne 2016). Nonetheless, research on middle-income families in apartments reveals that this sub-section of the apartment market also faces distinct challenges due to the neglect of families' needs. Carroll et al.'s (2011) study based in Auckland, New Zealand, revealed that middle-income families identified apartment living drawbacks relating to traffic danger, safety concerns around balconies, spatial constraints, inadequate storage, poor acoustics and a lack of outdoor play space. Similar challenges have been observed among middle-income families in Australia. Parents living in apartments in inner-city Melbourne, for instance, reported that spatial constraints in high-density living challenged their perceptions of ideal family life (Nethercote and Horne 2016). Key points of tension related to storage, privacy and separation between family members and accommodating long-term visitors. These required parents to adopt socio-spatial strategies for coping with less space that necessitated negotiation and compromise (Nethercote and Horne 2016). Andrews et al. (2018) similarly drew attention to the challenges families faced with internal space restrictions, difficulties finding apartments with enough bedrooms, limited storage and having visitors within the confines of apartments. Their participants identified specific design elements that made family life in apartments difficult, including a lack of appropriate space for rinsing clothes, balcony and carpark safety concerns, and poorly designed windows whereby airflow must be compromised in order to ensure children's safety (Andrews et al. 2018).

Rather than focusing on a particular socio-economic group, other studies have focused on women's experiences. In a study by Reid et al. (2017), apartment-dwelling women in Brisbane reported that high-density living environments were materially inappropriate and provided inadequate space for their families. They faced challenges with the internal apartment space being restrictive in its size. Additionally, balconies caused a sense of fear requiring management work by mothers. Reid et al.'s (2017) study also underscored women's perceptions of a lack of community and connectivity in high-rise settings, causing social isolation (see also Warner and Andrews 2019). They cited difficulty entertaining in small spaces, a lack of visitor parking (making it hard for guests to visit) and a lack of family-friendly communal spaces, as key obstacles (Reid et al. 2017; Warner and Andrews 2019). While apartment complexes bring more people closer together – with potential opportunities for greater social connections – their design plays an important role in shaping neighbourly relations, or lack thereof. As a consequence of the physical and social barriers outlined above, some dwellings facilitate distance rather than connection (Warner and Andrews 2019). Research has shown that shared space provision (both in terms of communal spaces within an apartment complex and surrounding public spaces) can help facilitate casual social ties between apartment residents, resulting in benefits for social inclusion and cohesion (Thompson 2019). While this is the ideal, such spaces are not always provided.

Given that apartment complexes often fail to provide an environment for children to play (either due to safety concerns or oppressive by-laws regulating where and how children can play on common property (see Sherry 2008)), research has shown that public spaces in surrounding neighbourhoods become especially important (Whitzman and Mizrachi 2012; Andrews and Warner 2019). Environments surrounding high-rise dwellings are a crucial part of families' everyday lives (Andrews and Warner 2019). In Andrews and Warner's (2019) research conducted in Melbourne, access to green space and children's services, including schools and childcare, were considered non-negotiable by families. Yet such spaces and services were not always accessible, creating further challenges for families living in high-rise neighbourhoods (Andrews and Warner 2019). Sherry and Easthope (2016) similarly argued that a failure to recognise families as legitimate apartment residents has resulted in an under-supply of required school capacity in inner-city Sydney. Others have also observed that holistic compact city planning is needed that takes children's needs into account in the public realm, service provision and travel routes, as well as in apartment design (Easthope and Tice 2011; Krysiak 2018).

This thesis and related publications (Kerr et al. 2018; 2020) build on this growing specialist field to illuminate parents' lived experiences raising children in apartments – highlighting the limitations and affordances apartment living entails. While extant research has provided vital insight into the material constraints of apartments and surrounding environments for families with children, there has been less mention of how these experiences impact parents' emotional wellbeing[10] and sense of home (see Reid et al. 2017). At the core of this thesis, then, is a focus on the emotional work of parenting in discordant spaces that unsettle cultural norms and are not necessarily designed or governed to suit the needs of families with children. Such insights are necessary to illuminate discord, stress and dysfunction in the housing system. To examine how higher-density parenting is experienced *emotionally*, I have chosen to focus on the interplay between i) apartment planning and design, materials, governance and cultural norms and ii) embodied practices and emotional work. Insights from cultural feminist research on the material and emotional experiences of dwelling, discussed in sections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2, have guided this process. The following section explains how these diverse aspects of apartment life come together to form a framework for this study.

2.3.2 Material, cultural and emotional dimensions of parenting in apartments

Addressing the study aims and research questions outlined in Chapter 1, requires attentiveness to the interconnected nature of the material, cultural and emotional elements of home. This approach recognises that the material and immaterial elements of homemaking (or unmaking) cannot be separated from each other, or the broader socio-political relations in which housing systems are embedded. Entanglements of infrastructures, emotions and housing systems, iteratively shape dwelling experiences. As Jacobs and Merriman (2011:213-214) suggest, within buildings,

> users, experts, material and immaterial things encounter one another in a myriad of complex, choreographed and unexpected ways… [generating] different kinds of embodied engagements with and sensory apprehensions of buildings, as well as different modes of dwelling and inhabiting, and different perspectives on architectural spaces.

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[10] Wellbeing is a complex and multidimensional concept, understood as both individual and collective (Atkinson 2013). Understanding wellbeing requires attentiveness to social, material and spatial relationalities.

Attending to dwelling experiences from a socio-material perspective, provides opportunities to shed light on the diverse ways in which buildings are inhabited, embodied, designed and re-designed, with implications for residents' practices and emotions. A number of papers already discussed in this chapter have brought together the material, cultural and emotional aspects of homemaking in various ways (see for instance Blunt 2005; Blunt and Dowling 2006; Jacobs and Smith 2008; Kraft and Adey 2008; Lees and Baxter 2011; Cox 2016a; Cox 2016b; Baxter 2017; Power and Mee 2020). This thesis draws together insights from this literature with the cultural housing norms and densification planning agendas outlined in Chapter 1, to reveal a complex and discordant experience of dwelling for families with children inhabiting apartments.

As depicted in Figure 2.1, parenting practices and emotions in apartments are co-produced by modernist planning visions of homogeneity and order; cultural housing norms that position apartments as spaces for childless households; apartment materiality that is ill-suited to the needs of families with children; and formal and informal apartment governance processes that constrain families' lives in individual apartments and on common property.
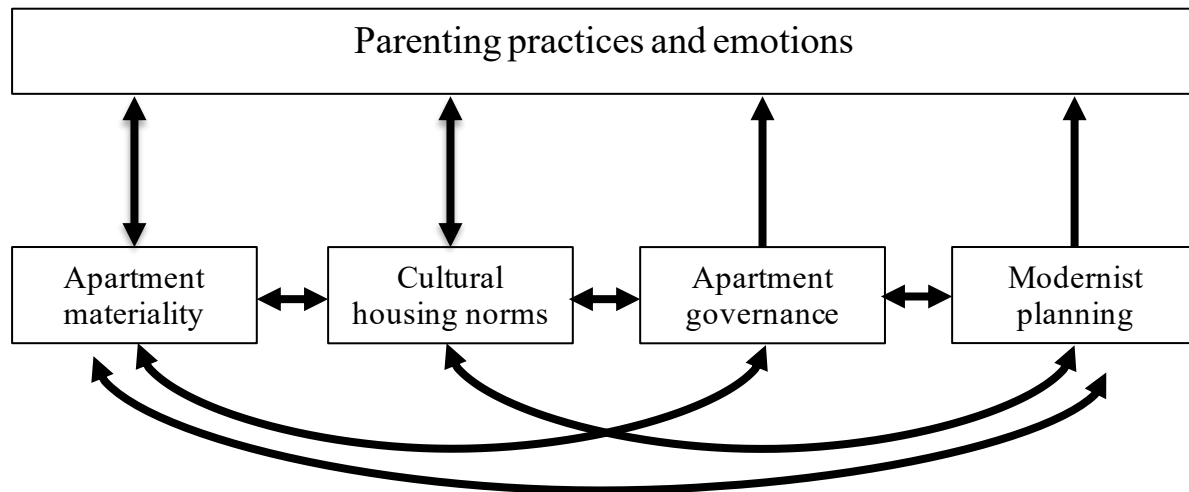
Figure 2.1: Diagrammatic representation of the elements that co-produce parenting experiences in apartments

The materials, norms, plans and regulatory systems that influence parenting emotions and practices, are also interrelated and reinforce one another, as shown in Figure 2.1 and discussed throughout the empirical chapters of this thesis. For instance, cultural housing norms that position families as belonging in detached houses, feed into compact city planning agendas that neglect the diversity of apartment residents. Planning agendas in turn impact on the material

form of apartments as child-blind design is built into dwellings during the construction phase (Chapters 5-7). Driven by a rhetoric that apartments are unsuitable for families, cultural norms help legitimise certain behaviours in apartment complexes and exclude others, through governance mechanisms (Chapter 5 and 7). Further still, cultural norms impact on expectations of good parenting. Norms and judgements relating to a 'proper childhood' and 'proper home', are experienced in social relations and also internalised by parents, with implications for their sense of belonging (Chapter 8). At the same time, the material form of apartments feeds back into cultural norms of who belongs in apartments and also shapes the ability to be a good parent in apartments – as families encounter challenges relating to space (Chapter 5), storage (Chapter 6) and sound (Chapter 7). It is the entanglement of each of these elements that co-produces parents' everyday practices in their apartment homes, and the material and emotional tensions they face. The challenges and *work* of managing everyday life in this setting, with implications for parents' senses of home and belonging, is revealing of dysfunction in the housing system.

As shown in Figure 2.1, the relationship between apartment materiality and cultural housing norms on the one hand and parenting practices and emotions on the other, is not one-directional. Over time, as parents devise strategies for reconfiguring their dwellings and challenging parenting norms, their practices also influence apartment materiality (within limits) and work toward shifting cultural norms relating to the perceived appropriateness of apartments as familial housing. The everyday adjustments made by families, as they come to learn what does and does not work in their dwellings (see Chapters 5-7), is representative of the ongoing process of accommodation between residents and buildings (Miller 2002). While parents attempt to rework materials and push back against exclusionary norms where possible, notably what is missing in Figure 2.1 is a pathway for parenting practices and emotions to feed back into apartment governance and modernist planning agendas. These, as set out in Chapter 1, largely operate in a child-blind manner. This thesis aims to contribute to this feedback process by documenting parents' discordant experiences of apartment life and by suggesting avenues through which planners and regulators can better accommodate their needs (Chapter 9). The argument here is not just for better design, but also for an underlying shift in the philosophies underpinning urban planning and governance toward a system that listens to vernacular experts (urban residents) and prioritises diversity and human flourishing over profit maximisation and modernist notions of homogeneity and control. Paying attention to the material, emotional and cultural intricacies of everyday life will be key to this success.

2.4 Conclusion

The house-as-home is a material and emotional space. Residents' experiences of home are shaped by social norms and expectations, material features, consumption practices, power inequalities, social relations (within and beyond the household) and housing markets and governance regimes. Cultural and feminist geographies of home provide a framework for better understanding the material, cultural and emotional homemaking experiences of families living with children in apartments. Several crucial insights are relevant to the remainder of this thesis. The first is that home is an ongoing process, made and remade through everyday practices. Second, these practices involve material, cultural and emotional elements, and experiences of dwelling are co-produced by relations between these dimensions. It follows that conflict, struggle and emotional work can be heightened in particular material or cultural settings, in this case, apartments. Third, the work of maintaining a sense of home and belonging in materially or culturally inappropriate settings requires significant emotional and physical energy. While the process of accommodation between residents and their dwellings is ongoing, by nature of their design and interconnectedness, apartment structures are rigid and difficult to physically alter. This requires householders to undertake spatial, material and behavioural adjustments to work with or around existing infrastructures and proximate others who have different, sometimes conflicting, aspirations and norms. The burden of this work is shouldered particularly by women. This work is ongoing, across the day and across the life-course and occurs as needs change and the dwelling continues to be adapted. The dwelling itself is always in a process of holding together or pulling apart long after construction is complete. A sense of home may be present, but is always contested.

While such negotiations are well documented in the context of detached housing, less is known about the material and emotional homemaking experiences of apartment dwellers, especially in the discordant spaces arising from extraordinary densification in previously low-density cities. This thesis contributes to the emerging discussions outlined above by exploring how everyday practices of homemaking play out for families with children in apartments. It seeks to explore the strategies these families have for adapting to the (seemingly) rigid physical structure of their buildings and attempting to make home amidst cultural norms that erode their belonging. When exploring how the materiality of apartment buildings shapes everyday family life, it becomes abundantly clear that such strategies require physical and emotional work and are influenced by homemaking ideals and expectations. Investigating these intricacies requires

a distinctive methodological approach centred upon qualitative and narrative analysis techniques, attuned to lived experiences, emotions and materialities. It is to this methodological approach that the thesis now turns.

Chapter 3
Methodology

3.1 Introduction

My interest in this topic first emerged in 2013 when I undertook a 13 week Directed Studies project as an undergraduate student. Working under the supervision of Dr Natascha Klocker, I completed a report exploring the social and environmental sustainability of urban consolidation in Australian cities. As part of this study, I analysed 2011 Census data to determine apartment demographics and conducted a literature review that aimed to investigate existing understandings of how people manage their everyday lives in apartments, with particular focus on families with children. The literature review identified a gap in understandings of families' experiences living in apartments and the report set out the need for further qualitative research in this area as Australian cities continue to consolidate. At that point in time I could not have imagined myself going on to do a PhD, but a subsequent Honours year sparked my interest in research and fed my ongoing curiosity about the everyday practices of urban residents. In 2015 found myself returning to this topic – families with children living in apartments – as I commenced my postgraduate research journey.

I was interested in understanding the reasons why an increasing number of families are living in apartments and in exploring everyday family life in these dwellings. This led me to develop the research questions outlined in Chapter 1. Gaining insight into the challenges families face in this setting was motivated by a desire to advocate for better design and governance practices. The methods that enabled me to document and understand families' experiences of home in apartments were inspired by cultural and feminist geographers who have identified home as a process with both material and emotional elements (Blunt and Dowling 2006). Guided by this framing, I sought to get to know the participants and their homes – and interactions between the two. To that end, I employed a qualitative, mixed-method study design incorporating interviews, floor plan sketches and home tours. This range of methods allowed me to gain rich insights into diverse homemaking practices and emotions.

This chapter describes the research journey undertaken for this thesis, illustrating the research design, its alignment with the study aims, and the methods chosen to answer the research questions. I first detail the mixed-methods used in this research project. I then share reflections

on research ethics and researcher positionality. After contextualising the study, I outline the recruitment strategies and participant selection criteria and provide an overview of the study participants' attributes and apartment characteristics. The chapter then describes the data analysis techniques that were used, specifically, why narrative analysis was selected for engaging with the everyday experiences and meanings of place specific practices, encounters and emotions (Wiles et al. 2005). Finally, I reflect on the experience engaging with the wider public throughout my research. A commitment to convey families' experiences in a timely manner – to feed back into the public debate as Sydney is being actively reshaped – was a core part of my research journey. I reflect on the experience of communicating the research findings through public outlets and show how a significant (and unforeseen) amount of media attention on this project provided extended opportunities for public and practitioner engagement. I conclude by arguing that amidst rapid changes and with growing risk of material and emotional dysfunction in our urban fabric, engaged qualitative housing research has a further role to play in creating a platform for participants' narratives and vernacular expertise to be shared with policy and practitioner audiences.

3.2 Documenting the lived experiences of apartment residents: a qualitative, mixed method approach

A mixed-method approach was employed to capture participants' everyday experiences of apartment life, incorporating sequential stages of semi-structured interviews, floorplan sketches, home tours and photographs. These approaches complemented each other and, as detailed below, unlocked insights into parenting practices and emotions and the ways in which they were influenced by apartment materiality and cultural housing norms. A preliminary review of nascent literature on families' experiences in apartments (see Chapter 2) helped me to decide on the themes I would pursue in my interview schedule.

Before conducting the first tranche of interviews, I piloted the interview schedule with two participants who were recruited through personal networks. The piloting stage provided an important opportunity to refine the questions for subsequent interviews. It was during this piloting phase that the significance of emotions became apparent. Beyond merely sharing their experiences and practices, participants reflected on how they *felt* parenting in apartments. This provided insight into the emotional labour of parenting in a living arrangement that runs against cultural norms and that is not necessarily designed to suit the needs of families. The complexity and richness of the stories shared affirmed the importance of an open and conversational

approach to interviews, and led to adjustments to the interview schedule to bring emotions to the fore. Below I describe each of the methods utilised throughout the project in further detail.

i)   Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were the primary method used to elicit personal, nuanced insights into families' everyday lives. A well-recognised method in geography and the social sciences more broadly, semi-structured interviews 'give space to participants' personal understandings of situations and, in turn, show how those personal feelings are constituted through various, contingent relations' (Anderson 2016:187). Interviews capture how people make sense of their everyday lives and provide an encounter in which people can talk about their practices in revealing ways (Hitchings 2012). Interviews were conducted over the duration of the project, although the majority occurred in 2016, at the height of Sydney's apartment 'boom' (Sisson et al. 2019). Interviews took place with parents (usually one, but occasionally both) who spoke on behalf of their household. In total, 24 participants from 18 households participated in the study. Interviews were conducted in two stages and were conversational, encouraging parents to share stories and detailed explanations of their experiences (see Appendix A).

Stage 1

The initial in-depth interview explored parents' housing histories, the factors taken into account when choosing their apartment, the process of finding a suitable property and their involvement in or understanding of strata. Interviews then explored the emotional experiences of sharing space (both as a family and with neighbours). Discussions focused on how certain home spaces were used (for multiple purposes, at different times and by different family members); and on experiences of living within close proximity to neighbours and how this impacted parenting decisions and family life. These questions helped to unpack the ways in which the materiality of the dwelling, and interactions with others, shaped parenting practices – at times requiring significant emotional energy.

Stage 2

In total, 15 of the 18 households went on to participate in a second interview. Follow-up interviews aimed to gain greater insights into relationships between the materiality of the home and the ways in which families negotiate the purchase of household items and storage, as well the sharing of objects and space with others. These interviews concluded with a discussion of the overall experience of home in an apartment and future housing aspirations. Participants had

an opportunity to reflect on their own experiences and to consider what advice they would give to other families contemplating living in an apartment, and to planners, developers and architects who design, build and sell apartments. Participants were also given a chance to reflect on any other topics which were not included in the interviews and to add any final comments or questions. Both interview stages were audio-recorded.

Despite the interviews being semi-structured and organised into themes, I remained open to abandoning the structure of interviews when discussions headed in different directions (Aitken 2001). This openness was important in situations where parents had recent stories of conflict or tension they wished to share. The benefit of face-to-face interviews was that I could listen with sensitivity, empathy and care, as parents shared emotional stories and experiences (Anderson 2016). This flexibility was also important, given I was often interviewing parents while their children were present. The flow of the interviews was often interrupted by children needing food, waking up from naps, needing a nappy change and wanting attention to play. In some instances, I paused interviews during these breaks and in others the focus of our conversation shifted as we switched rooms to accommodate children's changing needs.

ii)   *Floorplan sketches*

Floorplan sketches were incorporated during the Stage 1 interview. Drawing has been used as a participatory research method by geographers to bring visibility to certain spaces and provide insights into affective and emotional geographies of place (Tolia-Kelly 2008; Antona 2019). Seven of the eighteen Stage 1 interviews were not conducted within the apartment itself due to participants' preference to meet initially in a public space. Other interviews were conducted in participants' apartments, but were confined to just one room. In both of these scenarios, the sketches provided a spatial introduction, allowing me to gain a sense of apartment layouts and material features that I could not otherwise see. By sketching their floorplans, participants were able to describe different parts of their apartments, engaging with 'the spatiality of memory and experience' (Antona 2019:700). Participants' sketches of their apartments were used as a prompt for further discussions about certain spaces within the home. Discussions explored the different uses of various spaces by adults and children, privacy and separation for family members, tensions and challenges and the specific feelings parents associated with different spaces. Floorplan sketches were used differently by each participant. While some participants chose to write on their sketches to signal how they used or felt about different spaces within the apartment, others were less expressive. It was not uncommon for the drawing exercise to

elicit a level of discomfort from participants who felt they were 'bad at drawing' or joked that they could not remember the layout of their apartment correctly. In an effort to make participants more comfortable, I related to these experiences, acknowledging that when I completed this activity myself at home I too found it difficult. I reassured participants that regardless of how the sketches turned out, their primary purpose was as a prompt for further discussion. While the sketches do not appear throughout the thesis, I have included several below for illustrative purposes (Figure 3.1).
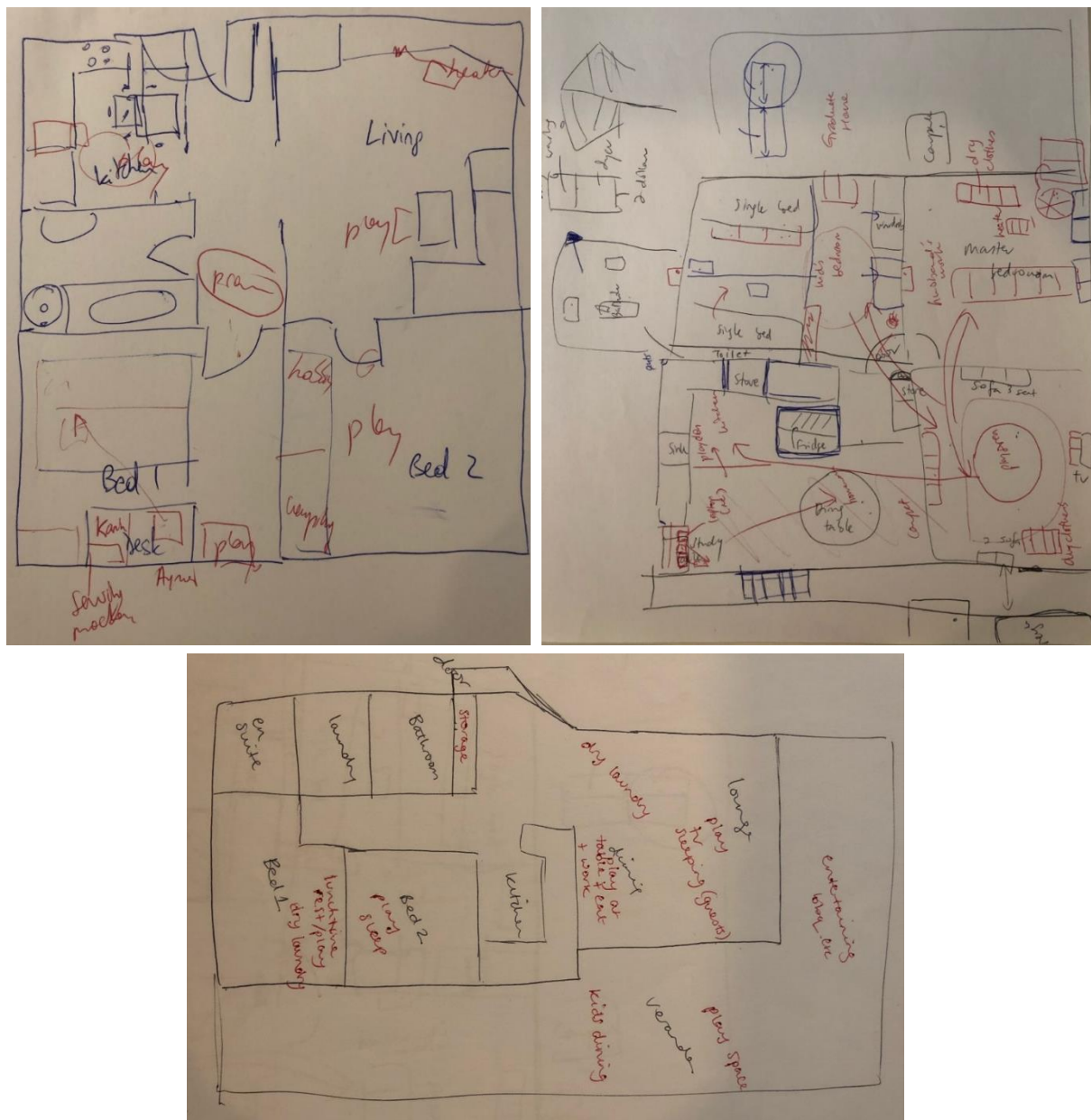
Figure 3.1: Examples of participants' floorplan sketches

iii) Home tours

Once rapport was established with participants, usually at the completion of the Stage 2 interview (but in some instances at the end of the first interview), I was taken on a narrated home tour. Such home tours occurred in 14 of the 18 participating households. The conversations that occurred during the home tours were audio-recorded. Home tours are a common method used in housing and home research to reveal different types of knowledge about domestic practices and the relational affect of building materiality (Dowling 2008; Jacobs et al. 2012; Baxter 2017). While conducting the home tour, participants were able to talk in a material context rather than an abstract one, offering deeper insights into 'ways of living' with children in apartments (Tolia-Kelly 2004; Klocker et al. 2012). Home tours provided an opportunity to explore the materiality of the apartment building and triggered new topics of discussion prompted by the surrounding environment. They led to impromptu stories because being in different spaces within the apartment often reminded participants of experiences, struggles and strategies they had not yet shared. Specific elements of buildings' materiality and homemaking that were discussed during home tours included the layout and design of spaces within the home, storage facilities and practices, furnishing choices and design and provision of communal spaces. Home tours also allowed participants to show changes or adjustments they had made (or would like to make) to their apartments to make the space work better for their families. Photographs were taken throughout home tours, with participants' consent. The main purpose of the photographs was to document each home to jog the researcher's memory, however, the images also captured examples of material dysfunction alongside innovative examples of how families were making apartment life work. Several of these images appear throughout the thesis, reproduced with participants' permission and anonymised where necessary. Photographs of the outside of participants' dwellings are not included for privacy purposes. Between the interviews and home tours, I spent somewhere between one hour and four-and-a-half hours with each family.

iv) Follow up emails

Throughout the research process, several families got in touch with me to let me know that they had moved out of their apartments. Their reasons were varied, with some linked to negative experiences and others driven by life circumstances (e.g. the unexpected birth of twins). In an effort to capture this information across the sample, I contacted all participants in late 2019 to see how things had panned out for each family. I sent an email to each participant querying if they still lived in an apartment. If they did, I was interested if it was the same

dwelling and, if not, what had prompted their move. If they no longer lived in an apartment, I sought to find out what kind of dwelling they had moved to and what motivated the shift. Given it had been some time since the original interviews, the response rate was expected to be low. In total 10 of the 18 households responded to the email and the outcomes of their housing journeys are captured as a postscript at the conclusion of this thesis.

3.3 Ethical considerations

The research project was granted formal ethics approval by the University of Wollongong Human Research Ethics Committee in February 2016 (protocol number 2016/040). In accordance with the ethical research practice of informed consent, participants were provided with information sheets and consent forms prior to interviews (see Appendix B). Participant information sheets outlined the aims and methods of the project, what participation would involve and how to contact the investigators should they have any questions. After understanding and reflecting on their involvement in the project and asking any questions, participants signed a written consent form and indicated the stages of the project in which they wanted to participate. The participant information sheet and the consent form clearly stated the potential for use of data in academic journal articles, books, conferences and media publications, as well as this thesis. All interview recordings, transcriptions and personal details were stored securely. Beyond informed consent and security of data there were several key ethical issues that were of particular importance to this study which I outline below.

i) Protecting participants' right to confidentiality

In recognition of the personal stories parents were invited to share, participants were given the option of a pseudonym being used in place of their real name to ensure privacy and confidentiality. Pseudonyms were automatically adopted for all family members who were not part of the interview (e.g. spouses, children). Protecting participants' identities and personal details throughout the course of the project was particularly important in the case of subsequent widespread media engagement (see section 3.8). On multiple occasions, television or radio producers asked me if I could connect them with a family to interview as part of the story. While I was always in support of having the firsthand voices of families included in media stories, I did not pass on the information of parents who had participated in this study and instead suggested producers seek to engage willing families through their own recruitment methods. The assurance of confidentiality was also important given the difficult stories some

participants disclosed (e.g. conflict and abuse from neighbours). There were instances where participants shared copies of letters and emails they had received from neighbours and asked me not to publish this information. Others disclosed personal details of tensions with intimate partners and mental health struggles that they did not want included in the research. In each of these cases, participants' right to control what they shared was respected and such information has not been included in this thesis or related publications.

ii)   Acknowledging the transformative potential of the research encounter

As Aitken's (2001) work interviewing cohabiting partners after the birth of their first child revealed, seemingly innocuous questions about daily routines can be a form of intervention. By the very nature of asking questions we alter people's day-to-day lives (Dowling 2010). In my own research there were instances where I was aware that topics raised caused participants to consider issues they might not have previously contemplated. For example, my questions around apartment windows brought new concerns to light for Anna:

> Sophie-May: have they [the windows] got fly screens on the outside?
>
> Anna: There's a couple that don't, and we do keep those closed. That's a really good point. I should make sure that they're locked, the ones without fly screens now we've got a little boy… there is one in Jacks's bedroom that doesn't have a fly screen but we always keep that closed yep… [our windows] they open like this wide [gesturing with hands] and so if there's no fly screen on that that is really dangerous obviously… it's so flimsy and old so I'd hate to think of a child, you know, pushing it or something. Oh no, I'm freaking out. I need to look it up.

As the above excerpt shows, Anna's parental concerns amplified as a result of a seemingly innocuous question. Similar reactions occurred when I asked parents about their plans for adjusting the apartment as their children aged. Discussions emerged that led parents to think about potential future challenges they might not yet have considered, such as teenagers' privacy needs. An ethical consideration following these conversations is that participants may have left the interviews feeling less comfortable in their own homes due to uncertainty about the future.

Some questions created awkwardness when both parents were present and either had differing views on the situation or used the interview as an opportunity to find out how the other partner felt. As Hall (2014:2182) has shown, interviewing multiple family members can accidently provoke sensitivity:

Participants often have little control over what other family members disclose, whether in their presence or absence, or how they deal with situations when these topics arise. Emotions are unruly and "in their very intensity involve miscommunication", and misunderstandings... Families can say "destructive"… or "embarrassing"… things to each other in the group interview context, sometimes without even meaning to, which is in part down to the intimacy of the group.

In my own research, when both parents were present during interviews, there were instances where the dynamic of the interview changed, as topics were brought up which the couple had not yet discussed or which were subject to disagreement. In one interview, the main parent I was speaking to kept referring questions on to his wife who was half-listening to our conversation, in an effort to hear her perspective on how things were working. As Valentine (1999:70) has shown, interview questions can 'accidently expose tensions in the relationship between household members', creating moral complexities for the researcher. This became evident when discussions around collecting and ridding practices prompted different reactions from a couple who began to argue about their different values regarding what to dispose of. Embarrassed by the direction in which the conversation had headed, one partner stated: 'Let's not fight' and tried to move the interview along. My concern about the potential for interviews to cause an argument caused discomfort as a researcher and left me concerned for the implications of this research encounter. This remained an unresolved ethical dilemma.

iii) Situating interviews at home

The spatial context where interviews take place influences the construction of identity and knowledge and the people, place and interactions discussed in the interview (Elwood and Martin 2000; Sin 2003). Interviewing participants within the emotional and intimate spaces of their homes thus required awareness of power dynamics and interviewee performativity (Sin 2003). Upon entering families' homes I was treated like a guest, with participants offering cups of tea or water, and checking I was comfortable. While this changed the dynamic between the researcher and participant, being in their homes was crucial to understanding the routines and everyday experiences I was trying to uncover. Accepting participants' gestures of hospitality helped to create a relaxed atmosphere for the discussion to take place.

The performative nature of the interview was evident in participants' homes. Homemaking ideals prompted a material performance from participants who cleaned before my visit, and

placed spatial boundaries around which parts of the apartment were included in the home tour (Dowling 2008). Several participants opted to exclude certain rooms from the tour in an effort to hide their 'messiness'. One admitted that she had left her child sleeping in the lobby so that she could vacuum before I arrived without waking him up. Another did not feel comfortable with the interview being in her home all together. Concerns about mess were not the only source of discomfort relating to being interviewed at home. While discussing a recent neighbourly tension over noise, Anna shared that she had heightened anxiety about sound and what her neighbours could or couldn't hear, commenting, 'maybe they can hear us right now'. In some cases, anxiety about bumping into aggressive neighbours in common spaces during the home tour was also evident, with participants perhaps fearing how their neighbours would react if aware of their participation in the research. Such tensions prompted me to be discrete in common areas, suddenly more aware of my own presence as a researcher.

iv)   *Negotiating participant distress*

The experiences parents shared with me during this research project were emotive and for some families were a cause of distress. This was something I remained conscious of throughout the research process, and was an issue that was heightened for participants who had opted to take part in the research because they were in the midst of a current dispute or challenge. I listened with empathy and, where possible, suggested avenues for further support (e.g. Fair Trading website and strata lawyers). Despite this, I left some interviews feeling deeply unsettled and ill-equipped (see Widdowfield 2000). While I believed capturing and sharing stories would play an important role in gaining further support for families in apartments in the longer-term, it was difficult to wrap up 'data collection' with some families knowing these tensions would continue to shape their everyday lives after I left. The ethics of negotiating parents' distress also continued beyond the interview phase. As I will detail towards the end of the chapter, the significant amount of media attention the project gained resulted in parents and other apartment residents (who were not part of this study) emailing me for further advice on tensions they faced within their strata complex. At times I faced ethical challenges of becoming a proxy counsellor when people emailed me in distress. This required me to set and negotiate boundaries and be clear about what expertise I did and did not have. As with the parents I interviewed, where possible I pointed families who emailed me to resources and further avenues for support.

3.4 Reflexivity and positionality

Ongoing critical reflexivity throughout a project recognises that research is a dynamic social process, requiring the researcher to be aware of their positionality and power relations and how this might impact on the research processes and outcomes (Dowling 2010). As researchers, our identities are multiple and complex. Our personal experiences, way of seeing the world and 'insider' or 'outsider' status has the potential to shape our encounters and interactions with participants (Aitken 2001; Dwyer and Buckle 2009). Wiles et al. (2005) for instance has suggested that *not* sharing similar experiences or characteristics to participants has the potential to shape how participants feel they can tell their story.

I entered this project with experiences of both rural and urban dwelling. I spent my childhood and teenage years growing up in detached houses surrounded by acreage filled with trees, grassland and dams. In primary school I rode my bike to school and I spent my afternoons climbing trees and jumping the fences of neighbouring properties to explore. I had the type of 'free range' childhood that apartment dwellers are often accused of denying their children. Moving in 2011 to Wollongong for university marked the beginning of my experience as an apartment dweller. The initial apartment I rented had no balcony or outdoor space, and for the first time in my life, my bedroom wall backed onto the wall of a neighbour. Despite the building being constructed with concrete and double brick, it was not uncommon to hear my neighbours going about their everyday lives around me. This was a new experience for me. I found myself at times on the receiving end of unwanted noise from neighbours. Throughout this experience I also discovered benefits to apartment living which I had not encountered in a rural upbringing. My small apartment required little maintenance, I had a short walk to public transport and the shops, and I relished having an abundance of activities on my doorstep.

Entering into this project, I was aware that although I have lived in apartments for nine years, my everyday practices and apartment living experiences are different to those of my participants, in that I am not a parent. While I have had experience of being a neighbour to families with children in several apartment complexes, I was not aware of the extent of neighbourly tensions over children's noise prior to commencing this research. To build connections with the interviewed parents, research practices were framed by an ethic of care for participants (Ellis 2017). I listened to personal stories with empathy and understanding and an effort was made to make parents feel comfortable and reassured about their parenting

decisions. This meant making it clear that my project aimed to support families living in apartments and that I did not agree with dominant discourses that frame apartment living as inherently bad for children. During interviews I found myself playing with children to keep them distracted while their parents spoke, being given babies to hold and empathising with parents about the judgement they received. As a result of building rapport with families, my interest in the topic and comfort playing with children, I found that at various times interviewees made the assumption that I too was a parent. Questions about how old my children were and how long my family had lived in an apartment caught me off guard and required me to explain that my research interests were not based on personal experience. During these encounters I was reminded of my position as a 'researcher' and 'outsider', and I reflected on how these assumptions by participants may have shaped what they decided to share with me. While I did not have personal experience of parenting in an apartment, my primary supervisor did. Natascha's 'insider' knowledge of the highs and lows of raising a young family in higher-density housing provided valuable insight. Natascha regularly created space for me to discuss ideas, the sensitivities of the research and to trial the relevance of particular questions. These conversations and her willingness to share insight into her own experiences, undoubtedly strengthened the quality of the research design.

3.5 Recruitment

Participant recruitment began in 2016. Rather than focus on one particular suburb as a case study, I decided to cast a wide net and engage participants from diverse locations across the city, recognising that experiences may differ between inner, outer and middle-ring suburbs. While the focus was ostensibly on Sydney, when families from nearby Wollongong[11] (the city I live and work in) contacted me to share their experiences, they were incorporated in the study (n=4) in an effort to be inclusive. In order to be eligible to participate, households had to have one or more child/ren aged 15 or under living at home and had to be currently living a flat, unit or apartment (i.e. adjoined horizontally and vertically).

Participants were recruited through a variety of methods. First, I designed a flyer (see Appendix C) outlining the focus of the research and distributed this information to online groups and within personal networks. I also wrote an online article which was posted on

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[11] Wollongong is located on the east coast of Australia, approximately 60 kilometres south of Sydney. It is common for people to commute for work purposes, between Sydney and Wollongong, on a daily basis.

LookUpStrata.com (an Australian property blog dedicated to strata living) and republished on the 'Apartment Mum' blog. In total, 10 participants were recruited through personal networks (including friends of friends who had seen the flyer shared online) and four participants were recruited through the online posts. A further four participants were recruited via snowballing and word of mouth, particularly through mothers' groups. Snowball sampling has both advantages and limitations (see Browne 2005; Noy 2008). Being introduced to participants through snowballing or via personal networks helped establish rapport with participants. When meeting participants for the first time I was treated warmly and trust was established with ease due to the perceived sense of familiarity. A drawback of this method was that it led to a cluster of parents in certain geographical areas. While I could have continued recruiting to cover more suburbs, the rich volume of data collected from the 18 households was deemed sufficient to address the research goals.

3.6 Participant and dwelling attributes

In total, 24 people from 18 families took part in research interviews (see Table 3.1 for a summary of participant attributes and refer to footnotes used to remind the reader of the key attributes of each participating family at their first mention in each empirical chapter). It is important to clearly identify the types of voices that were included and those that were absent. The findings of this project largely reflect the experiences of women from middle-class, heterosexual nuclear families with young children. Whilst the interview did not directly ask participants for information on their income, they were deemed predominately middle-class based on home tours, professional status and education level. Median house prices across the suburbs that participants were located also indicate moderate wealth. In addition to these household attributes, the term middle-class is also used in this thesis in relation to a set of parenting and homemaking ideals and identities (see Dowling 2008; Dowling and Power 2012). It is important to note that the experiences and living environments of families will differ markedly depending on their class, socio-economic status, family configuration and tenure status. (Randolph 2006; Whitzman and Mizrachi 2012). I did not deliberately try to exclude low-income families, same-sex families, or single parents, but these cohorts did not feature in my sample. Social networks among similar family types limited snowballing's capacity to engender wider diversity. I am conscious that such voices and experiences are therefore missing from this thesis. The age of children within households is also likely to impact on experiences. The families who participated in this study predominantly had younger children.

The experiences of parents of teenagers were not included. Parenting teenagers in apartments is likely to bring a different set of challenges and negotiations and this is an important area for future research.

Three-quarters of participating households had one or both of the parents born overseas. This high immigrant representation conforms with recent demographic studies of Australia's apartment dwellers, and invites contemplation of the cultural contexts of housing and cross-cultural encounters (Liu et al. 2018). Many individual households in this study encompassed one Australia-born and one overseas-born partner. I was cognisant that norms associated with housing discussed in this study may reflect differences within and across cultures, country of origin, or indeed the absorption and influence of Australian culture. In practice, however, the sample was not large enough to tease out clear trends based on country of birth. There were not sufficient numbers of participants from distinctive cultural groups (whether a shared country of origin, or from cities overseas where apartment living dominates) to facilitate comparative analysis along those lines. Moreover, very few participants from migrant backgrounds had grown up in high-density housing settings; and assuming that 'Australian' culture equates with a singular (Anglo-Australian) set of housing norms is problematic (Rowe et al. 2018). In most instances, participants had grown up in a mixture of detached housing and apartments across their life-course. As adults, many were in mixed-ethnicity households, reflecting the hybrid and diverse nature of contemporary Australian multiculturalism (Tindale and Klocker 2020). Notwithstanding their diversities of background, and that all cultures are hybrid and fluid, the interviewees nevertheless expressed a commonality of experience living in apartments with children, in the discordant suburban Australian context.

While an effort was made to include the perspectives of both owners and renters, only five families owned their apartments and the majority (n=13) were renting. Uncertainty and struggles to nurture a sense of home were shared across both owner-occupiers and renters. Nonetheless, where relevant and appropriate the empirical analysis reveals tenure as a factor informing experiences, and emotional responses to everyday living in apartment spaces with children. While the ages of the interviewees' children ranged from three months to 11 years old, the majority (80 per cent) were aged five years and under. Although recruitment was not gender specific, the bulk of the interviewees were women. As a result, the majority of the individual interviews were conducted with mothers (n=11), as opposed to fathers (n=1). Six interviews were conducted with both parents. This is perhaps unsurprising, given the home

remains a gendered space with women positioned as holding primary responsibility for both the domestic sphere and care for children (Blunt and Dowling 2006). The duration of time participating families had spent living in their apartments varied, as did their housing histories and reasons for living in their current home (see Chapter 4). While cognisant of children's geographies scholarship that seeks to give children a voice in research (Greig et al. 2007; Christensen and James 2008), the focus of this study is on parents experiences and thus children's perspectives relating to apartment living are absent.

Table 3.1: Participant attributes (pseudonyms used where requested)

Name of participant/s	Household composition	Children's age (gender)	Tenure	Time lived in current apartment
Paul	2 adults, 2 children	6 years, 2 years (girls)	Owners	5 years
Natalie	2 adults, 1 child	5 years (boy)	Renters	2.5 years
Darren and Vivian	2 adults, 1 child	16 months (boy)	Renters	1 year*
Rhiannon	2 adults, 3 children	7 years, 4 years, 3 months (2 girls, 1 boy)	Owners	3.5 years
Samantha	2 adults, 2 children	7 years, 5 years (girls)	Renters	2 years
Melanie and Adam	2 adults, 2 children	4 years, 16 months (girl and boy)	Owners	2 years
Ruth	2 adults, 2 children	4 years, 2 years (boys)	Renters	9 months
Anna	2 adults, 1 child	12 months (boy)	Renters	2.5 years
Richard and Francesca	2 adults, 3 children	11 years, 9 years, 15 months (2 girls, 1 boy)	Renters	6 years
Rebecca	2 adults, 2 children	3 years, 1 year (boys)	Renters	6 months
Rachel and Tom	2 adults, 2 children	3 years, 4 months (girls)	Owners	6 years
Mariam	3 adults, 2 children	3 years, 10 months (boy and girl)	Renters	3 years
Amanda	2 adults, 2 children	7 years, 5 years (girls)	Renters	10 years
Belinda	2 adults, 2 children	5 years, 6 months (girl and boy)	Owners	11 years
Ximena	2 adults, 1 child	13 months (girl)	Renters	> 1 year
Linda	2 adults, 1 child	13 months (boy)	Renters	5 years
Alice and James	2 adults, 2 children	3 years, 1 year (girl and boy)	Renters	9 years
Daniel and Clancy	2 adults, 1 child	3 months (boy)	Renters	1.5 years

*Moved mid-research to a different apartment.

Insight into the apartment styles inhabited by the study participants is also necessary to make sense of the empirical analyses. The design and typology of modernist apartments have taken on many different forms since Sydney's first apartment buildings emerged at the start of the Twentieth Century (see Butler-Bowdon 2009 for a comprehensive overview). Earlier era apartments in middle-ring suburbs were typically built close to railway stations on large single blocks of land originally intended for a house with a garden (Randolph 2006; Butler-Bowdon 2009). Between the depression and World War II, red-brick walk-up apartments dominated apartment growth, typically finding their form in two to four storey apartments without lifts. These blocks, inspired by Art Deco aesthetics, were standardised and built upon modernist principles of mass construction, with form following function (Harvey 1989). Their rapid construction attracted criticism due to the monotony of their design (Butler-Bowdon 2009). Bondi and Coogee were among suburbs that experienced concentrated growth. In the 1960s and early 1970s apartment construction again boomed. Although vertical apartment towers became more common in locations near the inner-city, town centres (e.g. Parramatta and Chatswood) and waterfront locales (e.g. North Sydney, Waverley, Kirribilli and Cronulla), the suburban walk-up block remained the most common apartment type built in Sydney – despite ongoing criticism that design standards had not been improved. These walk-up complexes were an adaptation of the internationalist architectural movement, which embraced concrete as a new core building material, around which brick, glass and other materials formed an exterior 'skin'. These walk-up complexes were typically designed to include car spaces and washing lines, communal spaces were however lacking. The growth in suburban walk-up apartments at this time occurred in previously low-density suburbs such as Drummoyne, Hurstville, Ryde and Auburn.

Over the past 30 years, apartments have continued to transform many areas of Sydney – taking on diverse forms and being constructed in larger numbers. While still taking up the majority of the site, walk-up blocks have diversified to include larger balconies, concrete rendering and below ground parking, providing a change from earlier era 'box-like facades' (Butler-Bowdon 2009:359). The most distinctive shift in recent years has been the extraordinary growth in vertical tower blocks and mixed-used developments in suburban areas and town centres (e.g. Liverpool and Fairfield). Typically, apartments of this form include elevators and communal facilities such as roof gardens and pools and may include retail or office space below. These developments are often located near transport corridors (e.g. Wolli Creek and Ryde) or

waterfront sites (e.g. Pyrmont/Ultimo) and are built in established streets and or on old industrial or brownfield sites (Randolph 2006; Butler-Bowdon 2009).

The majority of participants in this study lived in apartments that were constructed between 1960 and the early 2000s (exceptions include two apartment complexes built in 1930). Although I aimed to recruit a representative sample of participants across different suburbs and apartment types, the bulk of the sample ended up residing in middle to outer-ring suburbs and lived in medium and low-rise apartments (primarily 2-3 storeys high – although several families lived in taller complexes – see Table 3.2 on dwelling characteristics). This can be attributed to the snowballing method of recruitment, initial interviewees were located in these suburbs and tended to have contacts who lived nearby. While the sample in this project was characterised by families living in older apartment complexes (Figure 3.2 a and d) as opposed to newer, taller developments (Figure 3.2 b and c), as I outline below, there were many commonalities between their accounts and families with children who lived in more modern, higher-density apartment blocks.

Table 3.2: Dwelling characteristics

Name of participant/s	Suburb	Number of bedrooms	Apartment characteristics	Year built
Paul	Cronulla	2	3 storey, brick	1994
Natalie	Wollongong	2	3 storey, brick	1977
Darren and Vivian	Wollongong	2	3 storey, brick	1990
Rhiannon	Hornsby	4	3 storey, brick	1967
Samantha	Wollongong	2	3 storey, brick	Unavailable
Melanie and Adam	Cronulla	3	3 storey, rendered	1964
Ruth	Cronulla	2	3 storey, rendered	1999
Anna	Coogee	2	2 storey, brick	1930
Richard and Francesca	Merrylands	2	2 storey, brick	1980
Rebecca	Cronulla	2	3 storey, brick	1970
Rachel and Tom	Croydon	2	3 storey, brick	2001
Mariam	Parramatta	2	13 storey, rendered	2009
Amanda	Sydney CBD	2	30 storey, concrete	1984
Belinda	North Parramatta	3	3 storey, brick	1990
Ximena	Kensington	1	3 storey, brick	1995
Linda	Coogee	2	2 storey, brick	1930
Alice and James	Bondi Junction	2	3 storey, brick	Unavailable
Daniel and Clancy	Wollongong	2	8 storey, brick	1981

Figure 3.2 a (top left), b (top right), c (bottom left) and d (bottom right): Images depicting diverse apartment types across Sydney. These images were produced for illustrative purposes and are not the actual dwellings of families interviewed in this research project, nor are they taken in the suburbs participants lived. Photographs were taken in Katoomba (a and d), Sydney CBD (b) and Darlinghurst (c). (Photo credit: Anthony Kerr)

Parallel to undertaking my own doctoral research, in 2018-19 I was employed as a Research Assistant in an interdisciplinary team[12] exploring apartment dwellers perceptions of densification in the Western Sydney suburb of Liverpool (hereafter referred to as the Western City project). While the Western City project did not set out to focus on families, six of the ten participants in the study were families with young children (Cook et al. 2020). This is perhaps unsurprising, as 50 per cent of the apartment stock in Liverpool CBD is occupied by families (Herath et al. 2020). My research responsibilities included primary data collection (interviews, home tours and neighbourhood tours), data analysis and contributing to various outputs (Hendrigan et al. 2019; Cook et al. 2020; Herath et al. 2020). Involvement in this project provided me with ongoing opportunities to be 'in the field', learning from apartment dwellers' experiences during the period when I was writing up the results of my own study. The Western City project also helped affirm the relevance of the issues uncovered in my project, in a very different empirical context. Families who participated in the Western City project lived in a lower-socio economic status suburb than my study participants, and lived predominantly in large scale high-density developments (built in the last 15 years) (Figure 3.2 c). Although the focus of the interview schedules differed between the two projects, similarities emerged in parents' (typically mothers') narratives relating to the key themes discussed in this thesis. The Western City project was led by Dr Nicole Cook who also works in the School of Geography and Sustainable Communities, where I am undertaking my PhD. While we plan to bring the two datasets together in subsequent publications, the Western City project was not undertaken for this thesis and thus the participants' experiences are not included alongside my primary sample. That being said, at various places throughout the thesis, I make reference to the Western City project in boxes – drawing on additional examples and making comparisons where appropriate to add further diversity to the discussion. I do so with the knowledge and support of my co-researchers on the Western City project.

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[12] The Western City project team included Dr Nicole Cook, Dr Shanaka Herath and Dr Cole Hendrigan. I was invited to join this team as a research assistant based on my experience conducting qualitative apartment research.

3.7 Analysing the data

After completing the interviews and home tours with my study participants, I transcribed the audio recordings verbatim and coded the transcripts thematically. Thematic coding enables researchers to organise qualitative material into broad categories and to compare participants' shared or differential experiences in order to begin analysing the multiple meanings embedded in their accounts (Cope 2010). This initial analytical strategy provided an opportunity to determine key themes emerging from the discussions and to refine the research questions accordingly (Cope and Kurtz 2016). The themes that are discussed in this thesis on the basis of the data collected, were not predefined but rather developed as the project evolved. For example, sound emerged as a strong theme within participants' narratives and so became the focus of Chapter 7, whereas sharing practices with neighbours, a theme originally anticipated to be central – proved insignificant. I first started identifying the themes during transcription. Parallel to ongoing data collection, I kept a record of the interview questions and topics that prompted emotive and detailed narratives from the families I had spoken to so far. These themes included tensions relating to sound, storage and sharing space. I returned to these themes when each interview was coded individually. As I examined the discussions in greater depth, I became more attuned to coding not only the frustrations parents faced, but also their creativity in adapting to their circumstances. After it became clear that a common theme related to the material and emotional strain of making everyday family life work in apartments, I revisited the transcripts to elicit more detail on parents' motivations and the perceived benefits to living in apartments. Shedding light on both these elements, allowed me to present a more nuanced account of family life in apartments. Each of the themes, identified through multiple iterations of coding the transcripts, became important to how the research data is presented in this thesis. They also informed the way subsequent additional data sets, from the Western City project and media, were coded.

The Western City project did not specifically set out to focus on the experiences of families in apartments, yet as outlined above, similar themes relating to space and storage constraints emerged in the interviews. In analysing the Western City data for inclusion in the thesis, I first separated the transcripts into two groups – families living with children and other household types. Focusing on families living with children, I coded the transcripts for the same themes I had identified in my own data set. With regards to the media content (outlined in the following section), I extracted 661 comments that were responding to four key media

articles that I wrote or to which I contributed ideas. These comments were again sorted according to the same analytical logic as used for my primary dataset.

In order to privilege the participants' voices and interpret and analyse the research conversations within broader social and spatial relations, I turned to narrative analysis. Narrative analysis provides a framework for engaging with the everyday experiences and meanings of place specific practices, encounters and emotions (Wiles et al. 2005). Sharing stories in narrative format allows the audience to understand the complexity, emotion and depth of participants' accounts, in their own voices. While the researcher still maintains authority over shaping the way the material is presented, participants' voices, feelings, knowledge and perspectives are emphasised (Wiles et al. 2005). Reflexivity throughout the writing process ensures that the final work reflects the stories shared in interviews (Dowling 2010). The narratives in this thesis are presented as vignettes, supported by other long-form quotes from discussions. The stories shared by participants not only give insight into their individual experiences, but also reveal details about 'wider social and spatial relations, norms and values' (Wiles et al. 2005:92). In this research project, participants' narratives were often framed by social discourses which position families as not belonging in apartments. This wider social context had implications for how parents viewed themselves and their practices. Awareness of these broader cultural norms influenced how parents interpreted events (such as altercations with neighbours or conversations with family and friends), how they spoke about them (with emphasis on certain emotions) and how they felt their practices were perceived by others. While in some instances participants made direct connections between their experiences/feelings and broader cultural norms, at other times these relations were interpreted by the researcher.

3.8 Enacting public geographies

The discipline of geography is inherently engaged with complex and timely issues that are relevant to a range of audiences beyond the academy (Kitchin et al. 2013; Crabtree 2017). Discussions of engaging with diverse audiences through 'public geographies' have a long history, however, this form of geographical praxis has only established legitimacy more recently (see Kitchin et al. 2013 for an overview of debates). Complementing applied geography, public geographies refer to:

The interventions by geographers that are addressed to or produced with non-academic audiences, and which emphasize the importance of social values in matters of debate. The term 'public geographies' is also often used to imply that there are not only many publics, but also many ways in which academic geographers and non-academics may engage constructively (Castree et al. 2013: online).

While institutional pressure to measure and assess public engagement and 'impact' beyond the academy has caused contention (Crabtree 2017), 'traditional' public geographies are less about attempting to prove the significance of research and more about contributing to public debate on issues that are of public importance (Kitchin et al. 2013). As social media and blogging experiences reveal, public engagement entails more than simply presenting findings to the wider public, it also creates opportunities for further research and analysis and for establishing relationships with agencies, individuals and policy-makers throughout the research, not only after it is published (Kitchin et al. 2013; Gibson and Gibbs 2013). Public geographies provide a vehicle for contributing to a discourse that may otherwise be dominated by top-down voices (Kitchin et al. 2013). Moreover, decision-makers at both municipal and state levels may welcome this style of research reporting in settings where planners are lacking insight into on the ground challenges (Gibson 2019). The age of online media presents many such opportunities for researchers to bridge the gap between the academy and the wider public, to recognise research as two-way dialogue and non-linear process. As documented below, my experience of engaging in public geographies, adds a further case study to ongoing discussions of the benefits of sharing research beyond the academy. It reveals that research processes are ongoing and co-created by academic and non-academic audiences. Building public advocacy and debate into the research process, at the time when public discussion is needed, provides the opportunity to position 'ordinary inhabitants' (Jacobs and Merriman 2011:216) as vernacular experts and ensure that their voices are part of the dialogue. Moreover, while it was not my intent, this approach also generated further data (in the form of online commentary) that is included in this thesis across Chapters 4-8. In the remainder of this chapter I explain how the public elements of my research unfolded, and the complexities and opportunities that this approach afforded my study.

Although this thesis follows a traditional monograph format, I published select chapters as journal articles along the way. In addition to academic publishing, sharing the findings and purpose of my research with a public audience (without the restrictions of journal paywalls and

in accessible language) became an aspiration of mine early on in my PhD candidature. My motivation to do so arose from my methodological commitment to foreground the narratives of families with children in apartments in a rapidly changing city. In sharing the voices, experiences and vernacular expertise of families, I hoped to unsettle and shift cultural norms about who is seen to belong in apartments and to advocate for more inclusive design. Incorporating public engagement into the research design also recognises that capturing lived experiences is critical to understanding how housing policies are experienced and felt – thus opening up pathways to enact changes to this system (see also Harris 2015 and McKee et al. 2019). As I discovered through my experiences, and as I will detail below, sharing participants' emotive experiences outside of academia provided opportunities to shift public debate and policy responses.

As news stories related to my research topic appeared more frequently throughout 2015 and 2016, I felt increasingly compelled to shape public debate based on my findings. Nevertheless, taking the advice of my supervisors and mentors around me, I waited until I had the first publication from my PhD accepted before sharing my research in the public sphere. My first journal article from this project, co-authored with my supervisors, was published online towards the end of 2017. The article focused on the emotional geographies of sound in apartments, highlighting the tensions parents face while trying to be both a good parent and a good neighbour (see Chapter 7). I drafted an accompanying article for The Conversation, providing a summary of the key findings ready for when the journal article became available online. As the story was not deemed time sensitive, the article, originally pitched to The Conversation in late November 2017, was eventually published in early January 2018 (Figure 3.3).
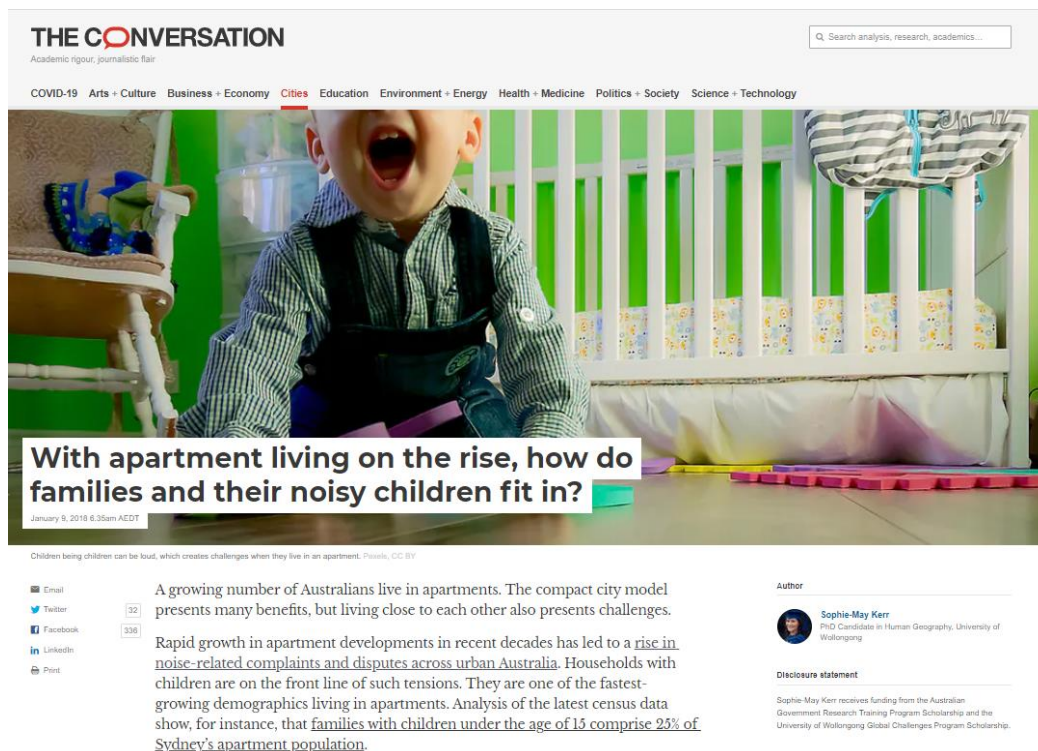
Figure 3.3: Author's conversation article published 9th January 2018

A key priority for both the academic paper and the subsequent Conversation article was to make space for parents' narratives. I wished to shine light on tensions and anxieties relating to sound, and to demonstrate that parents were already doing everything they could to reduce the sounds made by their families. My work sought to underscore the wider issue of poor acoustic performance of apartments. The emotive stories that were shared struck a chord with readers and the Conversation article quickly gained traction. Less than 24 hours after the article was published it had been read by over 60,000 people and republished by every major news outlet in the country. The level of interest in the article was much higher than anticipated and quickly led to follow up media requests from radio stations across Australia. In the next two days. I completed four live radio interviews and by the end of January this number had risen to seven, including speaking on ABC Radio's National Life Matters program. Such opportunities produced mixed emotions of excitement and anxiety. With no previous media training or experience, I knocked on many doors down the department corridor to seek advice from academics and peers as I navigated my way into a new space of public engagement.

The audience of the original Conversation article continued to steadily increase and, at the last count (June 2020), the article had reached over 870,000 readers. Approximately 440,000 of these read the article via Essential Kids or Essential Baby (websites marketing themselves as 'Australia's largest resource and community for parents of young children') demonstrating that the topic resonated with parents across the country. Based on the interest the article generated, it was selected as one of 50 articles (of 4,211) to be published in The Conversation Year Book, as one of the conversation starters from 2018. The Conversation's 2018 stakeholder report confirmed it was the most read article in their cities category.

The conversational nature of the topic was confirmed through a series of stories that were fed back to me throughout this period. A journalist (who also happened to be raising his own children in a Sydney apartment) contacted me after hearing about the project from a colleague, who had learnt of the research from a discussion with other parents at a school fete. In another instance, a PhD colleague from Melbourne shared a story with me about a striking up a conversation with a stranger in a dog park who proceeded to talk to her about my research not knowing that she knew me or the project already. Another friend experienced sitting at a coffee shop listening to two strangers reflect on Wollongong's increasing apartment density and heard them speak about my research and the newspaper article they had just read. With the extent of the media exposure reach unanticipated, these experiences were quite surreal.

The topical nature of the project and ongoing media interest led to further radio interviews and requests for me to comment on print media articles across 2018 and 2019 (See Appendix D). While academics have control over the content and angle of a story within journal articles, in the media this is not always the case. Each time I participated in a media interview, there was fear that my research would be misinterpreted amidst the vagaries of story production. In one instance, an article in which I was quoted made front page news of the Sydney Morning Herald, claiming 'High rise lifestyles put kids at risk' (Figure 3.4). While the article itself was well balanced in terms of recognising the need for better design, I felt uncomfortable that the chosen headline was a direct reproduction of the same negative attitudes I was trying to unsettle through my research and public engagement. In a similar instance, another article in which I was quoted was titled 'Big Australia means high-rise battery chook living'.

Figure 3.4: Sydney Morning Herald article, published 16th September 2018 (Author's own photograph)

While in most cases, I did not have control over the headlines and foci of the stories citing my work, on other occasions I did have better opportunities to push back against cultural norms and shift the tone of the public conversation. Following on from the Sydney Morning Herald front page article, I was invited onto Chanel Nine's Agenda program as part of The Today Show, for my first national television appearance. While an incredible opportunity to disseminate my findings, this experience was (again) new territory to navigate. During a phone conversation with the producer the day prior to the interview, they revealed they were looking for further comment around topics of 'danger, risk and hazards' of high-rise parenting. After explaining the focus of my research, I had an opportunity to push back against the narrative that apartments are undesirable and unsafe for children, instead shifting the conversation back to the importance of design and planning that takes families with children into account. The producer was receptive to this discussion and agreed to shift the focus of the segment away from danger and towards what changes we need to see to make apartments more inclusive for families. This example highlights the potential for engagement work to play a critical role in the construction of knowledge outside the formal academic sphere (Kitchin et al. 2013; Crabtree 2017). Another example of this was being invited to present to an expert audience of planners and architects in Sydney. After reading media articles citing my research, FUSE architecture in Surry Hills, Sydney, reached out with an invitation for me to present my findings

to their team of architects and urban and interior designers. This was the first event of this nature hosted by the firm, who invited other built environment professionals within their networks to attend the presentation. Several of the design principles I put forth at this event were also published in the Sydney Morning Herald the day prior to the presentation (Figure 3.5). Rachid Andary, Director of FUSE Architecture, was quoted in this media piece stating '[there is] a moral obligation [for the profession to consider the needs of all ages in their work]. It's not just housing the immediate generation. This is a legacy that is going to be around for a long time'.

Figure 3.5: Sydney Morning Herald article, published 18th November 2018 (Author's own photograph)

Feeding the results of this study into the public debate throughout the project resulted in three key outcomes that have iteratively shaped the research and contributions of this thesis. First, having the opportunity to share families' emotions and experiences with a national audience has allowed me to contribute to validating their experiences and highlighting families' right to belong and feel at home in apartments. A cultural shift occurs slowly and is difficult to track. Yet an opportunity to be part of the conversation and share families' stories as cities are actively

being reshaped goes some way towards shifting attitudes and recognising the need for more inclusive norms and understanding in this setting. Alongside the research being shared in public fora, the publication (Kerr et al. 2018) and associated media outputs have become recommended texts for both senior high school[13] and university students, encouraging further awareness and debate on this topic.

The second outcome relates to research contributions reaching decision-makers through media coverage. Beyond the general public, recognition of my work enabled me to engage with practitioners throughout this project in unanticipated ways. The participants' emotive narratives gained the interest of stakeholders working across the domains of urban planning, architecture, policy and design. As a result, I have been contacted by designers, architects, construction and building policy specialists, developers and strata managers, and have been involved in dialogues with these groups about the changes that need to occur for apartments to be more family-friendly. The recommendations I put forth to those audiences are directly informed by parents' experiences, and their lived insight as to what needs to change to better support families in higher-density housing over the longer-term. My recommendations were also shaped by dialogue with stakeholders who I spoke to throughout the course of the research, including strata lawyers, architects and planners. In contrast to setting up a researcher/policy-maker partnership at the beginning of the project, the practitioner engagement with this project shows that 'impact' is not simply a linear, expert-to-expert transfer between researchers and policy-makers but emanates from research participants. While researchers are increasingly encouraged to interact with relevant stakeholders outside of academia, and to demonstrate how their research has a measurable impact on the economy, society, environment and culture (Crabtree 2017), sharing the lived, vernacular expertise of residents through media engagement has the potential to engage practitioner audiences in different ways.

Media engagement and impact involves two-way dialogue. The third outcome of engaging in public debate mid-way through this project is that I collected an unexpected amount of additional data in the form of online comments and debate. Given I was only mid-way through analysing and writing up my data at the point when the media frenzy began, this provided unique insight as to how the research was interpreted – iteratively feeding back into the writing

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[13] Susan Caldis, Vice President of the Geography Teachers Association of NSW, reviewed Kerr et al. (2018) in the Geography Bulletin – HSC Edition No 1 (2018). Caldis (2018) linked the article to key learning outcomes for Stage 6 students and included several of the media outputs as supplementary and easily accessible resources.

process. As the project gained traction in the media, a significant number of families living in apartments (beyond my original sample) shared their experiences with me both formally and informally. Several people emailed me with stories of tension in their own apartment complex and were seeking advice. In addition, when I shared my research participants' experiences in live media interviews, these were affirmed by listeners who called or texted the radio station to share their own stories. The online comment sections of articles provided further evidence of the extent to which this topic resonated with people (and sparked debate among others). Following each public engagement, the stories that emerged further affirmed the widespread nature of the challenges families face. So too, comments posted by neighbours of families with children reminded me of the extent to which poor sound proofing impacts a diverse range of apartment residents. The engagement with this topic in the form of online comments, phone calls and emails confirmed that this is an emotive as well as a material issue. I collated 661 comments across four key media articles that I wrote or contributed ideas to: my own piece in The Conversation, an online article on ABC news, and two newspaper and online articles in the Sydney Morning Herald[14] (see Appendix D). I have chosen to include examples of these responses throughout the empirical chapters as an additional source of data. While some of this material is quite similar to the stories shared by my participants, there were also perspectives obtained in the media responses that were not captured in the original interviews. Examples include the experiences of neighbours who are on the receiving end of children's noise and commentary that positions children as not belonging in apartments. Bringing these perspectives into the thesis provides further evidence of the complexity and emotion that surrounds the shift toward more families living in apartments. Examples that were emailed to me privately as a result of this media coverage are only included where consent was given.

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[14]The Conversation – 'With apartment living on the rise, how do families and their noisy children fit in?' (https://theconversation.com/with-apartment-living-on-the-rise-how-do-families-and-their-noisy-children-fit-in-88244); ABC News – 'Apartment living in now a fact of Australian life. Meet the families going up, not out' (http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-08-08/apartment-living-families-in-highrises/10070332); Sydney Morning Herald – 'High rise parenting puts kids at risk' (https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/high-rise-parenting-puts-kids-at-risk-20180913-p503gt.html), Sydney Morning Herald – 'Parks and prams: rethinking flats for families' (https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/parks-and-prams-how-to-improve-sydney-apartments-for-kids-and-families-20181117-p50go1.html)

3.9 Structure of the following empirical chapters

The following five chapters, reveal the qualitative insights yielded through the research methods described in this chapter: interviews, floorplan sketches, home tours and media engagement. Chapter 4 addresses the motivations and constraints driving more families with children to live in apartments. Chapters 5-8 then focus on everyday life within those apartments. Chapter 5 explores spatial constraints and negotiations; Chapter 6 examines the challenges associated with inadequate storage; Chapter 7 considers the emotional geographies of sound in apartments and, prior to the thesis conclusion, Chapter 8 documents the way cultural norms circulate in everyday social relations with implications for parents' sense of belonging in their apartment homes.

Chapter 4
Why do families with children live in apartments?

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides introductory insights into of the lives of the families who took part in this research, with a focus on the aspirations, motivations and pressures leading them to live in apartments. Overlapping with motivations are the perceived benefits of apartment living. Although I asked participants about motivations and benefits in separate sections of the interview, their comments in relation to each blurred into each other (i.e. motivations were related to benefits). Due to the difficulty of teasing the two apart, at the outset of this chapter motivations and perceived benefits are discussed together.

Conventional housing studies of structuralist persuasion have focused on economic and demographic factors as the primary determinants of residential choice (Shlay 1986). However, as Karsten (2007) argued, the assumption that families adjust their housing situation to correspond with their financial resources and spatial requirements does not explain why some families may choose to reside in apartments in the inner-city, despite being able to afford a house in the suburbs. Research focusing solely on demographic and economic determinants 'isolates housing from the wider context of life' and does not recognise that both accommodation and its surrounding location are important factors shaping residential preference (Karsten 2007:85). Dwellings and the domestic lives within are 'intimately bound up with wider social, economic, and political processes' (Blunt 2008:551). Housing preferences are complex and are shaped by macro-level factors (e.g. housing markets/systems and economic climate) and mirco-level factors (including age, household composition, income, and current and future needs and aspirations about dwelling forms and lifestyle preferences) (Wulff et al. 2004). Advertising materials, developer and planner narratives and media content also play an influential role in shaping housing choices, aspirations and expectations, while framing who is seen to belong or not belong in certain forms of housing (Fincher 2004; Gillon and Gibbs 2018; see Chapter 1).

By focusing on the broader context of families' residential decisions, this thesis recognises that housing decisions are intimately bound up in the coordination of daily life, as residential locations and families' socio-temporal practices are co-constituted (Jarvis 2005; Karsten

2015b). Households engage in complex trade-offs relating to dwelling form and the type of neighbourhood or location in which they desire to live (Brun and Fagnani 1994; Karsten 2007). While families who live in apartments may contemplate trade-offs in terms of size and lack of child-friendliness, they may gain other benefits from choosing a strategic location. Such trade-offs and their associated material and emotional complexities form the empirical basis of this thesis.

Consistent with previous research (see Chapter 2, e.g. Carroll et al. 2011; Brydon 2014; Karsten 2015a and b; Nethercote and Horne 2016; Andrews et al. 2018), financial imperatives and locational and lifestyle factors both featured prominently in the participating families' apartment living narratives (see Table 4.1). Adding to existing literature, this research captured detailed empirical insight into the trade-offs families were willing to make to achieve their ideal work-life balance. Importantly, parents identified a number of affordances to living in apartments, challenging outsider perceptions that apartments are not conducive to family life. While much of this thesis focuses on more complex emotions associated with family life in apartments, this chapter serves as an important reminder that not all emotions relating to raising children in apartments are negative. In what follows, I provide further evidence of these affordances, focusing on factors that were prominent in the participants' narratives: affordability; proximity to work, school, transport nodes and amenities; work-life balance; lower maintenance; walkability and a strong sense of connection and community. These insights complicate narratives that position apartments as undesirable places in which to raise children.

Table 4.1: Participant housing histories and summary of their motivations for apartment living

Name of participant/s	Housing history	Main reason/s for living in current apartment
Paul	Both partners born overseas. Lived in a mixture of detached housing and apartments as children but then lived in apartments for most of adult life.	Location - proximity to extended family and work.
Natalie	Both partners born overseas. Lived in a mixture of detached housing and apartments overseas and then moved into current apartment after migrating to Australia.	Affordability.
Darren and Vivian	Vivian born overseas. Both partners lived in detached housing as children and a mixture of detached housing and apartments throughout their adult life.	Affordability. Location - proximity to work and walkability to city.
Rhiannon	Both partners born in Australia. Both grew up in detached housing as children but then lived in apartments for most of adult life and since starting a family.	Stepping stone into the property market. Location - proximity to train station.
Samantha	Both partners born overseas. Grew up in detached housing as children and purchased a terrace house overseas as a couple after getting married. Moved into current apartment after moving to Australia.	In Australia for work/study – chose to live in furnished accommodation close to the University.
Melanie and Adam	Both partners born in Australia. Both grew up in detached housing as children but then lived in apartments for most of adult life.	Location – proximity to beach. Opportunity to buy a three-bedroom apartment.
Ruth	Both partners born overseas. Both grew up in detached housing as children. Lived in a mixture of detached housing and apartments as adults. Own a terrace house together overseas. Since living in Australia together, they have lived in apartments.	Relative affordability allowing one parent to stay home with children. Location - proximity to extended family and train station.
Anna	Husband born overseas. Both partners grew up in detached housing as children but then lived in apartments as a couple and family.	Location – liked the suburb.
Richard and Francesca	Both partners born overseas. Both grew up in detached housing as children and have lived in a mixture of detached and attached housing as adults.	Affordability.
Rebecca	Husband born overseas. Both partners grew up in detached housing as children and have lived in a mixture of detached and attached housing as adults. Have lived in apartments since having children.	Relative affordability in particular suburb. Location – proximity to beach and amenities.

Rachel and Tom	Both partners born in Australia. Both grew up in detached housing as children and have lived in a mixture of detached and attached housing as adults.	Stepping stone into the property market. Location – proximity to train station.
Mariam	Both partners born overseas. Both grew up in detached housing as children and then moved into an apartment after getting married and have lived in apartments since migrating to Australia.	Location – proximity to work and walkability.
Amanda	Both partners born overseas. Amanda grew up in detached housing. Lived in a mixture of detached housing and apartments since meeting her husband. Moved into current apartment after migrating to Australia.	Location and lifestyle – proximity to work and amenities.
Belinda	Both partners born in Australia. Lived in a mixture of detached housing and apartments as children and adults before buying current apartment.	Wanted to buy a three-bedroom apartment and liked the location. Relative affordability allowing one parent to stay home with children.
Ximena	Both partners born overseas. Lived in a mixture of detached housing and apartments as children and adults. Have lived in apartments since migrating to Australia.	Location – proximity to work, city and beach. Lower maintenance.
Linda	Both partners born overseas. Both grew up in detached housing as children. Lived in a mixture of detached housing and apartments as adults. Have lived in apartments since migrating to Australia.	Relative affordability in particular suburb. Location – proximity to beach and social networks.
Alice and James	Both partners born overseas. Both grew up in detached housing as children and lived in a mix of detached housing and apartments as adults.	Relative affordability allowing one parent to stay home with children. Location – proximity to beach, public transport and city.
Daniel and Clancy	Both partners born in Australia. Both grew up in detached housing as children and lived in a mix of detached housing and apartments as adults.	Location – proximity to work and beach. Lower maintenance.

4.2 Motivations and benefits associated with apartment living

4.2.1 Affordability

While recent research disproves claims that increasing densification provides a solution to housing under-supply and unaffordability (Sisson et al. 2018), the comparatively lower entry price of apartments is nonetheless an important consideration for a range of household types, including families. This was evident in conversations with parents interviewed in this study who indicated that apartments were more affordable than detached houses in the suburbs where they wanted to reside. A strand of the existing research on families' experiences in apartments has focused on lower socio-economic status households who are constrained to apartment living (Randolph, 2006; Easthope and Tice 2011). Such research has highlighted the link between smaller properties and relative affordability, arguing that for low-income households apartment life is a matter of constraint not choice. That is, while 'small wealthy households can afford to live in large dwellings... larger poorer family households may have little choice but to live in small dwellings' (Easthope and Tice 2011:419). The suggestion that families only live in apartments when they are constrained to do so is also reflected in discourses surrounding life-course trajectories and the 'proper' pathway up the 'ladder of life' (Fincher 2004:331). While apartments have been characterised as stepping-stones towards the eventual purchase of a detached house (Fincher 2004; Wulff et al. 2004), recent housing preference studies reveal that the financialisation of housing, alongside shortfalls in supply, are disrupting 'traditional' housing pathways (Opit et al. 2020). As a result, apartment residents may end up living in higher-density housing for longer than expected, despite having preferences for other dwelling types.

In this study, affordability emerged in discussions with some parents as a strong influence shaping their decision to live in an apartment – particularly for those on lower-incomes. Natalie[15] and her husband, for instance, are migrants from South America. In their native Brazil, they had owned a house on a small block of land. Natalie explained that it was too expensive for them to rent a house in Australia and so they had ended up in their apartment. Natalie, who lived in Wollongong at the time of interview, initially wanted to live by the beach but found that even in an apartment this location was beyond their budget. She described the location of the apartment they could afford to live in as 'not that good', both in terms of its

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[15] Natalie (renter, 5 year old child, 2 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)

distance to the beach (her preferred location) and the distance she had to walk to connect to public transport options. Richard and Francesca[16] were in a similar position. Having migrated from the Middle-East, the family originally lived in a regional city, 200 kilometres northwest of Sydney. Ready for a change, they moved to Sydney and initially lived in a townhouse. However, during their tenancy the townhouse was sold and they were rushed to 'just get out of there and look for something else' (Richard). Richard described their current apartment in Western Sydney as 'temporary' and commented that they would prefer a 'bigger property, bigger house [that is] more spacious'. As our conversation continued, Francesca revealed that they had been looking to move 'for a while… applying to many [rental] inspections'. In addition to wanting more space, the desire to move was driven by school catchment areas, with Richard and Francesca wanting their children to be able to attend a 'better high school'. Having looked at many apartments in their preferred suburb of Parramatta, Francesca felt many of the apartments were 'really small…not big enough for a family' and yet still 'really expensive'. While they were not satisfied with the size of their current dwelling, the price was comparatively affordable and so they remained. Similar themes emerged among commenters responding to media articles, who indicated that affordability in major Australian cities was the primary factor prompting more families to live in smaller dwellings. One commenter felt that living in an apartment was the only choice 'unless you like traveling hours every day to get to work or you have the funds to buy a house'[17]. Another person shared:

> High rise is how we get 1. Affordable 2. Space in 3. Ideal locations, so either 1. Get rich, 2. Live in a shoebox house (not a real thing in Australia) or 3. Live hours away from everyone else[18].

For families participating in the Western City project (described in Chapter 3), affordability pressures were even more pronounced and a key determinant of apartment living (Box 4.1).

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[16] Richard and Francesca (renters, three children aged 11, 9 and 15 months, 2 bedroom apartment in a 2 storey complex)

[17] Commenter responding to Petersen 2018, 'Apartment living in now a fact of Australian life. Meet the families going up, not out', ABC News, 8th August.

[18] Commenter responding to Gladstone 2018, 'High rise parenting puts kids at risk', Sydney Morning Herald, 16th September.

Box 4.1: Housing affordability as evidence in the Western City project

Conducting fieldwork in Liverpool CBD, provided first hand evidence of financial hardship as a driving factor leading families to live in apartments. Indeed for many participants, it was the relative affordability of Liverpool that drew them to the suburb in the first place. Three of the participating households were living in apartments with four children. While families struggled to manage daily life with restricted space (see Chapter 5), they remained in smaller dwellings due to financial constraints.

For some Western City project families, there was a further financial motive for living in an apartment. They were able to reside in the Liverpool CBD and so did not need to own a second car. This was evidenced by Ayasha (renter of two-bedroom apartment built in 2017, living with husband and toddler and pregnant with second child) who explained: 'We are paying $50 higher than in our last apartment but if I had to own my own car that would cost me more'. While willing to pay an extra $50 for the location and to save on the costs of running a second vehicle, Ayasha indicated any further rent increases 'would be too hard on us because it's a single income family now and I'm not really sure when I will be able to [go] back to work' (Cook et al. 2020).

The experiences outlined above are similar to lower-income families characterised by Randolph (2006) and Easthope and Tice (2011) who were driven to apartment living by financial necessity. Nevertheless, such experiences were not representative of the majority of families who participated in the present study. While the following section continues to focus on relative affordability, it is important to signpost that, with exceptions, the families who participated in this study were predominantly middle-class and had the economic resources to potentially make different choices. Although there are elements of financial constraint that I will discuss below, the experiences of middle-class families in apartments are distinctive from those in lower-socio economic status households. Specifically, middle and higher-income families often live in apartments not because they are unable to afford houses *per se*, but rather because they are unable to afford houses in their preferred locations. That said, the cost to both rent and own apartments relative to detached houses emerged within interviews as a factor shaping housing choices. Dan[19], who lived in Wollongong, for instance commented:

> If the housing market was cheaper, we probably would have bought a house somewhere and that's where we would be living… we don't see ourselves living in an apartment in Wollongong for the rest of our lives so we don't want to try and pay you know, a shitload of money for one… [Owning a house is] a nice dream but, you know, you've got to do something in the meantime.

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[19] Dan and Clancy (renter, child aged 3 months, 2 bedroom apartment in an 8 storey complex)

Dan and his partner Clancy were clear that while they enjoyed the benefits of their current situation, they did not see purchase of an apartment as a worthwhile investment and still had the 'dream' of house ownership. Their apartment was seen as a temporary place they were living 'in the meantime' due to affordability considerations. Others such as Rhiannon[20], who owned her apartment in Hornsby in Sydney's upper North Shore, explained that although they would have preferred a house, purchase of an apartment was an affordable means of getting 'into the property market'. Her comments were in keeping with the stepping stone understanding of apartment ownership that has been discussed in a number of previous studies (Fincher 2004; Wulff et al. 2004):

> We were noticing that the house prices were going up and up and up and we thought we better get in before it went off. And we were really lucky we did because I think that following year it went crazy up, so we were lucky in that respect. We would have preferred a house but it wasn't in our budget in Sydney (Rhiannon).

Similar stories were shared by other parents for whom the rising cost of Sydney's housing has shaped decisions to live in an apartment as either renters or owners. At one level, these comments identified affordability as a constraining factor driving more families to live in apartments. At another, in depth discussions with the parents involved in this study revealed more nuance and complexity in their decision-making. For many, the connection between apartment life and affordability was not a straightforward equation. Instead, families sought to balance their priorities around affordability, location, work-life balance and other benefits of compact living when making residential decisions.

4.2.2 Balancing affordability and location

While many participating families maintained the longstanding Australian cultural preference for detached housing, some could afford to live in a detached house – elsewhere. They nevertheless opted for apartment living in order to remain in a particular location. Melanie[21], who lived in a beachside suburb in Southern Sydney, shed light on this:

> The reality is, if we could afford a house in Cronulla, we'd definitely have a house. There's no use pretending that we prefer apartments over houses. But we also prefer to live where we like rather than in a house somewhere we don't like.

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[20] Rhiannon (owner, three children aged 7, 4 and 3 months, 4 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)
[21] Melanie (owner, two children aged 4 and 16 months, 3 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)

Rebecca[22] owned a townhouse further south of Sydney where housing was more affordable, but chose to live in a rented apartment in her family's preferred location, also in Cronulla. She revealed a similar set of priorities:

> If there was a house here I would probably go more of a house… if we could afford a house around here we probably would but yeah we can't… I'd rather be here, and in an apartment, than in the suburbs and be in a house… I'd rather a little space being at the beach than… I guess we could choose to live out there [a house in outer suburbs] but we choose not to… it's a lifestyle here. That's why a lot of people choose to be in units and stay in units.

While both Rebecca and Melanie acknowledged a partiality for detached housing, their preference to live in their current suburb was stronger, and so they remained apartment dwellers. Rebecca referred to her decision to live in an apartment in a coastal suburb as a lifestyle choice. She elaborated that 'no one can afford houses' in the area 'hence we all live in units'. Although she indicated they could afford to live in a house elsewhere, the beachside location was more important for her family and thus worth living in a smaller dwelling. This preference was a reflection of Rebecca and her family's identity – beachy people who enjoy getting out for runs along The Esplanade with the pram each morning. Other participants shared similar priorities. For Darren[23], who lived in Wollongong, the decision to live in an apartment was, 'More to do with location… it's a great area to bring up kids… next to the beach, lots of parks'. Ximena[24] and her family in Kensington, meanwhile, 'wanted to stay close to the beach and the city because with her [child] I need places to go every day'.

With detached houses in such locations deemed unaffordable, these families had decided to make trade-offs in terms of space to live in the well-connected (sometimes higher status) locations they desired (see Gibson 2013 for a discussion of class and place stigma). While some families preferred a coast lifestyle, other parents' positive accounts of their suburbs (and relatedly apartment living) were shaped by proximity to parks, playgrounds, public pools, cafés and good schools or childcare centres. Similar motivations featured frequently in the stories families shared in the comments elicited by my media engagement. Responding to one of the articles in the Sydney Morning Herald, one mother stated:

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[22] Rebecca (renter, two children aged 3 and 1, 2 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)
[23] Darren (renter, 16 month old child, 2 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)
[24] Ximena (renter, child aged 13 months, 1 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)

We live in an apartment and get out twice as much as our friends who live in houses. My kids do long harbour bush walks, ride their bikes everywhere, spend hours in parks and at the beach. It's fantastic[25].

Another added:

Nothing wrong with living in a unit with children. For me there area/location is more important than the space of a house. Good schools, many playgrounds, beaches, cafes, sports and other amenities are more important to me than living in a house[26].

In addition to their enjoyment of public amenities, for the participants' in my study, location choices were shaped by proximity to work and public transport nodes. By living in an apartment that was close to transport or work, these families were able to integrate public (community or institution based) and private (home based) activities on a daily basis (Karsten 2007). As Ruth[27] explained, being close to public transport in Cronulla meant that her partner was able to spend more time with their children after work:

Our last place was a 20-minute walk to the station. And this is about a 7-minute walk to the station. Which actually makes quite a big difference when Aaron is trying to get home to see the boys before bed… Kind of just gives him that little bit of extra time. So that was a big factor.

Likewise for Amanda[28] who lived in Sydney's CBD,

As a family, probably location [is the driving factor] in the sense of no one's commuting anywhere, so if Pete finishes [work] at 5.00 he's home at 5.15, that sort of thing, and I don't have a long commute to work.

Choosing a residential location within close proximity to work or transport nodes enabled parents to simultaneously balance career and familial responsibilities, supporting a more manageable work-life balance. Rhiannon noted that while her family had trialed moving further north of Sydney to live in a detached house, the lengthy commute ultimately swayed them back

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[25] Commenter responding to Gladstone 2018, 'High rise parenting puts kids at risk', Sydney Morning Herald, 16th September.
[26] As above.
[27] Ruth (renter, two children aged 4 and 2, 2 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)
[28] Amanda (renter, two children aged 7 and 5, 2 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)

towards their well-located apartment:

> We moved away to Newcastle and we had a house but it was too far to commute and then we moved back to here… we just wanted him [Rhiannon's husband] to be able to get to the train station quickly and [for] it [to] be on… the North Shore line – so no transfers, just get on and off.

As Rhiannon's experience reveals, for working families a strategic location helps parents accommodate the juggle between paid work and family (Karsten 2007). In addition to reducing lengthy commutes and creating more family time, living close to the train station enabled families to juggle work and childcare commitments:

> We're only a five-minute drive to childcare for Maddy, and if I am delayed at work then Tom can take the train home and ride over and get her and come back again, and he can do that easily (Rachel).

For Rachel[29], who lived in Croydon in Sydney's Inner West, living within close proximity to school, childcare and transport networks enabled her and her partner to both manage full-time work. The relationship between housing decisions, work commitments and family time were varied depending on priorities. While several parents valued being able to live within close proximity to school and work, enabling both partners to continue with full-time work without long commutes, others enjoyed being able to have one parent stay home. Apartment living facilitated this, they explained, due to lower housing costs. Belinda[30], for instance, was financially motivated to continue living in her family's apartment in North Parramatta as it meant that she did not feel the pressure to return to full-time work straight after having her second child. Moving to a house would mean moving a few suburbs over and feeling 'forced' to go back to work to pay off a larger mortgage:

> I didn't want to have a huge mortgage hanging, because what we want in terms of dream house whatever, is going to cost us over $1 million, and I didn't want to go into maternity leave a second time with a huge, huge mortgage, and I prefer to have that choice about how I go back to work. Whereas if I have the mortgage then go [on] maternity leave, then I'll feel that I have to go back to work full-time, whereas now if I choose to go back to work full-time I do, or if I go back, I have the option to go back

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[29] Rachel (owner, two children aged 3 and 4 months, 2 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)
[30] Belinda (owner, two children aged 5 and 6 months, 3 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)

part-time and that kind of thing. So this way it's actually a choice, not an 'I feel I have to' (Belinda).

Ruth, like Belinda, explained that she was able to stay at home with her young children due to the lower costs of an apartment:

> Especially on one salary… There's just no way you could ever get a deposit together… Or buy something around here on one salary… 'Cause then I'd have to go back to work and then that would be a big change for our family… And I don't want to be at work five days a week, just to buy a house. But then I'm not spending time with the kids… You know, I'd rather have less, ourselves, but kind of have more in terms of kind of our relationships and our time together.

The affordability and locational benefits of living in apartments helped parents to justify the trade-offs they were making in terms of space. Ximena explained that she had 'doubts about the place [apartment] because it is small – a lot smaller than what we had before…but the price was good and the [layout] distribution was better… But it is the location. [It] was very important to be close to uni [workplace]'.

While housing studies literature shows a longstanding preference by families for detached housing (Lauster 2010; Mulder and Lauster 2010; Dowling and Power 2012), the narratives revealed here suggest that for some middle-class families, the desire to live in certain places is prioritised over the dwelling type. Amanda provided further evidence of this, narrating the story of a friend who had actually traded in their house for an apartment, countering anticipations of house ownership as the ultimate 'Australian dream'. That family 'chose to downsize the internal space for a better location' (Amanda). Similarities were found in the Western City project (Box 4.2), amongst a lower socio-economic status cohort. Housing decisions, then, are intimately connected to residents' identities and connections to certain places. Such insights complicate narratives that portray detached houses as ideal family homes, revealing that the ideal home is shaped by several different factors with dwelling form just one component.

Box 4.2: Western City project participant reflections on location and proximity to amenities

A strong theme among the families who were interviewed in Liverpool CBD related to the benefit of their apartments being co-located within close proximity to amenities and services. Sarah (owner of two-bedroom apartment built in 2018, lives with husband and baby), who enjoyed regular walks to the shops and surrounding amenities commented:

> We feel very lucky. And we have thought about moving into a house in the area but we know that we would miss out on all of these convenient things that we like to do… even just a couple of suburbs away, like Moorebank or something, you can get a house there for a similar price that we're paying now and we could have some grass and get a dog. But, yeah, I don't know if that's as important to us as being able to come and do all of these things.

Similarly, Sigrid (renter of three-bedroom apartment built in 1976, lives with husband and four children) enjoyed living in close walking proximity to everything she needed:

> I am close to everything. The children can go to school, I have no pressure driving them or picking them up which is really the best advantage to me. I am close to the library, close to everything, Aldi, Westfield, the church, the station. I see so many advantages.

While acknowledging 'there are better places than living in an apartment', Sigrid ranked her experience positive overall due to the location (Hendrigan et al. 2019; Cook et al. 2020).

4.2.3 Lower maintenance

Living in an apartment also fostered work-life balance in another key way: apartments typically require less maintenance from their residents than houses. In Australia, apartment upkeep, repair and maintenance (of external and shared areas) is subcontracted and managed through strata. The family who had moved from a house to an apartment (introduced in the previous section, as narrated by Amanda), found the reduced up-keep of an apartment liberating. Amanda explained:

> The kids just never used the garden, they never used the space, and it was cheaper for them to put their money into an apartment than to maintain a house. The benefits of this is yes, the weekends not mowing a lawn or painting something, doing an upkeep of a property, [living in an apartment] it is more about once you've tidied up inside the place, what should we do?

This theme also emerged within the comments sections on media articles in which my research was cited. One parent stated:

I prefer it. No weekends yelling at kids to do gardening or to take out the wheelie bin…
I pay body corporate and someone takes out the bins, cleans the pool, trims the hedges
and I don't have to yell at my kids nor organise anything[31].

Another commented:

I take my kid out to different parks every day. I think he gets far more variety and
enjoyment out of trying different things. Plus, I don't have to buy/maintain my own
play equipment[32].

With apartments located within proximity to parks (Figure 4.1), families still enjoyed the
benefits of outdoor play – and felt they had more time to do so due to the ease of maintenance.
Belinda described this situation as having 'the best of both worlds':

There's also two parks [nearby]…We don't have lawn and we don't have grass… but
actually we ended up getting the best of both worlds because we get the access to all of
that without having to actually do the mowing.

**Figure 4.1: Greenspace and children's play equipment located a short walk from one
family's apartment (Author's own photograph)**

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[31] Commenter responding to Petersen 2018, 'Apartment living in now a fact of Australian life. Meet the families
going up, not out', ABC News, 8th August.

[32] Commenter responding to Gladstone 2018, 'High rise parenting puts kids at risk', Sydney Morning Herald,
16th September.

Dan and Clancy who had previously lived in a house in Nowra (located on the NSW South Coast), and so had experienced both ways of life (apartment and house), shared similar perspectives. Comparing their apartment experience to their detached house, Dan explained that the apartment afforded more time on the weekends to do things he enjoys:

> That's a big bonus of the apartment too, as well. In the last house we lived in I felt like every weekend that I didn't have anything on, I just spent the whole weekend mowing the lawn.

When discussing the benefits of not having to maintain a garden and large space, Clancy observed:

> When you have a new baby… time becomes very precious and so living in an apartment just gives you like a bit more time, per se, because there are… less responsibilities and things that you need to do.

Ximena shared similar sentiments, commenting:

> I think a house would be too much maintenance I don't want to do. I don't feel like I have time to do anything – I can barely get a shower [because of the baby]. So it [a house] is not really something I can commit to right now… that is everybody's dream everywhere in the world, to have a house and garden and a pool and whatever – but I have lived in a house and it is just not that big a deal (laughs). 'Cause you see how much work it is to keep it clean and to keep it organised and so I'd really rather stay in an apartment and be happy.

Ximena and Clancy, who were both on maternity leave at the time of the interviews, valued living in a smaller space and being able to easily pack up and close the door behind them to 'get out and do things' (Clancy). They felt that at this stage in their lives, they would rather be in an apartment. Other participants felt that maintaining a smaller space made it easier to balance the juggling act of work and motherhood:

> We talk about apartments and family life, but it also comes into processes of mothering and fathering and parenting generally as well and what you value… the apartment's been great... I don't feel overwhelmed being a mother and an academic at the same time, and I feel like I can do both those jobs well… Whereas I wonder whether a house would actually make that more difficult in a way (Rachel).

While many participants expressed a desire for more space in the longer-term, they were unsure if they wanted the maintenance that more space would require.

4.2.4 Reduced car dependence and perceptions of walkability

Although walkability is not a unique or guaranteed feature of apartment living, parents' narratives revealed that they perceived the suburbs in which their apartments were located to be walkable. They identified this as a key benefit of apartment life. Positive experiences of walkability have also been observed in other studies. Walkability influenced housing preferences and attitudes towards urban intensification amongst young adults in Auckland (Opit et al. 2020). Walkability also positively shaped the experiences of families with children in the Western City project (see Box 4.3).

Returning to this study, Rebecca, who lived in an apartment near The Esplanade in Cronulla enjoyed that

> The park is right there, beach is right there, malls up there. I don't need a car – we are a one car family, train is just up there. So it is close to parks, close to The Esplanade so you can go for walks. I am a runner so I take the pram out there.

The enjoyment of being able to walk to so many places shaped families' commitment to apartments, even though they recognised other limitations. Ruth for example, whose apartment backed on to The Esplanade in Cronulla explained that,

> There's a lot more we can walk to from here. So I can walk to pre-school and that was a big thing and the school that Liam will go to next year… we've got beaches and playgrounds in either direction … basically it's just you can walk to everything. That's kind of what we wanted… that's why we put up with things in the apartment rather than going somewhere where we could have space… some people go like, "Well just go and live somewhere else then". Like my family live in Kareela. And… we could rent a house in Kareela… But we don't want to… it'd be fine when the kids are older but when they're this age… being able to walk to everything is so nice.

Having been for a short walk along The Esplanade prior to my interview with Ruth, I could see the positives she and Rebecca were drawn to. Both of their apartments were located a short walk from the well-maintained coastal walkway that I observed being heavily utilised by families with prams.

Participants made distinctions between their lives in apartments as walkable versus the perceived necessity of car use in more affordable suburbs. With many households sharing one vehicle, reduced reliance on the car was a common theme. Dan and Clancy had made a decision to live in an apartment 'in a convenient part of town' rather than 'living in a suburban house where you've got to drive everywhere' (Dan). Reflecting on the benefits of their location, Dan commented:

> I mean it's like a five-minute ride to work. The beach is right there... Clancy now with the baby can take the lift down and go on the bike track and go to cafes... before we lived here we were living in a house in Nowra. And it's... a bit more like you have to drive everywhere and we needed two cars, cause I was working in Wollongong and Clancy was working in Nowra. So sort of knowing that she was going to be on maternity leave, it was good to get a place close to my work. That's close to everything without having to drive around.

Clancy added that particularly while their son was young, it was better to be in an apartment where she could easily walk into town pushing the pram rather than having to get a second car (see also Box 4.3).

Box 4.3: Western City project participant reflections on walkability and reduced car dependence

Our research conducted in Liverpool found that walkability is a desirable product of urban density among families with children. Living in the CBD, families in this study regularly connected aspects of their daily lives with walking as their primary mode of travel. Amy (owner of three-bedroom apartment built in 2007, lives with husband and two children) for instance, commented: 'mums like me, we choose to come out on foot... to access service or shopping [it is] easier than using cars'. The walkability of Liverpool CBD was exemplified by Sarah (owner of two-bedroom apartment built in 2018, lives with husband and baby) who shared:

> The private hospital is across the road from our place, that's where I had the baby... So we walked across the road at 4.30 in the morning to have the baby... it was so easy. And then four days later walked home with the baby... I think that takes convenience to next level.

After the birth of her child, Sarah would regularly go for walks with her daughter in the pram. While she had considered moving to a house outside the Liverpool CBD, she was mindful that they would 'miss out on all of these convenient things'.

Despite a propensity to undertake journeys in the CBD on foot, Western City families also expressed concerns relating to pedestrian safety due to uncomfortable car encounters and poor pedestrian infrastructure. Their experiences signify the importance of ensuring increasing residential density is accompanied by supportive infrastructure that encourages safe active mobility (Hendrigan et al. 2019).

While walkability was valued by most participants, for some it was a matter of necessity. Mariam[33], who lived in Parramatta and did not have a driver's license, commented: 'The suburbs is out of the question – I am going to rot at home if I can't drive… we love going out. I love going out, that's why I am here'. Darren similarly stated, 'Being that close to town [Wollongong] makes life easy as my wife doesn't have a driving licence… so it felt like she wouldn't be isolated and have to get buses everywhere. That was pretty important'. Reflecting on what it would be like to live somewhere where walking is not a feasible option, caused reservations amongst participants. Rhiannon, who at the time of the research was in the process of looking at properties further away from inner Hornsby in Sydney's north, noted:

> [You] can't walk to the shops when you are that far away which will probably actually annoy me because I walk everywhere and I am so used to walking, I think it would be really weird not walking everywhere.

Alice shared similar hesitations about moving away from Bondi Junction:

> I am afraid that if I move somewhere else I am not going to be able to walk or cycle to the shops anymore and then we'll have to get a car and then it just seems – it's just different. I think that it would be exciting and nice to do that change as well. But… I am so torn between these two things.

While subsequent chapters will reveal some of the factors that prompted these families to contemplate detached housing, they were challenged by the idea that such a move would, in their minds, necessitate further car use. For the parents in this research project, being able to connect many aspects of their everyday lives on foot, was likely related to the fact that with a greater level of housing choice due to their socio-economic status – many families had selected their apartments on the basis of location. These experiences would likely differ for families who live in apartments in less well-serviced areas or those outside of town centres (Easthope et al. 2020).

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[33] Mariam (renter, two children aged 3 and 10 months, 2 bedroom apartment in a 13 storey complex)

4.2.5 Sense of community and social connection

Parents interviewed in this study indicated that having access to a range of public spaces surrounding apartment complexes helped them meet others in the community and avoid isolation:

> I like the fact that you bump into people where you go… it feels like a small community here… everyone's in the same boat. So that's quite nice… it's easy to meet people cause most people are at playgrounds and parks and that sort of thing… having the community stops you from feeling isolated. I think, often at home with kids you can end up a bit isolated too. Because you're very much around what they need… at this stage. So I really love it [living in the apartment] for now. Once they go to school it'll probably change a little bit. Just because we won't need all the stuff all week and I might go back to work and things… But yeah for right now, we sort of prefer the trade-off, I guess (Ruth).

For Ruth and others, apartment living was perceived as a conduit to connections that they might not have, if living in a lower-density suburb, further away from parks and amenities. Several other participants shared the same viewpoint, and questioned whether they would be more isolated if they lived in a detached house. For Melanie:

> It's a really mentally healthy thing to have to go out, whereas, [in a house] with a backyard you can kind of stay home and not see people, whereas [when you live in an apartment], you have to go out, you have to be part of the world and that's healthy.

Meanwhile, Rachel reflected that:

> If people were saying, "Oh you can't raise kids in apartment", I would say, "Actually, you should think about having kids in an apartment", like particularly in those early years, because it does get you out of the house in a way that it [living in a house] doesn't, when like, it's really easy to become house-bound with small babies.

The ability to connect with others in the neighbourhood of Coogee was particularly important to Linda[34], who had migrated to Australia and did not have any family living in the country:

> Not having any family [in Australia], for us, it's important to be close to the networks too… we would just walk down, and we know a few people around the place, that, you

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[34] Linda (renter, child aged 13 months, 2 bedroom apartment in a 2 storey complex)

know. It's always nice to feel like you're at home… Not having family means that you prioritise being closer to friends… community… walking out down the road and meeting people, having a chat and feeling you belong to the neighbourhood… We have that here, and that's why we still prioritise that over space.

Similar findings have been observed by Lauster (2016) in a Canadian context. In that study, families living in higher-density housing felt a strong sense of community in their complexes and surrounding neighbourhood. Lauster's participants also made comparisons between apartments and detached houses, suggesting that higher-density living was associated with more community and neighbourly interaction and connection. While it was more common for parents in this study to refer to social connections in their local neighbourhoods, several also experienced these within their apartment complex. Alice[35], for example, was good friends with her neighbour across the hall and discovered this proximity had added benefits:

> That's another reason that living here is so great because if we want to go out to dinner we can just drop a baby monitor around to their house. They don't even have to leave their house to baby sit for us, so we can go out whenever we want which is really quite rare if you have small children. Even if we just want to pop, I don't know, out for noodles… It's not often that we do, but we can. And I think that is really quite a big thing. And we are often are around having dinner together and you can just bring a baby monitor… We share a Wi-Fi connection with them, so we pay half our Wi-Fi.

Rebecca, who also had friends in her apartment complex, shared a similar experience being able to visit those friends for a game of cards, with baby monitor in tow, while the children were in bed. Melanie, meanwhile, discussed instances of support among neighbours who shared food and helped each other out with projects. So too, Belinda benefited from a sense of community in her apartment block with neighbours knowing her children and keeping an eye out for their safety:

> We know all our neighbours in our block, they all know our kids, they also probably know most of… our common visitors, to the point where if they saw someone with our child… they have actually questioned our friends before with Lara [daughter], like, "Hi Lara, how are you? Who's this?"… There's benefits to living in an apartment as well, with that community sense.

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[35] Alice (renter, two children aged 3 and 1, 2 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)

In the comments section of one of the media articles reporting on my research, a parent shared their experience of neighbourly connections:

> We live in an apartment with our 6yo – a small older block with a beautiful common backyard and a leafy outlook. In summer and spring we have afternoons with neighbours in the yard, the kids draw in the driveway, we ride up and down the street and go to parks. We babysit for each other, there's always someone baking something and leaving it on the doorstep. We have trees to climb and a jetty to sit on, short commutes and good schools nearby. And if there's crying in the night, we text each other to see what was up, not to go crook. Apartment living as a family doesn't have to be awful. Originally we rented here, then when our son was 2 we bought the place[36].

While, broadly speaking, apartments have been characterised as causing increased social isolation and disconnection (Gifford 2007; Reid et al. 2017; Warner and Andrews 2019), participants in this study presented counter narratives. The majority felt well-connected in their neighbourhoods and some even perceived a higher level of connection than they would have if they lived in a detached house (see also Lauster 2016). Some were able to base this perception on prior experiences of living in a detached house, but most formulated this view based on the experiences of family members and friends who did not live in apartments.

Children can be good catalysts for neighbourly relationships, with research reporting that the vast majority of neighbourhood relationships form between households with children (Grannis 2009; Thompson 2019). This can be attributed to children's tendency to be dynamic and variable in behavior, providing something for residents to talk about (Thompson 2019). With an increasing number of families with children living in higher-density settings, the combination of physical proximity and the presence of children may foster strong connections between families, within and around their apartment blocks. As Thompson (2019:35) suggests 'if there are fewer children present, there are likely to be fewer relationships between people overall'. A number of families in this study referenced local parks and playgrounds as key sites of connection, highlighting the important role that surrounding neighbourhoods play in shaping families' satisfaction with their residential decisions.

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[36] Commenter responding to Petersen 2018, 'Apartment living in now a fact of Australian life. Meet the families going up, not out', ABC News, 8th August.

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to shed light on middle-class families' motivations for living in apartments, and the affordances they experience once living there. While the following four empirical chapters focus more on the challenges associated with apartment living, what is clear from the discussions in this chapter is that families' experiences are far from solely – or even primarily – negative. There is a need to recognise the positive aspects of people's lives without denying the difficulties of the living environments with which they contend (Widdowfield 2000). Alongside understanding the challenges people face in higher-density housing, paying attention to what residents value about apartment living helps researchers and planners understand what works in densifying suburbs, so that this can be emulated (see also Cook et al. 2020).

As the above narratives reveal, families' motivations for apartment living are diverse, complex, and intimately bound-up in the coordination of daily life (Jarvis 2005). While financial considerations undoubtedly play a role in increasing the number of families with children who are living in apartments, housing preferences are also driven by other meaningful priorities including location and a desire to achieve work-life balance. While each family had a unique set of priorities that brought them to their current living arrangement, most made trade-offs in terms of dwelling size in order to be able to live in a particular location (Brun and Fagnani 1994; Karsten 2007). They prioritised proximity to work, a good school, amenities, extended family, public transport and a city or beachside lifestyle over the increased space provided by a house in a different (to their mind, less desirable) location. Although several parents acknowledged they could afford to rent or own a detached house elsewhere, locational and lifestyle factors were prioritised above housing form. For some families, this subordination of housing form to location was reflective of their identities and sense of belonging in particular places. For others it was driven by the time-saving conveniences of living in strategic locations that allowed them to juggle professional and familial lives. These findings are consistent with those of Carroll et al.'s (2011) New Zealand-based research in which families living in apartments in Auckland felt their situation was appropriate to their needs, despite broader perceptions framing apartment living as unsuitable for families. However, as Carroll et al. (2011) noted, the tendency to focus on positive aspects of their living situation and to downplay the negatives can be seen as a coping mechanism in itself as parents are unlikely to devalue their own identity. As I will show in Chapter 8, aware that raising children in apartments

contravened societal expectations, parents in this study at times felt the need to justify their decisions and focus on the positive aspects their apartments afforded them.

A focus on lifestyle and locational benefits (rather than benefits relating to apartment dwellings themselves) has important implications for this thesis. The above narratives reveal that residents' sense of home is shaped by factors beyond their apartment itself. The surrounding neighbourhood and connections to place exert a critical influence on families' housing decisions and satisfaction. This provides evidence of the importance of ensuring that public spaces surrounding apartments contribute positively to residents' quality of life. Increasing density needs to be accompanied by family-friendly services and amenities and public transport networks.

While the current chapter has primarily focused on the advantages to living in an apartment, in what follows, a more complex and at times fraught story transpires. As families make trade-offs or prioritise location over housing form, many are left living in materially discordant settings. Challenges emerge relating to tensions over noise, spatial constraints and inadequate storage. In addition, cultural norms position families as out of place in apartments leaving parents feeling judged and uncertain about their capacity to make their apartments home over the longer-term. More than a set of pre-determined relationships – in this thesis, family is conceptualised as a practice – 'people 'do family' and they do it somewhere' (Luzia 2010:360). The experiences detailed in the following chapters reveal that the practice of parenting is inherently spatial and emotional; 'negotiated, contested and resisted' differently in different settings (Aitken 2000:582; Luzia 2010). Parenting practices are shaped by gendered expectations (Aitken 2000) and normative ideas of good parenting (Pynn et al. 2019). Apartments are an important site for exploring parenting practices as they are sites where the complexities of 'doing family' emerge in close proximity to related and unrelated others. While aspiring to the benefits outlined above, the families involved in this study undertook significant labour in an effort to make their apartments work for them. This carried an emotional toll. This thesis now turns, in four thematic empirical chapters, to the material and emotional challenges families with children face in apartments.

Chapter 5
Making family life fit into apartments:
Attempting 'good parenting' amidst spatial constraints

5.1 At home with Rebecca

Rebecca, her husband and their two children (aged one and three years) live in a two-bedroom rental apartment in Cronulla, a coastal suburb in Sydney's south. Although Rebecca would like to live in a house, they prioritised location over dwelling type. With houses deemed unaffordable in the area[37], Rebecca's family opted for an apartment to remain in the suburb. Sitting in her living room for the first interview, Rebecca explained that they had moved from another apartment across the road six months ago. The decision to move was prompted by a desire for a space that was more conducive to family life. The present apartment offered more space, an open-plan layout, fewer stairs and access to a garage. Rebecca recalled life in their previous, third-floor apartment: 'carrying groceries, carrying two children, being pregnant, yeah it was pretty hard'. The move across the road into a first-floor apartment, meant that they only had to climb 20 stairs compared to 80, a change that made life 'heaps easier'. In addition, having a garage freed up space within the apartment itself. In the previous apartment, storage was an issue: 'we had surfboards, fishing rods – everything in the house. And then we had storage in the kids' rooms which was dangerous… So down there [the garage] is packed now' (Rebecca). While Rebecca valued the garage for storage, as we spoke she revealed it was also used for another, less conventional purpose. Rebecca's husband, a doctor, worked night shift, meaning he arrived home at 10 a.m. and slept until 4 p.m. Due to their confined living quarters, Rebecca attempted to vacate the apartment with the children so her husband could sleep during the day: 'I always had to try and get out of the house and go up to mum and dad's or something… it was really hard to get out with two kids'. Struggling with this routine, Rebecca and her husband improvised and turned their garage into a sleeping space:

> He sleeps down there while we are all up here… we have got like a mattress and carpet.
>
> He sleeps there and puts his ear plugs in… so that we don't have to get out of the house.

While this scenario could easily be read as indicative of a dysfunctional housing system, Rebecca described this strategy as working 'really well', affirming 'that's why it is such a

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[37] Analysis of property market trends in Cronulla show the median price of a three-bedroom detached house is AUD1.6 million, while the median price of four-bedroom detached houses is AUD2.2 million (Domain 2020b).

positive being here'. In order to balance the needs of household members, rooms in the home were adapted for multiple purposes, at different times.

After making the move from their old two-bedroom apartment to their new one, Rebecca and her husband gave their children the largest bedroom so it could simultaneously function as a bedroom and toy room. As we discussed this decision, Rebecca commented:

> I have really appreciated having the kids in the bigger room for the toy space, cause in the other place their room wasn't big enough to play, so all the toys were in the living room so we had a toy space, plus the living room. But now everything is in there [the children's bedroom] so it is really good.

Rebecca's children freely moved toys around the apartment during the day, but in the evening they were returned to the bedroom so the living room could transform back into a tidy adult space. The living room functioned as a fluid space, its uses altered throughout the day to suit different family members' needs: 'definitely at seven when the kids go to bed, this is cleaned and it is a space for me and my husband to be and chill'. This practice was particularly important when adult friends visited. In addition to its daily shift from a family space, to an adult space, the living area also functioned as Rebecca's work station and relaxation space. A corner desk created an unobtrusive work area and their television was placed on wheels so that it could be moved out of the way when not in use. By adopting these spatio-temporal and material strategies, Rebecca's living room was multi-functional. Yet, this sharing and shifting of space was not without tension.

While giving the children the larger bedroom helped address clutter in the living room, challenges arose around the children's distinctive sleeping routines. Rebecca explained, 'The sleeping is sometimes the most irritable part, that's when you want like a three-bedroom house'. Although a three-bedroom apartment would be ideal, Rebecca noted that they are 'really expensive' and 'too hard to come by' in Cronulla. To address this challenge, Rebecca and her husband had again shifted conventional uses of space. During the day, their youngest child had his daytime sleep in the children's bedroom and their eldest son had a shorter sleep in his parents' bedroom, so as not to disturb his brother when he woke up. During restless nights, the children also needed to be separated:

So our little boy Ollie [3 years old] sometimes sleeps out here now [in the living room] because he will wake up Miles [1 year old]. Yep, so this sometimes becomes a bedroom – the couch (Rebecca)

The use of space was ever shifting in order to juggle family members' needs in a small apartment. During our conversation, Rebecca mentioned the possibility of trying to conceive a third child. When I asked how this would change things, she commented:

The baby would be with us [in the parents' bedroom] for the first 12 weeks and then go in with them but… by then we'd probably move out… I don't think we'd do three big kids in here.

Regardless of whether they had another child or not, their apartment was not seen as a long-term home, and Rebecca felt she 'couldn't do teenage boys in this house'. While the family had devised complex spatial, material and temporal strategies for making everyday life work, their apartment had a perceived expiry date. With three-bedroom apartments and houses in the area deemed too expensive and difficult to obtain, this meant that their time living in their preferred suburb would also come to an end.

5.2 Negotiating apartment spaces

Rebecca's vignette touches on many of the themes that are explored throughout this chapter. As the research participants grappled with space related constraints, they adopted strategies to make apartment life function. While these strategies allowed parents to extend the duration of their apartment lives, the ever-changing needs of their growing families meant that some strategies would only last so long. As explored in greater depth below, there is only so much that parents can do to alter their practices, before the effects of child-blind design and planning render an apartment no longer functional for certain stages of the familial life-course.

Blunt and Dowling (2006:22) contended: 'the material form of home is dependent on what home is imagined to be, and imaginaries of home are influenced by the physical form of the dwelling'. This form can either facilitate or constrain certain domestic interactions (Stevenson and Prout 2013). As highlighted in Chapter 1, imaginaries of an appropriate family home in the Australian context are characterised by detached houses with backyards, alongside cultural norms of home ownership (as opposed to renting). Despite the environmental cost associated

with sprawl (Gleeson 2006), research has shown that socio-cultural narratives associated with middle-class discourses of good parenting continue to frame large expansive houses as ideal family homes (Gillon and Gibson 2018). Spatial affordances enable children to have their own bedrooms and for separate sections of the house to be designated as adult or child-friendly zones (Dowling and Power 2012). By providing space for parents and children to be separated from each other, children's 'mess' and 'noise' can be limited to specific areas of such houses, while other areas can remain tidy and presentable for guests (Dowling 2008; Dowling and Power 2012). Open-plan spaces, meanwhile, enable family members to engage in different activities in the same space, resolving 'the tension between… conflicting desires for togetherness and separateness' (Dowling and Power 2012:612). Apartments, by contrast, are framed as the domain of singles, childless couples and later life-stage empty nesters (Costello 2005; Raynor 2018). These ideals shape and influence the design and spatial layout of dwellings. While detached houses are built to accommodate family life, apartments are not (Fincher 2004; Dowling and Power 2012). Assumptions around who will live in apartments impact decisions regarding the number of bedrooms, layout of living spaces, and design of outdoor spaces. Consequently, physical separation of adult and child spaces is rare, children are more likely to share bedrooms and while individual rooms are built with specific activities and uses in mind, in reality each space needs to serve multiple purposes.

This chapter considers how modernist material structures (size, layout and design) and moral structures (good parenting and homemaking ideals), influence how families with children utilise and experience the spaces within and around their apartments. By exploring connections between residents' spatial practices, emotions, the built form and apartment governance, this chapter contributes to discussions on the socio-material geographies of home. A focus on familial rhythms and the routines of everyday life, demonstrates how families transform apartment spaces to suit their needs on a day-to-day basis and across the life-course. Complex spatial and temporal zoning within the apartment allows families to accommodate both adults' and children's activities (see Munro and Madigan 1999; Stevenson and Prout 2013). Such strategies are necessary due to the limitations imposed by the rigid physical structure of apartment dwellings that are often not built nor governed to accommodate the diverse needs of families with children (Fincher 2004). Making home with children in apartments required the parents in this study to push the boundaries of what is considered normal in the Australian context. Dominant ideals of homemaking and good parenting weighed on their emotions in their apartment lives.

The chapter is comprised of three main sections. The first section explores the spatial constraints of the apartment dwellings occupied by the study participants. The second section considers the strategies families adopt for making everyday life work with limited space. Paying attention to changing needs across the life-course, the third section explores the contingent temporal horizons of such strategies. In order for apartments to be seen as viable long-term homes for families with children, design and governance need to shift to be more inclusive of the varied and changing needs of diverse household types.

5.3 Spatial constraints of apartment dwellings

During interviews and home tours, parents identified key physical and emotional challenges stemming from the material constraints of apartment living with children. Common design shortfalls included a limited supply of affordable three or four-bedroom apartments, inflexible spatial layouts and a lack of family-friendly communal spaces within the complex. Parents also identified limited storage as a space-related issue (explored separately in Chapter 6).

Some families had chosen and lived in their apartments prior to having children. Others searched for apartments after having children, and so had their needs front of mind when deciding on the 'right' apartment. Both finding and adjusting to an apartment with children were challenging. As we sat in the living room of her Cronulla apartment, Ruth[38] provided insight into her experience navigating Sydney's apartment market:

> There's a lot of places where the dimensions are just wrong. They'd be great if you had two people who were at work most of the day… But if you're actually spending a lot of time in your apartment, a lot of them are just too small or they just haven't worked out how to use the space… it's actually really hard to find somewhere that is suitable for a family.

In Ruth's experience, apartments are not built with families' needs in mind (see Fincher 2004). Having come across many poorly designed living spaces in the search for a suitable apartment, Ruth admitted she had paid so much attention to the positives of her apartment's living space and balcony, that she neglected to notice problems with the bathrooms (Figure 5.1) and bedrooms. Ruth elaborated:

> The bathrooms are just tiny. They're really small so that in our bedroom, to open the

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[38] Ruth (renter, two children aged 4 and 2, 2 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)

[en suite] door it often gets stuck on the sink… They're just tiny, inconveniently so. So if you're trying to bathe children, the way the door opens in the kids' [bathroom]... you can't get to the toilet so you have to close the door to get to the toilet and then open it right up again to be able to have a bath… Whereas what you want for a bathroom is to have space to put the kids in the bath, have the door open, and sit near them and dry them off in the bathroom. But that bathroom's just so small it's too hard with two kids… so it's like a bath night in the hallway… [We] dry them out in the hallway.

Figure 5.1: Poorly designed bathroom resulting in the door catching on the sink (Author's own photograph)

Ruth also expressed frustration about the size and layout of her apartment's bedrooms, only one of which could fit a double bed. She attributed these design shortfalls to a lack of consideration of families as potential apartment residents: 'You'd do [the design] quite differently if you were thinking about a family living in it rather than just like two people or a couple and a spare room'. Similar space related frustrations emerged for participants of the Western City project (Box 5.1).

Box 5.1: Western City project participant reflections on spatial constraints in kitchen and living areas

Space related challenges emerged for families living in Liverpool, who had economised on space, in order to live in the CBD. For Sigrid (renter of three-bedroom apartment built in 1976, lives with husband and four children), space related tensions were most evident in her kitchen and living area:

> I cannot adjust the sitting room properly. If you try to force it, we do not have enough space [for a family of six] around the sitting room that is one of our difficulties. Another thing that I don't like [is] we cannot fit the fridge in the kitchen.

As a renter, Sigrid was unable to modify the kitchen in order to make the fridge fit, and the family were instead keeping the fridge in their living room – a space that as indicated above, was already too small for their needs (Cook et al. 2020).

Returning to the main study, in some participants' apartments, bedrooms were so small that they could fit the bed/s and not much else. Richard[39] explained that in his Merrylands apartment, his children were forced to play on their beds due to a lack of floor space:

> [The bed] becomes part of furniture like we use it every minute… it loses that character for only sleeping… you don't feel different when you go to sleep at night… because you spend all day there.

Samantha[40], in Wollongong, faced similar challenges. Her children's bedroom was too small to accommodate play: 'I used to have their play area here in the bed[room] but it's too… small. It's just like a space for you to… put your feet on the ground [getting out of bed] and then go'. Samantha explained that finding space for her children to 'play and to put their books' would be a priority in a new home. However, as Ruth's experience indicated, finding an apartment that meets families' spatial needs is not straightforward and compromises are typically required. Choosing an expansive living area often means making do with cramped bedrooms, or vice versa.

Ruth was not alone in describing the difficulties associated with finding a suitable apartment. Although Richard and Francesca would have preferred to be in a three-bedroom apartment, Francesca explained that those they had inspected typically had impossibly small living spaces:

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[39] Richard and Francesca (renters, three children aged 11, 9 and 15 months, 2 bedroom apartment in a 2 storey complex)

[40] Samantha (renter, two children aged 7 and 5, 2 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)

Sometimes they have three-bedroom[s] but the living room is too small… it can't fit like a big family or even [if] you have visitors… It is very difficult… you find three-bedroom but the living room is too small, and it is difficult to have the things you want.

While some families compromised on the number of bedrooms in order to have a larger, more functional living area, others prioritised more bedrooms and made trade-offs elsewhere. Melanie[41], for instance, surmised:

When we lived in our last unit the Holy Grail was a three-bedroom unit… We started looking at three-bedroom units and honestly, on our budget, which at the time was… $550 [thousand] about three years ago, there was probably three [three-bedroom apartments] that came up in a year [in their suburb] 'cause there's just no three-bedroom units in Australia… and then we ended up seeing this… [We thought] if we don't get this one we're never going to get [a three-bedroom apartment], we're going to be living in a two-bedroom unit forever. So even though it wasn't perfect and the lounge room's really small and we probably wanted a bigger balcony for the kids, we were like, well this is our chance and so we just did it.

Melanie's experience is indicative of the lack of affordable and family-friendly three-and-four-bedroom apartments on the Australian property market. As outlined in Chapter 1, speculative investment in real estate is finding its form in single and two-bedroom apartments built to maximise returns on land and construction costs (Murphy 2019). When larger apartments are built, they are often at the luxury end of the market. For Melanie, securing an affordable three-bedroom apartment was described as 'The Holy Grail' – a rare and prized housing form. Conversations with Ruth revealed the competitive nature of the housing market surrounding three-bedroom apartments:

Initially we really wanted three-bedrooms as well as those other things and that was just impossible… it's the competition that's the problem… we looked at every three bed that was on [the market] and we got none of them…We had applied for all of them and there'd be about 20 to 30 people viewing each one… And then you just couldn't get one… we even offered over [asking price] on one of them.

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41 Melanie (owner, two children aged 4 and 16 months, 3 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)

The lack of affordable three-bedroom apartments was an issue for my study participants, and for lower-socioeconomic status households in the Western City project (Box 5.2).

Box 5.2: Western City project participant reflections on the lack of three-bedroom and family-friendly apartments

A shortage of affordable three-bedroom apartments emerged in discussions with families who participated in the Western City project. As one mother, Naomi (owner of two-bedroom apartment built in 2016, lives with husband and four children) explained:

> I don't think the [apartment] buildings are ready for families… I feel as though they sell off land but they don't really then ensure that building developers are creating apartment spaces that are practical for families… In our building, on our floor, there are 10 apartments… There's two one-bedroom apartments, there's one three-bedroom apartment and then there are seven two-bedroom apartments. So in terms of ratio of apartments… really only one family could live across these 10 apartments, which is pretty low I think. Maybe they don't want families in the apartments… Across our building of, we have 100 units in the building, then you're only looking at 10 per cent being suitable for families… There are lots of young families, I think, in our building. But in terms of who we see, like we probably have the most amount of children. And we then see a lot of movement out of the building. So as soon as they get more children or the children are a bit older, we've noticed quite a few leaving the building.

(Cook et al. 2020; Herath et al. 2020)

The lack of family-sized (three-and-four-bedroom) apartments was also identified as an issue among those commenting on the media articles citing my research. One commenter stated:

> More three bedroom apartments per block would be a start. So many have one or two, which is fine for singles, or those with one child. Kids can share a room of course but once they're in their teens they need some space to unwind[42].

Another commenter squarely blamed the investor-focused apartment market for this problem,

> Ending all negative gearing and CGT [Capital Gains Tax] discounting would go a long way to ending the housing affordability crisis… [It's] bad enough in a two-bedroom unit when children are small but as they grow they will require – boys and girls – separate bedrooms. When they are in high school and require a place to study it is even more imperative [to have more space][43].

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[42] Commenter responding to Saulwick 2018, 'Parks and prams: rethinking flats for families', Sydney Morning Herald, 18th November.

[43] As above.

Returning to the study participants, their reflections on the spatial constraints of apartments were not limited to indoor areas. Families who had access to communal spaces in their complex valued these spaces greatly.

Anna[44] explained:

> It's just worked out so well because our courtyard… it's fenced, and sure cars can come in but very few cars actually do come in and so it's very safe for a kid to play. When he's a little bit older I don't really think I need to be there the whole time because it's really nice and friendly.

Rebecca[45] felt fortunate to have a 'brilliant' backyard with 'a tree house [and] swing', and Natalie[46] enjoyed having a 'very big' green area that is 'very good for the kids'. Backyards and fenced courtyards provided the families who were fortunate enough to have them with an opportunity to get outside their apartment. These spaces were used for play, barbeques and in rare instances, composting and gardening. While such family-friendly outdoor spaces were highly valued for their capacity to make families' daily routines more manageable – they were rare. Many parents revealed that communal spaces were unavailable, underutilised, poorly maintained or perceived as off limits or undesirable for children. Parents shared stories of abandoned barbeque areas where communal facilities had been disconnected from the gas (Belinda[47]) and spaces that provided little more than a concrete slab (Darren[48], Anna). Others did not feel comfortable using available communal spaces due to complaints about children's noise (Alice[49]). Both Linda[50] and Amanda[51] anticipated that having access to family-friendly common areas would make apartment life with children easier. Amanda felt that:

> It would be nice to have a driveway or a garden, because [my daughter's] got roller boots and that, so she might go outside a bit more and just do that sort of stuff, unsupervised. But now… I'm helping her [skate] up and down the balcony, and then I have to take them into the park physically and supervise them.

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[44] Anna (renter, 1 year old child, 2 bedroom apartment in a 2 storey complex)
[45] Rebecca (renter, two children aged 3 and 1, 2 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)
[46] Natalie (renter, 5 year old child, 2 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)
[47] Belinda (owner, two children aged 5 and 6 months, 3 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)
[48] Darren (renter, 16 month old child, 2 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)
[49] Alice (renter, two children aged 3 and 1, 2 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)
[50] Linda (renter, child aged 13 months, 2 bedroom apartment in a 2 storey complex)
[51] Amanda (renter, two children aged 7 and 5, 2 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)

Linda would have liked more outside spaces where her son 'can… just go and play in the sandpit, or something that would be easier. Then, I could still do my stuff [without having to leave]'. Ximena[52], who had an enclosed communal backyard at her previous apartment, longed to have a similar set up in her current complex. For her, a designated play space within the complex would increase her sense of safety:

> The last one [apartment] we had a backyard with a garden, we never used it because she was really small, she wasn't even crawling then. Now it would be nice to have an open space like that. Playgrounds – maybe that is too much to ask but it would be nice… Just an open space where I can let her run and not worry that she is going to go for the road or escape.

In addition to reducing parental concern over cars, and allowing parents to provide outdoor play opportunities without leaving the complex, several families also indicated that communal spaces could provide opportunities for social connection with neighbours:

> I'd like to arrange Christmas drinks. I talked about doing it last year, but the problem is not really having a very good common area… we have to be quite creative about it, we either go on the driveway, or out the back and it feels like not that lovely… which is a shame, I'd love that, that would make the building even better… [We would be] more likely to stay for a lot longer if we had a common area (Melanie).

Clancy[53] expressed similar thoughts, commenting that, for families, communal spaces could provide social space outside their individual dwellings:

> I think it would help… to make it a bit more social… because there isn't anywhere to interact with anyone… we've both worked full-time before we had the baby… But now that I have this time and I'm home… It would actually be nice if there was some other space here that I could use… Even if the strata were to say, "Feel free to use that grassed area" or some sort of comment around using the space that's already here would make it feel a little bit easier.

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[52] Ximena (renter, child aged 13 months, 1 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)
[53] Dan and Clancy (renter, child aged 3 months, 2 bedroom apartment in an 8 storey complex)

Clancy's husband Dan had a 'hunch' he would have a 'fair bit in common' with some of his neighbours, though there was little opportunity to interact beyond riding the elevator. While there was a large fenced grass area to the rear of their complex (Figure 5.2), and further grassed areas around the complex, as renters, Dan and Clancy were unsure if they could use this space and felt discouraged to do so as they had not seen anyone else using it. Clancy guessed there were around six other families with young children in their complex who might use this space, yet to her disappointment it remained empty. In their case, it was perceived social norms rather than the outdoor spaces themselves that inhibited sociability.

Figure 5.2: Although some complexes had grass areas ideal for children's play – families were unsure if they were welcome to use these areas (Author's own photograph)

While study participants had ideas for using common spaces, shared ownership complicated the implementation of these ideas. Paul[54], for instance, commented:

> I would have loved to put a swing or something in the back, or slippery dip [slide]… I could just go in the back and just sit there while the kids play. But I need to talk to strata about that if it is going to be permanent.

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[54] Paul (owner, two children aged 6 and 2, 2 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)

Parents' hesitation to use common property without permission from strata, is a reminder of how apartments are governed. Strata regulations control how residents can and cannot use communal spaces. When it comes to children's use of common property, there are two model by-laws (Box 5.3). The first option allows the owners corporation to designate part of the common property for children's play, whereas the second option restricts children from using common property. While banning children on common property would be seen as 'harsh, unconscionable and oppressive', and thus unlawful under Section 139(1) of NSW strata law, based on the premise of safety, this by-law is deemed legal.

Box 5.3: Model by-laws for residential strata schemes pertaining to children playing on common property

Option 1: Any child for whom an owner or occupier of a lot is responsible may play on any area of the common property that is designated by the owners corporation for that purpose but may only use an area designated for swimming while under adult supervision.

Option 2: An owner or occupier of a lot must not permit any child for whom the owner or occupier is responsible, unless accompanied by an adult exercising effective control, to be or remain on common property that is a laundry, car parking area or other area of possible danger or hazard to children.
(NSW Government 2016).

In my research, it was the latter, more prohibitive option, that appeared to be most commonly adopted. This led parents to feel uncomfortable or unwelcome when bringing their children into common areas. In some instances, strata schemes adapt the model by-law even further to make it clear that children's use of common property for play is unlawful (Figure 5.3) (see also Sherry 2008; 2016). Responses to one online media article for which I was interviewed suggested that this trend is widespread. One apartment resident commented:

> [I] bought into an apartment complex with a beautiful big open space area, only to have every possible activity I could possibly have enjoyed with my visiting grandchildren, outlawed by the body corporate [owners corporation]! Apparently, it's something we can only look at![55]

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[55] Commenter responding to Gladstone 2018, 'High rise parenting puts kids at risk', Sydney Morning Herald, 16th September.

Figure 5.3: Signage restricting children's use of common property – photograph taken across the road from a participant's apartment (Author's own photograph)

The difficulty of making communal spaces more child-friendly within strata schemes was further highlighted by one mother who emailed me her experience – hoping I might be able to provide her with support (see Box 5.4). Her lengthy email makes it clear that making a formal request to accommodate children's play equipment in apartment complexes can generate hostility. In her case, attempting to follow the correct procedure – via the strata committee – led to threats from neighbours.

Box 5.4: Email outlining tensions arising over children and communal space

I have been reading about your research online and am interested in hearing your thoughts on a situation my husband and I find ourselves in at our Strata building, involving the discrimination of children and families living here.

My husband and I have been owners for 6 years at our Strata property located in the prized suburb of Bellevue Hill in Sydney's Eastern Suburbs. We purchased the 2 bedroom apartment when we were [a] 26yr old couple, and now 6 years later we have 2 children – a 2yo toddler and a 12mo baby. We have renovated our apartment, including turning an old formal dining room into a 3rd bedroom so now both our children have their own room. We are very comfortable living here, and love the proximity to the CBD for my husband's work and the parks, beaches and wonderful schooling options for our children.

Our apartment common property space has recently undergone an enormous garden landscaping renovation. Our garden space was previously dangerous, overrun with weeds and dead plants. However, 10-20 years ago (prior it becoming dilapidated) the back yard had children's play equipment at the back of the enormous yard (approx. 250m^2 space). Since completing the landscaping project recently, two neighbours have approached my husband and I suggesting we place play equipment in the backyard for communal use once again. We have 5 families in our block of 19 apartments--8 children aged 6 years and under, and one teenager.

We took this suggestion to place a small swing set in yard to our Strata Committee (of which my husband is the Treasurer). Unfortunately, one member of the committee (the Secretary, who is an older single woman with no children) was heavily opposed to this idea and started screaming at me and threatening she would have to move house if play equipment was put in the yard. She believes it would not look good, would increase noise from children playing and disturb the peace, as well as devalue the property. Due to her outburst, other members of our committee were unwilling to speak on the matter, and others were in agreeance with the Secretary. As we couldn't agree as a Committee we have subsequently asked our Strata Manager to place this motion on an up-coming AGM agenda for owners to fairly vote on this issue.

The response we have received since placing this motion down as an agenda item is very disturbing. The Secretary has made threatening and personal comments about our family on email (in view of the rest of the Strata Committee), as well as sending private emails to my husband blackmailing us to rescind the motion or else she will cause us reputational damage by slandering us to all owners. She has also left an intimidating note on our car just this morning. We have also since received other emails from two other owners (single females, no children) who support the Secretary stating it is unlawful (of which we have since been advised by Strata Manager, it is not) and carries risk.

We believe what we are doing is an important community initiative to help make our home more child friendly given 25% of our building is made up of families (consistent with stats from the ABS). And as the ABS shows, this figure is projected to increase in years to come. We believe having a defined area for children's play at the back of our very large yard is reasonable and would not cause nuisance (given children already play in the yard anyway without complaint, how would a swing set create more noise)? Furthermore having play equipment that meets Australia[n] safety standards will encourage safe play, instead of having children playing on garden beds, stairs and other areas that are not safe. We feel the children and families in our block are being highly discriminated against.

The policing of children's use of communal space led some families to feel discriminated against, questioning their sense of belonging. Parents suggested that alongside formal governance, there are unspoken rules that govern the use of shared spaces. Rhiannon[56] commented that despite their property having a pool, expectations came with its use:

> If someone is in the pool then no one will go there until they go out and then the next lot of people. It is kind of like no one wants to share that space… you can see it from your balcony… when we first moved in – we went down with the kids and other people were in and they just kind of looked at us like, this is not protocol (laughs).

The examples in this section highlight two issues at play: i) a lack of appropriate outdoor communal spaces and ii) restrictions on using outdoor communal spaces. Restrictions on using common spaces can be governed formally (through by-laws) or informally (by neighbours making it clear when norms are being transgressed). In other cases, parents still felt uncomfortable even when nothing had been said or done – because they had not seen anyone else using the space.

Given the challenges posed by space-related insufficiencies of both indoor and outdoor spaces in their apartment complexes, the parents involved in this study had developed a range of strategies for making family life feasible in less than ideal spatial (and cultural) contexts. It is to these strategies that I now turn.

5.4 Strategies to make everyday life work within the spatial constraints of apartments

With spatial constraints at the forefront of families' apartment living experiences, parents had devised strategies for making everyday life work in their smaller dwellings and limited or inaccessible outdoor spaces. This section provides insight into the two-way process of accommodation in apartments (Miller 2002); parents transformed apartments that were not designed to suit their needs (to the extent possible) and also adapted their practices in order to suit their dwellings. Focusing on spatio-temporal strategies and their underlying logics, I build on the work of Nansen et al. (2011), Cox (2016a) and Carr et al. (2018) to explore the nuanced temporalities of dwelling. I explore the ways in which rhythmic practices and everyday space negotiations are carried out across the day and across the life-course in order to accommodate for the changing requirements of family members. In some instances, the focus of entire rooms

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[56] Rhiannon (owner, three children aged 7, 4 and 3 months, 4 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)

shifted over the life-course as families grew. In others, the structural limitations of apartments meant that families could not dedicate specific rooms for singular functions, so spaces became multifunctional. Apartment residents' shifting use of space, at different times, reveals that dwellings are not static but are made and remade through relations between domestic practices and the built form (Dowling 2008; Clapham 2011; Strebel 2011). In turn, domestic practices and family lives adjust to their spatial constraints. Common approaches, discussed below, were: multifunctional use of space, giving kids the largest bedroom, professional advice and modifications and even limiting fertility.

5.4.1 Multifunctional use of space

As Melanie and I discussed separation and privacy within her apartment, she commented: 'When you live in a small space, it's about rituals not just about spaces. So it's about the times that things happen'. Melanie described the challenge of finding space to be alone, so the timing of activities became important to enable harmony among family members. Using the same space for multiple purposes, at different times, was the most common strategy used by study participants to meet family members' diverse needs in a small home. Three key areas were discussed with regularity: living spaces, offices and bedrooms.

i) Living spaces

Detached houses with multiple living areas allow children and parents to have separate spaces (Dowling and Power 2012). By contrast, apartments typically contain one living space to be shared by all family members. As revealed by the study participants, living spaces are regularly reconfigured to support diverse family members' needs. These ongoing transformations involve significant work, mostly performed by mothers.

In interviews, living spaces (including open-plan kitchens, lounge and dining areas) were identified as where 'most of the family life occurs' (Rachel[57]). In Belinda's words, '[it is] the central [part] of our house… it's where we live'. Living spaces, accordingly, served multiple purposes.

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[57] Rachel (owner, two children aged 3 and 4 months, 2 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)

Amanda, in Sydney's inner-city, explained:

> [I] always thought it would be lovely to have a playroom, but kids still want to play wherever their parents are. If I had a separate room they'd never go into it, so, this is play area, TV area, eating area… [the living room] is the most-used area, and multiple purpose, entertaining area.

At Belinda's apartment in North Parramatta,

> Our laptop now lives in the lounge room on the coffee table, because it used to be in the baby's room, which was the study… It [the lounge room] also has foam mats and stuff down on the floor now, because he's just starting to try and crawl, so it's like lounge room come study come playroom… it's quite diverse in that area at the moment.

Many participants' echoed Amanda and Belinda's sentiments, explaining that at different times their living spaces were used for playing, eating, socialising, entertaining, watching TV, working, homework, arts and crafts, laundry and more (Figure 5.4). The function of living rooms shifted throughout the day and life-course as families grew and the primary focus of each room in the apartment changed.
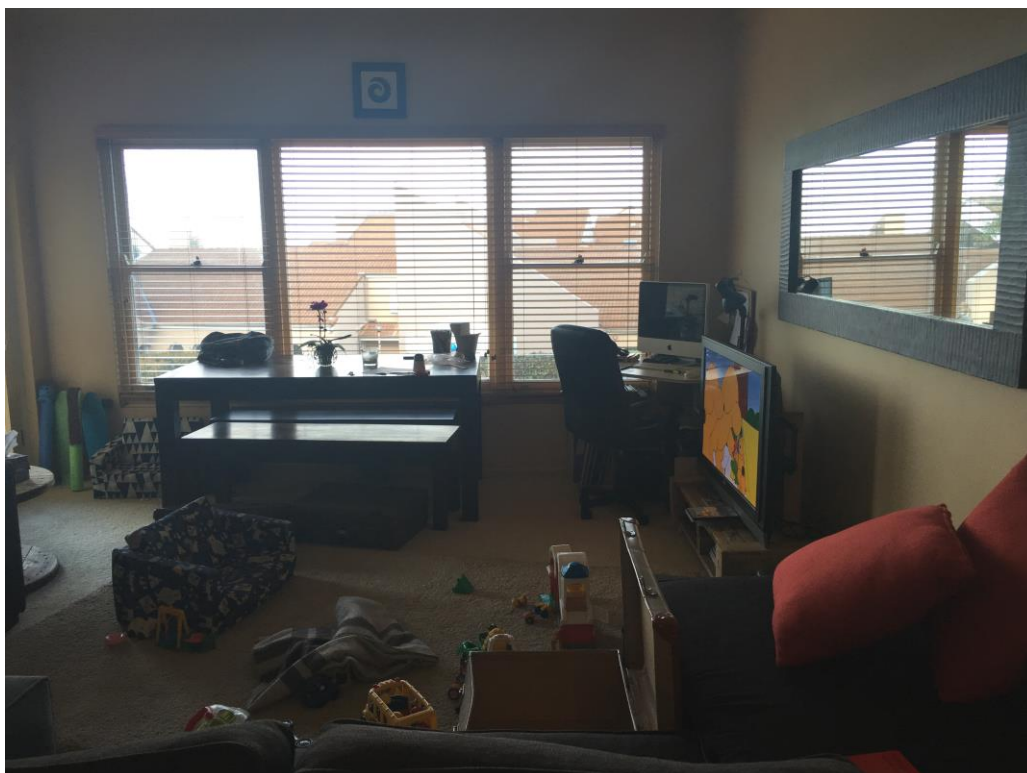
Figure 5.4: A multi-functional living room used for both children's and adults' activities (Author's own photograph)

Open-plan living areas facilitated adaptability amidst this domino effect of shifting uses of space. As Dowling (2008) and Dowling and Power (2012) have shown, open-plan domestic interiors in large houses are valued by families because they facilitate multitasking and a sense of control. Common experiences were shared by the parents in this study. Open-plan living rooms enabled them to continue with other activities while supervising and being near their children. Anna, in beachside Coogee, described her apartment as 'perfect for having a kid in because it's open-plan… I can be in the kitchen and doing my thing… and Jack's in the lounge room and I can see him'. Similarly, Belinda explained:

> When I'm in the kitchen I can have him [son] just outside, because this area is like a low bench. So… you can see into the dining room. I have him in a bouncy chair just outside the entry way… while I'm getting dinner ready, and then his sister will be in the dining room doing her homework… I like that it is quite open… You still have that sense of knowing what's going on with other people… We can be [doing] independent activities, but still [have a sense of] togetherness.

In addition to allowing parents and children to be simultaneously together and apart, open-plan designs made apartments feel more spacious: 'even though it's not a very big apartment, I think because it's open-plan, the kitchen/living area are one room – it just feels bigger' (Anna). While the argument in this thesis follows that developers are by-and-large not designing apartments with children in mind, the propensity for open-plan living spaces was one aspect of design that was consistently valued by families as it meant the space could be adapted for multiple purposes.

Another featured valued by families was balconies. Families whose apartments had balconies or adjoining outside areas used these areas to extend their living spaces, often creating children's play areas. Belinda's apartment had a large balcony on which they placed a swing, a mini trampoline, foam mats and a play pen. Amanda, meanwhile, explained that opening the balcony door allowed her to 'create as much space as possible' for her children to play with friends. Ruth shared a similar experience:

> I can open those doors there… and put a rug out there [on the balcony]… and make little play areas… that might be train sets over there, and that might be cars over there, or jungle something… to kind of like zone it. And there's enough space to do that, and then kids can also ride little bikes and scooters… [with the balcony door open] you can have quite a lot of people and quite a lot of kids without it feeling too crowded.

While Ruth remained frustrated about her apartment's small bedrooms, the trade-off they had made for a large living area and undercover balcony (Figure 5.5) made entertaining possible:

> We can cope with smaller bedrooms if they're not spending so much time in their bedroom… and it [the large balcony] makes it easy to have people over… I want to be able to have other people over with their kids without us being like, "Ah! We're all in the same tiny space".

Figure 5.5: Large balconies were valued as an extension of living space (Author's own photograph)

With their apartment located on the ground floor, Ruth felt reassured that the space was safe for children. Paul and his partner also made use of their third-floor balcony as a play space by setting up a kid's pool in summer, alongside art and craft activities. But their children were only permitted to be on the balcony under close supervision. In order to reduce their stress around balcony safety and not have to be constantly vigilant, they installed a Crimsafe door – not to keep burglars out, but to be able to lock their children into the apartment while still having a breeze. For families living above ground level, balcony safety nets provide another option for improving safety and thus diverse functionality of balconies. However, as Sherry (2016:online) has shown, some owners corporations adopt by-laws that make it legal to refuse apartment residents' applications to install these nets, essentially 'prioritis[ing] building aesthetics and property values over children's lives'.

Balconies were valued by the families interviewed in this study, however, the Western City project revealed that this is not unanimously the case. Families interviewed in high-density new-build apartments in Liverpool faced challenges with dust, dirt and a lack of shading on their balconies resulting in exposure to sun and rain (Cook et al. 2020). In addition to the need for strata laws to be more inclusive of child safety, these examples show that in order for families to be able to use balconies as an extension of their apartments, consideration must be given to design, orientation and protection (Cook et al. 2020). Failure to do so risks underutilisation of these spaces, in a setting where space is at a premium.

Although open-plan living areas were valued for their flexibility, this also caused challenges for the study participants, particularly around children's 'mess'. Amanda admitted the challenge of 'trying to be organised and tidy… because you are using the same spaces so much, it is hard to keep everything tidy and organised and not messed up'. Samantha explained that she rarely invites friends to visit because her open-plan living area constantly looks messy.

The challenges of keeping living spaces organised and tidy, and the work of constantly transforming spaces for different purposes, led participants to desire more space. Linda for instance, commented:

> With a small kid it [the apartment] gets untidy in like a minute… the living room that was like a playful area, becomes all like "Argh!" I am stepping on toys and… it becomes a frustrating space… in my dream world I would love to have a separate dining table… where I don't have to constantly [make the dining table] become different things. You know there is a lot of cleaning to do to become one space from another.

Ruth shared similar sentiments, commenting that sometimes she imagines having a space 'where everything's not on top of you all the time… [where] you could leave the toys out and go into another room that isn't full of toys and relax'.

With living rooms used as play spaces during the day, it was important for parents to pack toys away each evening, reclaiming the living room as an adult space with a different atmosphere. Linda referred to this routine transformation as 'the walk of pack up':

> Whenever he [child] goes to bed, then it's… the walk of pack up… just putting everything else away and then the house is like a different space. It's not all toys all over the place… It's our [Linda and her husband's] space.

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Similarly, Amanda described tidying the toys away in the evening and lighting candles in the living room. 'I don't mind toys coming out', she said, 'as long as they get tidied up at the end of the day'. After putting the children to bed, the space transforms into, 'our lounge, dining, glass of wine sort of area'.

For Anna, this daily routine and the associated shift in mindset allowed her to remember her identity outside of motherhood:

> Remembering that we're not just Jack's parents. We are who we were before… So I guess I tidy it away [to] try to get back to that person… my husband and I can still have our nice conversations and watch our favourite shows and be who we were before and have that relationship.

For others, the tidying and transformation of living areas into adult spaces became more important when hosting adult visitors. 'If we are having friends over for dinner and drinks', Ximena explained, 'I will pack everything [away]'. Meanwhile Belinda reflected:

> We don't tend to transform that [space] for ourselves [on a daily basis]… [but] if we're having friends over… we… spend a ridiculous amount of effort making it non-kiddy… everything goes away. And the coffee table goes back into the middle… rather than it being pushed over to the side up against one of the lounges.

The tidying away of toys for guests reveals parents' desire to present a respectable interior that demonstrates their ability to keep a 'proper home' (Dowling 2008:547). The work of transforming domestic spaces for different purposes and people reveals a constant juggling of identities as parents, adults and homemakers, with the priority given to each shifting at different times. While the families in this study shared their living rooms in diverse ways, they were always used as multifunctional spaces to compensate for spatial constraints elsewhere in their apartments.

ii)   *Bedrooms*

As illustrated in this chapter's opening vignette, bedrooms were also key multi-purpose spaces for the study participants. Far more than a space to sleep at night, they were used for play, storage, study and work – at different times of day and throughout the life-course. The use of bedrooms as storage spaces and work spaces are discussed elsewhere (Chapter 6 and section

iii below). This section focuses on bedrooms as shared spaces.

The sharing of bedrooms, by siblings, sometimes led to challenges, particularly around different sleep patterns. Melanie described this juggle:

> Kevin's [16 month old] a really bad sleeper, and he still is, and we were kind of waiting till he went to sleep to put Emily [4 year old] to bed. So she was staying up too late and she was getting crabby so now we've gone back to being really strict and he goes to bed at seven and then she has a book and she goes to bed at seven-thirty... I don't like the thought of her having to listen to him cry... that's one thing that I really worry a lot about.

The challenges of shared bedrooms led some participants to feel guilty and to question their parenting practices. Creative strategies were necessary. Amanda avoided having her newborn wake her three year old by placing the cot in the hallway:

> I didn't have my children in the bedroom with me for very long... the first one [Abby] was 11 weeks... [I] put her into that room [the children's bedroom], and then [Erin] I never brought in [to my bedroom], but I couldn't put her in [the children's bedroom] either, because I didn't want to wake up [Abby], so [Erin] got the hall when she was a newborn.

Although Amanda would have preferred to have 'a little baby room', she made the hallway work and noted that this strategy had its perks because it allowed her to get to her newborn daughter quickly in the night without disturbing the household. Other parents also used space creatively to avoid tensions between siblings with different sleep patterns. Another example, highlighted in Rebecca's vignette, was the use of parents' bedrooms to separate children during daytime sleeps. Ruth had a similar approach:

> Jake [2 year old] has his lunchtime sleep there [the children's shared bedroom]. And Liam [four year old] has downtime but not a sleep... because... he doesn't have his own room, he does it in our [parents'] bedroom... so at lunchtime our bedroom becomes his play space... I can then have the lounge and dining room and kitchen for my space.

Parents' appropriation of spaces for uses not foreseen by apartment designers (Clapham 2011), demonstrates the ongoing lively relationship between residents and their buildings. The strategies families employed for sharing bedrooms evolved as children aged and families grew.

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When I first met Rhiannon, her newborn was still sleeping in the parental bedroom. Her two eldest children had their own bedrooms, allowing them to have their own space. Rhiannon explained, 'At the moment their bedroom is their zone. They don't have to let their brother or sister in if they don't want to'. With this arrangement, both children's rooms were used for sleep and play. However, this routine was soon to change. Rhiannon was ready to move the baby into her own room. Rhiannon's situation was atypical as her family lived in a (rare) four-bedroom apartment. But the fourth bedroom was used as a playroom, so giving the baby her own room meant that the two older children would be sharing a bedroom. Rhiannon envisioned that this shift would mean the older children's shared bedroom would be used mainly for sleeping and reading, and that play would mostly occur in the playroom. This change would necessitate new parenting strategies:

> [W]hen one of them needs separation I am going to have to put one in their bedroom and one in the playroom with a timer… When the timer goes off that is when you can leave that room (laughs).

Other families navigated similar challenges as their families grew (albeit without the flexibility of a four-bedroom apartment). Having lived in an apartment during her own childhood, Belinda felt privacy was a concern as children age:

> There's seven years' difference between my sister and I, and we were living in apartments together sharing a room… To be honest, as a teenager in that situation, it would be nice to have private space… maybe I [would] think about it differently if it was, like, two girls or two boys… My daughter did suggest that they could share a room. I thought that was a very bad idea. She's, like, "No. I can share with him". And I'm, like, "Yeah… I don't think it's a good idea".

Gender played a large part in shaping parents' views on shared bedrooms. Amanda explained that having two children of the same sex made sharing easier and helped her family 'get away with the apartment'. 'Thankfully I've got two girls', she surmised, 'if we had a boy and a girl, we'd probably be really focused on moving into somewhere that had three bedrooms'. Decisions about sharing bedrooms were also made easier for those who saw this as a short-term living arrangement and thus did not have to think too far into the future as to how older children's privacy needs might play out.

Culture and childhood experiences played into some parents' willingness and ability to make shared bedrooms work for their families. Mariam[58], who lived in a two-bedroom apartment, shared a room with her husband and their two children (aged 3 years and 10 months) while subleasing the second bedroom to friends. For her family this practice was cultural:

> Even if we had more room it would still be the same. It doesn't matter if we are living in a one-bedroom, or a two-bedroom or a four-bedroom. I think it is cultural… we have friends who live in a four-bedroom [house] but use one [bedroom].

Although Mariam's cultural preference for shared bedrooms was an exception, several other participants noted their own childhood experiences of sharing a bedroom with siblings. These experiences helped to justify their current living arrangements. According to Amanda:

> I think it's quite a new concept as well, that you have your own bedroom. When I was growing up, everyone was just shoved in, you never had your own bedroom… unless you were an only child… I'm not worried too much about that… they'll [two daughters] be sharing a room for a long time. I think even if I had a three-bedroom house, I think they would still share a room until they got a bit older.

Likewise, Anna recalled, 'When I was growing up I shared a bedroom with siblings. There were four of us in my family and you just kind of make it work. So… I'm like, "No this is how it's working, we're not moving. So yeah suck it up"'. While Amanda and Anna remained positive that they would continue to make their apartments work with children sharing bedrooms into the future, several other parents were less certain of how long this strategy would last. The strain of shifting and shuffling space required ongoing work. So too, uncertainty around the lifespan of these strategies was emotionally draining.

iii)   Offices

Throughout the life-course, the function of certain spaces in participants' apartments shifted entirely to accommodate their children's needs. For some families, this meant a room used as an office (prior to children), became a bedroom or additional space to store children's belongings (e.g. change table, toys). As parents no longer had a demarcated room for working from home, work spread into other parts of the home like parents' bedrooms and living rooms.

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[58] Mariam (renter, two children aged 3 and 10 months, 2 bedroom apartment in a 13 storey complex)

A number of families shared stories relating to the juggling act of managing parenting and paid work within the spatial confines of the apartment. Linda's experience, recounted below, illustrates the complexity of this juggling act.

During my first visit to Linda's apartment, I interviewed her in the lounge room while her husband (who works from home) was working in their bedroom. Before their son was born, his bedroom was a study. While Linda and her husband delayed repurposing that room for as long as possible, they ultimately had to reconfigure their own bedroom as an office and hobby space, as well as a sleeping space. Linda said she would love to have a bigger home with a third bedroom that could be used as a study. In their apartment, having her husband work from home caused tension and became 'too much at times'. The challenges associated with balancing different household members' needs in a small space, were front of mind at the time of the interview. As Linda and I continued our conversation, her husband emerged from the bedroom/office, momentarily contributing to the interview. To his mind, 'working from home' was the biggest challenge they faced in their apartment. He described his work space as 'crampy' and discussed struggling to concentrate when he could hear his son and wife in the next room. In an effort to give her husband space and silence to work, Linda spent as much time as possible outside of the apartment:

> I'll leave as much as I can, if my husband is here. Like this morning, I already left twice. Once to make him [son] sleep… and the second one to go and play. So, that's one way in which we give each other space.

While this strategy eased the pressure at home, as the primary care-giver, Linda bore the brunt of the situation and admitted it was not always practical:

> Especially if it rains as well and you're restricted to what you can do outside and then… everyone's here. It just gets too much at times… we leave the house anyway. In the car or in the pram with a cover. It doesn't matter. We still leave.

In addition to leaving the apartment several times a day, Linda and her husband set up barricades to stop their son crawling and knocking on the bedroom/office door, minimising disruptions. While my two interviews with Linda were only one month apart, by the second interview her then thirteen month old son had become more active and mobile. Linda explained that they were leaving the apartment three or four times a day, to 'ride on the trike' or to go for a walk or outdoor activity 'when he gets just too fed up and cranky'. When I asked Linda how

she felt about this arrangement she responded, 'It's not what I would always choose… I've got stuff to do [at home], but… I don't think there's any other choice'. She went on to say that if their apartment complex had more child-friendly play spaces then her life would be easier. On my second visit, Linda explained that after a period of prolonged rainy weather (which had made it difficult to leave the house), she and her husband had decided something else had to shift. As a result, her husband no longer worked from home on the same days as she and their son were home,

> He works three days out of home, and two days from home… we used to match so that the two days that he was at home, we were at home as well, so the three of us, but… now that my son is so interactive, he doesn't get much work done… So, we swapped his days, so now we are home and he's not, and he can work and focus on the days that he's here without us being here.

Time-zoning use of the apartment by different family members on different days eased the tensions of sharing a small space. For Linda, this change 'eased the need to move [out of the apartment]… with one kid, I think we can make it work'. Linda and her partner were not the only ones whose domestic routines had to shift around family members working from home. Mariam worked wherever and whenever she could find space. She commented:

> When I am trying to get some work done, it is basically impossible… my husband will take them both out… Because otherwise I have the kids interrupting every five minutes.

Melanie and Adam, meanwhile, had to give up on the 'dream' of working from home, as shown in the following exchange:

> Adam: I ended up kind of arranging my weekly schedule so that I could be home when you weren't, and vice versa, because we had this idyllic idea of being able to have lunch together and come and go, but then…
>
> Melanie: We'd just have fights all the time.
>
> Adam: Well, I'd be home and you'd think you could walk in and talk to me anytime, and vice versa.
>
> Melanie: And then the same thing happened when I started working from home this year, and Adam was here with Kevin [son]. I couldn't get any work done.
>
> Adam: Yeah, there really needs to be a real division, I think, when one person's working and one person's not.

Melanie: I think you have to be so strict with making it clear that the door's shut and then just pretend that I'm not here… So, it's probably true to say that we gave up on the… work-from-home dream.

Adam: It's more of a work-from-library kind of dream than home.

For Melanie and Adam, the boundary between work and home was too easily crossed when they were in close proximity. In addition to arranging their schedules to avoid being home at the same time, having a small apartment meant adjusting their expectations about what constitutes an appropriate work space. Again, multi-functional and shifting uses of space were key:

I've got like a desk… in our [bed]room… it's like a nice fold up desk so I can work in there… or like at night like I'll work at that [dining] table… I've worked in the garage, I've worked in the laundry, I've worked every place in this unit. I've worked out the back under the clothes line… you've really got to be very flexible about it and not be precious about who owns which space.

Other parents recounted similar experiences. Ruth's husband had taken 5 a.m. work calls on the balcony to avoid waking the children, and Rhiannon's husband had taken skype calls from the children's playroom when the children were asleep.

Alice and James were among a number of families who had a desk in their bedroom. Alice (a freelance writer) used this space to work from home while James (the primary carer) looked after their children. To make this arrangement feasible, Alice closed the bedroom door while working, signaling that it was a 'no go zone for the kids' (Alice). The material strategy of the closed door, allowed Alice to create a boundary between 'work' and 'parenting' (Nansen et al. 2011). While this strategy worked well for some families, others found spatial and aural separation harder to maintain. The idea of having a working space in the bedroom also did not appeal to everyone. Rachel, for instance, commented:

We could kind of set up a desk in our room, but I really don't like the idea of having a computer and work in our bedroom… psychologically I couldn't imagine that would be a very good thing.

In the absence of a designated work area, Rachel worked from the dining table during the day but ensured that everything was packed up before her family got home: 'while we don't have the space to create that demarcation, we use a different time of the day to create it instead' (Figure 5.6).

Figure 5.6: Without dedicated offices, work spaces were set up in participants' living rooms and bedrooms (Author's own photograph)

Across the study sample, then, creating space to work from home involved spatial and temporal zoning and material and behavioural adjustments, providing further evidence of the 'iterative process of negotiations involved in high-rise family life' (Nethercote and Horne 2016:1592). The strategies outlined in this section have demonstrated how families engaged in iterative practices of accommodation, undertaking spatial, material and behavioural adjustments in order to use the same spaces for multiple and shifting purposes (Munro and Madigan 1999; Carr et al. 2018). The next three examples shed light on longer-term strategic decisions that families made in order to make their apartments more liveable. The first of these strategies was giving the children the largest bedroom.

5.4.2 Giving children the largest bedroom

Living in smaller dwellings required parents to think outside the box regarding the use of spaces within the apartment. Middle-class families who live in expansive houses usually have one bedroom per child with some households also having a spare room (Dowling and Power 2012). Parents typically occupy the largest bedroom, a function of cultural norms and familial ideals. As the families in this study confronted the hard spatial boundaries of apartment living, they enacted strategies that contravened such norms.

As shown in Rebecca's vignette at the beginning of this chapter, many parents chose to give their children the larger bedroom. This move created more space for play and toy storage, enabling a more clutter-free living area. Paul and his partner also made this choice. Paul explained that during their property search the size of bedrooms was an important consideration:

> We knew we wanted to have more children… we thought if the rooms were too small that is going to make it really difficult to stay in the same apartment for longer. We didn't want to just live here for two years and then go back and look for another place.

Based on previous experience living in an apartment that they did not consider family-friendly, Paul and his partner inspected many apartments before purchasing their home. While they would have preferred a 'three-bedroom unit with good sized bedrooms', many of the three-bedroom apartments they inspected had small, narrow rooms. They were realistically 'two and a half bedroom' units 'really not suitable' for a family (Paul). The length of time spent looking for a suitable apartment paid off, and they were able to give their children the larger bedroom and still have enough space in their second bedroom for Paul's partner to fit her workspace.

Melanie made a similar choice after looking at the 'Apartment Therapy' blog in an effort to find ways to 'make things work better' for her family. In Melanie's case, she and her husband slept in the middle-sized bedroom, their children slept in the smallest bedroom and the largest bedroom was set up as a playroom. Reflecting on this decision Melanie commented:

> I take a lot of satisfaction that the kids have that space… I'm kind of a bit like quietly chuffed that we thought of doing that. So I'm always like… how lucky are our kids, they've got a playroom.

While this strategy worked well for some families, it was not an option for everyone. In Ruth's case, only one bedroom would fit a double bed so it was not possible to give the children the larger room. While many of the study participants were in older apartment blocks, similar issues with small bedrooms exist in newer developments, as evident in the Western City project (see Box 5.5). For Amanda, meanwhile, cultural norms shaped her husband's resistance to giving the children the larger bedroom:

> I have ideas… that me and Pete would move into this smaller bedroom, and that I would create a double space in the larger bedroom, with maybe a dividing wall or two separate beds on either side of the room… maybe a desk in there… to make it more accommodating as the girls get older… [but Pete] likes his space, and he doesn't think parents should move into a smaller room to accommodate children.

Box 5.5: Western City participant reflections on bedroom configurations

As Naomi (owner of two-bedroom apartment built in 2016, lives with husband and four children) showed me around her apartment in Liverpool, she explained that with the growth of their family, space was becoming a challenge. The three eldest children shared a room, while the youngest was still in the parental bedroom. Naomi conceded it was 'pretty tight' and due to space limitations 'it probably won't be sustainable in the long-term, staying here'. The restrictive size and lack of flexibility of bedrooms was the key issue:

> I think that when it came to building, the builders were trying to build quickly and make as much money as they could from the build without really considering families and people and who would be living in the spaces… To get two beds into the boys' room is actually really awkward… we tried a few configurations and just, even to get two single beds in there... how we've got it now… there's not that much space between the two beds and the [built-in] wardrobe. Or we could have had one bed up against the window which, with kids, I don't think… would have been very safe… and then in the main bedroom, it's the same… if we wanted to swap the rooms with the children, we couldn't really put beds in a way where you could have two… Often in the plans for the apartments, they just have a queen bed in each bedroom. And that's fine if that's what you want but when you want two singles, then it's a little bit tricky.

(Cook et al. 2020)

Families whose apartments did not provide the flexibility of giving children the larger room, found it harder to envision their apartments working over the longer-term. Frustrated by the material constraints of their apartments, some families sought to modify their apartments and engaged professional advice to do so, as detailed below.

5.4.3 Professional advice and modifications

In an effort to improve functionality for family life, some parents sought advice from online blogs, magazines and professionals. To illustrate, I focus on Rachel and Tom, one of two families to engage an interior designer to help make their apartment more liveable. The decision to employ an interior designer came at a time when the apartment was 'really not working' (Rachel) for their family's needs. Challenged by the spatial constraints of their apartment, Rachel and Tom had started looking for a house, but this coincided with 'the point when the housing market started taking off' (Rachel). After inspecting a few properties and seeing them sell well above their budget (and the real estate agent's expectations), they had to reassess their options. They decided to seek out professional advice:

> I said why don't we get an interior designer in and we give her the brief that we need workable storage and we want… a space that's easy to keep tidy but is still functional with a small child and allows us, because I work from home one or two days a week… I need to have that sort of space… We said [to the interior designer], "This is the problem that we have with it, can you fix it for us?" And she did (Rachel).

Reflecting on this decision, Rachel felt that seeking professional advice had 'extended the life of [the] apartment' and made a big difference to the functionality of the space:

> It's a multifunctional space, but it's a multifunctional space that's well-designed, because we had someone do that for us… It's one of those things that I didn't realise just how much it would add to the enjoyment of this place… but it has.

Having had such a positive experience, when their second child was born they asked the interior designer to return, to help create more space. While none of the changes involved large structural modifications of the apartment layout, owning the property meant that Rachel and Tom had the security to benefit from their investment in these changes over the longer-term. Notably, the fact that this strategy worked so well for Rachel and Tom – even within the confines of their apartment's existing built form – signals the enormous potential of putting professionals into conversations with parents as new apartment complexes are designed and developed. If a professional designer can achieve such a positive outcome with retrofitting, it begs the question as to what could be achieved if families with children's needs were taken into account in the initial design process.

While other families had ideas for changes they would like to make, renting restrictions and uncertainty over how long they would stay in the apartment meant these possibilities went unrealised:

> I'd change the kitchen and I'd change the bathroom around. I would actually have an architect in, because I think you could… create a double bedroom in the back. I think you could maybe sacrifice one bathroom… and create more space that way… If we owned this place, then I would look at a lot of changes… [for] how we could maximise space. I think when you don't own you're a bit limited on what you can do. (Amanda)

Although some owners made modifications to their properties, none involved large structural changes to the spatial layout (see Easthope and van der Nouwelant 2013). Many of the changes they made related to non-structural storage modifications (discussed in section 6.4.2). DIY maintenance and modification works can be an important part of 'making houses into homes' (Cox 2016a:65), helping to achieve a sense of belonging and satisfaction. Yet in apartment complexes, relatively minor renovations can have impacts on other parts of the building (Easthope 2019). Even apartment owners, therefore, do not have the same autonomy as other property owners. The frustration of being unable to adapt their dwellings, alongside the material struggle of negotiating everyday life in discordant spaces had implications for residents' sense of home and belonging.

The strategies discussed thus far predominantly relate to how internal apartment spaces are used and configured, both day to day and across the life-course. The final strategy discussed below indicates a more personal sacrifice discussed by some families in an effort to make apartment life with children feasible.

5.4.4 Limiting fertility

During discussions with parents, the burden of coping with their apartments' spatial constraints was readily apparent. While they had many strategies for making their apartments work as family homes, as detailed in this chapter, each additional child required further shifts. For some families, an additional child risked pushing them beyond the limits of what they could handle, within the space available. Both Ruth and Melanie had friends who were delaying having more children in order to keep living in their current apartment. Knowing that they were already at capacity, the decision to have another child would require them to move out and away from

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their desired locality. Discussing the difficulties of securing three-bedroom apartments, Ruth commented:

> Everyone gives up hope. Because I know a lot of friends all around here were all in two beds with two kids. Because you just can't get a three bed[room apartment]. You either can't afford it or there just aren't any. They don't come up… And so a lot of my friends… they're trying to decide whether they're gonna have more children or not knowing that they couldn't fit another child in their existing apartment… But [they] can't necessarily afford to move… I've got a couple of friends who are all deciding whether they're having another baby and moving away or staying with two kids and staying here… which is quite a big life decision that's… directed by housing.

Melanie shared a similar story about a friend of hers:

> She's got two kids, and she loves the spot she lives in, and she loves that they have an affordable life and basically, they're not going to have any more kids in order to stay there.

While the justification for building more apartments is often based on statistics demonstrating average household sizes are getting smaller across Australia, these findings reveal that a shift towards smaller dwellings may actually contribute to these changing demographics. Joel Kotkin drew attention to this in his book, *The Human City* (2016), referencing a strong correlation between lower fertility rates and higher-density. Similar trends have also been observed in relation to housing costs and family formation – with higher housing costs associated with lower rates of family formation (Kotkin 2016). The present study provides further evidence that major life decisions are being directed by housing market dysfunction, with spatial constraints ultimately dampening fertility levels. Some families, like Rebecca's (introduced in the opening vignette to this chapter), were not willing to make this sacrifice, and discussed that they would abandon their apartment (and cherished location) in order to be able to achieve their desired family size. But families who wanted more children were not the only ones who perceived there was an expiration date for their apartment lives. As discussed below, children getting older was regularly identified by parents as a push factor that would ultimately make apartment life unmanageable. In many other cases, the labour of making everyday life in an apartment work – with children – appeared to be pushing families to a breaking point. Even the most carefully conceived strategies had limits.

5.5 The lifespan of spatial and temporal strategies

Although the strategies discussed throughout this chapter enabled workarounds for spatial challenges that emerged in apartments, my conversations with parents revealed that the shifting uses of space and needs of children were ever present on their minds. Amanda, for example, who felt very positively about her apartment living experience, had already started thinking about how she would adapt different spaces in her apartment as her children aged:

> We're not quite so much into the homework stage yet, because it's more reading and spelling at this stage… but I have to think about that, because I might actually look at putting a desk into our bedroom at that sort of time, to give more quiet area when they need to do that sort of stuff, or adapting that bedroom.

Similarly, Rachel and Tom had also begun thinking about what changes would be necessary in the coming years as they recognised their current strategies had a limited lifespan:

> Tom: I think they'll [children] get to know each other and [won't] want to share a room [anymore]… things like homework and we wouldn't want them out here [in the living space]. They'll need their own desk. You couldn't fit a desk in there [the children's bedroom] and share a room…
>
> Rachel: But I don't see a lot of that stuff being an issue until maybe, Maddy's ten or twelve years old. Like when they're nearing high school age… cause I mean homework at primary school age is very parent-interactive anyway so I see us doing that around the [dining] table in the afternoon… so the immediate stuff, because we've been able to adjust this space according to our needs up until now, I can see us being able to do that going into the future maybe for another five years. If we needed to, I think we could live here for another five years. But whether we want to is another matter.

While for Rachel and Tom the challenge of creating space for homework was not immediately pressing, it was something they were already thinking about and alongside other factors, led them to question how long their apartment would continue working for them as a family. Rachel surmised,

> We are at a bit of a junction with this place aren't we? About whether we stay or whether we go. And there are lots of factors for going and lots for staying.

Gazing into the future, other parents also acknowledged their current apartment was not likely to suit their longer-term spatial needs as a family. Samantha explained:

> I would want to add [a] study table for each [child]. So that they can study… here it wouldn't be enough space… it's good to share but I don't know, I feel like having your own space is nice… as you grow up. Because they will become teenagers… even if they don't want a single space by themselves I'd have a bigger space for them.

Small bedrooms emerged as a key breaking point. Ruth commented:

> The bedrooms are just too small… [Continuing to share a room] wouldn't work. And also like the homework thing. You know because we've only got one dining table and we like to sit down and eat together as a family… I know you can clear up the table… but there's not even enough places to put things… They couldn't have a little desk in their room or anything like that even, because there's only really space for beds in their bedroom.

While parents were navigating some of these challenges already, they were uncertain how long current strategies would last. Space-related issues were pertinent as children aged and also for parents who were contemplating having more children. The need to constantly adjust space (both in real time and future planning) required work and for some families, became tiring. Belinda, for instance, revealed that the process of constantly transforming and tidying space caused stress and led her to desire a larger home:

> It's a bit funny because part of me is like one of my requirements [for a future home] is that there's actually another living space, so I don't have to feel stressed… there has been times where it's like, "Oh my gosh, we have people coming on Friday night", during the week both my husband and I have worked full-time, my daughter's just come home, she plays with stuff, and we're not that worried about putting it away… And then I'm suddenly, "Oh my God, we have people coming and it's like crazy". There's stuff everywhere… So having a separate living space where there can just be toys left out… is something that I think would be a requirement, an actual requirement of a future house. But do I want all the other stuff that comes with that [owning a house] as well?

Belinda's narrative reveals a tension between perceived homemaking ideals and the reality of family life in a shared and spatially-confined dwelling. While there were many aspects of apartment life she enjoyed, the constant work associated with transforming the multi-functional living area was a source of stress. Home unmaking occurred as material and emotional elements of home were disrupted – requiring parents to exert significant emotional and physical energy to reconfigure the apartment to suit familial needs (Baxter and Brickell 2014). The strategies enacted by parents (often mothers) for negotiating life within the spatial constraints of their apartments create additional physical and emotional labour. Developing and enacting intricate sleep routines, getting out of the house to enable a partner to work at home, clearing away children's toys from the living room on a daily basis and turning a dining table into a home office each morning and back again each night, all require work. Moreover, these routines are unstable. They are carefully planned and implemented only to become unworkable as children age, or more children arrive. And so the planning and shuffling starts again. Many interviewees realised that their strategies would only work for so long, that at some point there may be no new strategies to try within the physical confines of their space, or knew that they would eventually just run out of steam.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the ways in which parenting practices and emotions are influenced by the materiality of the built form and apartment governance structures that restrict children's use of space. Understanding how people use their domestic space, what is important to them and what challenges they face, is critical for planning purposes given the rapid increase in families with children occupying apartments. With a focus on space-related difficulties and strategies for overcoming them, this chapter begins to illustrate the material and emotional work that families undertake to make their apartments home. Key challenges relate to inflexible spatial layouts, a lack of family-sized apartments and insufficient or underutilised communal spaces within apartment complexes. Such shortfalls are inherited from child-blind planning agendas that have resulted in dwellings built with no consideration to families as potential residents. These material constraints influence how families utilise and experience space within the home, and whether they can envisage apartment lives over the longer-term. Discord, stress and frustration emerged in instances where the material form did not provide the flexibility to be adapted to families' everyday domestic practices and desires.

The families involved in this study made numerous adjustments to their material and behavioural practices in an effort to overcome the spatial limitations of their apartments. They created complex routines and implemented spatial and temporal zoning to accommodate both adults' and children's activities. While some socio-material strategies involved one-off decisions regarding the use of particular spaces (e.g. giving the children the larger bedroom), others were ongoing and practised daily (e.g. turning the living room into an adult space by clearing toys at the end of every day). Either way, the participants' narratives revealed that their apartment dwellings were not static, but rather made and remade through relations between domestic practices and the built form itself (Miller 2002; Dowling 2008). Strategies were met with varied success, and each family's individual capacities to make changes and adjust their everyday lives was dependent on their unique circumstances and the different functions their home served. Commonalities shared by all families were that both material and behavioural strategies took an emotional toll, required compromises and were ongoing as needs shifted across the life-course. As children aged and families expanded, some strategies had a limited lifespan. With the shifting use of space and shifting needs of children ever present on parents' minds, many participants were left questioning their ability to make their apartments continue to work over the longer-term. In the meantime, they continued to manage with the space available. For many, material belongings – the stuff of everyday family life – were a particular source of tension and an ongoing challenge in apartments with limited storage capacity. These struggles are the focus of Chapter 6.

Chapter 6
Living with things:
Negotiating material possessions and storage within the spatial constraints of apartments

6.1 At home with Rhiannon

Rhiannon and her husband live with their three children (aged 7 years, 4 years and 3 months) in a four-bedroom apartment. After nine years of renting apartments on the North Shore of Sydney, they purchased their apartment in Hornsby. When I met them in 2016, they had been living there for three and a half years. While Rhiannon would prefer to be closer to the city and in a detached house, neither of these options were in their budget and they wanted to get into Sydney's property market 'before it went off'. When looking for a suitable apartment a few factors were front of mind: it had to be close to the train station and have enough rooms for everyone to have their own sleeping space. An earlier-era block was also favoured because 'older apartments are bigger… and double brick usually means you can't hear your neighbours at all'. The family's experiences in previous rental apartments shaped these preferences.

Rhiannon's apartment is larger than those occupied by the other participants in this study. Indeed, four-bedroom apartments are highly unusual in the Sydney apartment market (see Chapter 1). Having this extra space allowed Rhiannon's family to use the fourth bedroom as a play room. Nonetheless, finding space to store all their things was an ongoing challenge and, for Rhiannon, a point of stress:

> Living in an apartment, if something is out of place it just makes the place look really messy so it drives me insane. I try to keep it tidy, it might not be clean but at least everything is put away (laughs). Otherwise it just drives you insane and you just feel crowded and claustrophobic with all the crap everywhere… it kind of just makes you feel really depressed and horrible.

Staying on top of the 'mess' was important to Rhiannon's wellbeing and homemaker identity. As a result, she had strategies for ensuring everything had a place. With limited built-in storage, Rhiannon purchased furniture that provided additional storage space:

> One thing we use a lot is underneath the beds and underneath the sofa… under my son's bed is the linen, under my daughter's bed are clothes that are too small or too big. Under the sofa there is loads of things. Under our bed is linen and towels and stuff. So…

storage wise, we make things [furniture] a little bit further above the ground to put things under. Even her [baby's] cot linen is under her bed in nice boxes… the book shelf which stores toys… that chest is also our coffee table and inside there is all the kids' games. So it is two functions… we needed a sideboard but we also needed somewhere to put our nice plates and stuff, so we got that… you do what you have to do.

While Rhiannon characterised her family's furniture as 'pretty boring', she explained that she had been living in apartments long enough to be able to decipher that 'pretty' is not necessarily 'practical'. Despite everything having its place, spatial constraints remained an issue. So, at various times, Rhiannon used her parents-in-law's house to store larger items that were not in use:

We asked them to store like the baby bassinet and baby stuff when my son was a bit older, ready for the next one. And they did for a little while and then they moved house so we had to get it back because they didn't want to store it anymore.

A lack of storage space shaped Rhiannon's consumption and ridding practices. 'We try not to buy stuff until we have space for something new', she explained. 'So basically if we can't store things we just don't have it – we get rid of it'. Regular clean-outs ensured that items were not kept if they were no longer used:

Twice a year we go through the toys they don't play with and work out what to keep and what to throw in the bin if it is broken and what to donate if you don't use it anymore… like the kids clothing. I try to get into their room a couple of times a year because kids hoard stuff. And we do it with linen maybe once a year as well… We try not to buy stuff until we have space for something new… we still have a lot of stuff – no matter how much [we get rid of]… we always have so much stuff.

Although Rhiannon's strategies were somewhat effective in reducing domestic clutter, friends and family members who did not live in apartments were less conscious of the constant challenge of storage. Gift-giving resulted in Rhiannon having to find space for new (and sometimes quite large) items that entered the house:

My in-laws got my son this massive big wooden farm that has to be put together and the only way it can be stored is in a big long box... It doesn't fit under the couch, it doesn't fit anywhere. So we never use it cause it's in the garage (Rhiannon).

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In an effort to regain control over the things entering their apartment, Rhiannon pleaded with family and friends to stop buying her children toys – though her efforts were met with limited success:

> My daughter just had her birthday… and everyone rang up asking, "What can we get her?" and I was like "Please no toys, we are bursting at the seams". And she got toys (laughs) and clothing and more toys. It's like "Oh, thanks. Thanks for listening!"

At the time of the interview, Rhiannon was on maternity leave with her third child. As we discussed the future of family life in their apartment, she explained it would likely not work much longer, 'it's just too painful'. A desire for more storage, slightly more space and a backyard were the main reasons behind her growing desire to move. Discussing the search for a new property, Rhiannon shared:

> I would be pretty excited if I saw a storage room… There was one house we looked at that had a massive big laundry that I got really excited about and on the back of that was a storage room! Like wall to wall of shelves. I was like I want that house for that room! I fell in love… [Other] people are like, "Oh look at the backyard" and "It's got a nice lounge room" and I am like, "Look, it's got a storage room! It's got a linen closet! Yay!"… I think because of what I am lacking. I won't have to store my linen under my bed! That's very exciting for someone who has to move a mattress every time they want to get a set of sheets out.

The storage-related tensions and workload revealed by Rhiannon were not unique to her household. As detailed below, insufficient storage in apartments emerged as a significant theme across all interviews.

6.2 Dwelling with material possessions

This chapter focuses on how the families involved in this study accumulated, stored, shared, borrowed, organised and ridded material possessions within the spatial constraints of their apartments. As Gregson (2007:21-24) has argued,

> Dwelling is achieved through an ongoing flow of appropriation and divestment; through acquisition, holding, keeping, storing and indeed ridding… [Such practices are] fundamental to our everyday lives with things and to making dwelling structures accommodating accommodations… The state of being at home is re-established,

through what happens to and what is done with and to certain things.

Research examining material cultures of objects and their use reveal housing units are more than just physical spaces, but rather sites of consumption and material practices. Spaces within the home and the material objects within them, have agency and can either facilitate or constrain residents' experiences of home (Nansen et al. 2011). The relationship between the material features of dwellings and the social lives that inhabit them is co-constitutive of residents' sense of belonging and homeliness (Jacobs and Smith 2008; Nansen et al. 2011). By exploring parents' domestic materialities and practices, this chapter demonstrates the complex ways in which parents' everyday lives shaped, and were shaped by, their engagements with 'stuff'. As Cwerner and Metcalfe (2003) and Dowling (2008) have shown, everyday relations with material objects in the home are impacted by middle-class notions of good homemaking. Children's and their toys complicate such ideals, requiring parents to devise strategies for containing children's belongings through spatial and temporal zoning (Munro and Madigan 1999; Dowling 2008; Stevenson and Prout 2013). Storing, tidying and ridding practices are also key. This chapter shows how the management of material objects is a key part of families' apartment living narratives. The chapter begins by establishing storage as a challenge in apartments, as articulated by the participants. Their narratives demonstrate that storage is not only a physical challenge, but also an emotional one. The chapter then delves into parents' experiences of managing stuff in apartments, revealing how apartment materiality shapes practices and emotions associated with purchasing, acquiring, storing and ridding.

6.3 Storage as an ongoing challenge of apartment life

The difficulty of containing and organising material objects – the 'stuff' of family life – was a perennial theme during my conversations with parents. Storage was a problem due to an overall lack of space and general sense of mess. The challenge of storing large items was also a major concern.

6.3.1 'There are things everywhere': the challenges of everyday mess in a small space

For Ximena[59] and several other participants, insufficient storage space was the primary point of stress in apartments that otherwise suited their needs:

> It lacks storage room that is the only thing that bothers me. It seems like the house explodes every now and then and there are things everywhere that I don't know how to put away… we don't have places to put things… there is no closet in here, there's no [built-in] wardrobe, so that is a problem (Ximena).

Poor storage was a common source of frustration:

> The [built-in] wardrobes are really crap because they're so poorly designed, cheap…because of the lack of space, you can't really get into them…I mean all Emily's clothes are in the playroom cupboard because we haven't got room in the other bedroom for everyone's clothes. And the cupboards are really bad 'cause they're so cramped. Yes, storage is very much an issue (Melanie[60]).

Other participants shared similar feelings. The inability to contain 'stuff' created a sense of 'chaos' (Linda[61], Belinda[62]) and 'mess' (Ruth[63], Samantha[64]). Samantha, explained that due to a lack of storage space for her children's clothing, it 'has been piling up [in their room] to the level they can't even see'. Trying to manage this sense of chaos was emotionally taxing and impacted parents' homemaking practices. Ruth described trying to organise her family's belongings, with limited space, and the work involved in this process:

> Your mess just gets everywhere… you can't just contain it… and stop things creeping from one place to another… there's not real places for stuff. So sometimes even getting out the front door can be hard… the kitchen becomes a dumping ground for stuff… there's not enough hanging space. The wardrobes [are] too small… they're not built for four people's stuff… I'm constantly moving things around. Trying to work out how to make it work today. Or this week, or you know, it's hard to get it consistently to work… Even if I could think of great storage solutions there's not many places to put them

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[59] Ximena (renter, child aged 13 months, 1 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)
[60] Melanie (owner, two children aged 4 and 16 months, 3 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)
[61] Linda (renter, child aged 13 months, 2 bedroom apartment in a 2 storey complex)
[62] Belinda (owner, two children aged 5 and 6 months, 3 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)
[63] Ruth (renter, two children aged 4 and 2, 2 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)
[64] Samantha (renter, two children aged 7 and 5, 2 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)

while still having it look aesthetically nice… You want it to feel homely rather than just having cupboards along the walls everywhere.

For Ruth, the challenge of storing stuff within their apartment was compounded by a desire to create a 'homely' and attractive domestic environment (Dowling 2008; Stevenson and Prout 2013). The inability to contain items due to a lack of internal storage space meant that participants regularly had to confront explosions of mess in their day-to-day lives. These challenges were compounded by the struggle of finding space for larger items.

6.3.2 'I wish there was a better place to store that': the challenges of storing large items

While parents struggled to satisfactorily store everyday household items such as food, clothing, toys and other small objects, large items like prams (Figure 6.1 and 6.2a) and children's bikes (Figure 6.2b) amplified the issue. Darren[65] explained:

> We store this stroller here as you can see [just inside the front door]… I wish there was a better place to store that… I don't like having it right there… that's an unresolved issue… we could put it in the garage every night. But then it becomes a bit impractical… if these guys [partner and son] just want to go out in the morning with the stroller.

Linda had a similar issue, but with a trike:

> Recently someone gave us a trike and we don't have space for the trike in here... So it's in the lobby. No one has complained yet but that's a common area, right... technically, we wouldn't be allowed.

Linda had not yet received complaints about her trike, but families interviewed as part of the Western city project were less fortunate (see Box 6.1).

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[65] Darren (renter, 16 month old child, 2 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)

Figure 6.1: Limited entryway space within apartments making pram storage difficult (Author's own photograph)

Box 6.1: Western City project participant reflections on storing bikes and prams

Lack of storage space emerged as a key challenge among families interviewed in Liverpool. When it came to storing things like prams and bicycles, Naomi (owner of two-bedroom apartment built in 2016, lives with husband and four children) felt there was 'nowhere really to put those things'. For a city dwelling family that valued getting out on foot, this was an issue:

> We do walk quite a bit around the area and the local neighbourhood so we do a bit of walking as well and… we've got the double pram just folded up in the living space… that's been a bit tricky trying to make storage available in the house… Outside there's [a] common area and we get told off for leaving our bikes and prams [there].

Storage constraints are amplified in new-build apartments where lock up garages are rare. Naomi had access to a storage cage in the garage, but noted that everything in the cage gets dusty and that they have had issues with break ins. Another mother, Sarah (owner of two-bedroom apartment built in 2018, lives with husband and baby), shared similar concerns about their belongings getting dusty or stolen in storage cages (Cook et al. 2020).

Figure 6.2 a (left) and b (right): Prams and children's bikes stored in communal entry ways were a common point of tension (Author's own photographs)

Returning to the present study, both Alice[66] and her neighbour previously stored their prams at the bottom of their apartment's stairwell to save space in their apartments and avoid carrying the prams up and down the stairs each day. In the interview, Alice explained that this was no longer possible because a disgruntled neighbour had attempted to damage their prams:

> Somebody moved them [the prams] from underneath the stairs and left them out in the driveway outside the building, either to get stolen, but it was actually forecast for rain that night so we suspect it was so they would get rained on.

In addition to having their prams moved outside, Alice had discovered 'cigarette butts left in there [pram] and a great big phlegmy spit, someone spat in the pram'. Frustrated by the lack of secure pram storage space in her apartment complex, Alice explained that she now had to lug the pram upstairs each day and store it inside which was 'really annoying'.

With space at a premium and storage being a continual challenge, the parents involved in this study had devised strategies for managing their material possessions. Some strategies involved inhabitants adapting the building physically and others reflected parents reworking their

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[66] Alice (renter, two children aged 3 and 1, 2 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)

practices to accommodate structural constraints (see section 2.2.2). These strategies, discussed on the following pages, included: limiting purchases and acquisitions; adding storage solutions and ridding unused material possessions. As with the spatial strategies discussed in Chapter 5, these strategies required ongoing work – often performed by mothers – and were regularly described as a source of weariness.

6.4 Strategies for managing material possessions in apartments

6.4.1 Limiting purchases and acquisitions

Storage challenges shaped decisions about the material objects parents were willing to purchase or acquire. For Alice, a lack of storage space made her keep 'things minimal', while Rachel[67] commented that 'there's a war on stuff at all times'. Ruth explained that in order to prevent unnecessary purchases, she avoided browsing at the shops all together:

> I don't just go to Miranda [the location of a large shopping centre] and have a little wander around the shops, and… I don't read house magazines anymore... things that I used to quite enjoy doing, I just don't do them anymore because I don't want to be tempted to have more things… I think part of the key to living in an apartment with kids is just being content with what you've got.

Other interviewees shared that limited storage space was always front of mind when making purchasing decisions:

> There have been many times where we have seen things that we would have liked to have but we then don't buy them based on space… there is no space – no kitchen space – there is hardly any space there for appliances… I think shoes and clothing and other things… We constantly have to think about space all the time (Paul[68]).

Parents made careful decisions about what they had space to store and for how long. In addition to adopting a minimalistic lifestyle, sharing, borrowing and second-hand networks helped participants to limit their acquisitions. For instance, using toy libraries enabled Anna[69] borrow items for her son, without having to make the longer-term commitment of storing those items:

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[67] Rachel (owner, two children aged 3 and 4 months, 2 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)
[68] Paul (owner, two children aged 6 and 2, 2 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)
[69] Anna (renter, 1 year old child, 2 bedroom apartment in a 2 storey complex)

> Living in an apartment you don't have much space… we're really keen on the toy library… you can get so many good things there, you don't need to buy and you just bring them home and take them back in two weeks, and it's all good.

Borrowing and sharing enhanced the flow of items through apartments, meaning items did not overstay their welcome and so did not become cumbersome. While some families participated in formal sharing networks such as toy libraries, others practised this informally within friendship circles and mothers' groups. This was a common practice among groups of apartment-dwelling friends. As Mariam[70] explained:

> With the things he [Mariam's son] outgrows, we pass them on because we don't have the space. So we just pass them on and other friends who also live in units, they pass things on to us… So it just goes around.

Ruth similarly described how:

> People are quite keen to lend stuff out because no one can store it… I've got a toy that's kind of about Jake's size, and I lent that to a friend who's got younger children, because it just gets out of my house for a while. And her kids really like, it, so I was like, "Well you have that for a while and then when you finish give it back to me".

Diverse items were shared across these informal networks, toys, children's clothes, books, gardening equipment, tools and extra pillows and bedding for guests. Recognising that children grow quickly and that there was insufficient space to store items that were not in use, parents also purchased second-hand goods from websites like Gumtree, Ebay and Facebook Buy, Swap and Sell pages. When finished with those items, parents re-sold them on similar sites or donated them to avoid clutter in their homes (see section 6.4.3). Both borrowing and purchasing second-hand helped parents to side-step dilemmas and arguments over what was worth storing (Gibson et al. 2013).

Parents' strategies for reducing their purchases and acquisitions (and hence their storage workload) were not always straightforward. At times efforts were hampered when their children were gifted toys by friends and family members who did not live in apartments (and so had less insight into the daily challenges of negotiating family life in small spaces). Parents

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[70] Mariam (renter, two children aged 3 and 10 months, 2 bedroom apartment in a 13 storey complex)

often felt obligated to hang on to items that had entered the apartment as gifts, despite not having a practical place to store them:

> He [son] doesn't like soft toys… I'll have to accept them anyway and they're still there because they [the gift-givers] told me how he would like them. And I was like… It's a present so, you know, kind of hate to get rid of it but I really do hate to have them because [they're] in a big bag that takes up a lot of room (Linda).

Gifts created an emotional dilemmas for parents and disrupted their sense of control over new acquisitions. 'If they give it to us, I can't say no', Natalie[71] stated. Belinda expressed similar angst, 'If someone's given them [the children] something, you can't get rid of it for a little while'. Although the gifted objects may not have a high use-value, parents felt obliged to retain such possessions due to their social bonds with the gift-giver and the expectation that gifts should be treasured (Glover 2012). As in Rhiannon's opening vignette to this chapter, some parents explicitly asked their friends and family members to stop giving their children bulky items. Belinda explained that she had made such a request to avoid storage-induced stress:

> I've said to friends… "Do not buy her any more, if the toy is bigger than half her height then no, it's not coming in the house"… I'm just like "there's just nowhere for these to go".

Belinda and Rhiannon were not alone in their efforts to be on the front foot with gift-givers. Mariam commented:

> My in-laws are coming and they said, "Oh what gifts do we bring for these two?" And I am like, "Oh please don't!" I told my husband, "Please don't, please don't! Don't, don't! Tell them they are not supposed to bring anything big… bring food that is going to be consumed in a while… Just please don't bring anything"... My mum is also that way, "I found this and I found this" – "Oh but we don't need that". She's like, "It's cute", and I'm like, "We don't have space, please don't!" (Laughs). I find myself saying that a lot. Especially around birthdays and Christmas.

Meanwhile, Rachel shared a more positive experience of her mother-in-law developing a new understanding after she had stayed in their apartment for a few days:

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[71] Natalie (renter, 5 year old child, 2 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)

She looked after Maddy when we were in hospital having Katie… it was only like three days. But she came and visited us two weeks later, and she didn't buy toys. And she said, "Oh, I figured that you probably need clothes more than more toys" and I was like, "Oh, wow, thank goodness". And I think it's just cause she lived here for just three days, and she understood… they all live in huge four-bedroom houses, so for them having more stuff doesn't really matter… living the experience made a big difference.

Regardless of whether items entered the home as new or second-hand purchases, gifts or temporary loans – the reality is that families still ended up with excess belongings. Careful strategies were needed to meet their storage challenges, as outlined on the following pages.

6.4.2 Storing stuff

i) Organising the stuff of everyday family life

For many parents, storage solutions were front of mind and microscale adjustments were built into the ebb and flow of participants' daily lives (Carr et al. 2018) as they grappled with how to best organise material possessions in a small space. Ruth acknowledged that living in apartment, 'does make me think more creatively about how we live with things'. Parents sought-out storage inspiration from online blogs, magazines, home furniture shops (such as IKEA) and interior designers in efforts to maximise storage space in the apartment: 'I'm always looking at Apartment Therapy [online blog], trying to find ways that I can make things work better' (Melanie). As the name of the online blog 'Apartment Therapy' implies, managing stuff within the spatial constraints of apartments involves physical and emotional labour.

In addition to always thinking about storage, many parents described the ongoing process of doing this work:

> It's every few months. So the kitchen I just did last weekend in terms of trying to reorganise all the cupboards because that was just getting full of stuff... You just accumulate stuff… there's always somewhere else to organise, somewhere else to organise, somewhere else to organise. So yeah, every few months I do a different section to keep me sane (Amanda[72]).

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[72] Amanda (renter, two children aged 7 and 5, 2 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)

Belinda described having to,

> re-jig where everything was in some of the cupboards… it's still work in progress as
> well because… I know as well as we're doing this, give it a couple more months then
> things change again… it feels like it really is constant. Because I think with two kids at
> this age, one at five and one as a baby, our needs for what we have are constantly
> changing, and literally each week… there is more stuff coming into the house. So that's
> been challenging.

With children's needs evolving, storage practices have to keep pace. Efforts to control and order material belongings within the spatial constraints of apartments, were routinised in parents homemaking practices (Lauster and Zhao 2017). Belinda reflected that over time her understanding of the necessary amount of storage had also shifted: 'You're going to need a lot more than built-ins. So thinking smart about the spaces that you're living in and how you can, even utilise small spaces'. Alice shared similar sentiments, joking: 'there is no clear lines in our place as you can see'. Looking around the apartment I could see items stored on top of cupboards and wardrobes, every surface had been put to use. Home tours revealed that this was common practice (Figure 6.3).
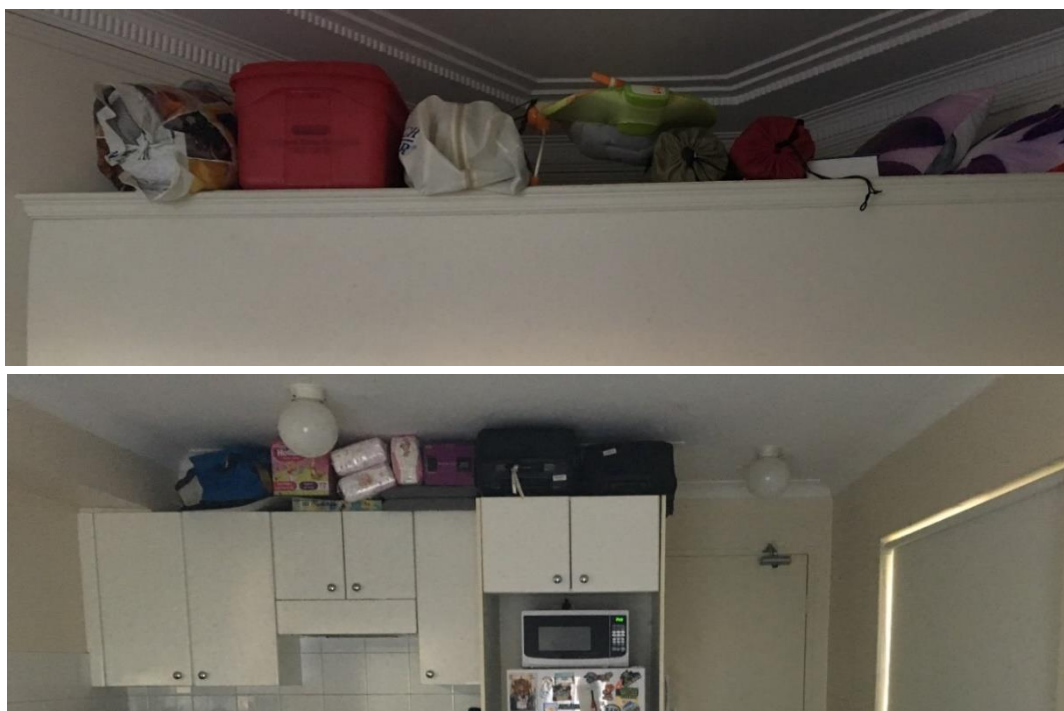
Figure 6.3: Families commonly stored items on the top of cupboards and wardrobes, seeking to make use of every space within the apartment (Author's own photographs)

In some apartments, fitting in furniture was a challenge. For Anna, the prohibitive size of the

second bedroom required her to carefully plan the layout of furniture in advance, to make sure it would fit:

> It was more pragmatic than anything, how do we fit everything in that small room… because it's this weird shaped room, we measured it up, and made a scale replica, just on a piece of paper… I cut out in cardboard like all to scale, like a bed, a cot, a bookshelf, a chair, all these things so we could move them around and see how they fit in.

Other parents shared strategies they had implemented in order to organise material objects within bedrooms that had to function as spaces for sleeping, toy storage and play:

> There are specific drawers for things, so there's the barbie drawer, there's the teddies, the dress up drawer, the craft drawer, the playdough drawer… there's even one drawer that is called, well my daughter calls it the nowhere drawer, so there's one drawer where you've got those little bits and pieces that don't really fit into any of the other categories, they go in the nowhere drawer. And yeah, the toy box for soft toys and that kind of thing and that… there's definite organisation in her room (Belinda).

Rebecca[73] explained that she uses suitcases for extra storage,

> and the boys have got a storage box from IKEA. So everything is boxed up. All the toys have got labels and they have got the appropriate box… So then it is just easier to pack it all away.

Strategies including the use of storage draws, cube storage systems (Figure 6.4) and stackable boxes helped parents to organise material belongings in all rooms of the apartment – making effective use of every space possible. While these strategies are not exclusive to apartments, they are amplified in small spaces, as parents struggle with middle-class norms around mess and disorder (Sennett 1970; Cwerner and Metcalfe 2003) and a desire to ensure their children are not missing out based on their small living quarters. Due to the difficulty of ordering material possessions in small-ill-fitting spaces, strategic furniture choices were key.

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[73] Rebecca (renter, two children aged 3 and 1, 2 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)

Figure 6.4: Storage cubes allowed families to contain children's toys (Author's own photograph)

ii)   Buying furniture with additional storage capacity

In addition to carefully organising available wardrobes and cupboards, several families, including Rhiannon, purchased furniture with additional storage in mind. During the home tours, I was shown beds with storage space underneath or built into the sides, change tables and coffee tables with built-in storage and couches with storage under the cushions or with shallow boxes stored underneath. Dan[74] explained that while storage was not as pressing an issue when it was just the two of them, following the birth of their son he and Clancy had purchased new furniture:

> We have heaps of extra stuff so we had to get a change table with drawers in it so that we can store all the stuff… Previously we just had the spare bed on the floor, the spare room for when guests stay. We got a bed so we can store stuff underneath it.

[74] Dan and Clancy (renter, child aged 3 months, 2 bedroom apartment in an 8 storey complex)

This strategy was also employed by Rachel, who as evidenced in Figure 6.5 had also purchased furniture with storage capacity in mind.

Figure 6.5: Beds with storage space underneath enabled families to maximise storage capacity (Author's own photograph)

Rachel commented that a lot of their furniture was from IKEA – designed in countries 'where apartment living is the norm'. With the majority of apartments (new and old) lacking sufficient built-in storage for families' needs, parents had to purchase free standing furniture to house their belongings. With limited floor space, they made use of vertical space where possible. Ruth explained: 'Furniture-wise for the boys… they have tall chest of drawers rather than wide ones… Because I've got more space going up than I do going across'. For renters, like Ruth, trying to find furniture that would store as much as possible while not being a hazard, was a delicate balancing act:

> Even storage that goes tall, I've got to be really careful that they [the children] don't pull on it… normally, they'd recommend that you fix it to a wall… But of course, we can't fix it to a wall. So it's a constant balance between what's the most I can fit into something without any danger to them.

Other renters also expressed safety concerns due to perceptions that they were not allowed to secure furniture to the wall. Darren had gotten rid of a bookshelf due to safety concerns. He explained, 'it would take some work to attach it to a wall, which we don't really have

permission to do that in a rental house'. Likewise, Anna commented:

> [We] did have a bookshelf… in this corner here but when Jack started to pull himself up I was just lying in bed one night and had this vision of him pulling himself up on this bookshelf and it falling down on him. So the very next day I got rid of the bookshelf. I meant to buy another one… some sort of solid thing that's not going to tip, but I haven't been able to find one so all our books… are in this alcove. It's so messy and it's driving me crazy!

While the NSW Department of Fair Trading (2020) considers securing furniture to walls for safety purposes, as an alteration that would be unreasonable for a landlord to refuse, none of the renters in this study had made such a request to their landlords, perhaps due to the belief they were not entitled to do so, or due to the perceived difficulty of this process. Those who felt unable to attach storage to their walls, were instead surrounded by things that had nowhere to go. Due to lack of built-in storage, Mariam's apartment had a lot of boxes on the floor: 'I can't put shelves – it is a bit frustrating, but I have no choice really'. Mariam felt a lack of control over the state of her home and revealed that if she was permitted to do so, she would mount shelves to the walls. Other parents, like Amanda, expressed similar desires, 'you make the best with furniture and storage solutions, and that side of things. But I think if you owned it I'd really look at how you could create more storage and space'. Ruth also commented:

> If it was up to me, I would build in… I would change the little wardrobe in the boys' room and I would build in some stuff in there that could be used a lot better… and even in our room. Like if this was my unit I would ditch the two bathroom thing and just make one big one… [I would build] some high cupboards… and stick [them] on the wall.

In addition to the barriers preventing renters from fixing furniture to walls and making structural changes to create more storage space, they also felt inhibited by the uncertainty of their leases. Investing in storage solutions to suit their apartments did not make sense under their circumstances. Natalie commented that it, 'would be good to build shelves, but not in our situation, we don't know how long we gonna stay there'. Acknowledging the lack of security renters face, James felt there was no point requesting modifications as 'anytime we could get kicked out anyway'. Ruth was in a similar situation. She wanted to upgrade their storage, but felt uncertain about buying furniture specific to their apartment knowing that their lease would run out in a few months' time:

I don't want to buy furniture for this place and then find out we've got to leave… But if we do renew our lease here… then I could get taller things [chests of drawers]… cause' we are running out of space.

Storage was a pressing issue in Ruth's household so she planned to contact the landlord to find out their intentions so that she could make a decision and better organise her family's belongings. The inability to make physical changes to dwellings impacted renters' capacity to feel at home (Easthope 2004) and also, simply, to dwell within discordant spaces – in some instances further reinforcing the notion that their apartment was a temporary home.

iii)   Building in additional storage

Although the restrictions on renters outlined above prevented many families from expanding their storage capacity, several apartment owners had made more substantial changes. Belinda had built a shelf to go under the microwave in an effort to 'make the space more useful'. Rachel and Tom, who were introduced in Chapter 5 as one of the families who employed an interior designer, had added in-built storage to several rooms in an effort to extend the life of their apartment. Alongside the addition of a large mounted storage unit on the living room wall, Rachel detailed other modifications they had made:

We added heaps of shelves into the laundry… the mirrors [in the bathroom]… have all this storage behind them which we didn't have before.

Reflecting on the changes, Rachel stated 'it like doubled the storage… it is just infinitely better than it was before'. Paul and his partner had also added additional storage to their living space (Figure 6.6) and laundry. Paul commented that for his partner, whose father is an interior designer, all decisions had to be practical. Pointing to a fitted storage unit mounted to the living room wall, Paul explained:

This was… just a plain wall. You had to think about how to decorate it… we thought surely we have to put something there… but that something can't be just a picture… because what do we need a painting for? It is not going to help us with anything (laughs). So we thought a cupboard, but… something practical – something we can use for many purposes – storage, but also we thought about [fitting the] piano [keyboard] there and so we designed it specifically so we can put the piano on there so that Isabelle can actually use it then as her little spot.

In addition, Paul and his partner had modified their over-sized laundry by adding a built-in wardrobe that ran for the room's entire length. A lot of thinking had gone into this decision to maximise the storage potential while not disregarding the laundry's other uses:

The wardrobe in the laundry has sliding doors and that is specifically because of space because if you constantly have to open doors you just kill space. Sliding is easy because you can still access the space but it doesn't kill space if the doors are left open. It [the storage cupboard] is quite big, attached to the wall, a bit deeper… definitely how we designed it we knew what was going to go in each area (Paul).

Figure 6.6: Additional storage added to participants' living room (Author's own photograph)

Paul explained that each space within the laundry cupboard was planned in advance. Demonstrating a desire for order, they had dedicated space for cleaning products, winter blankets, the vacuum cleaner, kids' art and craft supplies, travel bags, some larger toys and an overflow of shoes that otherwise had nowhere to go. They also chose for the cupboard doors to be made from a material that children could draw on with marker pens that would wipe off. While he had not told the kids this about this feature yet – laughing that they would never stop – this meant that the space carried the potential to also be used for play, in addition to storage and laundry activities.

iv) *Making the most of garages*

With internal storage being a constant battle, families utilised garages (Figure 6.7) and storage rooms (Figure 6.8) – when available – for the overflow of stuff that did not fit within their apartments. Those fortunate enough to have secure garages and storage rooms spoke very highly of these spaces. Dan explained:

> There's a storage room downstairs which is a lifesaver. There's a garage and a storage room as well… it's not huge, it's just like a big cupboard… but like it means… I've got a lot of camping gear and sports gear and stuff which all just sits down there… if we had it up here… we'd have to have another cupboard somewhere, I don't know where we'd put it… then there are some boxes… with the baby stuff… we got a bunch of hand-me-down stuff and Clancy organised [it] into like stuff we'll need in the first stage and stuff we'll need a bit later and so all the stuff we need a bit later lives in the storage room, waiting for when he grows out of the stuff we have up here and then that stuff will go… that's the advantage of the storage room.

Similarly for Darren,

> [I] don't know what I'd do without it [a garage] because it is jam packed full… So that's a real useful storage space… I don't think any of the four units actually use their garage for their cars… I think everyone uses [them for] storage… it's very useful for me in that sense, and without it I guess I would just be forced to get rid of a lot of stuff.

The home tours revealed that garages were commonly fitted out as storage units (Figure 6.7). Many of the families interviewed had added shelves along the walls, bike racks, and stacked storage containers to fit as much into their garages as possible. Garages contained large items of furniture with sentimental value, boxes of children's clothing saved for the next child or ready to pass on to friends, recreational equipment and numerous other possessions.
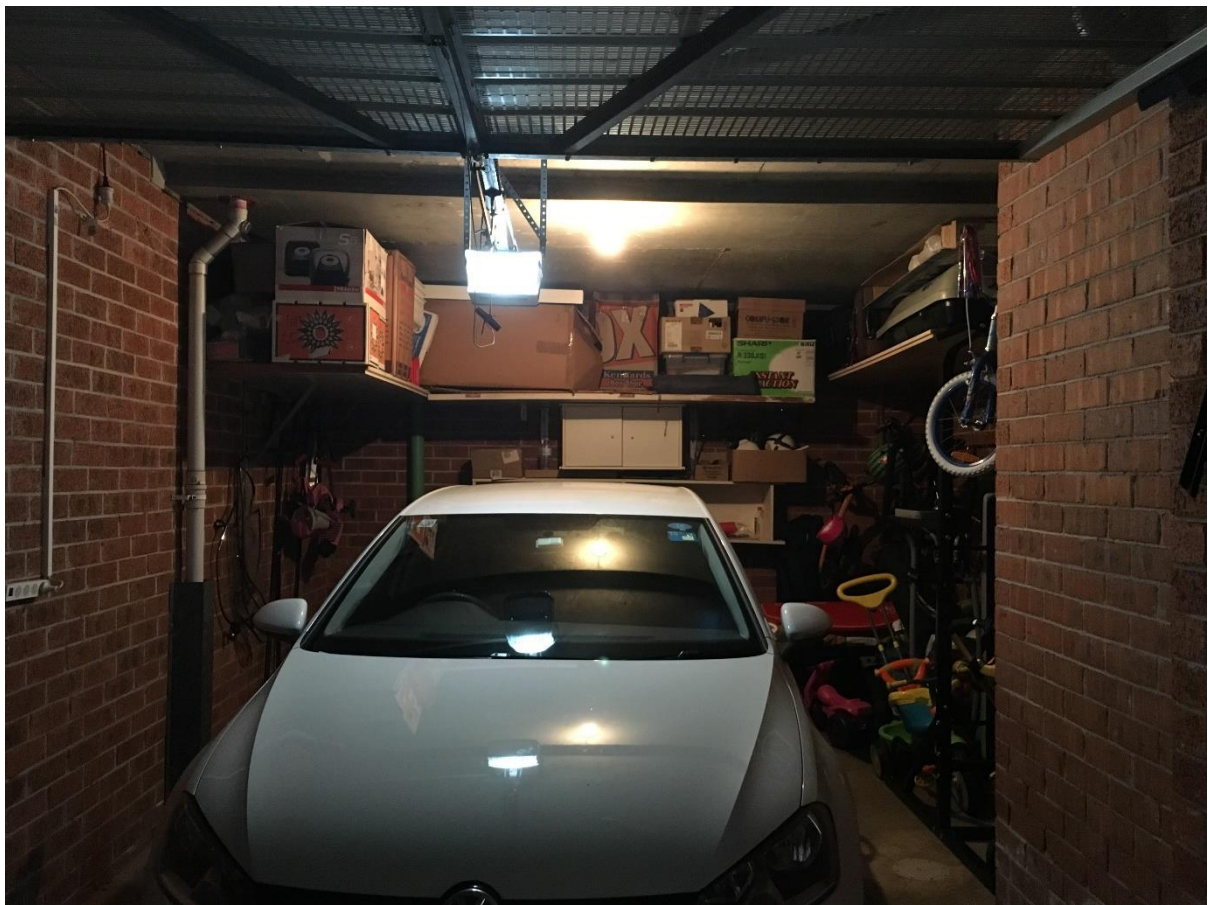
Figure 6.7: Garages were commonly fitted out with shelves and storage racks to enable families to fit in as much as possible (Author's own photograph)

Filled with overflow from apartments, garages were rarely used for the sole purpose of car storage. Belinda stated, 'There's a number of people [in the apartment complex] that don't actually park their cars in the garage, they're just like a spare extra room for storage'. Similarly, Richard[75], who parked on the street, commented, 'In the unit you have no place to put all your stuff, so the garage is to compensate that… the car can stay outside'. A secure, well sized garage that could be used beyond car storage was looked upon favourably by families during property searches:

> We can still fit one car in. It is a single garage and we can still fit lots of other things because of that extra bit on the side. If it was a very tiny garage with no extra storage, we might have had a different opinion of the unit. That was definitely one of the things that enticed us and we just went "Yeah, we could use this", so that was good. And the previous owner had built a wooden kind of platform, so there was already like a storage area in there (Paul).
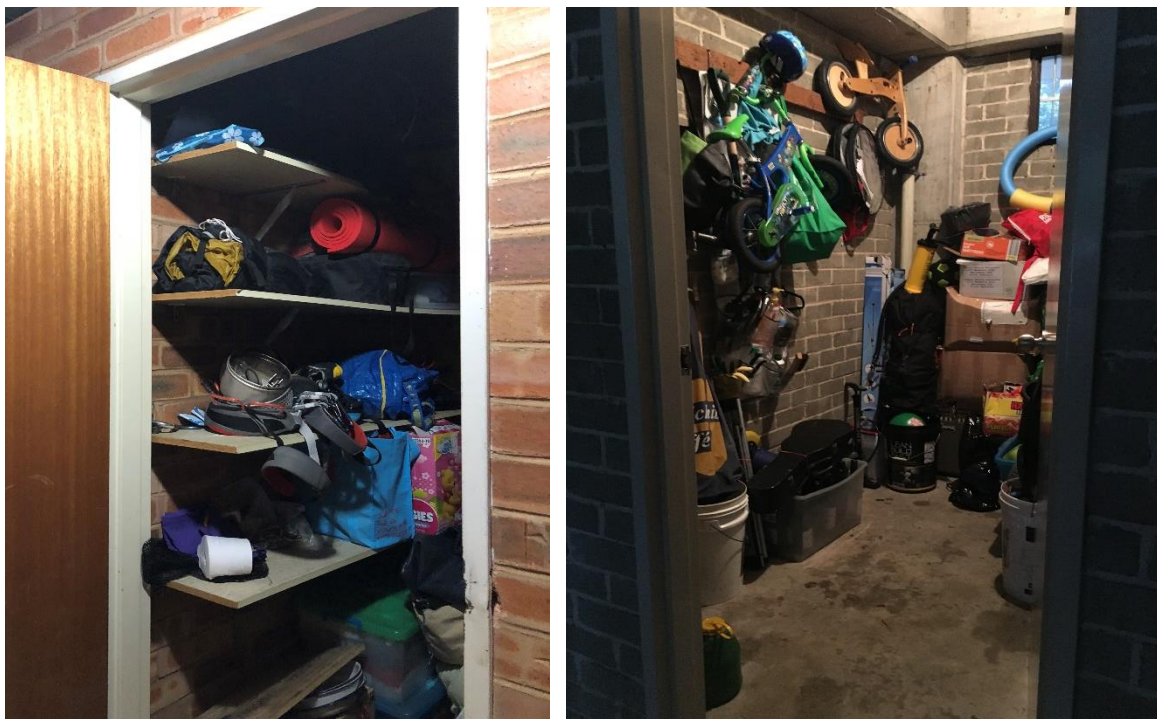
Figure 6.8: Storage rooms were highly valued by those who had them (Author's own photographs)

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[75] Richard and Francesca (renters, three children aged 11, 9 and 15 months, 2 bedroom apartment in a 2 storey complex)

The use of garages as more than a space for a car, has been reported elsewhere (see Gibson et al. 2013; Taylor 2018). Taylor (2018) found 40 per cent of apartment dwellers in Melbourne used their car spaces for storage combined with parking and non-car uses, compared to 53 per cent of respondents in detached housing. This difference is likely due to different types of car spaces and the potential of their use. While lock up garages are more common in low-density suburban developments, many new medium and high-density developments provide car spaces (some with storage cages) rather than individual garages. This fulfils legal requirements that are commonly imposed on developments to provide minimum parking requirements (Taylor 2016). However, as the above narratives reveal, it may not satisfy apartment residents' storage needs.

v)   Utilising other external storage options

As Rhiannon's vignette revealed, some families made use of external storage spaces – beyond their apartment complexes. Oftentimes, parents' houses were called upon to accommodate the overflow. Rebecca, for instance, indicated that having access to a 'bigger space' at her mum and dad's house allowed her to hang on to items from her first child to use again:

> We store it at mum and dad's, like the bassinet and stuff… they've got a tiny shed so things are in there. Things are inside in their spare rooms and things like that… I just dump it with them and they work it out (laughs).

Dan and Clancy had also chosen to store belongings at Dan's parents' place:

> We took a lot of our stuff down to Dan's parents place to store… we had a lot of our kitchen stuff that we didn't really bring up [into the apartment] and use because it was just easier to get new sort of Op shop [charity shop] stuff. Because we packed it all away really well… [we thought] let's wait until we actually move somewhere [more permanent] where we can unpack all this more decent stuff (Clancy).

Envisioning their apartment as a temporary home, Clancy and Dan had stored a number of belongings at his parents' place prior to moving in. At the time of the interviews they were in the process of packing up more things to create extra space. These items were currently in a transitional space, their garage, but they intended to transfer them to Dan's parents' house for longer-term storage.

As garages became full, some families considered other external storage options. Belinda, who commented that her garage was 'getting more and more full', had contemplated paid storage as a next step:

> We've converted the garage… So that's got lots of storage down there. We've got shelves all along one wall, and there's an extra fridge down there that we use for surplus stuff… there's furniture [in the garage]… that we're, like, "If we are going to move into a house soon, we don't really want to get rid of this… we don't want to get rid of it just to get something new later". And there's also things [in the garage] that we've had for a long time, like some antique furniture… that we're, like, "Okay. We definitely don't want to get rid of this". So our garage is getting more and more full. Maybe we should put stuff in [paid] storage for, like, a year or a year and a half… But we've never really done that before, and we don't know anyone else that has. So we're not really sure what we're doing.

Belinda felt uncertain about external storage facilities. While they were currently able to manage, she flagged storage as the driving factor prompting them to consider moving to a detached house:

> We're still okay, but now we're actually starting to go, "Okay. We might need to look at moving soon with the second child". But more because of storage than anything else.

Despite their efforts to organise their belongings and build in storage in both their apartment and garage, ultimately Belinda's family had reached a point where storage constraints were inhibiting their apartment's functionality as a family space.

6.4.3 Ridding stuff

In addition to limiting acquisitions and careful storage practices, periodic ridding of belongings was another strategy adopted by participating parents. Gregson (2007:19) has referred to 'ridding events' as practices that are embedded in 'the intricacies of both routine and exceptional everyday life in the domestic realm'. Practices of ridding occur within a whole range of mundane activities (e.g. doing the laundry, tidying up toys), and are also prompted by larger 'exceptional events' (e.g. moving house, redecorating or renovating). With space at a premium and children's needs and interests ever-changing, ridding events were frequent in the participants' apartments. Practices of ridding and 'clearing out' played a crucial role in the way

parents made everyday life work with limited storage capacity:

> If we need to buy something for her [daughter] I just check what's not needed anymore. I'd say for her we do one or two big clean ups a year and then every other month donate [unused items] (Ximena).

Natalie described ridding belongings 'all the time',

> it's too much toys… every three months or something I sit with him [son] and we have to donate things… Toys and books… And I do [that] with my clothes and with almost everything.

Similarly, Amanda cleared out 'all the time: clothes, toys that they don't use anymore, books that they've grown out of. Because we don't have the space and then whatever space we do have is fully utilised'. Amanda described her regular 'wardrobe splurge' to 'get rid of stuff that hasn't been worn'. Anna engaged in similar practices, commenting:

> I'm always going through my cupboard and trying to get rid of things to [take] back to Vinnies [St Vincent De Paul charity shop] or… passing them on to friends or something… We try not to have too much clutter… it's getting a bit more of an issue when you have a kid. It's crazy how much stuff you end up having.

As the above examples show, parents not only engaged in sharing and second-hand networks as a way of acquiring things (as in section 6.4.1), they also used them as pathways for ridding and prevent build up. As Linda stated, 'Whenever there is something that is not needed anymore, it's quickly out the door'. She explained that with children's interests changing and size growing so quickly, the ridding of belongings required ongoing attention:

> Now with him growing out of toys and clothes so often, I find I'm constantly reshuffling things in storage, getting rid of stuff, giving it away again, passing it on… we don't keep his things for very long at all at home because there's not much space for it.

She described this process of finding new homes for belongings as 'time consuming', but wanted to rid unused items in the 'most sort of environmental' way possible. As a brief aside, this study did not attempt to measure the sustainability of apartment residents' practices of acquiring, storing and ridding the belongings, however, in light of the environmental implications of resource consumption, Linda's comment raises interesting questions. While the

parents involved in this study had a tendency to share, borrow or engage in second-hand networks (with inadvertently beneficial environmental implications (Hitchings et al. 2015)) – space restrictions also forced them to rid material goods frequently. In a context where apartments are frequently positioned as a solution to a range of environmental challenges (As discussed in Chapter 1; Gleeson 2008; McFarlane 2016), the findings presented here shed light on the complexity of assessing apartments' environmental virtues. Further research into the material geographies and household consumption practices of apartment dwellers is necessary to further understand the environmental implications of apartment-dwelling families' complex relationships with material belongings.

Returning to the study participants' ridding practices, Dan and Clancy also tried to pass items on to others, on a regular basis:

> All his [son's] clothes that don't fit him anymore have already gone to somebody else... we don't have a lot of space so it's like move it all through, you know? Others I know are saving it all for their next baby and so I feel like they'll have a bedroom filled with baby stuff the whole time (Clancy).

The regularity of sorting and ridding items that were not in use was directly linked to the spatial constraints of living in an apartment with children. While circulations of children's belongings among parents are common (see Gibson et al. 2013), they become more critical in ill-fitting, discordant spaces. Some families had made an effort to keep things for their next child (packing things away in the top of cupboards, boxes in the garage or at parents' houses). Others such as Clancy and Dan were happy to move things on, with hope they would come back when they next needed them. The regularity of these ridding practices, meant that they were routinised into everyday life.

Ridding was also prompted by larger 'exceptional events' (Gregson 2007) such as moving and the birth of a new child. As discussed in Chapter 5, the expansion of the family often required parents to rethink how their apartment spaces were being used. The birth of a new baby results in a 'surge of consumption' of baby related materials including nappies, a pram, cot, change table, high chair, rocker, toys, clothes, blankets and more (Gibson et al. 2013:23).

Alongside repurposing particular spaces within their apartments, making room for a new arrival also prompted families to declutter:

> It was literally a two year period of just getting rid of stuff… when we moved in, we got rid of stuff and then when we had Maddy we got rid of stuff again… And I've done it again with this one [Katie] (laughs)… When I was pregnant with Katie and was like, right, we've got to make room for her in our bedroom. It was a big kind of de-clutter… (Rachel).

Although Rachel recognised the benefits of decluttering, she had mixed emotions around minimising her possessions. Rachel explained she had 'so many clothes' and the challenge of making room, ridding things and not buying things was 'really hard'. It was easier for some parents to make decisions about ridding second-hand children's clothing and toys, that were always seen as temporary, than their own clothes and possessions. Anna observed that her husband, 'can get rid of things just like that', while she struggles, 'I have a bit more of a sentimental thing about… some items'.

At times the process of ridding required parents to make hard decisions about what would stay and what would go. Linda had to get rid of some clothes in order to make room for her sewing supplies. For some couples, storage difficulties and different ideas of what should be kept and what should be thrown away created tensions and dilemmas. They constantly grappled with the challenges of being 'at capacity' (Dan) in their apartments. Melanie and Adam shed light on this:

> Adam: I'm a bit of a collector, so I find there's that tension.
> Melanie: We have a fairly constant tension about keeping or throwing, because I like to get rid of everything, whereas Adam likes to keep things, and it's only recently that we've kind of come to have a mutual respect… but it is a bit intolerable when you haven't got enough space… it's a source of tension when you live with someone and… it's a fight for resources, and it's something that definitely has to be worked through when you live in a unit, and especially once you've got kids, even getting rid of their stuff, you'll have different values around what to keep, and what to get rid of.
> Adam: Because that's the thing, we're reasonably mindful of not spending money on stuff that is just going to accumulate, we don't buy the kids heaps of toys or anything, but there's enough with birthdays and Christmases, to fill up our house constantly with stuff, and then we've just got to work through it.

Ximena reflected on differences between herself and her husband, and on the unequal distribution of their family's storage workload:

> [My husband] likes to move the furniture around every now and then – he gets bored of the distribution and he will change everything… It actually bothers me that he does that… every time he moves something there is stuff that gets out of place and then I am the one that has to put it away… he is more practical in throwing things [away]. Like "I am not using this, get rid of it". And I am always thinking, well I might use it later so I don't want to get rid of it.

Ximena's husband's tendency of rearranging the furniture created more labour for her, as she was forced to tidy things away and find new storage spaces. In addition to tensions over items that ended up 'out of place', other participants shared insight into tensions over unused possessions. Amanda complained about her husband's 'golf clubs… that he's used once in ten years [laughs]… they're just taking up space'. Similarly, Linda complained about a bicycle seat that her husband was 'waiting for a bicycle to be fitted to'. She had decided to draw the line, 'I said to my husband, if you don't do anything with that in the next month, I'm gonna get rid of it because… [it is] occupied space that is pointless, and space is a premium now'.

While some items were easy to rid, others produced a sense of guilt. Melanie felt 'mean' when her daughter noticed items that had disappeared:

> We do have to do it [rid items] more than you'd think. Right now the boot's full of toys that need to go to Vinnies, and it's really hard… because they play with everything… Emily will notice if things go missing, so it's really quite mean sometimes having to get rid of stuff.

Sentimental attachment to certain possessions also made it difficult for couples to make decisions about what stays and what goes. Ruth provided insight into navigating these dilemmas with her husband:

> We have a lot of baby things, baby clothes that I'm ready to get rid of, but Aaron isn't [ready]… 'Cause I think, I'm happy with two children and I feel like we're done and he's not quite there yet. So I'm storing this massive box of clothes and things that Jake doesn't fit into anymore. Just because he's [Aaron] not emotionally ready to get rid of that… that takes up a decent amount of space in this unit. But I think, "Okay, that's fair enough… when he's ready, then we'll get rid of it". It's not fair just to push him to

make… this quite big emotional thing for him to accept… not having more children.

For Ruth's husband, there was sense of loss associated with ridding the children's clothes. The decisions that these families made about what to store were not straightforward or rational, but deeply connected to other facets of their lives, identities and aspirations. Ruth was able to cope with the baby clothes taking up space, knowing that they would eventually be moved out. Others had dilemmas with larger items of personal significance such as dining tables. Melanie explained:

> This is a huge source of stress for me. We have this beautiful antique dining table and set of chairs that was my great auntie's and it was 80 years old… it didn't fit in here… we talked at length for months about what we're going to do with that table, because no one would store it for us… and we don't have any room to store it. So we ended up having to put it in our laundry, so now it's in our laundry, and it's an eyesore, and it's a hassle, and I just want to get rid of it. And if you look in our laundry, it's just furniture, like it's been… all piled up, waiting to be sold or given away or got rid of, or for when we have a house.

Belinda's family also had a dining table related dilemma:

> my husband doesn't want to get [rid of the dining table]… it was actually one of our wedding presents. He's like "No, you wanted the big dining table", and I'm like "I still want the big dining table but I'm feeling like it just takes up too much space… maybe we should just get a little table" because it's big and it's right there, where we come in, it becomes everyone's dumping ground…

As the above narratives reveal, the challenges of living in apartments with inadequate storage for multiple householders' possessions created both physical and emotional work for parents (especially mothers). Emotions that emerged due to insufficient storage included stress, frustration and despair. Parents faced internal tensions relating to the difficulty of finding space to store things. These tensions also emerged within relationships and were heightened when couples had differing views on what to keep and what to rid.

6.5 Conclusion

By shedding light on families' practices of accumulating, storing, organising and ridding material possessions within the spatial constraints of their apartments, this chapter has sought to highlight the complexity of their everyday engagements with 'stuff'. Tensions were aggravated in the context of a housing form that is discordant, set up for a kind of idealised, purified minimalism associated with singles and couples living luxurious urban lives, instead of families with inevitable mess. The empirical material presented shows that storage was an ongoing challenge for families living with children in apartments. The storage challenge was both material and emotional and required endless work as parents sought strategies to contain the 'mess' and 'chaos' of everyday materials in a confined space. This work was essential to make their homes continue to work for them. Through their efforts to contain stuff, these families reproduced cultural norms around order/disorder and a proper home being one that is free of clutter. The strategies families adopted took place both within and beyond their apartments. They organised items within existing (typically insufficient) storage, bought furniture with built-in storage, built in additional storage units, used garages and found other external storage options. Alongside their strategies for storing possessions, parents' practices of acquiring and ridding material objects were also influenced by their small living quarters. They tried to minimise new purchases and engaged in sharing, borrowing and second-hand networks. Through these channels, items entered their homes temporarily and then exited in the same way as soon as they were no longer in use. While this strategy worked well for children's toys and clothes, other items that had a longer period of use (e.g. prams), were larger in size or of sentimental value (e.g. a large table gifted as a wedding present) caused more difficulty. The feeling of not having enough space (whether it be for everyday or larger objects) led families to express stress and frustration toward the constraints of their living situation and at times this caused tension within their relationships.

The ongoing adjustments to storage spaces and material possessions documented in this chapter reveal homemaking as a dynamic, discordant and tense process. Far from being fixed, dwellings are made and remade through mundane and incremental daily domestic practices (Dowling 2008; Carr et al. 2018) that are often frustrating and emotionally taxing. Whether it be reconsidering a purchase, re-organising a kitchen cupboard or passing on unused items on a regular basis, parents were constantly and consciously in tension with storage constraints that exist at least in part because families with children are rarely considered in the design of

apartments. Apartment designs arise out of imaginaries and strategies for cities that are simplistic and boxy, aimed at profit maximisation and establishing order and control, not for accommodating diversity and unknown unfolding uses (Jacobs 1961, Sennett 1970). Despite several families referencing a desire for structural modifications, such changes are difficult in attached dwellings (Easthope 2019). Therefore, the changes families did implement, required them to work with or around the existing infrastructure (Carr et al. 2018). Parents' capacities to undertake spatial and behavioural adjustments differed, shaped by tenure, apartment materiality, financial resources and whether or not they saw such changes as a long-term investment. Ultimately, both renters and owners faced challenges in the 'war on stuff' (Rachel).

As highlighted both in this chapter, and Chapter 5, parenting practices and emotions within the spatial contexts of apartments are shaped by planning regimes focused on investor profit; apartment materiality (including size and availability of indoor and communal spaces); cultural norms about who belongs in apartments; and apartment governance structures that limit families ability to use and change spaces both in individual dwellings and on common property (see Figure 2.1). The entanglement of these elements, co-produce a discordant dwelling experience – that requires significant emotional and physical energy. The work of making family life 'fit' in spatially constrained settings led parents to question their ability to make their apartments home in the longer-term.

Chapter 7
Parenting and neighbouring in the consolidating city:
The emotional geographies of sound in apartments

7.1 At home with Rachel and Tom

Rachel and Tom live in a two-bedroom apartment in Croydon, with their two daughters (aged 3 years and 4 months). At the time of the interviews they had owned their apartment for six years, a purchase they saw as a stepping stone to a detached house. Despite seeing benefits to their apartment lifestyle, noise related tensions were front of mind, prompting them to start the search for a house:

> Tom: There's always issues living in apartments. So, proximate to other people… Noise is probably one of the biggest things.
> Rachel: That's been the last… six to twelve months hasn't it that it's come to a head? Since we've got new neighbours… that's been a really big push factor for us, hasn't it?
> Tom: There's a direct correlation between the neighbours making a lot of noise and us looking for a house.

While sound had not been an issue for the first five years, a change of neighbours had seen musicians move in upstairs and start running a music school from home:

> Tom: [You] think a bit of classical music that will be nice… [but] it just goes on and on and on.
> Rachel: They practise for like four hours straight.
> Tom: Students come up. A lot of school kids practising [it sounds] like strangled cats… And like this is going on all day… I think that's probably the biggest issue of why we would move out.

In addition to the upstairs music lessons, another neighbour listened to 'doof doof' [an Australian term for loud electronic music centered on a heavy bass drum kick]. The combination of these sounds was impacting on Rachel and Tom's family life and ability to feel at home in their apartment. Rachel recalled breastfeeding her youngest, Katie, when she was just four weeks old: 'I was up feeding her and I could hear this 'doof doof' coming through at like 2a.m. in the morning and I was just like, "That is it"'.

Despite being in a double brick complex, the noise issues persisted. Rachel commented,

> If we were going to be here long-term I'd think about getting double-glazing windows… but it is such an expensive investment… but if we're not going to buy a house for the next five years, then I might think about doing that. Because the noise… the last twelve months has really just driven us mad… it really ruins our experience of the property.

Rachel and Tom had tried to speak to their neighbours about the noise to see if they could reach an agreement. Their upstairs neighbours said they intended to sound proof their second bedroom for music practise, but two weeks later decided 'it's just too expensive so we are not going to do it'. Speaking of their own noise, Tom stated:

> We're conscious of our noise… you can't really complain about all these people's noise if you're going to make noise yourself… We have altered our behaviours with the kids, we're aware to try and keep the noise down… At the beginning I was very conscious. So when we had our first one, Maddy, I was very conscious of her crying and how that would impact other people… Katie doesn't really do it now, but she used to cry a lot through the night and sometimes I could hear the upstairs, I could hear their balcony door shutting. So I could tell they probably could hear her. So we wouldn't let her cry… When we're coming up through the common areas, we try not to let Maddy yell or scream or sing. Try to keep the noise down.

Rachel added that when they had their first child, they apologised to neighbours about the noise. Ever conscious of annoying the neighbours, they had put in place strategies like quickly soothing their crying children during the night, limiting noise in common areas and restricting balcony play until after 9a.m. While they did their best to keep their own noise down, they worried about the neighbours complaining:

> Sometimes I think what I would say if noisy neighbours did come down and made a complaint about the crying… I would tell her, "This is a phase… We're trying to minimise the noise, and it will last only a few months. Whereas you're purposefully making the decision to run a business that creates noise that affects our day"… You do have to alter your behaviour when you live in such close proximity to people I think… If you don't like it then move… unfortunately that's what we're going to have to do (Tom).

With more people living (and working) in close proximity in poorly sound proofed apartments, such neighbourly tensions are on the rise. While Rachel and Tom were negatively impacted by the noise of their neighbours, more commonly, it was children whose noises were seen as the 'problem'.

7.2 Materiality, sound and home

Sound related tensions are an emotive and common experience for families raising children in apartments. While an increasing number of families with children live in apartments, they struggle with expectations that children (and their sounds) do not belong. In this chapter I focus my attention on how the materiality of sound and built form of apartments interact with cultural norms to shape how apartment spaces are understood and inhabited. So too, how the emotions of everyday life co-construct apartment spaces and social relations (both within families and between neighbours). Physical proximity within buildings leads to tensions around acoustics and privacy, while apartment materiality creates an emotional dilemma between being a good parent and a good neighbour. Sound can lead to feelings of guilt, shame, and stress, highlighting discord between the reality of everyday family life and the expectations that come with living in close proximity to others. In this chapter I discuss such travails, as well as families' spatial, temporal and material coping strategies. Before delving into parents' narratives, this chapter begins with a brief overview of i) a broader body of literature on sound and the emotional geographies of home, and ii) existing research on sound and parenting. These literatures help contextualise the present chapter in wider discussions.

Sound provides an under-utilised sensory departure point for understanding the fabric of urban spaces (Connell and Gibson 2003; Atkinson 2007). Nevertheless, inspired by antecedent work in cultural geography on soundscapes (Smith 1994), an interest in emotional and affective geographies of sound has emerged in recent years, with researchers seeking to better understand the impact of sound on emotions, bodies, place and everyday experiences (Thompson and Biddle 2013; Duffy et al. 2016; Doughty et al. 2016; Gallagher 2016; Gallagher et al. 2017). Sound is not merely observed; it is *felt*, with the capacity to move bodies and affect particular emotions and social relations (Doughty et al. 2016; Gallagher 2016). Sound has political agency and therefore can be a source of contest or conflict in certain spatio-temporal settings (Revill 2016).

Attention to the everyday visceral experiences of sound offers new insights into geographies of home (Duffy and Waitt 2013). Emotional responses to sound provide an opportunity to understand where the body feels at home and whose (or what) sounds belong (Duffy et al. 2011). Such observations coincide with the relatively recent 'material turn' in housing studies, which foregrounds socio-material interactions between spaces, objects and subjects within the home (Jacobs and Gabriel 2013; Nansen et al. 2011; Jacobs and Smith 2008; Blunt 2005). As discussed in Chapter 2, the home is a material *and* affective space, 'shaped by everyday practices, lived experiences, social relations, memories and emotions' (Blunt 2005:506). Research into the materiality of the building and the lived experience of sharing space has provided insights into politics of domesticity, intimacy and privacy (Blunt 2005; Gorman-Murray 2007); and into the negotiations that underpin families' daily lives as they share physical and acoustic space (Dowling and Power 2012).

Despite cities being layered with different sounds, discourses surrounding home are entwined with ideas of personal autonomy and quietude (Adams et al. 2006; Atkinson 2007). Sounds deemed to intrude into these personal spaces are understood as noise. Much as mess or disorder of physical objects are confronting to purified dwelling spaces (Chapter 6). Insights from literature on noise and acoustics, demonstrate the complexity of distinguishing between sound and noise, as interpretations are highly subjective and dependent on the context of the sound to the listener (Adams et al. 2006; Gallagher et al. 2017). The relative presence or absence of sound prompts visceral reactions that interact with residents' everyday lives in meaningful ways (Atkinson 2007; Duffy and Waitt 2013). The implications of being surveilled by sound-prints, leads people to manage themselves in ways which reduce sounds made at different times and places, to avoid becoming a source of annoyance (Atkinson 2007). And indeed, regulations in apartment blocks frequently demand such self-management. The model by-law for residential strata schemes in NSW relating to noise reads: 'An owner or occupier of a lot… must not create any noise on a lot or the common property likely to interfere with the peaceful enjoyment of the owner or occupier of another lot or of any person lawfully using common property' (NSW Government 2016). Strata by-laws cannot legally restrict children; therefore the regulation of children's sounds occupies an ambiguous space governed by cultural norms. Dominant cultural norms about what is deemed 'appropriate' activity vary temporally: 'day is for activity, labour, and noise. Night is for silence and sleep' (Gallan 2014:136). The same sound can invoke diverse emotional reactions, reflecting social norms around what kinds of people, sounds and activities 'belong' at different times of day and night (Gallan and Gibson 2011; Gallan 2014).

As shown in this chapter, these norms weighed heavily on the study participants.

Scholars have begun to explore the relationship between verticality, home and sound/privacy (Mee 2007; Baker 2013; Power 2015). Baker (2013) explored the interactions of residents living in high-density housing in Newcastle, Australia. Tensions around noise and discordant homemaking values, evident between proximate residents within apartment blocks, were attributed to differences in residents' tenure and age (Baker 2013). For Baker's (2013) participants, moderating noise levels and thus being a 'considerate neighbour' was critical. While this experience is not unique to higher-density forms, the significance of such neighbouring practices is increased due to the intensities of contact experienced by apartment residents (Baker 2013). Neighbours in such contexts have to negotiate their privacy both when in public spaces and in the private or personal domain. While residents might be in a 'visually' private space (i.e. behind closed doors), they can still be exposed to the noises and smells made by others (Mee 2007).

Power (2015) has explored how 'nuisance noise' is self-governed by residents in Sydney apartments. The ideal resident or 'good' neighbour ought not disturb other residents with personal and household sounds – in her case, from pets (Power 2015). Building materiality influences the way sound travels, impacting residents' ability to identify its origin. Easthope and Judd (2010) found that higher-density residents rated noise highly as a disruptive behaviour, particularly when apartments contained hard floor surfaces. When living in close proximity, the feeling of being free from surveillance while 'at home' is constrained, particularly when noise-related issues are brought to residents' attention. While existing noise research has examined the health effects of annoyance induced by neighbour noise (Maschke and Niemann 2007), the emotional stress experienced by those deemed responsible for creating 'nuisance noise' warrants further exploration. This chapter responds accordingly, examining emotional geographies of parenting in the soundscapes of medium and high-density living.

7.3 Sound, parenting and surveillance

Following Aitken's (2000:582) work on fathering, parenting is understood as 'a daily emotional practice that is negotiated, contested and resisted differently in different spaces'. Sound is key to such negotiations, as it regularly invokes moral judgement from others, leading to parental discomfort and adjustments to parenting practices. The surveillance of children's sounds in diverse spaces is the subject of growing research attention. Boyer and Spinney (2016) discussed the difficult emotions mothers experience while navigating public transport with infants. Their study participants experienced anxiety when travelling with a crying baby in a confined space. Mothers felt judged or out of place because they knew their crying babies were disturbing other passengers (Boyer and Spinney 2016). Similarly, Small and Harris (2014) explored aeromobility and parenting, shedding light on the angst and intolerance of plane passengers towards parents with crying babies. In such settings, judgements of 'good' or 'bad' parenting (or indeed bad passengering) have emotional implications. Strata buildings can also be sites where parents face hyper-surveillance of their parenting practices and sounds. Probyn (2004) has described shame as the feeling of being out-of-place, with seemingly no place to hide. While shame is one of the most intimate of feelings, it is brought into being through proximity to others (Probyn 2004). As I detail in this chapter, shame was felt regularly by the families involved in this study.

The sounds of children playing on common property and within apartments themselves have been identified as causing conflicts within apartment complexes (Easthope and Judd 2010). The legal structure of apartments, allows other residents to over regulate families use of space and may adversely impact on children whose sounds and behaviours are more difficult to control (Sherry 2008). Similar to the story that opened this thesis, Sherry (2008) has drawn attention to breach of by-law notices being issued to families over the sounds of their children, despite the fact that 'such behavior might be seen as normal and expected in a different environment' (Easthope and Judd 2010:36). While conflicts emerging over the sounds of children have been discussed in the literature (Easthope and Judd 2010), the emotional experiences of parents who are deemed responsible for controlling this noise add an additional perspective.

In what follows, I detail empirically how moral and emotional geographies of parenting unfurl in a consolidating urban landscape. Emotions (and moral judgements) are understood as being

spatially constituted (MacKian 2004; Castree et al. 2013) – in this case, through the particular material and acoustic properties of apartment buildings. The chapter is structured around narratives of night and day, the everyday temporalities around which proximity, sound, and cultural norms intersect (Gallan and Gibson 2011; Gallan 2014). The participants' stories demonstrate the capacity of children's sounds to elicit feelings of guilt and shame in parents; prompting behavioural and material strategies that endeavour to appease neighbours.

7.4 The moral and emotional geographies of parenting in apartments

Discussions about sound were a dominant and emotive component of participants' narratives. The sounds made by their children were always at the forefront of parents' minds and prompted them to make a number of adjustments to their domestic practices and space, as they came to know the built fabric of their homes (Carr et al. 2018). Most had made a number of changes to the physical space of their apartments (e.g. the addition of carpet or mats to dampen noise), and had altered their everyday behaviours including their parenting strategies and activities. They made such changes due to their consciousness of neighbours' surveillance and (at times overt) moral judgements. The following two sections focus on key aspects of raising children in apartments that caused challenges for parents: sleeping and crying at night, and playing and running during the day. As shown through two detailed vignettes – organised around the temporalities of night and day – parents' narratives of apartment life centered on sound, noise and shame. The voices of other study participants are incorporated to provide additional evidence, as relevant.

7.4.1 Anna: "pick up your baby" – the challenges of managing crying during the night

Anna and her husband live with their one-year-old son in a two-bedroom rented apartment in a beachside Sydney suburb. Like many of the participants in this study, they moved into the apartment before having children and subsequently made adjustments to make apartment life work with the expansion of their family. Anna revealed that she had been conscious and stressed about sound and proximity since her son was born, aware of how loud her family could be and that the property is poorly soundproofed. This awareness of sound (and associated anxiety and guilt) was exacerbated during the night.

Regardless of housing type, the changing sleep patterns of newborns and children can be testing on the whole family (Gallan 2014). Parents in this study discussed how the challenges of

sleeping problems are more pronounced in apartments. They struggled to find a balance between 'not going in too soon and not letting them cry too long because you have got other people to consider' (Anna). Almost all participants explained that the fear of disturbing neighbours impacted on their parenting practices – especially their reactiveness to crying (as opposed to trying to teach babies to self-settle or utilising controlled comforting/crying or 'crying it out' methods). After months of getting up several times a night to comfort Jack, and Anna having to breastfeed him back to sleep, Anna and her husband made the decision that it was time to try something different to help their son learn to self-settle and get back to sleep at night:

> [W]e're not that kind of 'cry it out' parents but we just thought we haven't tried this before, let's just let him go for a couple of minutes just to see if he'll self-settle to go back to sleep because we'd been up and down, up and down so many times. And so it would have been like maybe two minutes of doing that and you could hear the neighbour downstairs stomping around. It was the middle of the night, 3a.m. or something. I could hear him stomping. I could tell he was having a bit of a tantrum because Jack [son] was having a shocker. And then you know I was just leaving him [Jack]… and so we went, "Oh okay maybe he's gone to sleep." And then he started again and then we thought okay just two more minutes, we'll just leave him for two more minutes. And so after like two minutes he [the neighbour] called out… "Pick up your baby!" And so when I settled Jack I came back to bed and Luke told me, "Oh the neighbour just called out." And I'm like, "Why did you tell me?" And I was so upset because we are trying our best and we were exhausted ourselves and we just thought maybe in the short-term this is going to be a bit awful but in the long-term if he can learn how to self-settle… we've never left him to cry before… It's really hard and so now that really upset me when I heard that he called out for us to pick up our baby… If I bumped into him the next day I probably would have burst into tears.

Despite being shaken by this experience, Anna and her husband still felt they needed to change things – particularly as she prepared to return to work. Being a new mother, Anna read widely, chatted to other mums and professionals and put a great deal of thought into writing up a plan which consisted of her stopping breastfeeding during the night and her husband going in to settle their son. On their first night trying this new strategy, stress levels were high among the whole family and Jack was 'hysterical'. After 20 minutes of her husband trying to settle their 'screaming' baby, they swapped and Anna spent a further 45 minutes trying – before their

neighbour reacted again:

> One of the neighbours downstairs like banged on the ceiling really loudly… I felt it on my feet, like it was shaking. And he didn't call out or anything but it was like quite severe. That just kind of added to my stress… when I got back into bed after the shrieking finished, and he [Jack] went back to sleep, and the stomping on the roof finished… I just said, "I don't know if I can do that again"… knowing that, you know they're hearing it all of course, and we felt terrible.

While Anna was reassured the next day by friends that her sleeping plan was the right thing to do to help Jack get to sleep, she felt torn between doing what she believed to be right for her and her family, and being a good neighbour:

> If we didn't have those neighbours maybe we would have tried that earlier but I have been really conscious about trying not to let him cry… You don't want to hear our screaming baby. We know that. But we are trying our hardest as well… I had been doing what I was doing for probably months, because of them… running in as soon as he cried, because I was conscious that he would wake them up. But I can't do that anymore.

Others parents also reflected on how their efforts to be good neighbours had influenced their parenting decisions:

> I've been very like responsive, too responsive to the point where it's probably made his sleeping worse because I've kind of catered to that in order to not annoy the neighbours (Melanie[76]).

The challenges of negotiating sleep training in an apartment were discussed by almost all participants. For some, the anxiety around sound eased after having neighbours reassure them that they could not hear, or did not mind. For others, either personal experiences of tensions with neighbours or stories from friends led to them feeling constantly on-edge or anxious that they were disturbing others every time their child cried at night. Ximena[77], for instance, commented: 'At night it's sometimes worse and the five-minute cry seems like an hour for you because you can't shut it down!'

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[76] Melanie (owner, two children aged 4 and 16 months, 3 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)

[77] Ximena (renter, child aged 13 months, 1 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)

In each of these instances, participants' narratives demonstrated the complex juggling act of parenting within close proximity to others. Deciding on how to best deal with children crying during the night was not just a personal dilemma. Rather, it involved awareness of impacts on others within a shared material space (Boyer and Spinney 2016), linked to perceptions of what kinds of sounds and noise are, or are not, acceptable at night (Gallan 2014; Gallagher 2016), and ultimately, what kinds of people do or do not belong in apartments. In line with Baker's (2013) findings, parents acknowledged the importance of being considerate neighbours. However, the sounds of crying children were not always easy to control, leaving parents feeling guilty and uncomfortable as aspects of their private lives were exposed to others. Parents felt guilty, yet believed that they were doing everything they could to reduce their impact on neighbours – including compromising their own parenting ideals. Feelings of being subject to unjust circumstances permeated the interviews. Parents were acutely aware that cultural norms place pressure on them to reduce their children's noise, rather than expecting other apartment residents to adjust to children's co-presence.

In addition to adjusting parenting strategies, Anna and her husband had also attempted to make alterations to their apartment to reduce noise such as covering internal vents with cardboard to reduce noise travelling through the building. These strategies were not unique. Families talked about closing windows to contain sound and one family even chose to take their baby to their parents' 'big house' in the suburbs for a few days to attempt sleep training away from their apartment, in order to avoid conflict all together. Wanting to maintain positive relationships with neighbours, Anna, alongside other participants, described feeling the need to be apologetic:

> When Jack was first born maybe after a week or two, I baked all of my neighbours muffins and left them on the doorstep to say sorry about the noise and welcome; this is Jack… your new neighbour. And then he had a shocker again maybe at about six months. He was just not sleeping very well so I left on the downstairs neighbour's doorstep like a bottle of wine and some chocolate and some ear plugs, kind of as a joke but kind of not, to say, "Look, really sorry about the noise".

The gifting of chocolate, baked treats or wine was not uncommon from participants who felt they wanted or needed to apologise to neighbours – either after bringing their new baby home for the first time, after an incident (such as a rough night's sleep, sickness or tantrum), or when

a new neighbour moved in – pre-empting challenges and hoping to establish open communication.

However, parenting anxieties were not limited to night time. Many families also talked about the challenges of reducing noise from their children's activities during the day. Again, they reflected on the balancing act of being a good parent and being a good neighbour: allowing children to play, whilst also being anxious about annoying the neighbours.

7.4.2 Alice and James: "imagine trying to teach a crawler that they are not allowed to crawl through the house" – negotiating daytime sounds of play

Alice and James live with their two children (aged 1 and 3 years) in a two-bedroom apartment in Bondi Junction. Their rented apartment was their home for almost 10 years before children were even considered. Proximity to amenities and the lifestyle afforded by their location continued to suit them after their children were born (Chapter 4). At the time of the interview, however, their lives felt constrained by living in close proximity to others, because sound had led to a number of recent tensions with a neighbour (a single man in his 30s) who had moved in next door in the past 18 months. After an initial period of communication about the noise (including Alice and James bringing a gift of brownies when he first moved in and trying to do what they could to reduce sound after receiving letters of complaint) – the disputes started.

Alice and James had a number of strategies for managing sound. As we talked about the use of space in the apartment, they described the way they 'corral' their children into one room at a time, by keeping the doors closed continuously, in order to prevent the children running through the house on the floorboards. On an occasion when two doors were left open and their one-year old son did run through, their next door neighbour banged on the wall and started imitating stomping on his floor. Alice recalled,

> He said to me, "I have spoken to other people; this is not a problem anywhere else. You can't let your kids run around in the house… you should lock them in their bedroom until they learn". So he just did not have any kind of concept of how much you have an influence over your small children… When he first started complaining Harry [son] was crawling. Imagine trying to teach a crawler that they are not allowed to crawl through the house… You know, he wanted the impossible, and got angry with us when we couldn't deliver that for him. With no kind of seeming effort to understand where

we were coming from… So it is a very difficult position to be in because I always didn't want to upset anyone but there is not much I can do about it… You can't do anything quietly so you just feel like you are on show all the time.

Alice and James reflected on the guilt they felt – both towards their children and their neighbour. Noise from hard floor surfaces was frequently mentioned in existing research as causing disruption for apartment residents (Easthope and Judd 2010). In addition to closing doors and putting carpet on the floor, Alice and James (among other participants) mentioned they used the television more often than they would prefer, in an attempt to keep their children still and quiet during 'non-sociable hours', such as early in the morning. They also opted not to have friends visit:

> I spend most of my time seeing other people with children and, you have to go to either their house or you know a park or something. Because if they are… if Phoebe [daughter] is in here she knows not to run, but if there is a friend in here, they are inevitably going to chase each other within seconds and then, I get really stressed and I spend my time trying to control them. And then it is not fun for anyone. The children not being able to have their friends come and visit really, is not particularly nice (James).

Several participants had similar experiences, noting the difficulties of controlling children's play behaviour, feeling like the 'fun police' (Paul[78]). Rhiannon[79], meanwhile, explained, 'I always feel like I am constantly telling them, "Not in here, not in there, don't do that"… I'm constantly worried that we are annoying the neighbours. Because they are kids, they are loud. They don't have a volume button'.

In Natalie's[80] experience,

> Kids, they run, they jump, they shout, they play you know… and you have to be just worried a little bit and looking at the time and there is people around us you know you can't just do everything… but he has energy you know, he just has to run. But I will just say to him, "Run slow" (laughs).

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[78] Paul (owner, two children aged 6 and 2, 2 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)
[79] Rhiannon (owner, three children aged 7, 4 and 3 months, 4 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)
[80] Natalie (renter, 5 year old child, 2 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)

Participants found it difficult to 'police' their children's play activities, exasperated but resigned that this is just what comes with living with children in apartments in Sydney, and that this is something which needs to be understood from both sides.

Parents actively 'managed' noise from their children differently depending on the time of day, with evenings and early mornings causing the most anxiety (Gallan 2014). They had also adopted strategies for minimising sound from certain activities such as singing or dancing. Paul and his partner restricted these activities to certain rooms that did not adjoin with neighbours. Belinda[81] and her husband had put down foam mats for dancing practice and several families installed carpet, closed windows and timed activities such as instrument practice. Some participants, particularly owner-occupiers, also talked about taking building materials and layout into account when looking for an apartment, with double-brick apartments deemed most desirable largely for their capacity to reduce the travel of sound.

Although parents expressed feeling worried and apologetic about their noise, they also felt that they were doing everything they could to try and be considerate. Mothers' groups provided important support networks for parents to reassure each other and share experiences with others – but beyond this, families needed further support. While it was difficult to explain to younger children why they needed to be quiet, once children were old enough parents tried to teach their children to be respectful of others who shared the same building. Despite parents undertaking a number of spatial, temporal and material strategies to reduce noise, in some instances sound-related disputes were ongoing. For Alice and James, months of growing tension with their neighbour erupted in the stairwell one day:

> It was a rainy Sunday so I was very aware of the noise… I was actually going out in order to give this guy some peace and quiet… And I think he was going out because he was really annoyed with the noise. So it was like that kind of perfect storm of – you know we were going out to be considerate and he was going out because he was so pissed off with us. He was yelling at me… in the hallway – I was like, "Look I am really sorry", and he was like, "Don't you fucking apologise to me ever again!" Like I had only seen him like three times before. He says, "That is like me going out to a bar, punching someone in the face and then saying I'm sorry mate, and then punching them again and then saying I'm sorry mate, and then punching them again"… if you take

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[81] Belinda (owner, two children aged 5 and 6 months, 3 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)

someone's power away to apologise what am I left with? What can I do if I can't even say sorry? (Alice)

As Alice reflected on the tensions her family has experienced, she described feeling vulnerable and unsure what else she could do:

> I feel like we have entered this entirely new area of discrimination that I had no idea existed before, but is actually quite prevalent among our peers. It is common among the mothers in my mothers' group… people just don't like children and they don't like children's noise… And you know parenting is hard – you are constantly just "What – what do I do with this? How do I stop it?" (Laughs) So to have the "Oh my God I am pissing loads of people off" in the back of your mind as well as having to deal with what is going on is really uncomfortable. I feel really uncomfortable about it.

Alice and James revealed that in addition to the notes, aggressive stomping and confrontation, their property had also been damaged. Plants were poisoned and their children's towels were dragged through mud. While this example is at the more extreme end of the spectrum, several of the families interviewed (including Anna and her husband) had received letters, complaints or had neighbours call out or bang on their walls. While some participants did not have directly negative experiences themselves, almost all felt anxious about sound and had stories of friends who had experienced problems. The politics of noise in apartments extends well beyond parenting, too (Silmalis 2017). As evidenced in this research, participants also felt self-conscious about neighbours hearing other everyday sounds, for example arguments with their partners or going into labour. In a city shifting physically from low to high-density (but without cultural norms and cultures of neighbourliness adjusting in pace), everyday tensions emerge over when and where sounds are appropriate, or when they become noise. For Alice and James, the situation eventually led them to move from their apartment, shortly after they were interviewed for this study. For all the personal benefits of living in a consolidated city, the stress and anxiety over noise ultimately led to a difficult decision that meant sacrificing the inner-city lifestyle they had grown to love.

7.5 Sound as an ongoing point of contention

As outlined in Chapter 3, I published the above findings in an academic journal, accompanied by an accessible public-focused article in The Conversation, mid-way through this research project. A flurry of media attention ensued and over subsequent months I discussed these issues with print/online news, radio and television journalists. In this section I share some of the dozens of comments that were captured pertaining to sound and parenting in apartments, in response to these various media engagements. These comments highlight the extent to which this issue resonated with apartment dwellers. Some people wrote in to share their own emotive experiences of noise-induced stress, with one person commenting:

> Having lived in these environments, I've seen how they induce bizarre behaviour, paranoia and a range of social problems related to noise. This is not just to do with young children pounding the floor. It's an insane way for anyone to live. Bad experiences left a deep impression on me, and I swore to never again to put up with the madness. If regulators and politicians had to experience living in these poorly designed and insulated boxes with their thin concrete floors, I'm sure we'd see some change. I'm genuinely surprised there haven't more homicides because of the neighbour wars and stress in these shit-holes[82].

Another mother texted in after a radio interview[83] to share her own experience of waking up after a rough night with her sick child, to find a note on all apartment doors that read: "whoever has that crying baby, shut it up!" In addition to flagging concerns relating to the psychological impacts of noise, residents who live next door to families with children also responded, giving valuable insight into their perspectives:

> Unfortunately, I am on the reverse end of this dilemma. The family living above me has a young child who is audible both day and night – but I take this on as a part of apartment, and thus to an extent communal, living. HOWEVER. If I make a sound late at night or during nap time, I have an irate parent hammering at my door. I agree kids in flats can be a challenge, as people aren't always tolerant, but this discussion needs to be broader – it's not just kids, and it's not just rogue tenants. This is a way of life that

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[82] Commenter responding to Kerr 2018, 'With apartment living on the rise, how do families and their noisy children fit in?', The Conversation, 9th January.

[83] Listener sharing their experience on the text line following an interview I did with ABC Sydney Breakfast radio show, 8th August 2018.

Australians aren't so used to[84].

Another person expressed similar frustration toward parents:

> We had neighbours who ripped up the carpet at the same time as having small children.
> Night crying and running and games didn't bother us, but the noise from the parents
> constantly shouting at their children drove us spare. It was frustrating to think that
> they'd actually diminished the minimal sound insulation at precisely the moment when
> they needed it the most[85].

Likewise, a downstairs neighbour of a family with 'very active children who jump and bang
from 6a.m. right through the day' wrote that – 'it seems their parents have given up which I
understand but is so difficult to deal, we are all young and all work fulltime so the building
design has an impact on everyone'. This person was not alone in recognising that building
design played a significant role in the transmission of noise within their apartment complex.
Another commenter reflected:

> I share a level in a 14 month old building with a newborn. Please understand, I don't
> blame the parents, but at least once every three days when we hit the 1.5-2 hour mark
> on the newborn crying – I curse out the cheap builder who failed to include adequate
> soundproofing[86].

Similar comments acknowledged that,

> While apartments continue to be jerry built with little thought to noise reduction, this
> conflict will continue. Governments don't see it as a problem, and therefore don't
> legislate strict noise controls in new buildings, which allow developers to choose the
> cheapest option, and buyers suffer. As do their neighbours[87].

While the issue of poor sound proofing was widely recognised, some people continued to direct
blame and anger towards parents – perpetuating discourses that children and their sounds do

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[84] Commenter responding to Kerr 2018, 'With apartment living on the rise, how do families and their noisy children fit in?', The Conversation, 9th January.
[85] As above.
[86] Commenter responding to Saulwick 2018, 'Parks and prams: rethinking flats for families', Sydney Morning Herald, 18th November.
[87] Commenter responding to Kerr 2018, 'With apartment living on the rise, how do families and their noisy children fit in?', The Conversation, 9th January.

not belong in apartments:

> Your child, your problem. If you choose the lifestyle of having, and raising, children, then please accept the responsibility that accompanies it. This also extends to noisy children in all confined spaces, shopping centres, aircraft etc[88].

Such comments reveal an intolerance toward children's sounds, as well as the assumption that they can be easily controlled. This was further emphasised by commenters who made reference to 'respect', a lack of care for others and parental failings:

> I am from a generation which was taught manners. Certainly I was probably as noisy as most other kids but my parents instilled respect for others in me. Your choice to have, a responsibly environmentally friendly sized family, is respected by me. However please do not expect society in general to share their noisy failings... It is your responsibility NOT to inflict them upon others. Rather like the neighbour with the persistently barking dog who cares naught for his/her neighbours[89].

Comments in this vein even emerged from other parents living in apartments. One parent felt there was an upper limit to the appropriate number of children to house in an apartment:

> I have a child and I think people with no more than 2 children should live in apartments. I'm dealing with my neighbour down the hall and their 5 kids running up and down the hall past my apartment and down the stairs over and over again. It shakes my living room floor and I can hear it through my whole apartment. I don't feel sorry for any people that decide to have that many kids… Rent a house or a duplex because apartments are not for you and your 3+ kids that you have zero control over[90].

Although the experiences of Anna, as well as Alice and James, highlighted the significant lengths families in this research project went to, to reduce their noise impacting on proximate others – the above examples demonstrate that while ever apartment soundproofing is an issue, tensions continue to persist.

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[88] As above.

[89] As above.

[90] Commenter responding to Kerr 2018, 'With apartment living on the rise, how do families and their noisy children fit in?', The Conversation, 9th January.

7.6 Conclusion

In newly densifying cities, built according to simplistic, modernist, profit-seeking agendas, families living with children in apartments confront a series of cultural norms in their everyday lives – norms that demarcate the home as a place of quietude; that position 'good neighbours' as tranquil ones; and that consider children as belonging elsewhere, in detached suburban dwellings. Problematically, such norms are confronted in material contexts that make it difficult for parents to regulate sound; and which necessitate complicated and emotionally challenging regimes of sound management. At the same time, governance structures do little to protect families – and indeed are sometimes used against them. The emotions that emerge through parenting within close proximity to others in the increasingly vertical city complicate simplistic narratives of densification as the preferred model of urban development.

As many cities consolidate, shifting priority from low-density suburbs to higher-density modes of living, a growing number of families with children will live in apartments – whether by choice or through financial constraint – as discussed in Chapter 4 of this thesis. In this chapter, I have continued to explore the experiences and emotional travails accompanying parenting in higher-density environments, with a specific focus on sound. Parents' varied strategies for managing everyday life in apartments highlight the need for further support for families with children, as densification continues. This chapter has made a contribution to this agenda by revealing the emotional contours of parenting through a focus on sound and associated tensions and conflicts, furthering discussions around verticality, home and sound/privacy (Mee 2007; Baker 2013; Power 2015). Adding to the challenges families face relating to storage (Chapter 6) and spatial constraints (Chapter 5) the narratives presented in this chapter further reveal how experiences of home are shaped by the entanglement of materials, cultural norms, governance processes, planning regimes and everyday practices and emotions (as set out in diagrammatic form in Chapter 2, Figure 2.1). The lived experience of apartment acoustics provides a lens through which to explore the tensions and negotiations experienced when living in close proximity to others, and the implications of this for parenting emotions and practices in the everyday rhythms of day and night. Parents' narratives shed light on the emotional stress felt by those deemed responsible for 'nuisance noise' (Power 2015), highlighting the complex emotional geographies of sound in higher-density living.

This chapter has shown that families living in apartments pursue strategies for making everyday life 'work' in vertical living arrangements. Some are behavioural strategies, notably parenting

decisions – which require negotiation and understanding from both families and other residents. Other influences relate to the built form, physical structure and design and the building materials. Some participants sought to alter built fabric where they could exert control: installing carpets or covering up air vents. The parents I spoke to tried to be considerate neighbours in myriad ways, due to their awareness of close proximity. Further elucidating this perspective may lead to a shift in neighbourly tolerance, and perhaps even updated understandings of who lives and belongs in apartments.

As shown in this chapter, there is only so much that individual apartment owners – and especially renters – can change. The wider problem of apartments with poor acoustic design and performance persists. The interviews – and indeed, subsequent media commentary – point towards structural barriers that can only be overcome if planners and developers acknowledge that apartment demographics have shifted in fundamental ways, and adjust designs and governance accordingly (see Chapter 1). Those responsible for apartment design and construction ought to be more fully informed by insights from families with children who live in apartments (and from other residents impacted by their sounds). In their experiences, the dysfunction of the housing system is laid bare, demonstrating that it is time for planners and developers to start listening.

Chapter 8
Contested meanings of home:
Cultural norms and parenting emotions in apartments

8.1 At home with Belinda

At the time of the interviews, Belinda and her husband had owned their three-bedroom apartment in North Parramatta, for 11 years. When they first bought the apartment, its size enabled them to have a spare room for guests and a study. The open living area that flowed onto a large balcony was valued for entertaining. The function of different rooms had changed over time as their family expanded to include two children (aged 5 years and 6 months). Belinda explained that while they had anticipated staying in their apartment with one child, they had not expected to still be there with two. They were surprised that, notwithstanding challenges – particularly with regard to storage (Chapter 6) – the apartment had continued to work for them for so long. Living within close proximity to work, school, family, parks and amenities allowed Belinda and her husband to be a one car household. They felt a strong sense of community within their apartment block and commented that, with the majority of the apartments in their complex having three-bedrooms, there were several other families raising children. Despite being surrounded by other families, Belinda was acutely aware that their decision to raise children in an apartment contrasts with social expectations that they should live in detached housing. In fact, this awareness informed her decision to participate in this study:

> Part of the reason I responded to you was because literally since we had our first child, we've been bugged by every man and his dog… "So when are you going to move into a house?" And it's, like, really, we don't need to. We've got enough space. It's really interesting, I think, the Australian attitude [is]… you *need* to live in a house.

While Belinda was mostly comfortable with their circumstances, she explained that the pressure to live in a detached house was encountered regularly, and so they felt compelled to justify their choices. In some cases, the expectation that they should be in a house was implied – for instance, when the children's grandparents bought them a trampoline for *when* the family acquires a backyard/detached house. Other comments were more direct.

> Within my mothers' group… there's a few people that are just, like, "How can you live in an apartment?"… [It's] such as strong Australian sentiment that, "What are you doing to your kids if you live in an apartment? They don't have a backyard".

Belinda recognised that these 'Australian' norms differ from other places she had visited globally:

> We did a lot of travelling before we had kids… around the world it's not necessarily the norm to live in a house… If you've got parks and stuff close by, we didn't really see it as a problem… It's funny, it's not that we have to justify ourselves, but that we…[say to people] "It's not the norm everywhere else"… it does get brought up… more than is probably normal.

In addition to being made to feel that apartment living was inappropriate for children, Belinda faced questions about the economic value of their apartment:

> We've actually had one comment… "You guys must earn okay money. Why are you living in an apartment?" It's just like, "It's actually a choice at this stage"… Even my mum and stepfather who live in [an] apartment themselves… "Well, are you going to buy a house?" And it's like, "Really Mum? You brought us up in apartments!"… She's like, "Yeah, but I was a single mum".

The comment from Belinda's mother unveils how apartments are perceived as appropriate for certain social groups, but not others: they are suitable for single mothers whose options are constrained, but not for a nuclear family with alternatives. Belinda's apartment is not envisaged as the ideal home to which she and her family should aspire. Justifying their decisions and facing this questioning on a regular basis was emotionally draining. As Belinda shared her experiences with me, I asked her how this judgement made her feel. She responded: 'It's going to sound silly, I guess, a bit defensive, because for us, it really is a choice'. Beyond the convenience and lifestyle associated with living in such a central location, as the main income earner, Belinda was financially motivated to continue living in their apartment as it meant that she did not feel pressured to return to full-time work straight after having her second child. She explained that due to rapid growth and rising house prices in her suburb, buying a detached house would mean moving a few suburbs over and feeling 'forced' to go back to work to pay off a larger mortgage. For all the benefits the apartment lifestyle provided them, there was still a sense of uncertainty about their housing future, tainted by the expectation of others around them.

8.2 An absence of diversity in apartment discourses

Dominant cultural norms frame detached housing as appropriate for families, with apartments deemed transitional, 'unhomely' or unsuitable for children. As outlined in Chapter 1, these discourses are evident in media representations (Raynor 2018), within planner and developer narratives (Fincher 2004) and in marketing and advertising of apartment developments (Fullagar et al. 2013). Relevant work in children's geographies, assists in deciphering how children, youth and teenagers are constructed as in or out of place (Matthews and Limb, 1999; Skelton, 2000; Jones, 2008). Such work has focused on how children are seen as out of place in certain public spaces. However, as demonstrated in this thesis, children and families can also be seen as out of place in certain kinds of domestic/private spaces, complicating the usual narrative that children belong at home. Apartments are imagined as adult spaces and children are 'outsiders', restricted and ordered by adult authority. While these discourses are well documented (Fincher 2004; Wulff et al. 2004; Fincher and Gooder, 2007; Lauster 2016; Raynor et al. 2017; Raynor 2018; see Chapter 1), this project provides new insight on how cultural norms shape parents' experiences of home in apartments.

Cultural and feminist geographies of home provide the framing for such insights. As discussed in Chapter 2, a key strand of emotional geographies research has explored connections between home, identity formation and belonging (Blunt 2003; Easthope 2004; Blunt and Dowling 2006; Gorman-Murray 2006; Mee 2009). Such research has shown that while the right fit between self and place solidifies a sense of belonging (Gorman-Murray 2011), homes are complex and contested and this sense of belonging is not present for all (Mee 2009; Easthope 2014). As highlighted in Chapters 5-7, the material inappropriateness of the design, layout and form of apartments can hinder families' sense of home and belonging. But materiality is not the only factor that creates such challenges. Indeed, as set out in Chapter 2 (Figure 2.1) – and explored in empirical detail in Chapter 7 – materiality, governance and cultural norms intersect. In the data presented in Chapter 7, such intersections arose around the issue of children's sounds in apartments, contributing to great discomfort for some families.

Existing research has suggested that negative stigma (for instance associated with tenure or housing form) influences residents' emotional wellbeing and identity (Easthope 2014; Baxter 2017). Examining verticality and home within a high-rise social housing estate in London, Baxter (2017) argued that the use of unsympathetic imagery and language in media accounts,

portraying this form of housing as sinister and unsafe, has implications for residents who have to negotiate stigmatisation and devaluation of their homes. This chapter contributes to this discussion by examining how pervasive cultural norms that position families with children as out of place in apartments, shape parents' experiences of home, with implications for their emotional wellbeing.

Focusing on interconnections between cultural norms and parenting emotions, this final empirical chapter illuminates the emotional labour that parents, especially mothers, undertake to make their apartments homes amidst negative discourses. These discourses – at times well-intentioned, at times hostile – question their right to be in apartments, and also their parenting choices. The narratives presented in this chapter provide important insights into what it means to feel at home, or not, in an apartment in a city shaped by certain planning philosophies and norms, alongside broader cultural norms. The findings are organised into three interrelated themes that emerged from interviews: i) discourses framing apartments as inappropriate for families are circulated in everyday social relations; ii) the ongoing process of homemaking amidst these narratives requires significant emotional energy and; iii) this situation leaves families feeling uncertain about their housing futures – that is, about their capacity to make their apartments 'home' over the longer-term. By exploring parents' emotions and experiences of home in higher-density environments, this chapter highlights the need for a broader cultural shift towards recognising the legitimacy of families' presence in densifying urban morphologies.

8.3 Encountering negative apartment discourses in everyday social relations

In the Australian context, detached housing has been normalised as the appropriate setting for families with children (Fincher 2004). The corollary is that apartments are framed as unsuitable. The ideas for this chapter (and the associated publication, Kerr et al. 2020) came together at the same time as my sound-related findings (Chapter 7 and Kerr et al. 2018) were sparking debate in the public sphere. While my media engagements involved writing and speaking about parents' experiences when confronting negative apartment discourses, the comments sections of those media pieces saw a barrage of responses that perpetuated the very stereotypes I was attempting to dislodge. Many commenters strongly felt that apartments are not an appropriate place for children. While other commenters defended families, the prevalence of negative remarks demonstrates the ongoing dominance of cultural expectations

that children belong in detached suburban houses. Comments described apartments as 'third world slum conditions... very unhealthy for children[91]', 'shoddily built dog-boxes[92]', 'prison cells where you get day release[93]', 'a recipe for mass psychosis[94]' and 'NOT something we should be accepting as normal[95]'. Echoing the words of Dick Smith (a prominent Australian business man first mentioned in Chapter 1), multiple people compared apartments to 'battery cages', stating 'chook boxes are for chooks... no life for kids[96]'. Responses commonly referenced the absence of backyards and reduced space as conflicting with Australian childhood ideals:

> Horrible life for kids in an apartment: should be trees to climb and build tree houses in: backyard cricket and footy: dogs: water slides: lawns for camping on[97].

> Kids need space to play and run around in and not just once a week when the parents can be bothered to take them to a park. Fresh air, a cubby, a place to draw chalk and ride their bikes. Their own outdoor space for play and imagination[98].

As shown in Chapter 1 others suggested that because parents living in apartments could not afford a 'proper' home, they could not afford to have children. Apartment living was even equated to child-abuse:

> Raising children in an apartment instead of a house is tantamount to child abuse... I grew up in a house like all children should. It's abuse, plain and simple[99].

While there was acknowledgment that Australian cities are densifying, there was an obstinate belief that families did not belong in this landscape:

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[91] Commenter responding to Petersen 2018, 'Apartment living in now a fact of Australian life. Meet the families going up, not out', ABC News, 8th August.

[92] Commenter responding to Gladstone 2018, 'High rise parenting puts kids at risk', Sydney Morning Herald, 16th September.

[93] Commenter responding to Kerr 2018, 'With apartment living on the rise, how do families and their noisy children fit in?', The Conversation, 9th January.

[94] Commenter responding to Kerr 2018, 'With apartment living on the rise, how do families and their noisy children fit in?', The Conversation, 9th January.

[95] Commenter responding to Gladstone 2018, 'High rise parenting puts kids at risk', Sydney Morning Herald, 16th September.

[96] Commenter responding to Petersen 2018, 'Apartment living in now a fact of Australian life. Meet the families going up, not out', ABC News, 8th August.

[97] As above.

[98] As above.

[99] As above.

They can build all the units they want all over Sydney, you know you're seeing them everywhere being built. Fact is you can't bring up a family in a unit[100].

Well-designed and well-built apartments suit many people at some stages in their lives. But they don't suit all of us, all the time. Children and pets are the sticking points[101].

The parents interviewed in this study were acutely aware of such discourses – which they often encountered via friends, family members and strangers who questioned their housing decisions. For many parents, including Belinda, the questioning around when they would move to a detached house began as soon as they announced their pregnancy. Linda[102] recounted being asked:

"Are you thinking of moving?"… people would come and see us here [at the apartment] when he was first born or when we first found out I was pregnant. "Are you going to move?" I'm like, "No (laughs). Why?"

Pressure to get a 'proper house' (Ruth[103]) was experienced regularly. Participants shared comments made by their siblings about how they could 'never raise kids in an apartment' (Rachel[104], Rebecca[105]). Similarly, when Clancy[106] told her mothers' group that her family lived in an apartment, she was questioned about how long they planned on staying, with the assumption that this had to be a short-term living arrangement: 'I do get the idea that if I was like, "Oh yeah, we love it. You know, we want to stay", they'd be like, "Oh, that's not very good for your kid" or something like that' (Clancy). Melanie[107] described feeling 'sensitive' when friends commented that they "couldn't live without a backyard". She reflected:

I sometimes feel like we can really be judgy [judgmental] to each other… there's a sense that you're not doing the right thing by your kids by not having a backyard… there are times I feel almost a bit ashamed, like am I living in a unit for my own

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[100] Commenter responding to Gladstone 2018, 'High rise parenting puts kids at risk', Sydney Morning Herald, 16th September.

[101] Commenter responding to Kerr 2018, 'With apartment living on the rise, how do families and their noisy children fit in?', The Conversation, 9th January.

[102] Linda (renter, child aged 13 months, 2 bedroom apartment in a 2 storey complex)

[103] Ruth (renter, two children aged 4 and 2, 2 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)

[104] Rachel (owner, two children aged 3 and 4 months, 2 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)

[105] Rebecca (renter, two children aged 3 and 1, 2 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)

[106] Dan and Clancy (renter, child aged 3 months, 2 bedroom apartment in an 8 storey complex)

[107] Melanie (owner, two children aged 4 and 16 months, 3 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)

benefit, is this what I like for me, because I like to live at Cronulla? One of my friends said to me… "I think if I'd had kids I'd be moving to a house… for their sake", or something like that, and I was like, "Am I selfish?" But I don't really think so, no.

In each of these encounters, participants were reminded that their housing situation challenged normative expectations of family life. Parents encountered these judgements across many different settings and were made to feel that their apartment should only be temporary. In this vein, Melanie recounted what happened when she requested a quote for a kitchen renovation. The tradesperson told her not to waste her money, based on the assumption they would not be living there much longer. When sharing this story, Melanie explained: 'They just assume you won't live here for long… So there's like, still this mindset that this isn't a home, this is just a transitory sort of place'. Here, Melanie's attempts to make her home better suit her family, by renovating the kitchen, were questioned based on the assumption that her apartment would only be a temporary residence – and so the expense would not be worth it. When it came to justifying outlays on their apartments, owners' experiences were fraught because they were seen to have bucked the trend by committing to apartment living. Meanwhile, renters – who are often perceived to be in a temporary phase anyway – also felt their apartment homes were devalued or looked down upon.

Ruth, for instance, felt that her parents viewed her family's apartment as 'a nice little holiday home for a while'. The notion that apartments could only provide temporary accommodation for families with children was influenced by their size (or perceived size) vis-à-vis detached houses. For some participants, comments relating to the size of the dwelling caused frustration:

> I know that some of my relatives think our place is small, and I've had a few friends who've been like, 'Oh, how's your little place going?' and I'm like, that's not the words I'd choose if I was asking someone how their house is going (Melanie).

Despite the fact that many detached houses in her suburb were just as small as their apartment, Melanie felt there was a 'certain stigma around a unit, even though they can be quite big'. Such attitudes led to participants feeling they were regularly put in situations where the value of their apartment was questioned. Rachel shared the experience of having her apartment devalued by family members:

> My dad was really appalled that we were buying an apartment… He was like "Why are you spending so much money?"… "I can't believe you're spending this much", and,

implying basically how can you raise a family in an apartment and that sort of thing…
[My parents] would never contemplate living in an apartment and, you know, all these
apartments are supposed to be going up exactly for this age group to downsize to…
they can't think of anything worse than living in apartment.

Similarly, Melanie commented:

I saw a house that I liked, and so I went along to the auction a few weeks ago, the guide
price was, I don't know, $900,000 to one mil [$1 million]… which we could have
almost afforded, and my dad was like, "You should do it, you won't get many chances
like this to get a house". And it's almost like they think we're settling, do you know
what I mean? Rather than seeing that we actually see this [apartment] as our home.

Both Rachel and Melanie faced familial pressure from their fathers, who did not see their
apartments as good investments, let alone as suitable family homes. Participants found
themselves constantly justifying their choices as they confronted expectations to achieve the
'dream' of a detached house (the only 'appropriate' housing form for the child rearing stage of
the life-course). Attempts to maintain the feeling of being at home under this critical *cultural*
gaze required significant energy. Together with the material and emotional challenges these
families were already experiencing in regard to space, storage and sound (Chapters 5-7), this
critical gaze took an additional emotional toll on parents – undermining both their sense of
belonging and their parenting abilities.

8.4 The emotional work of making home in an apartment amidst negative discourses

Prevailing cultural norms that position apartments as temporary, less valuable and
inappropriate for families, were often internalised by the study participants. Whether families
owned or rented their apartments, their sense of home and belonging was compromised.
Throughout the interviews, parents expressed times when they felt judged, embarrassed, guilty
or discontented about their housing situation. Linda recalled feeling judged about space before
her child was even born. Despite acknowledging the 'dream of having a nice living sized
bedroom for the kid', Linda and her husband did not deem it necessary to repurpose their spare
room into a nursery until it was absolutely necessary. They were aware that not having 'a
bedroom or a sticker on the wall, or anything to say that there was a kid coming for the first six
months' contravened 'good parenting' norms. Living in a smaller space required many

participants to push the boundaries of what is considered 'normal' in the Australian context. In addition to siblings sharing bedrooms, several parents gave their children the larger bedroom so that this space could accommodate both sleep and play (Chapter 5).

A fear of judgement or scrutiny also influenced how families felt they could use space within their apartment. Internalisation of judgements and wider cultural norms led some parents to feel uncomfortable hosting guests who live in detached houses. For Melanie, feeling unable to host gatherings was a source of discontent:

> We do have occasionally have people over for dinner, but I find that the default position is we always have Christmas at my brother's cause he's got a house… that's one of my bugbears, that we can't host things… It's probably the one area where I feel almost a bit embarrassed to invite people over, because especially friends with houses… there's sometimes that little bit of rivalry, "How can you live in a unit?" kind of thing, so I sometimes feel a bit like we can't really invite people over, unless they are also in a similar boat.

Several participants' shared similar emotive experiences, noting that mothers' group gatherings or other outings and celebrations primarily occurred in public spaces or at the 'friend's that has the house and the backyard' (Rebecca). In lieu of having their own backyard, participants described using their parents' detached houses for birthday parties and entertaining, allowing them to fulfil social expectations associated with hospitality and good parenting. While this helped parents address space shortages on a case-by-case basis, discourses associating a 'proper' childhood with a backyard shaped the emotional lives of parents. This was evidenced through conversations where participants expressed feeling 'house envy' and a desire for their own backyard. In an effort to try to quell these emotions and compensate for the differences between living in an apartment and a detached house, Melanie bought her children a cubby house. She explained:

> I bought the [cubby house] from Bunnings [major hardware chain], because I wanted my kids to have everything that a kid with a backyard would have… I've bought things like… a small slippery dip at Bunnings, which is in the garage, and the idea was that I'd pull it out and they could use it when I'm out the back, but we hardly use it, and now we've got it, and it's like, "Oh, another piece of emotional baggage." It's all about giving my kids what they would have if they had a backyard.

Throughout conversations with Melanie, it was evident that apartment living inhibited her from creating an 'ideal' family home where she could entertain and where her children could play in their own backyard. Her efforts to compensate and provide the same opportunities for her children had emotional implications when the material form of the apartment was not conducive for storing such a large object. In this example and others, it was evident that the prevalent external discourses that depict what a family home *should be* were taken onboard by participants. In some instances, reactions were based on specific comments or experiences made by family members or friends. Yet, for others, these feelings cropped up, even in the absence of specific negative commentary. The broader cultural norms and perceived stigma attached to apartment living led parents to question themselves even when the other people in their lives did not. Amanda[108] explained:

> I don't think people have put the pressure on me, I think I've had that pressure because I was brought up in a house and I wonder how you are affecting your children by having a different upbringing in a city… When I was pregnant I didn't believe you could live in an apartment… I worried, worried, worried about people complaining about crying and all that side of things, and I think it's just a mother/female thing where you just maybe worry about this stuff, pleasing everybody, making sure your baby's okay, making sure your neighbours are okay. I put all that pressure on myself I think… But you grow into your space and make it a family home… No, they [the children] don't have a garden but they have a lot of other things that they do… I feel guilty as a mother that they don't have space, whereas, I think they do a lot of stuff as well, so, which is best, I don't know.

Amanda's anxieties highlight the emotional tensions she faces, trying to decide what is best for her family. Her thoughts on apartment living have shifted over time. Despite initially finding it hard to imagine raising children in an apartment, Amanda's experience of raising her two daughters in an inner-city apartment was by-and-large positive. On occasions when she faced judgements about her family's lifestyle, she described becoming 'defensive' and quick to 'point out the good bits'.

Aware that their lifestyles contravened Australian norms, and amidst comments from friends, family and strangers, the parents I interviewed found themselves regularly justifying and

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[108] Amanda (renter, two children aged 7 and 5, 2 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)

defending their housing decisions. While living in an apartment constrained some elements of their ideal family home, they also explained that it came with benefits (see Chapter 4). Emphasising the positives provided a way for parents to cope with judgments and societal pressure. Anna[109], for instance, explained:

> I grew up on the Central Coast, and so all my mummy friends up there from school that have… got kids, yeah I've got house envy with them. Because they've got backyards, like their own, with like grass, and they've got dogs... But they live far away [from the city], so I don't envy their lifestyle because I like living where we live, and close to the city and close to work. And close to other things that they don't have. So, house envy yes, but not lifestyle envy.

Having internalised discourses that apartment living was unsuitable for families with children, some parents were actually surprised that their lives turned out to be (mostly) manageable and even enjoyable. Rachel commented that, 'We've stayed here for much longer than I ever thought we would. So, that's quite nice, and it's worked much better than I ever thought it would as well'. Similarly, Amanda 'thought we might have moved by now, but we just haven't. [We] just sort of kept going with the flow, because it's been absolutely fine with the children'. While detached housing continues to be widely framed as the ideal home for children, the narratives of participants in this study show that many families are now prioritising other factors above housing form and that the dream of a 'big house' is no longer the 'benchmark' to which all families aspire (Paul[110]).

8.5 Cultural norms foster parents' uncertainty about their housing futures

Despite identifying many benefits to their current lifestyles (as discussed in Chapter 4), the continual questioning of parents' choices (by others, and by themselves) meant that apartment life with children came with significant emotional labour. There were perceived 'tipping points' relating to space, storage and sound (Chapters 5-7), that might ultimately push these families out of their apartments. The emotional burden of constantly pushing against the cultural tide added to this weight. With this in mind, most of the parents interviewed expressed uncertainty about their housing futures. At the time of the interviews, most participants described feeling 'at home' and enjoying the lifestyle their apartment afforded them. Yet they

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[109] Anna (renter, 1 year old child, 2 bedroom apartment in a 2 storey complex)
[110] Paul (owner, two children aged 6 and 2, 2 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)

were constantly evaluating (and re-evaluating) their housing and parenting choices – demonstrating a discordant experience of home that was complex, ongoing and at times contradictory (Mee 2007). For Linda, conversations with her husband about moving into a detached house often resurfaced after visiting friends who had moved into a 'big home'. She explained:

> You come back home and you have this conversation with your husband, and we both get on the [real estate] websites and we see, well, can we make it work? How come other people… are making it work and living in debt… After going through the whole process… we've gone through it a few times already, reviewing our finances and options and we always arrive to the same conclusion; that our priorities are still in the location and we can't afford anything else [in this location].

The competing pressure between wanting to stay in a particular location and wanting a detached house was common among both owners and renters. Melanie provided insight into this:

> I've got the Aussie bug… that sort of parasite of home ownership – having a house with a garden, even though I love this place. I love where we live… I go to auctions a lot and stuff like that… Sometimes I pretend I'm driving to my house, you know, what'd it be like and I'm like, don't care… this is still better, and yet I still keep searching.

Many families were in a similar situation: they would have to move to a different (in their mind, less desirable) suburb or even out of the city, should they decide move to a detached house. The lack of larger affordable housing options (whether detached houses or townhouses) in preferred suburbs was directly linked to densification policies transforming the nature of particular suburbs and apartment developers placing a premium value on larger land parcels primed for up-zoning. Belinda explained:

> We've been living in this area for 11 years, and we actually really love living in this area… we can walk to Parramatta, the school's across there… The problem is that since we've been living here, the area has now become more popular, so to buy a house in this area now is kind of a million-dollar property… and the [houses] that aren't [$1 million], are being bought by developers to knock down and build high-density housing. So now we've got to make decisions about whether we stay in this area [or] move a suburb out or a few suburbs out.

Ongoing questioning of their own choices and priorities, amidst housing affordability constraints, weighed heavily on some parents:

> My in-laws… they've been saying it for years, "You need more space for Toby". I'm like "Okay, do you want to buy us a house? I've found one" (laughs). So we just say that back to them. I think they've stopped saying that actually (Rhiannon[111]).

On top of this pressure, Rhiannon's seven year old son had also started pressuring his parents to buy a house:

> Most of his friends from school have houses… we go to play dates and stuff and he will be like, "Oh I want a house like Henry because he's got a treehouse". Or "I want a house like Ness because she's got a big backyard"… We are like "We're working on it buddy, we're working on it".

Feeling at home amidst the uncertainty of social and familial expectations, housing affordability and rapidly changing suburbs was emotionally draining. While participants placed a high value on living in particular locations, material and emotional challenges relating to storage, sound and space (see Chapters 5-7) – alongside the cultural norms outlined in this chapter – made it difficult for many of the participating families to envision themselves staying in an apartment over the longer-term. As families have not traditionally lived in apartments in the Australian context, parents navigating homemaking in higher-density settings felt the absence of a successful model to look to, for how it could work:

> I just don't feel like there's any reference points for people with kids of going through every stage with them, there's no information available about what's it like to have a 15-year-old and live in a small unit (Melanie).

Because I was unable to recruit participants with older children living in apartments (Chapter 3), this thesis has not be able to address the gap identified by Melanie, and further research is needed in this area. The parents involved in this study experienced persistent negotiations, judgements and tensions at the intersection of apartment materiality and cultural norms. This demanded significant physical work (particularly when sorting, shuffling, resorting and ridding belongings, as per Chapter 6) and emotional work – as discussed across all of the empirical chapters. The emotional work of hanging onto, and trying to bolster, a fragile sense

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[111] Rhiannon (owner, three children aged 7, 4 and 3 months, 4 bedroom apartment in a 3 storey complex)

of belonging in their own homes seemed to be pushing some to a tipping point.

8.6 Conclusion

Certain living arrangements and housing forms have become normalised and associated with different stages of the life-course, with implications for those who do not conform. While increasing density has been accompanied by a shift towards more families living in apartments in cities like Sydney (Chapter 1), design and cultural norms surrounding who is seen to belong in apartments are yet to reflect this diversity. In the context of traditionally suburbanised nations, visions of a 'proper' family home are conflated with notions of ownership and detached dwellings. Apartments, by contrast are considered unhomely, temporary, less valuable than detached houses and unsuitable for families. Such discourses erase children from apartment landscapes and imaginaries and therefore do not accurately reflect the demographic diversity of apartment occupants.

Discourses that portray apartments as inappropriate for families, are circulated in advertising materials, media commentary and everyday social relations and play an important role in shaping (or indeed, undermining) parents' housing decisions and subsequent sense of belonging. My examination of the emotional terrain of parenting in apartments has revealed that the ongoing processes of making and remaking home, amidst material, regulatory and cultural constraints, has significant implications. At times, the practice of making home in an apartment requires parents to push normative boundaries of familial living in the Australian context and to compromise on their own (often ingrained) ideals of home. Faced with judgement from family members, friends, strangers and themselves, parents spend significant emotional energy constantly weighing and reassessing the pros and cons of apartment living. They experience multiple and contradictory feelings of being at home (or not) in apartments.

In the context of rapidly densifying suburbs and the subsequent growth in the number of families making home in apartments, the emotions (of guilt, shame and embarrassment) and experiences revealed in this chapter are troubling. While parents pointed to a number of explanations and positive attributes shaping their decision to live in an apartment, these feelings were undermined by persistent questioning of their housing and parenting choices. Parents' emotions were spatially, temporally and socially-located in dwellings where child-blind thinking has informed planning, design and governance practices (Fincher 2004; Randolph

2006). In cases where apartment living was an active and positive choice, parents nonetheless felt the considerable emotional burden of having to justify themselves. In cases where affordability and availability constraints compelled families to rent or buy smaller-than-ideal apartments, subsequent parental guilt and tensions with neighbours compounded existing emotional stresses – punishing parents for circumstances beyond their control.

By documenting the emotional terrain of everyday parenting in apartments, this chapter adds further evidence of the labour that goes into maintaining a feeling of home and belonging in these dwellings (Nethercote and Horne 2016; Reid et al. 2017), with implications for housing and parenting choices. As demonstrated in Chapters 5-7, these culturally located challenges are exacerbated by the material form of apartments, the planning regimes that permit child-blind designs, and accepted governance processes that hinder families' homemaking practices. Importantly, physical design, strata governance and cultural housing norms do not operate in isolation; rather they reinforce one another. In addition to the impacts of the above discourses on parents' ability to feel at home, cultural norms relating to housing (which increasingly positions apartments as a vehicle for investor profit) influence how dwellings are imagined, built and governed. As highlighted in previous empirical chapters, families face significant material challenges inhabiting physical structures that were built and marketed with single people or couples in mind. Families are forced to cope with inflexible spatial layouts, too few bedrooms and lack of family-friendly communal space (Chapter 5), limited storage (Chapter 6) and inadequate sound proofing (Chapter 7). Together these challenges impact on their ability to envision apartments as homes over the longer-term. By the end of my interviews, I felt that many of the participating families were at – or near – a breaking point in their apartment lives. I made contact with them again, in late 2019, to see whether they had moved on or remained. A postscript to this thesis provides an update on their circumstances.

Chapter 9
Toward diversity in higher-density housing

9.1 Introduction

This project was conducted during an ongoing period of transition in Australian cities. It documented the experiences of families with children living in apartments. These families are at the forefront of a profound shift in demography, urban form, and lifestyle. A focus on their everyday dwelling practices and emotions reveals discord between urban consolidation planning visions, wider cultural norms and the intricacies of everyday life with children, raising key questions concerning urban inclusivity and liveability. By documenting the emotional, cultural and material terrain of everyday parenting in apartments, this thesis argues that greater attention ought to be afforded to the *work* that goes into maintaining a feeling of home and belonging in this setting. Such attentiveness is needed in the field of housing studies and in the planning and policy domains. This chapter reflects on the implications of the physical and emotional work borne by apartment-dwelling parents. It makes clear that this work could be made much easier to shoulder with changes to governance, planning and design and more inclusive cultural norms.

Followed only by a brief postscript, this chapter concludes the thesis by bringing together its conceptual and empirical threads. I begin by revisiting the contributions made by this study to geographical and housing research literatures. Next I return to the aim and research questions, summarising how parents' sense of home and belonging in apartments is shaped by materials, emotions and cultural norms. Positioning families as vernacular experts, it becomes clear that for higher-density housing to be a viable long-term housing option, apartment design and cultural norms must accurately reflect the diversity of apartment residents and the complexities of everyday life.

9.2 Contributions to housing studies literature

By drawing together feminist and cultural geographic insights to explore connections between the emotional, cultural and material dimensions of apartment life, this thesis has sought to contribute to the interdisciplinary field of housing studies. Working across conceptualisations of housing and home (Jacobs and Smith 2008), this thesis has highlighted the co-constitutive relationship between apartment planning, design and governance and families' experiences and

meanings of home. While studies of home have a longstanding tradition in housing studies, much of this research has focused on detached dwellings. Shedding light on the ways in which apartment dwellings, family life and meanings of home are co-produced – this thesis contributes to a burgeoning body of work that pays attention to experiences and meanings of home in higher-density housing (Mee 2007; Baker 2013; Ghosh 2014; Power 2015; Baxter 2017; Scanlon et al. 2018). In so doing, I have sought to trouble hegemonic discourses that portray the ideal family home as a detached dwelling, demonstrating instead that for many families a sense of home is shaped beyond the apartment itself. Parents revealed a willingness to make trade-offs on space in order to live in a particular location or enjoy lifestyle benefits they associate with apartment living. Despite families identifying benefits to living in apartments, a key contribution of this thesis has been documenting the material and emotional travails of parenting in apartments constructed and governed around modernist visions of homogeneity and order. Growing numbers of families with children are motivated or constrained to living in apartments that are ill-suited to their needs, and so discord predictably emerges. This thesis has shed light on the ongoing work that goes into maintaining a sense of home and belonging in this discordant setting. It has demonstrated how, for families with children, the making and unmaking of home is fraught with complexities and shaped by interactions with family members, neighbours, wider cultural norms and asymmetries and dysfunctions of the housing system. Conceptual influences from literature on material and emotional geographies, together with the narratives shared by parents, reveal that the challenge of making apartments home results from child-blind apartment design and pervasive norms in planning and governance processes – and indeed in society more broadly – that position families as out of place. I have argued that housing studies should focus further attention on homemaking emotions in higher-density settings, and that while our cities continue to expand vertically, housing policy needs to be informed by diverse residents' interconnected emotional and material apartment experiences.

A second contribution of this thesis is expanding current understandings of families' experiences in apartments. As outlined in Chapter 2, a growing number of researchers have begun to explore families' experiences in higher-density dwellings in response to the growth of this demographic in the past decade (Easthope et al. 2009; Carroll et al. 2011; Whitzman and Mizrachi 2012; Karsten 2015a and b; Nethercote and Horne 2016; Reid et al. 2017; Andrews et al. 2018; Agha et al. 2019; Andrews and Warner 2019; Warner and Andrews 2019). This thesis has examined a specific case study, namely, middle-income nuclear families with

children living in predominantly medium-density dwellings in middle to outer Sydney suburbs. In so doing it has contributed to emerging understandings of families' experiences with a focus on how discordant spaces of higher-density housing are experienced emotionally. By foregrounding parenting practices and emotions – and their intersections with planning regimes, apartment materiality, governance structures and cultural norms – this thesis has extended current understandings and responds to calls for further attention to be paid to how everyday verticality is experienced, embodied and inhabited in multiple ways. It is important to reflect on the absence of low-income parents from this study, recognising that their experiences and living environments are likely to differ markedly from the middle-class sample explored in this thesis. For example, low-income households may experience multiple feelings of not belonging and housing stigma and may live in dwellings with lower-quality apartment materials. On the other hand, if low-income parents have more neighbours, friends or colleagues also raising children in apartments, they may be surrounded by a different set of cultural expectations and thus face less questioning about the appropriateness of raising children in this setting. Exploration into the material and emotional experiences of lower-income families living in apartments warrants further research.

The final contribution I have sought to make in this thesis relates to my commitment to foreground the narratives of apartment-dwelling parents and to inject their experiences into the public debate. While big data and analytics play an important role in shaping future policies and planning agendas, there are blind spots in such approaches and decisions must also be shaped by the richness and diversity of lived experiences and stories. By documenting the opportunities and conversations that emerged through various public engagement activities undertaken throughout my candidature, I argue for further engaged qualitative housing research that repositions city dwellers as vernacular experts. Doing so responds to a key gap portrayed diagrammatically in Chapter 2 (Figure 2.1): there is presently a lack of opportunity for apartment residents' practices and emotions to feed into planning processes and governance structures. Diverse urban residents' insights are vital to understanding how housing policies are lived and felt. Bringing these insights into public debate in a timely way is crucial for generating iterative dialogues – not just between researchers and policy-makers but also research participants. This is especially important in the context of rapidly consolidating cities that are, at this very moment, being actively reshaped by modernist planning ideals that are intolerant of diversity.

9.3 Revisiting the research aim and questions

This thesis, situated in the specific field of housing studies, has adopted a critical cultural and feminist geographical framework that demands attentiveness to connections between the material, cultural and emotional dimensions of home. Focusing specifically on parents living with children in apartments, the aim of this study was to gain insight into their lived experiences, practices and emotions in this setting. In order to address this aim, I employed a mixed-methods approach comprised of in-depth interviews, home tours and photographs, to explore six key questions:

1. What is prompting families with children to live in apartments?
2. How are parenting practices and emotions shaped by higher-density living arrangements?
3. How does the materiality of apartment buildings intersect with everyday family life?
4. How do cultural housing norms shape families' sense of home and belonging in apartments?
5. What strategies do families with children have for making home and managing everyday life in apartments?
6. How might apartments be designed, managed and governed to better meet the needs of families with children, as a longer-term (rather than transitional) living arrangement?

These questions were explored in this thesis via five research themes that emerged from the empirical data: apartment living motivations, spatial constraints, storage constraints, sound-related tensions and the impacts of cultural norms. Each theme was addressed via a dedicated empirical chapter. I revisit each research question below, consolidating findings and highlighting the importance of this work.

9.3.1 What is prompting families with children to live in apartments?

The first research question, addressed in Chapter 4, was focused on uncovering the factors prompting an increased number of families with children to live in apartments. The analysis sought to examine housing within the wider context of participants' lives, moving beyond traditional housing studies perspectives that have focused on economic and demographic factors as the primary determinants of residential choice (Karsten 2007). The findings revealed

that families' decision–making processes are multifaceted and shaped by both macro and micro-level factors. Financial imperatives and locational and lifestyle factors both featured prominently in the participants' apartment living narratives. Parents indicated they were willing to make trade-offs on space and private gardens, in order to live in a particular location, reduce maintenance workloads, achieve greater work-life balance, feel socially connected and have greater affordability. A focus on these affordances complicates constraint-focused narratives that assert apartment living only occurs due to a lack of choice. While affordability is undoubtedly a key determinant influencing more families with children to live in apartments, it is not the only factor. Parents' insights into the perceived benefits of living in apartments challenge outsider perceptions that apartments are not conducive to family life. They also help to explain why families undertake significant emotional and material labour (as outlined in Chapters 5-8) in an effort to make their apartments work for them, despite challenges. For many of the families involved in this study, the benefits of relative affordability and having access to so much on their doorstep outweighed the difficulties they faced within the apartment itself, at least for a time. The dominance of lifestyle and locational attributes in participants' narratives have important planning and policy implications.

First, the participating parents' motivations for apartment living reveal that the marketed benefits of the compact city (i.e. lifestyle, proximity, lower maintenance, affordability) appeal not only to singles and couples, but also to families with children. In seeking out these affordances, however, families are forced to make compromises due to apartment design. There is a risk that developers are capitalising on locational and lifestyle attributes, with limited consideration as to how people will manage everyday life within the spaces they create. A focus on housing (and investor and developer profit) rather than homes (Baxter 2017) has led to developers prioritising high-densities (and bigger returns) in desirable locations, over potentially more human-scaled density (see Jacobs 1961). While families may be willing to make compromises in the short-term, ultimately the challenges they face trying to manage everyday life in discordant settings means that they are effectively excluded from the locational and lifestyle benefits of higher-density living. To avoid pushing families out of the city, away from the lifestyle and locations they desire, apartment design must take families' material and emotional needs into account.

Second, alongside more inclusive apartment design, the dominance of locational and lifestyle factors as a motive for apartment living underscores that plans for increasing density must be accompanied by green space, public transport infrastructure and services and amenities. The environments surrounding apartment dwellings that can be used in lieu of private backyards, are key to shaping families' understandings of home. The public realm should cater for diverse needs across the life-course, however, pervasive discourses that position families as belonging in detached housing in the outer suburbs, have led to under-supply of family-friendly infrastructure and services in areas surrounding apartment developments (Sherry and Easthope 2016; Andrews and Warner 2019). For compact city planning to be successful, it must cater for diversity both in apartment dwellings themselves and surrounding neighbourhoods.

9.3.2 How are parenting practices and emotions shaped by higher-density living arrangements?

The dwelling is not merely a backdrop to family relationships, rather it is part of an interconnected network of people, places and things that can either facilitate or constrain domestic interactions (Stevenson and Prout 2013). While connections between detached houses and residents' practices and emotions are well understood, residents' feelings of home in higher-density housing are co-constructed by materials, practices and social relations in ways that are distinctively refracted by vertical living (Mee 2007; Baker 2013; Ghosh 2014; Power 2015; Baxter 2017; Scanlon et al. 2018). This thesis has contributed to current understandings of apartment residents' practices and emotions by emphasising the discord between i) planning, design and governance ideologies and materialities and ii) the disorder, complexity and diversity of family life within spaces never intended for this demographic.

The influence of higher-density housing on parenting practices and emotions was explored across each of the empirical chapters. Chapter 4 detailed families' motivations for living in apartments and the affordances they associated with this way of life. Apartments brought relative affordability, the ability to live in a particular location and proximity to amenities, and work and education facilities. For some families, apartment living made possible parenting practices unencumbered by lengthy commutes, and reduced the need for both parents to work full-time. However as the interviews zoomed in on life inside these apartments, a more fraught story emerged. Parenting practices were shaped by tensions that emerged from everyday interactions with space, material belongings, noise and cultural norms. Responding to these

tensions incited emotions such as frustration, stress, guilt, shame and discontent, demonstrating that apartment life not only creates material challenges but emotional ones.

As shown in Chapters 5 and 6, the spatial constraints of apartment living shaped the participants' use of space and storage practices. Accommodating the needs of both adults and children within apartments involved complex time-space negotiations. On a day-to-day level, specific spaces were used for multiple purposes (e.g. work, play, sleep, storage and entertaining). Over the longer-term, some spaces were adjusted and reconfigured in order to make room for changing practices. Amidst this flux, tensions arose between conflicting activities, such as paid work and caring responsibilities – and so, parents were creative with their use of space and flexible with their routines and practices. Husbands slept in garages, mothers and fathers vacated the apartment to allow their partners to work, and children took daytime sleeps in their parents' rooms to allow elder siblings to continue playing in their shared room.

As the parents involved in this study made clear, living in apartments also shapes practices of acquiring, storing and ridding stuff. With storage limitations at the forefront of parents' minds, they only purchased items deemed necessary and engaged in second-hand purchasing and sharing and borrowing networks. While the families I spoke to made a concerted effort not to accumulate too much, storage was an ongoing challenge. Finding space to store gifted items, large items (such as prams and bikes) and sentimental items (such as antique furniture) caused particular stress. Their accounts underscored that for families in apartments, storage requirements and uses of space constantly change alongside children's changing needs. Adjusting practices to keep pace with changing needs, in a spatially constrained environment has both material and emotional effects. The disorder and complexity of everyday life, then, needs to be wrangled – on an ongoing basis – within antithetical spaces, intended for others.

Chapter 7 showed that higher-density living arrangements also shape practices within the family and between neighbours and friends. Aware of the impact of their children's sounds on others living in their complex, these parents adjusted their parenting practices in an effort to be good neighbours. They reconfigured their sleep training practices (e.g. not letting babies 'cry it out' during the night, sleep training away from the apartment) and readjusted their children's activities at different times (e.g. limiting certain activities to more sociable hours and putting on more TV than they would otherwise). Their narratives demonstrated that parents' emotional

work extends outwards beyond their apartment walls, leading them to apologise, bake and gift treats, and go out of their way to appease neighbours.

Living with these everyday aural, spatial and storage tensions and dilemmas, has implications for parenting emotions and parents' wellbeing. Feelings of guilt were common for parents in this study – they were concerned about the impacts of their children's sounds on neighbours and simultaneously upset by the constraints they felt compelled to impose on their children's lives. Despite making behavioural adjustments to their lives, and material changes to their dwellings, apartment living amplified emotional dilemmas around being a good parent and a good neighbour. Senses of shame and discontent impacted parents' comfort levels – inhibiting them from entertaining friends and family. Spatial constraints, strata and tenancy regulations and insufficient storage caused emotional stress for parents who felt restricted in their capacity to make changes to their homes as their families grew. As a result, they were left feeling uncertain as to how to make apartments work as a longer-term living arrangement. On top of these everyday practicalities, Chapter 8 showed that apartment living parents must also contend with broader societal expectations that their apartment lives are temporary, less valuable and inappropriate for families with children. The parents I spoke to made it clear that these discourses do not just slide off – they cause damage. These parents' internalised critiques and judgements about their housing situation, further limiting their ability to feel at home.

9.3.3 How does the materiality of apartment buildings intersect with everyday family life?

Domestic architecture and design are shaped by and reproduce particular inclusions and exclusions (Blunt 2005). As recounted in this thesis, this is evident in the context of apartment buildings where child-blind thinking has informed modernist planning, design and governance practices – ultimately resulting in buildings that do not make way for diverse inhabitants (Fincher 2004; Randolph 2006). As a result, families face material challenges raising children in apartments. Inhabiting physical structures that were built and marketed with single people or couples in mind, families are forced to cope with inflexible spatial layouts, too few bedrooms, limited storage, inadequate sound proofing, inconsiderate neighbours intolerant to diversity and a lack of family-friendly communal spaces. The parents I spoke to were flexible with their efforts to adjust their routines and behaviours, however, the material features of their apartments proved harder to adapt – both practically, and due to strata regulations. The rigidity of apartment structure, size, layout, building materials and governance caused direct

challenges for families trying to negotiate the unfolding circumstances of everyday family life in this setting.

As discussed in Chapter 5, dwellings, apartments and rooms that were too small or inflexible in their ability to cater for multiple purposes caused frustration and restricted parents' capacity to envision their apartments as long-term homes. The narratives revealed that families with children are forced to make trade-offs due to the lack of affordable larger apartments. Opting for three-bedrooms, for example, often means putting up with a smaller living or balcony space. But the trade-offs made by families were also deeply personal. Parents involved in this study, shared stories of friends who restricted their family size in order to keep living in their current apartment, knowing that they were already at capacity and another child would require them to move away from the area.

Insufficient storage built into apartments (Chapter 6) also creates challenges for parents who struggle to contain their families' belongings. For the participants in this study, storage limits shaped their practices of acquiring and ridding and created dilemmas. Parents' inability to find places to store everything created a sense of chaos and mess and the constant workload of arranging and rearranging in an effort to make things fit. A persistent sense of failing to make things fit, in turn, challenged parents' aspirational homemaking ideals, which again took an emotional toll.

Sound-related tensions in apartments result from poor insulation in adjoining walls, floors and ceilings (Chapter 7). Parents in this study tried to alter the built fabric where they could (adding carpet and foam mats, closing windows and covering air vents). There is, however, only so much individuals can change, and the wider issue of poor acoustic performance persists – impacting on everyday family life and on the lives of those living within close proximity. The material design of apartments coupled with norms around who belongs in them, then, leads to discord and stress, compromising families' sense of belonging.

While the parents I interviewed altered the materiality of their apartments where possible (e.g. adding materials to absorb sound or adding additional storage), they were ultimately restricted in their ability to make changes that would make their apartments better suit their needs due to the interconnected nature of their built form and strata regulations. As their stories make plain,

this is a particular issue for renters and lower-income households who have even less choice and control over their living arrangements.

9.3.4 How do cultural housing norms shape families' sense of home and belonging in apartments?

What is clear from the findings presented in this thesis is that planning regimes, the physical design of apartments, governance structures and cultural housing norms do not operate in isolation; rather they are iterations of the same political-economic and philosophical foundations. Alongside underlying algorithms of land value uplift that shape the physical-technical shape of housing markets (Murphy 2019), cultural norms relating to housing influence how dwellings are imagined, built and governed. Norms, in combination with developer strategies and design templates, enable and restrict the ability of certain household types to live in certain kinds of dwellings and these norms are then reproduced in the planning, design and management of future developments (see Johnson 1997; Fincher 2004). In turn, this reiterates the homogenisation of building inhabitants, legitimises certain behaviours in apartment complexes and excludes others, feeding into rhetoric that apartments are unsuitable for families. This thesis has revealed the impact of cultural housing norms on planning processes, apartment design, governance and everyday social relations. It has shown that all of these elements are interrelated (see Figure 2.1). Cultural norms that dictate detached houses as the appropriate place to raise a family have tangible implications. They are quite literally *built into* dwellings during the construction phase: in decisions regarding the number of bedrooms, layout of living spaces, and the design of common areas. As demonstrated across Chapters 5-8 in this thesis, this creates material and emotional labour and ongoing tensions for families who are making home in apartments.

Pervasive discourses framing apartments as temporary, less valuable than detached houses and as unsuitable for families (see Raynor 2018) also have implications beyond design – as they permeate social relations and are internalised by parents themselves. As discussed in Chapter 8, the parents interviewed in this study shared stories of family members, friends, neighbours and strangers who questioned their housing decisions. The stigma associated with living in an apartment and the pressure to get a 'proper home', led some parents to feel a contested sense of home and belonging in their apartments. Some felt judged, embarrassed or guilty about their housing situation. Their narratives underscore that the ongoing process of homemaking in

apartments – against cultural norms – requires significant emotional energy.

The material form of apartments also requires families to push normative boundaries and compromise their own parenting and homemaking ideals. For some participating parents, the fear of judgement and scrutiny (from guests and neighbours) affected their willingness to entertain in their own homes. Many felt perpetually anxious about how their children's everyday sounds impacted on others. Discourses positioning apartments as unsuitable were often internalised by parents, leaving them feeling house envy and questioning if their housing choices made them bad parents. Pervasive cultural norms made them feel they were denying their children a 'proper' childhood in a 'proper' house. They subsequently felt compelled to justify their decisions based on the location and lifestyle benefits their apartments afforded them. Choosing to focus on the affordances, most participants in this study described feeling 'at home' at the time of the interviews. They expressed uncertainty, however, about their housing futures and were constantly evaluating (and revaluating) their housing and parenting choices, demonstrating an experience of home that is complex, ongoing and at times contradictory.

9.3.5 What strategies do families with children have for making home and managing everyday life in apartments?

Despite facing tensions relating to challenging housing norms, inadequate sound proofing and spatial and storage constraints, this thesis revealed that many families are committed to making apartment life work for as long as possible, and adopt a range of strategies to do so. Focusing on the benefits of apartment living is one coping strategy – but more tangible or material responses are also common. Strategies seeking to address issues relating to spatial and storage constraints and sound related tensions were discussed in Chapters 5-7.

The parents I interviewed described intricate strategies for coping with spatial constraints and making everyday life work in their small dwellings (Chapter 5). These strategies were material and behavioural. They worked to ensure specific spaces could be used for multiple purposes, they gave children the larger bedroom to allow space for play and toy storage, they used balconies, garages, communal and public spaces to extend their daily lives beyond the confines of the apartment, and they even limited the number of children they had to suit the available space. With limits to the amount of built-in storage, parents devised strategies for making room

in their apartments (Chapter 6). In addition to adjusting their practices relating to acquiring and ridding, parents enacted careful storage strategies. Furniture with built-in storage was purchased, garages were fitted out as storage units, additional storage was mounted to the walls, and some families hired interior designers or sought advice from online blogs, websites and magazines for how to maximise space. These strategies demonstrate a strong commitment to making their apartments continue to work as homes, despite the struggles.

With sound being at the forefront of parents' mind (Chapter 7), they adjusted their domestic practices and apartment spaces with a view to containing their children's noises. Changes were made to the physical space of apartments (e.g. putting down carpet and foam mats, covering air vents, and closing windows). As with space, they also altered their parenting strategies and behaviours (e.g. sleep training away from the apartment, corralling children into one room at a time by keeping the doors closed to avoid running on the floorboards, restricting certain activities to certain times or non-adjoining walls). The interviewees revealed that such strategies unfold across multiple temporalities (across the day/night and throughout the life-course). So too, that these strategies demand effort and emotional labour. As the needs of their children shifted, some strategies stopped working and they had to strategise yet again. With families living in apartments that were not designed for their presence, some strategies proved insufficient, and tensions persisted. Sound-related contestations provide an example of this. Despite efforts to reduce the sound emanating from their apartments, parents still found themselves in situations where neighbours were impacted by – and irate about – their sounds. In some cases, neighbours banged on walls and ceilings, wrote letters of complaint and damaged property. The parents involved in this study made it clear that such experiences take an emotional toll, particularly on those who are doing everything within their control to reduce their noise – yet are still made to feel like they do not belong.

While the affordances of apartment living are plenty, the participating families described continually feeling – and being made to feel – out of place. Many took dominant cultural norms on board, internalising them. As a result, they began to question if their apartments were no more than temporary stepping stones that would only work for a limited period of time. In some instances, sound-related tensions were a tipping point. For other parents, space-related pressure points made them feel that their strategies would reach an expiration date. Parents worried that their apartments would no longer work for their families as children grow older, likely requiring more independent space and having new material needs (e.g. a homework desk). Another key

tension related to storage. With some families already feeling at capacity in their apartments, the inability to neatly contain 'stuff' and 'mess' was a source of discontent (particularly for renters who were further constrained from making safe adaptations to their dwellings). For apartment-dwelling families like these, strategies for wrangling the 'stuff' of everyday life are necessarily ongoing. Aware of this reality, many of the study participants could not see themselves persisting with this work indefinitely.

9.3.6 How might apartments be designed, managed and governed to better meet the needs of families with children, as a longer-term (rather than transitional) living arrangement?

The wellbeing of children and families is indicative of the overall success, sustainability and liveability of cities (Randolph 2006; Kotkin 2016). When the needs of children and young people are not taken into account in urban design and policies, or are absent within the discourses that frame who belongs in the city, the resulting urban landscapes become discordant. While apartments are not necessarily intrinsically discordant spaces – this thesis argues that amidst modernist planning agendas built around homogeneity, order and profit, they become so for families with children. In an effort to encourage apartment designs, governance structures and cultural norms that are more inclusive and welcoming of diversity, this thesis has positioned families as vernacular experts. Rather than being guided by assumptions of who is suited to live where, the experiences and emotions shared in this thesis provide an opportunity for planners and policy-makers to learn from the successes, failures and complexities of everyday life (Jacobs 1961; Jacobs and Merriman 2011; Kotkin 2016). As cities are being actively reshaped, timeliness of responding to families' lived experiences is key.

A key ambition of this research project, as discussed in Chapter 3, was to engage with relevant audiences beyond the academy in order to advocate for apartment design and governance standards that account for a diverse population, not just singles and couples without children. Based on the findings presented in this thesis – and ultimately, on the narratives of the vernacular experts (apartment-dwelling parents) who were interviewed – the following recommendations are made:

i)   New apartments should be soundproofed to well above minimum standards. Opportunities for retrofitted soundproofing need to be explored and implemented.

ii)   Minimum provision of three-and-four-bedroom apartments should be mandated in new medium and high-density developments.

iii) Apartment layouts need to be designed in a flexible manner, with multiple uses and inhabitants in mind.

iv)   Adequate storage space needs to be provided within individual dwellings and within apartment complexes.

v)   Family-friendly communal spaces are necessary, and a culture where families feel welcome to use such spaces should be encouraged.

vi)   Strata governance requires improvement to be more inclusive of the needs of families with children.

vii) Tenure policy reforms are necessary to enable more secure occupancy and allow renters to adjust their dwellings.

The target audience for these recommendations is planners and policy-makers, who have the responsibility to regulate approvals processes that govern those who design, produce and manage urban consolidation. These recommendations present an attempt to address the gaps first identified in Chapter 2 (Figure 2.1): that is, while apartment governance structures and planning regimes deeply influence residents' practices and emotions, there are insufficient opportunities for these practices and emotions to inform and shape apartment governance and planning in return. While child-blind planning, design and governance of apartments continues to be the norm in Australia, this is the case everywhere. Numerous cities globally are recognising the importance of accounting for children's needs in higher-density futures, and thus adopting changes to apartment design and governance in NSW (and Australia more broadly) does not require policy-makers to reinvent the wheel. Australian planners, developers and policy makers have the opportunity to learn both from apartment residents and from cities facing similar changes to urban morphology and demographics, where guidelines and strategies are more advanced – for instance Toronto (City of Toronto 2017) and Vancouver (City of Vancouver 1992). Further detail on each of the recommendations emerging from the present study can be found below.

i)   *Soundproofing of apartments to well above minimum standard, to avoid tensions*
                 between neighbours

As higher-density living becomes more common in Australian cities, noise related tensions are an increasingly important planning consideration. Australia has been criticised as having one of the 'lowest noise reduction standards in the developed world' (Owners Corporation Network 2015:online). As a result, tensions are commonplace even when current standards are met. There is no single government authority responsible for noise pollution in Australia, and therefore recommendations need to be considered by a range of groups.

As highlighted in this thesis (Chapter 7), there are two types of noise transfer causing tensions between families and neighbours in apartments: airborne noise (i.e. children crying or making noise while playing) and structure borne noise (i.e. playing and running on the floor causing impact sound transmission to adjoining apartments). Problematically, these issues occur in material settings which make it difficult to regulate sound; and which require complicated and emotionally challenging methods of sound management. This is a matter of apartment design that needs urgent attention. Apartments must be soundproofed to standards well above the minimums currently required, to avoid tensions between neighbours. Areas in which noise-related technical changes could be implemented include more comprehensive building code regulations as well as government support for retrofit acoustic solutions such as thick carpet, double glazed windows and the addition of sound absorbing materials to walls and ceilings. Alongside improved design, there needs to be stronger regulation of the standards in practice to ensure compliance. As the assessors of development control plans, local councils could lead the way in improving residential satisfaction and quality of life by mandating developers to soundproof above minimum standards.

ii)   *Mandated minimum provision of three-and-four-bedroom apartments in new medium*
                 and high-density developments

Apartments need to be seen not just as housing or as investments, but as long-term homes. As demonstrated in parents' narratives (Chapter 5), speculative real estate investment is finding its material form in apartments – primarily of one-to-two-bedrooms – built to maximise returns from land value uplift (Murphy 2019). Where larger apartments are built, they are often at the luxury end of the market. As a result, there is a shortage of affordable, family-friendly three-and-four-bedroom apartments. Families are subsequently forced to make difficult trade-offs due to the lack of availability of affordable larger apartments – for example, purchasing an

apartment with a small living or balcony space in order to secure three bedrooms, or in some instances, limiting fertility to keep living in their current apartment.

One practical implication stemming from the present analysis is mandated provision of a minimum proportion of three-and-four-bedroom apartments in new developments. Precedents suggest that such recommendations are possible, technically and politically (Hills Shire Council 2016). The risk is that without increased supply of larger, better designed and more affordable three-and-four-bedroom apartments, apartments will continue to be understood as a 'transitional' housing arrangement, unable to accommodate families with children who would otherwise wish to stay for the longer-term.

iii)   Design flexible apartment layouts, with multiple uses in mind
In addition to increasing the availability of affordable three-and four-bedroom units, each space within the apartment should be designed with multiple uses in mind so that families can stay in their homes and communities over the longer-term. For families, bedrooms are used for play, sleep and work and living rooms are used for children's and adults' activities, including work, homework, play and entertaining (Chapter 5). Both bedrooms and living areas need to be large enough to accommodate different configurations of furniture and growing families. Recognising that children over time become teenagers, apartment designs need to be functional, flexible and adaptable to different needs throughout the life-course. Bedrooms should include space for homework and storage and should be able to accommodate multiple bed configurations (e.g. two single beds without blocking access to storage or ability to move freely around the room; or a layout that can fit bunk beds without needing to position them unsafely against windows). Open-plan living areas allow parents to supervise children while doing separate activities. Such liveable space can be further extended by providing a covered balcony. Generously sized entryways accommodate storage needs and free up space in living areas. Appropriately sized bathrooms, laundries and drying spaces also help families manage everyday life and improve the practical quality of apartments. There are precedents for these types of apartments that could be followed in the Australian context (see City of Toronto 2017 for illustrations of ideal family-friendly apartment layouts).

iv) Adequate storage space within and outside apartment complexes

A consistent finding in this study was the inadequacy of existing storage space in apartment complexes (Chapter 6). In light of changing apartment demographics, sufficient space is needed to meet the distinctive storage needs of families with children, recognising that along with children comes children's 'stuff': prams, toys, baby change-tables, bikes, boxes of clothing saved for the next child and so on. Managing these belongings requires constant negotiation in order to avoid clutter, and to maximise use of space. Yet such strategies are wearying. Parents' narratives articulate a clear need for apartments to include further storage capacity, both internally and externally. Within apartments themselves, designers should seek to maximise useable wall space that can accommodate built-in storage or furniture and should maximise vertical space by building in storage cupboards from floor to ceiling (City of Toronto 2017). Apartments should also provide dedicated storage spaces for large items such as prams and bikes. Such spaces could exist in individual apartment entryways or elsewhere in apartment complexes. Secure storage rooms on the ground level would ensure heavy and bulky items like prams do not need to be carried upstairs. The widespread use of garages as additional storage spaces highlights the necessity of external storage beyond the apartment. While many newer Australian apartment developments are opting for car spaces instead of garages (Taylor 2016), families' experiences show garages are just as important for non-car uses as they are for parking. In settings where individual lock up garages are not an option, storage rooms should be provided. Providing sufficient storage space for families at various life stages plays a role in helping families feel like apartments can be a longer-term living arrangement.

v) Increased provision of space to play and common property areas welcoming of families

With increasing numbers of families living in apartments, the provision of family-friendly communal spaces (e.g. backyards, rooftops, shared gardens, play equipment, hireable multipurpose rooms, gathering spaces for teenagers, gyms, pools or sound proofed music rooms) would make valuable additions to apartment design. Indeed, in this study, parents expressed a strong desire for more family-friendly common areas (Chapter 5). As previous research indicates, the provision of communal spaces can support social interaction and help to build community in apartment developments (Thompson 2019). When considering communal and surrounding public spaces, it is important that they are designed to be flexible for diverse ages, interests and uses. Common spaces (e.g. gardens or play areas) should be located away from bedroom windows to reduce sound related tensions and should include surfaces that are welcoming of play such as grass or turf, rather than concrete. Alongside

provision of specific recreation or play spaces, wide hallways and common areas near elevators can also foster socialising and play (City of Toronto 2017). Again appropriate sound proofing is integral.

Beyond provision, the governance of apartment complexes should not overregulate or ban children's use of common property. Design and signage in communal areas should actively welcome families (Figure 9.1). If more developers include family-friendly communal spaces from the outset, then planning consent is approved, removing the potential for families to face opposition or discrimination from neighbours when trying to create family-friendly play spaces (e.g. adding a swingset) in existing developments. The provision of play spaces within apartment complexes in countries such as Singapore (Krysiak 2019) shows this is possible, but it requires developers and planners to conceive families with children as potential apartment residents at the design stage.

Figure 9.1: Example of signage on common property that legitimises children as apartment residents (Author's own photograph)

vi)   Strata governance inclusive of the needs of children and families

Accompanying the above design recommendations, shifts in attitudes and cultural acceptance of children (and their mess and noise) are needed. This is a matter that goes well beyond building design – to the heart of cultural norms and expectations about where children do (and do not) belong (see Skelton, 2000). There is potential for strata bodies to lead the way in this cultural shift, by providing increased support and protection to families like those in this study, who face intimidating actions from their neighbours in the consolidating vertical city. Existing by-laws regarding noise and behaviour should be used to protect families who face threatening angry and discriminatory actions from neighbours or verbal disturbance such as abuse or banging on walls.

NSW Government strata law reforms in 2015 introduced a requirement that by-laws must not be harsh, unconscionable or oppressive (Section 139(1)). While this represents a step in the right direction, strata managers and committee members need to be trained in the importance of supporting families' rights to live in apartments. Otherwise this shift will do little to minimise instances of discrimination or support families' use of space. Alongside training for strata managers around the common challenges families face in apartments and how to better support their needs in strata buildings, there is room to further educate buyers and renters about their rights and responsibilities. Greater understanding of the governance process in strata buildings and negotiations expected in shared living could assist in ensuring the community remains safe and enjoyable to all residents.

The NSW Government has already acknowledged the growing presence of children in apartments through the relatively recent introduction of regulations that require all apartments to have lockable windows, to prevent falling injuries and death (NSW Government 2016). Other areas in which strata advocacy or reform could be beneficial for families relate to the implementation of balcony safety nets (an issue that often comes down to aesthetics being prioritised over safety (Sherry 2016)) and the fair use of common property.

vii)   Tenure policy reform to include longer-term leases and allow renters to make adjustments to their dwellings

Another implication of this research pertains to tenure-related regulations. Apartment developments are geared towards an investor market, with close to 60 per cent of all apartments in Australia rented (ABS 2016d). While uncertainty was a consistent experience for many

participants in this study, regardless of tenure status, it is important to recognise that tenure is implicated in dominant understandings of home and belonging (Easthope 2004; Blunt and Dowling 2006). Tenure policy shapes how residents understand, experience and make home, and the rights they do (or do not) have within their homes (Bate 2018). Through its intersections with materiality, tenure also shapes and constrains caring possibilities (Power and Mee 2020). Renters often cannot adjust spaces to feel at home, meet their needs, or to enhance the safety of their dwellings, and in apartments this may prove especially so due to the interconnected nature of individual dwellings. Policy reform (and greater awareness of existing tenancy rights) to empower renters to make reasonable adjustments to properties (e.g. securing furniture to walls for safety purposes or adding additional mounted storage), including apartments, would go some way to mitigating such emotional stresses. Longer-term leases would also provide families with the security of being able to implement changes to make their apartments work for them over the longer-term. Precedents show that systemic change is possible. Germany for instance affords renters secure occupancy and greater autonomy to make necessary changes to their dwellings (Easthope 2014).

9.4 Closing remarks

This thesis has shown that particular inclusions and exclusions built into dwellings during the planning and design phase have lasting impacts on residents' experiences of inhabitation. Focusing on the homemaking practices and emotions of parents raising their children in apartments in Sydney, Australia, it has highlighted discord between families' everyday lives and the material, regulatory and cultural setting of apartments. Material designs that are unconducive to families' needs create emotional labour for parents who find it hard to envision their apartment as a longer-term living arrangement. At the same time, pervasive cultural norms positioning families as out of place, create a contested sense of home and belonging. The consolidating city aspires to cater for a growing population in an efficient manner – accommodating more people on less land. Yet concerns about the quality and diversity of apartments already on offer, and being built, raises questions around the longevity of this planning agenda and its capacity to accommodate diverse inhabitants and unfolding uses of space. In order for urban consolidation to be inclusive, and to avoid pushing certain types of households out of the city altogether, apartments need to become more diverse. They also need to be designed with greater flexibility in mind, so that residents' shifting needs across the life course can be accommodated.

Accompanying shifts in design, a deeper rethink of the qualities and capacities of cities is necessary – beyond infrastructural efficiencies and maximum profit from land value uplift. As Kotkin (2016:18-19) suggested:

> To flourish, cities need to be flexible and responsive to changing human needs – from birth to the end of life… Cities should not be made to serve some ideological or aesthetic principle, but they should make life better for the vast majority of citizens.

The findings of this study show that, when left to their own devices, housing markets premised upon modernist and capitalist principles of profit and purity do not provide the diversity, function, flexibility or adaptability that is required by families with children. Planning practices, governance structures, public perceptions and cultural norms need to shift to reflect the diversity of residents who live in apartments. Discourses surrounding apartment developments must broaden beyond high-rise as investments or housing for singles and couples, towards a position that views apartments as homes, including for families with children. At issue is not just the mismatch between housing provision and need, but the persistence of twentieth-century associations of low-density suburbia and family status, amidst extant diversity. Densification plans, investment decisions, developer tactics, regulatory regimes and cultural norms inherited from an earlier era of low-density living intersect in ways that fail to recognise apartments as legitimate long-term homes for families with children. This impacts on not just the lived experiences of current residents – but also future generations who will live in these apartments in years to come. If we view the city as an 'unfinished, expansive and unbounded story' (Chatterton 2010:234); question planning regimes, governance structures and cultural norms; and draw on the vernacular expertise of cities' 'ordinary inhabitants' (Jacobs and Merriman 2011:216), we can start to imagine re-designing the material fabric of dense urban futures in more inclusive ways.

Postscript

Much has changed across the five years in which this research project was completed. As with any project – the participant narratives captured in this thesis portray a particular snapshot in time. While this project was not set up with a longitudinal approach, as the final sections of this thesis came together, I rekindled connections with the families whose experiences shaped this study for an update on where they were at the end of 2019. In total, 10 of the 18 participating households responded. Reflecting the complex, evolving nature of everyday life, responses captured a different chapter in each family's journey. As indicated throughout Chapters 5-8, inadequate design and the pressure of pervasive cultural norms had placed some families at a tipping point in their apartment lives and I wondered what had become of them in the intervening three years. The responses garnered through the follow-up emails provided me with an update on their circumstances. Some families had expanded – with parents introducing new babies and pets. Some had made additional modifications to their apartments to make them continue to work, whilst others continued to live in their apartments longer than anticipated because of positive lifestyle and locational factors or because they remained constrained by lack of affordability. Other families had moved out of their apartments and into detached houses – some moving to outer suburbs or leaving the city entirely, subsequently losing the lifestyle and locational benefits that drew them to apartment living in the first place.

Four of the ten families were still living in their apartments (Belinda, Amanda, Darren and Vivian and Richard and Francesca). The parents who continued to make home in their apartments generally responded with less information then those who had moved – indicative of the fact that they had experienced less disruption since we last spoke. Richard for instance, who at the time of the interviews had described their apartment as 'temporary', simply responded to my email with a brief statement that they were still in the same apartment and nothing had changed. Belinda shed more insight, commenting: 'we have considered moving, but instead altered our apartment to have more storage space, as this was our main 'problem''. In addition to the modifications they had made to adapt the dwelling to suit their longer-term needs, Belinda also shared that their apartment complex 'had many more families move in' since I conducted the interviews with her in 2016. Given this thesis drew on 2016 Census data that is now four years old, the trend Belinda noticed toward more families moving into apartments is likely to be reflected more widely at the next Census which is due in 2021. While Darren responded that his family had remained in the same apartment, he confessed still

envisioning the apartment as temporary – set against his 'white picket fence dream'.

The 'dream' of raising children in a detached house was actualised by six of the ten families who responded to my follow up email (Paul, Melanie, Mariam, Anna, Dan and Clancy and Rachel and Tom). Half of these families had been apartment owners, while for the other half (who were previously renting), moving to a detached house coincided with entering the property market as owners for the first time. For Mariam, it was the shift from renting to owning that prompted her family's move:

> It was time to buy instead of rent and there was no way I would buy an apartment… It has been 2 years and I still miss living in the [Parramatta] CBD with everything [in] walking distance. The ease of getting out with everything at your fingertips trumps more bedrooms and a backyard to clean. It is more space, but also more responsibility.

Although Mariam missed her former apartment, particularly the convenience of its location, she did not see purchase of an apartment as a good investment. Yet her response showed that life in a detached house came with its own challenges. Melanie who at the time of the initial interviews found herself torn between her preferred location and the 'Aussie bug' of detached home ownership, responded that her family had found a house in a nearby suburb that still enabled them to be close enough to the beach:

> We discovered that having a unit in a good area (Cronulla) meant we could make the compromise and trade up to a house in a less expensive area (Sylvania) for around $80k more in our mortgage, which seemed pretty amazing, and we are still only a 10 minute drive from the beach. As the property market boomed we realised that having a house in Cronulla would not be possible unless we forfeited the relaxed lifestyle we had to work a lot more. This was not a compromise we could make.

Melanie explained that with the property market 'heating up at the time', they were worried about getting 'locked out of the house market' if they waited any longer. Reflecting back on her apartment living experience, Melanie acknowledged that some of the benefits she had initially enjoyed, became tiring over time:

> I found with one child, an apartment was terrific, however by the time I had my second, the things I found appealing were a lot less appealing. I got sick of needing to go into the public sphere in order to be in the outdoors. If I was having a 'down day', I didn't want to have to grit my teeth, get dressed out of my daggy trakkies and face the world.

I didn't want to spend all my money in cafés, getting out and about. I felt crowded in and it always felt like the mess was in my face.

Melanie observed that a downside of the move was now being 'reliant on a car to go anywhere'. Overall, however, she felt positively about the change – commenting that she loved the 'privacy and space' the house afforded them. As a 'keen gardener', Melanie described having a 'gorgeous wild garden of over 800 square metres, with beautiful views of the bush and river' as 'a dream come true'. Being able to rent out an adjoining granny flat helped cover half their mortgage each week and provided an 'added sense of community in suburbia'. Melanie shared that her family 'also have two cats and have since had another baby, which would not have been possible in our unit'.

While Melanie's family expanded after moving to a larger property, Anna, who had been committed to making her apartment continue to work when they had a second child, was surprised with twins. This proved to be a tipping point – not only resulting in the end of her family's apartment life, but indeed, the end of their Sydney life:

I fell pregnant again and it was twins (!) so we decided it would be too cramped to stay living as a family of 5 in our 2 BR flat in Coogee. We considered moving to a bigger apartment, but given we really wanted to stay in the area, we couldn't afford the rent. So when the twins were 5 weeks old, we moved to the house we purchased on the Central Coast.

The move to the Central Coast – a region of NSW approximately 75 kilometres to the north of Sydney – meant that Anna and her partner could afford to: 'buy a house with a lovely backyard which is obviously great for little kids, and simply not possible for us, price-wise, in Coogee'. It also meant she was closer to family support, something she described as 'amazingly helpful when the twins were little'. Although the move was instigated by the growth of their family, Anna reported that the tensions they had experienced with their neighbours over noise also factored in:

I have to say our unkind downstairs neighbours also definitely played a part in our decision [to] move. Jack (my first little boy) was 2 when the twins were born and his jumping and running inside the flat made a fair bit of noise for the neighbours. Not to mention newborn twins – the stress of knowing the neighbours were being disturbed when we first brought them home (and until we moved when they were 5 weeks) is still

something I remember well. It was an awful feeling on top of recovering from a multiple birth, wrestling the challenge of breastfeeding twins, extreme sleep deprivation and caring for a toddler too. I actually don't know how I made it through really??!!

More space and a backyard were key motivators for Paul:

> We needed more bedrooms and living space for our growing family. Also the house is close to our jobs, a primary school for our young daughters and within the catchment area of a reputable high school. It has a backyard we need for our dog.

His partner added that noise had also become a deal breaker. When they first moved into to their house they 'told the kids to jump and stomp and be super noisy because it was the first time they'd been able to do that'.

This experience resonated with Alice and James who, as mentioned in Chapter 7, moved mid-way through the research due to tensions over noise. At the time they contacted me to let me know they were moving and thus unable to participate in the second interview, Alice and James 'rented a big house the kids can run wild in!' The expansion of space both indoors and out, was frequently mentioned by parents as a motivating factor leading them to move. Dan responded that while the move to a detached house was driven by a number of factors including cost, location and family,

> the timing was dictated almost completely by the difficulty of containing a toddler in an apartment. We left when our son was just over 1, and he was already bouncing off the walls. This meant that we had to spend ~2 hours giving him time and space outdoors to enjoy. This was sometimes fine, and sometimes a hassle, depending on what we had on. Our nearest park was quite close to a road, and you couldn't really relax when he was wandering around there (not to mention him trying to eat cigarette butts). The contrast now is that when he gets juiced up we can just open the back door and let him out to run around the garden and chase the chickens, giving us a great deal extra time in a day.

For Rachel and Tom, 'the apartment was always a step on the way to owning a home' (Rachel). When I contacted Rachel, they had recently purchased a house – but had not yet moved in. She explained how their apartment living experience provided some important insights, which shaped their priorities when searching for a house:

The apartment has taught us how little space we can live in (so we didn't end up buying a huge house) and also how important external locational factors are (e.g. access to transport, parks, schools, work etc which were a big factor informing what we looked at). Because we bought an apartment we had a smaller mortgage to pay and that meant that we paid it off quickly (paying it off as if we had the larger mortgage that would be required when we bought a house) and this saving strategy has meant that we were able to afford the house we wanted in the location we wanted.

Although their apartment was 'a really important step in our housing careers and life aspirations', Rachel explained that the spatial constraints of their apartment no longer suited their needs:

As the kids have got older 2 bedrooms isn't really enough e.g. we would like family to be able to stay with us (especially as both of us work and family don't live nearby – an extra room is essential so we can access this support), children will want their own room when they get older, we both work from home during the week and space for this would be preferred, [the] apartment was getting too small e.g. I am writing this email in the same space the kids are building a cubby house and husband is cooking, we wanted [a] garden for us all to use.

I spoke with Rachel again, to capture her reflections after they moved into their detached house. Having had a few months to settle in, Rachel felt that the move had improved her family's quality of life – prompting the realisation as to how unhappy they had been in their apartment:

The extra living space, access to garden/green space has just improved our quality of life so much. I was expecting to find aspects of living in a house frustrating or that I would miss aspects of apartment living but it hasn't been the case! Instead the move brought into sharp relief how miserable living in the apartment had been.

Rachel elaborated on the aspects of apartment living that had worn them down, referencing difficulties with their strata committee resulting in poor maintenance and concerns about fire safety. She also commented that 'awful' neighbours impacted on their experiences. The neighbours referenced here, were the same neighbours Rachel and Tom had previously experienced noise related tensions with (as detailed in Chapter 7's opening vignette). Rachel explained that these tensions remerged while they were trying to sell the apartment:

Our upstairs neighbour disliked us so much that she decided to sabotage our sale by playing loud music at inspection times and during the auction. At one point our agent asked us to approach her and ask if she could stop the music while the inspections were on (we even offered to pay her for her time recognising that she tutors music from home for a living)… our offer was not taken kindly. We honestly had no idea that she didn't like living next to us so much – things had flared up when Katie was born in early 2016 but we had worked hard to keep things civil and there had been no problems in the years that had followed… It does seem that kids were the problem (or one part). She told one neighbour that she hated kids and said that "all children should be held under water". Needless to say we are soooo glad to no longer be living in our apartment! Tom says he would never recommend someone to live in an apartment now.

Having moved from their apartment a few months before the Covid-19 lockdown, my follow-up with Rachel during the pandemic captured her additional relief:

Then COVID-19 lockdown hit. Oh wow! Once again we are incredibly grateful: 1) To have bought this house and sold our apartment before this happened because that would be so difficult to do now; and 2) To be living with more space. I have been able to do my work because I have room to lock myself away into. The garden and the park behind our back fence has been great for everyone. It sounds like a cliché but hugely important for our mental and physical health… It really doesn't bear thinking about how awful lockdown in the apartment would have been for us!

While it was opportune timing for Rachel and her family to have obtained a detached house, as the final stages of writing this thesis coincided with Covid-19 related lockdowns, I have often been prompted to think of the families still living in their apartments throughout the pandemic. As I sit down to write these final reflections, I do so from a makeshift work space set up in the kitchen/dining area of my townhouse. The adjustment to working from home as a household of four with no children has had its own material and emotional challenges. I am well aware that for families with children, such challenges are even more intense. For families, dwellings have not only become homes and offices, but also day care centres and schools. With more members of the family (and their proximate neighbours) being home together for longer periods of time – the difficulty of fitting work, study and play side by side have no doubt been heightened during this crisis. As this thesis has shown, working from home in an apartment with children is difficult under regular circumstances. With emerging evidence highlighting

the impact the lockdown is having on working parents (and mothers in particular) (McCarthy et al. 2020), the emotional tensions parents in apartments face over being a good parent and a good neighbour, have likely been further impacted by guilt about being a good remote worker and/or a good proxy teacher. The lockdown-related strains we have all faced are likely to be particularly pronounced for those parents attempting – within the material and spatial constraints of small apartments – to teach and care for their children, while simultaneously working from home, or attempting to create space for a partner to work from home with minimal interruption.

In addition to likely amplifying the challenges families (and their neighbours) face living and working together in confined apartment spaces, the Coronavirus pandemic has left many people questioning the desirability of higher-density living (Cosslett 2020). What this global pandemic means for apartment living is not yet clear. Will we see more people moving away from density, with the emphasis tilting back toward suburban or rural living? (Khadem 2020) Will this be a turning point for governments and planners to put pressure on developers to ensure more attention is paid to good design and wider provision of public green space? Will the pandemic provide opportunities to focus less on mass-production of housing and instead turn attention to experiences of dwelling? Or will apartment residents continue to carry the burden of exclusionary design practices – and the labour of finding and implementing strategies that make everyday life work (well enough) in an unconducive material and cultural context? While the answers to these questions remain to be seen, it is certain that flexible and inclusive apartment design is ever more important. This moment in time provides an opportunity for discourses to shift and for apartments to be recognised as homes, including for families with children.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Interview schedule

Interview stage 1
The aim of this interview is to gain an insight into your family's everyday practices living in an apartment in Sydney with children. Stories of lived experiences are sought and I am interested in hearing about your practices in and around the home and feelings towards living in an apartment. You are encouraged to speak freely rather than provide yes/no style answers

<u>Setting the scene</u>

To begin with I'd like to find out a bit of background information on your household. Can you tell me
- How many people are in your family/including how many children/how many people live with you?
- What are the ages of children? & broad age range of parents/guardians
- Are you currently employed outside of the home (ask the same for partner if applicable)? If yes, what is your occupation? How many days a week do you work?
- Are children at school/childcare? How many days a week?

I'd like to talk a little bit about your housing history;
- How long have you lived in this apartment/home?
- Work out if the children were born before/after choosing this home?
- Explore where they previously lived and if it was a house or apartment?
- Explore where they grew up when they were a child. Inc. house or apartment, country of birth, did they grow up in a city or rural area? If born overseas, do they come from a place in which apartment living is the norm?
- Do you rent or own this property?

I'd like to talk a little bit more about your current home – in particular what factors were taken into account when choosing to live in this apartment and what kinds of things were you looking for when house hunting

Firstly, thinking around the location:
  Prompts:
- Are you within close proximity to public transport, work and schools? Was this important to you?
- School – did you look into nearby schools when choosing to live here? Were long-term options in mind, such as high schools?
- Were you aware of surrounding amenities and green spaces or water front? Was this important to you?
- Affordability?
- What attributes of the surrounding outdoor areas/and or amenities did you see as most important for making apartment life comfortable and feasible as a family?
- Are there child-friendly spaces within walking distance from your home? Was this important to you?
- Did you consider topography (e.g. walking up a hill with pram might be a hassle?)
- Does this location suit the needs of certain family members more than others?

Turning to think about the actual physical structure of the building now:
- Were you aware of the building's layout e.g. did they buy off the plan or inspect the apartment?
- Did you give any consideration to building materials – i.e. what the building is made of? What the floor is made of? Adjoining walls? The level/floor on which the unit is – e.g. ground floor etc.
- Was the presence of balcony or other outdoor area important to you?
- Was the view/outlook important to you? E.g. trees for screening rather than looking into someone else's apartment or the street
- Do you have a garage? Was this important?
- Was the type of apartment important – e.g. low rise, medium rise, high rise etc. / high or medium density? Stairs, lifts?
- Were you aware of the levels of noise from proximate streets/venues?
- As part of the decision process did you spend time in the area or talk to neighbours or past tenants about their experience?
-

Thinking about the process of finding a home which suited your needs (refer to previous answers as to what these needs are):
- Was it difficult to find a suitable apartment?
- What aspects of the home and surrounding area were most important? E.g. what aspects were negotiable /non-negotiable?
- During the property search, did real-estate agents etc. try tell you that certain types of dwellings would suit them better because they have children – i.e. were certain places/types of dwelling marketed towards you in certain ways?
- Did you ever feel that you were discriminated against in the housing search as a result of having children? and for e.g. single mothers

Now that you are living in this home, I wanted to ask you a little bit about the strata body and your understanding of this:
- Were the conditions and obligations of the strata body made clear to you when you moved in?
- How often do you meet? Are you actively involved in the committee?
- Are there any bylaws that specifically relate to children?
- Explore strata laws relating to children living in high-rise e.g. locks on windows/screens)

Living in high-density with children/negotiating family life

I am interested in talking a bit more about family life in an apartment and in the city, in particular, in relation to raising your child/children in this context

(Recap to any comments made earlier in relation to children being born before or after apartment life/reasons for choosing to live in an apartment/city)

You mentioned living in an apartment for reasons such as XYZ. I wanted to talk a bit more about the realities of this and experiences you have

I wanted to first talk a bit more about life within your apartment – both in relation to the ways you share space as a family and also thinking about sharing space with neighbours who live

within close proximity

In order to gain a bit more understanding into life within your apartment and the layout of your home, I wondered if you could do a bit of a sketch/drawing of the floor plan of your home in order to talk about different spaces

Using the drawing as a prompt – explore the layout of the home and gain insight into how many bedrooms etc. Also try to find out if they know how many square metres their home is

I'd like to talk about how different spaces are used and shared as a family – I've got a pen here with different colours on it – you're welcome to draw on your sketch and write comments about certain aspects/spaces within the home as we talk

Firstly, I'd like to talk a bit more about how spaces are used for multiple purposes. E.g. bedrooms/lounge rooms used as play spaces, kitchen table used for homework/ironing etc.

Thinking about time zoning and space zoning of different areas in the apartment. Could you elaborate on this a bit?

How do you allow for separation and privacy for family members? Does the home allow you to do different things at the same time without interrupting each other? I.e. separate zones for parents and children at different times

Are there certain spaces in the apartment that are seen as one person's more than another's? E.g. kitchen, study area

Do you find it difficult living so close to each other to balance independent play/privacy and supervision/surveillance?

Are there certain spaces which are associated with certain feelings? E.g. enjoyment, frustration, relaxation, playfulness, happiness, anxiousness

What are the aspects of this shared space you most enjoy? E.g. communal living spaces may foster and encourage interaction and involvement in the home

What about tensions within the family – balancing different needs of adults and children in a small space (sleeping patterns, playing, entertaining friends, working) – can you think of an example of this which you find challenging? (i.e. might relate to sound, both needing the same space for different tasks etc.)

Shared bedrooms? Discuss bonding time, tensions… Impact of ages of children and gender and if they foresee this being an issue in the long term?

Where do the children play most of the time? Do you go outside a lot/leave the apartment for play/more space?

Shared bathroom – does this cause tension, do you have a system, do you have unlimited hot water?

What changes/modifications have you made to make your apartment to make it work better for

you as a family living with children or to make your home more comfortable/more efficient use of space? What was the process of this like? Consider strata, neighbours etc.

As your children grow older, it is likely there will be expansion of things and the space they consume. Have you made changes over time as a result of your children getting older? Or do you have plans to do so?
Are there changes you would like to make but can't due to strata and/or renting restrictions?
Do you think strata laws hinder or support families in making apartment living with children 'work'?

Do you consider your apartment as a child-friendly space?

Do you have any safety concerns that relate to raising children in an apartment?

What types of things do your child/children say about living in an apartment?

Living in close proximity to others

I'm interested in talking a bit more about how living within close proximity to others (with shared walls, ceilings/floors, common spaces etc.) impacts on your parenting decisions and family life (exploring the physicality of the dwelling)

To begin with, I'd like to explore your experiences of sound and sharing walls in apartments Is this (sound/proximity) something at the forefront of your mind?

Have you ever experienced tensions with neighbours relating to acoustics? (Either in relation to children causing noise and upsetting them or them causing noise which is disruptive to your family)

What parenting strategies do you have for negotiating this in an apartment?

Can you think of an example when you may have made a decision as a parent because of being aware of sound/neighbours? (Explore play/activities in the home & discipline etc.)

Are there certain things that you encourage your children to do (or not do) because of your neighbours?

How does parenting in close proximity to others make you feel? How has this changed over times? I.e. as children have gotten older

Have you purposely made adjustments to your home to reduce noise? E.g. rug on the floor, full shelves can act as a layer of insulation, curtains, TV not against an adjoining wall, line shared walls with furniture

Have you sought advice or done research on how to reduce noise?

What types of conversations have you had with your neighbours about your children? These might be positive or negative

Do you feel like you have commonalities with neighbours? Explore apartment diversity – are

their many other families? Did this impact choice on where to live? Do you value this?

Do you have pets? Do neighbours have pets? (Does strata allow for this?) Have your children ever made comments about having pets?

That brings me to the end of the questions I have for you for this first interview. Do you have any comments or anything you'd like to add at this stage?

Interview stage 2

Sharing stuff with neighbours

I'd like to start by thinking further about interactions and sharing between neighbours and others outside of your family. In the last interview we discussed how neighbours can be a source of support or community or friction and discomfort – I'd like to talk a bit more about your relationships with neighbours, in particular in relation to sharing things and spending time together

Explore levels of neighbouring/what relationships are like (reflect back on previous comments). Explore social cohesion within the apartment – involvement in activities as a group/friendliness/bad neighbour effect

Are there circumstances where you offer mutual help (e.g. watering plants while away), socialise?

Are there particular places/contexts where this is more likely to occur? E.g. communal areas such as BBQs, rooftops, gardens.

Are there particular times this is more likely to occur – e.g. is there ever formal socialising for events or annual rituals? E.g. Christmas party, Halloween

Can you think of a time when you have borrowed something or lent something to a neighbour? Does this occur regularly?

If there are other families in the apartment – have you ever minded someone's children or had someone mind your children? Or had your children play together/become friends?

Where do your children play?

Are there any formal sharing networks within the apartment complex? E.g. car sharing, roster for shared spaces, gardening/maintenance sharing

Where do you entertain friends/family for events you host?

What other communal spaces/materials would you use if you had them? E.g. communal room that could be hired out for entertaining/sound proof room for children to learn an instrument without worrying about sound/toy room or place spaces/other child specific facilities? Gym/shared laundry?

Sharing and storing stuff within the apartment

Transport – how many vehicles does the household own? Do you share a car in the family (why/why not?)

Thinking now about the way you organise/share and store 'stuff' within your apartment

Do you access shared resources through networks such as tool libraries, toy libraries, libraries – rather than purchasing these items?

Thinking about some of the materials you share in the household such as (refer to check list – TV, desk etc.) – is there a system you use to work out who has access? E.g. is it based on time?

If more than one child – do the children share items such as toys, hand me down clothing?

Has there ever been conflict in the family over shared storage or space?

Explore strategies for the storage of "stuff" in apartments – have you made changes? Do you have external storage space outside of your apartment (e.g. garage, paid storage, parents/friends?)

Explore safety/storage away from children or for children? E.g. toy boxes in living space

Explore space saving furniture / storage designs / built in storage – clever design can override space

Did you seek advice for designing this space/furniture? E.g. from an architect or from blogs How are consumption decisions limited by space restrictions?

What do you do with things you no longer need/have room for? (Explore patterns of consumption/waste/recycling sharing etc.)(Explore different things e.g. food, clothes, material goods)

How do you make decisions about acquiring new stuff?

How often do you rearrange/organise what you have to make better use of space?

Do you think living in a smaller household makes you more or less environmentally sustainable?

Who controls the decision making for decorating and styling? Do children get a say in decorating their rooms e.g. posters, colours. Has this ever caused tension?

Are living spaces decorated as spaces/filled with things for adults and children?

Experience of home – future aspirations

How satisfied are you with the current apartment/location/home choice?

Do you feel at home?

Can you think of a time friends/family/neighbours/strangers have said something to you about raising a child in an apartment? (either positive or negative)

Have you ever felt pressure to move into a house due to social norms/comments/discourses around raising children in apartments?

Have you ever felt 'house envy' and a desire to have more space? Have your children ever expressed house envy?

Do you see this apartment as a long term home for you and your family? Why/why not?

When they next move, would you like to move to another apartment? Or to a different type of dwelling? Why?

What advice would you have for other parents, who may be considering living in an apartment with their children?

What advice would you give planners or developers who are designing apartment blocks? How could building design better take children into account?

I wondered if we could now take a walk around and look at different spaces and if I could take a few photographs as we talk

[Home tour to be guided by participants with conversation emerging along the way]

Appendix B – Participant information sheet and consent form

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

TITLE: Living with children in apartments: sharing, materials and space

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH:

This is an invitation to participate in a study conducted by researchers at the University of Wollongong. The purpose of this research is to better understand the everyday lives of families living with children in flats, units or apartments. We are particularly interested in learning more about the ways in which families with children share and negotiate space, both within the walls of their own apartment, and also within shared and communal spaces in the apartment complex. The research project aims to explore how parents/guardians feel about apartment living, and the strategies families have for making apartment living 'work'. The challenges and tensions caused by building design and space constraints will also be discussed.

WHAT YOU WILL BE ASKED TO DO:

We are interested in talking to parents/guardians (renters and owners) who live in apartments with children under the age of 15. If you choose to participate, you will be invited to take part in two interviews, each roughly an hour in duration. You will be asked to talk about sharing space within the family apartment, and with neighbours in your apartment complex. Questions that you will be asked include: What factors were taken into account when deciding to live in an apartment with your child/children? How does living within close proximity to others impact on parenting decisions and family life? What changes have you made (or would you like to make) to make your apartment more comfortable for your family? Do you see apartment living as temporary or long term?

In addition to the interview, you will be invited to take the researcher on a home tour of your apartment, and/or to draw a sketch of your apartment, as you talk about different spaces. During the home tour, the researcher will ask for your consent to take photographs, as relevant. You will be given an opportunity to review these photos, before they are used in any publications. Participating in an interview does not obligate you to participate in a home tour, drawing activity or to consent to photographs being taken by the researcher. The level and frequency of your involvement in this project will be tailored to meet your time constraints and personal preferences.

Interviews will occur at a time that suits you, and can be conducted outside of your home if you would prefer. The researcher will ask for permission to audio-record the interviews for transcription purposes.

POSSIBLE RISKS, INCONVENIENCES AND DISCOMFORTS:

Apart from the time taken to participate in this research, we can foresee no inconvenience for you. We will tailor your involvement to suit your availability and needs and you will not be pressured to participate in more activities than you feel comfortable with. The interviews will be conducted professionally and ethically. You will not be pressured to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable, and your involvement is entirely voluntary. You may halt your participation at any time and withdraw any data you have provided until that point. You can also withdraw any data you have provided for one month following the completion of your participation in the project. If you decide not to participate, or withdraw your consent, this will not affect your relationship with the University of Wollongong.

FUNDING AND BENEFITS:

In appreciation of the time you take to participate in the project, households will be given a $25 gift voucher for their participation in each stage of the project (i.e. two interviews, participants will receive $50). The research will be used to better understand the everyday lives of families living with children in apartments. It will be become the basis of a PhD thesis and findings will be published in academic journal articles, books, media interviews, online blogs and conference papers. You will be able to choose whether you would prefer to be referred to by your real name in published materials, or whether you would prefer to use a pseudonym (false name). In accordance with the law, all data that we obtain

from you will be stored for a minimum of 5 years in locked filing cabinets in the School of Geography and Sustainable Communities and on password protected computers. With approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee, the data may continue to be used by the researchers after the 5 year period in related research and publications.

ETHICS REVIEW AND COMPLAINTS:

This study was reviewed by the Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee, University of Wollongong. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the way this research has been conducted please contact the UOW Ethics Officer on (02) 4221 3386 or email rso-ethics@uow.edu.au. If you have any questions about this study, please contact Sophie-May Kerr. Thank you for your interest in this study.

INVESTIGATORS:

Sophie-May Kerr, School of Geography and Sustainable Communities, University of Wollongong;

Dr Natascha Klocker, School of Geography and Sustainable Communities, University of Wollongong;

Professor Chris Gibson, School of Geography and Sustainable Communities, University of Wollongong;

CONSENT FORM

Research title: Living with children in apartments: sharing, materials and space

Researchers: Sophie-May Kerr, Dr Natascha Klocker and Professor Chris Gibson
Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. This form indicates your informed consent to be involved in the project.
I have been given information about the project 'Living with children in apartments: sharing, materials and space'. I have discussed the research project with Sophie-May Kerr, who is conducting this research as part of a PhD thesis in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Wollongong.

I have been advised of the potential risks and burdens associated with this research, which include the time taken to participate in interviews. I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary, I am free to refuse to participate and I am free to withdraw from the research at any time. If I decide not to participate or withdraw my consent, this will not affect my relationship with the University of Wollongong. I also understand that I can withdraw any data that I have contributed to the project within one month of the completion of my participation.

If I have any questions about the research, I can contact Sophie-May Kerr

If I have any concerns or complaints regarding the way the research is or has been conducted, I can contact the Ethics Officer, Human Research Ethics Committee, Office of Research, University of Wollongong on (02) 4298 1331 or email rso-ethics@uow.edu.au.

I understand that the data collected from my participation will be used for a PhD thesis, academic journal articles, books and conference papers. I also understand that the data collected may be used when communicating research outcomes to the media. I consent for the data I provide to be used in these ways.

Interview:
By signing below I am indicating my consent to (please tick all that apply):

☐Participate in an interview

☐Have an audio-recording of the interview made for the purposes of transcription
In published materials relating to this research, I would like to be referred to by (please tick one):

☐ My real/given name   ☐ A pseudonym (false name)
Name (please print)   Signed   Date
…………………….…….……….…   …………………….…….……….…
…..../……./……..

Photographs, home tours and home sketches:
By signing below I am indicating my consent to (please tick all that apply):

☐Complete a sketch of my home which may be used in publications

☐Participate in a home tour

☐Have photographs taken of my home
Where photographs of my home are taken by the researcher, I understand that these photographs will not be used by the researcher without my approval.
Name (please print)   Signed   Date
…………………….…….……….…   …………………….…….……….…
…..../……./……..

Appendix C – Recruitment flyer

Do you live in an apartment with kids?

Are your children aged 15 years or younger?

Researchers from the University of Wollongong are conducting a study exploring the everyday experiences of families living with children in apartments.

We are seeking adult participants who live in an apartment with one or more children under 15 years of age. If this describes you, then we would like to invite you to take part in this research study.

If you choose to participate, you will be invited to talk to us about your everyday experiences of apartment life with children, at a time and place that suits you. You will receive a $25 gift voucher for your participation.

If you are interested in this study and would like more information, please contact Sophie-May Kerr

ph: 0413704302
e: smk534@uowmail.edu.au

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Appendix D – Media engagement

The following table documents the media engagement conducted throughout the course of this research project. The media commentary that appears in the thesis was captured in response to four key articles as indicated below. The comments captured as additional data were gathered from the original articles and Facebook comments when the articles were shared by the publishers (ABC News, The Conversation and Sydney Morning Herald).

Date	Media type	Details	Public comments analysed for inclusion in thesis (yes/no)
9/1/18	The Conversation	Full article published in The Conversation https://theconversation.com/with-apartment-living-on-the-rise-how-do-families-and-their-noisy-children-fit-in-88244 Republished by every major news outlet in Australia including ABC, Domain, Sydney Morning Herald, The Daily Telegraph and News.com.au. Also translated into Indonesian by The Conversation.	Yes
9/1/18	Radio	6PR Perth - LIVE Interview on the morning show program	No
9/1/18	Radio	ABC NSW/ACT - LIVE Interview on the Drive Program	No
9/1/18	Radio	ABC Perth - LIVE Interview on the afternoons program	No
10/1/18	Radio	Talking Lifestyle Network Sydney - LIVE Interview on the Home and Holiday program	No
23/1/18	Radio	ABC Radio National - LIVE Interview on Life Matters Program http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/lifematters/high-rise-tension-for-families-and-neighbours-in-apartments/9351538	No
23/1/18	Radio	Kinderling Kids Radio - Pre-recorded interview https://omny.fm/shows/kinderling-conversation/the-new-noisy-normal-raising-a-family-in-an-apartm	No
8/8/18	Radio	ABC Sydney - LIVE Interview on Sydney Breakfast	No
8/8/18	Online article	ABC News – Apartment living in now a fact of Australian life. Meet the families going up, not out	Yes

		http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-08-08/apartment-living-families-in-highrises/10070332	
16/9/18	Newspaper and online article	Sydney Morning Herald – High rise parenting puts kids at risk (Front page news) https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/high-rise-parenting-puts-kids-at-risk-20180913-p503gt.html	Yes
18/9/18	Television	The Today Show – LIVE interview on the Agenda program with Georgie Gardner 'Challenges of raising kids in an apartment' https://www.9now.com.au/today/2018/clip-cjm6vu1mz000i0hlm1jbvnwpt	No
18/9/18	Online article	9Honey Mums – High rise parenting is the reality many Aussie families face https://honey.nine.com.au/mums/honey-you-high-rise-hover-parenting/bdea6c86-756c-40a6-bdf0-93bce2a9b67b	No
18/11/18	Newspaper and online article	Sydney Morning Herald – Parks and prams: rethinking flats for families https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/parks-and-prams-how-to-improve-sydney-apartments-for-kids-and-families-20181117-p50go1.html	Yes
4/7/18	Online article	Domain – Are apartments becoming more kid-friendly? https://www.domain.com.au/sponsor/apartments-becoming-kid-friendly/	No
4/7/18	Online article	Apartment living for families – how to get it right https://www.thefifthestate.com.au/innovation/residential-2/apartment-living-for-families-how-to-get-it-right/	No